Strengthen the Bond: Relationships Between Academic Advising Quality and Undergraduate Student Loyalty

Jörg Vianden, University of Wisconsin–La Crosse
Patrick J. Barlow, University of Wisconsin–La Crosse

Extant research suggests that student loyalty, a strong bond between the student and university, positively affects important student outcomes, most notably retention. In this article, we advance the notion that academic advisors should become managers of the student–university relationship. We examine the correlation between respondents' perceived quality of academic advising and their loyalty to the university as measured by our recently developed Student University Loyalty Instrument*, administered to 1,207 undergraduates at three comprehensive midwestern institutions. Results suggest that a positive relationship exists between the perceived quality of academic advising and student loyalty, other meaningful indicators of the student–university relationship, and specific student demographic characteristics. Recommendations for academic advising practice are shared*.

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For decades scholars have asserted that effective academic advising is critical to student persistence and graduation (Bean, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students' intentions to persist or to leave their institution are generated in large part by the student–institution relationships facilitated by faculty members, staff, and peers. This student–university relationship depends primarily on "the quality of psychological and emotional bonds with the institution as well as high levels of satisfaction with its performance" (Bowden, 2011, p. 222). Academic advising founded on strong interpersonal relationships influences student self-efficacy, emotional commitment to the institution, as well as persistence and loyalty. It instills school pride in the student and creates pathways for students to engage in high-impact activities (Bean, 2005; Kimball & Campbell, 2013; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Vianden & Barlow, 2014). In a higher education landscape characterized by dwindling state and federal support, legislature scrutiny of faculty and administrators, and low rates of alumni giving, stakeholders must examine ways academic advising improves long-lasting bonds between the student and the institution.

Unlike student affairs professionals who do not interact with every student on campus and faculty members who teach one or two courses over their collegiate careers, most academic advisors are assigned to their advisees for a year or longer. This potential for prolonged contact and interaction positions academic advisors to tie students to the university more strongly than any other educator on campus (Drake, 2013) and act as student relationship managers (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007-2008). These bonds should connect students to the university from the first summer orientation throughout their lifetimes as alumni of the institution. The role academic advisors play in this life cycle should not be underestimated and can be measured.

The NACADA Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising (NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, 2005) neither includes explicit language outlining ways academic advising creates loyalty between the student and the institution nor offers suggestions for advisor engagement in facilitating student outcomes other than retention and graduation. Further, the academic advising literature has not addressed the role of academic advising in turning students into supportive alumni of their institutions. This scarcity of research examining the relationship between academic advising and student loyalty inspired the present study.

Building on our previous work to predict student loyalty to undergraduate institutions (Vianden & Barlow, 2014), we analyzed the relationship between student perceptions of academic advising quality and student loyalty to the institution. The analysis draws on a sample of 1,207 randomly selected undergraduates at three midwestern comprehensive universities who completed the *Student University Loyalty Instrument* (SULI), a 75-item survey (Vianden & Barlow, 2014). To analyze the data, we generated the following research questions: What is the

relationship between students' perceived quality of academic advising and (a) student loyalty and (b) indicators of the student–university relationship (i.e., pre-college, student attitudinal/behavioral, or institutional characteristics)?

Conceptual Model of Student Loyalty

In 2001, Hennig-Thurau, Langer, and Hansen advanced the most-cited conceptual model of student loyalty to date. They asserted that institutional dimensions of perceived relationship quality between students and their university drive student loyalty. They defined student loyalty as a deep relational and emotional bond the student develops for the university that can be measured by survey items such as, "I am proud to be a student at my university," "I want to remain connected to my university after graduation," and "I get defensive when someone says something negative about my university." In their original study, perceived quality of teaching (path coefficient = .56) and students' emotional commitment to their university (path coefficient = .39) were the main predictors of student loyalty, and their relationship quality-based student loyalty (RQSL) model accounted for nearly 75% of the variance in student loyalty. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) argued that student loyalty may strongly correlate with student persistence decisions and behaviors. Because academic advising can create emotional connections between student, advisor, and the university (Bean, 2005; Drake, 2011, 2013; Kimball & Campbell, 2013), we explored the correlations between perceived academic advising quality and student loyalty.

Predictors of Student Loyalty

In addition to the predictors cited by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001), two main additional antecedents predict student loyalty to institutions of higher education. One emphasizes service quality, and the other focuses on long-term interpersonal relationships and levels of student satisfaction with such relationships. Perceived service quality in educational relationships is based on people; that is, interactions between students and institutional agents (e.g., faculty and professional academic advisors) significantly affect students' feelings and thoughts about their institution (Rojas-Mendez, Vasquez-Parraga, Kara, & Cerda-Urrutia, 2009).

According to Elliott and Shin (2002), students indicate satisfaction with five institutional attributes: valuable course content, organized registration processes, excellent instruction in the major, ability to get into classes, and the job placement rates in the major. Some of these factors fall under the influence of academic advisors. In previous studies, researchers found that student satisfaction affects loyalty approximately three times more than other factors do (Helgesen & Nesset, 2007; Nesset & Helgesen, 2009). Furthermore, in our original study using the SULI, we found that satisfaction was the strongest predictor of student loyalty (Vianden & Barlow, 2014).

Researchers report mixed results on examination of satisfaction, trust, and commitment in the creation of student loyalty by gender. Bowden and Wood (2011) found that gender did not influence the development of student loyalty. However, in the original SULI study, we found gender acted as a significant predictor of student loyalty with women showing higher loyalty scores than men (Vianden & Barlow, 2014).

Commitment refers to the fit between the skills, abilities, and values of the student and the values, expectations, and demands of the institution (Rojas-Mendez et al., 2009). Students initially committed to their institutions show continuous favorable perceptions of the focus on students' well-being and the integrity expressed by university faculty and staff (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). In a recent administration of the *Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement* at one of the research sites for our SULI study, 85% of respondents ranked the institution first among alternatives (Barlow, 2015); in the original SULI administration, 88% of respondents ranked their institution either first or second among alternatives (Vianden & Barlow, 2014).

With an early persistence model, Bean (1982) showed that institutional commitment was comprised of the attitudinal variables of loyalty and certainty of institutional choice; that is, it measured the certainty that students had picked the best institution for them. Bean (1982) suggested that such attitudinal factors, rather than organizational characteristics (e.g., student–faculty or peer contact) or environmental variables (e.g., family, financing college), exert more direct effects on student intent to leave. In the original SULI study, we found that all student attitudinal and behavioral variables (e.g., satisfaction, perceived institutional fit, initial impressions) predicted loyalty at significant levels compared to only one institutional variable (quality of teaching) (Vianden & Barlow, 2014). Bean (2005)

defined institutional commitment as the degree of student attachment to a specific institution compared to postsecondary education in general: "It parallels the common sense notion of loyalty, or as the Beach Boys would say, 'Be true to your school'" (p. 220). College educators, chief among them academic advisors, must consider ways delivery of programs, such as advising, helps students develop favorable attitudes toward the institution and encourages their continued enrollment.

In the academic advising literature, specifically the *NACADA Journal*, terms such as *loyalty* or *commitment* in relation to advising practice appear infrequently. In fact, we found one article, by Graunke, Woosley, and Helms (2006), that examined the effects of student commitment to their institution, educational goals, and an academic major to graduation. Graunke et al. suggested that institutional and goal commitment positively affects the likelihood of students graduating in six years and recommended that advisors work to enhance the students' bond with their institutions. In our current analysis of SULI data related to academic advising, we aimed to provide information that could be used to infer the effects of advising on student commitment and loyalty.

Student Relationship Management

The term *relationship management* emerged from the literature of customer service, public relations, marketing, communications, and management. In higher education, relationship management has not strongly resonated with scholars or practitioners (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007-2008), perhaps because of the visceral reactions invoked when educators are asked to consider college students as customers.

The principles of relationship management assert that retaining current customers is more cost-effective than recruiting new ones (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007-2008). Relationship management also calls for collaboration between the firm and its customers that extends beyond a simple buy–sell transaction. Contextualizing these precepts for higher education leads to the suggestion that educator and student become partners in a relationship. Applied to the academic advising context, the facilitator of information (academic advisor) partners with the learner (advisee) by integrating and sharing responsibility for learning. Relationship management encourages advisors to get close to students by learning about them, creating lasting interpersonal relationships with them, inviting input from them early and often, and communicating with them frequently (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007-2008). Academic advisors are predestined to serve as relationship managers because of the potential strong ties they create between students and the university (Drake, 2013).

However, student relationship management also requires actors to undertake some controversial measures. Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007-2008) stressed that "not all customers are worth the same to organizations" and "neither are students" (p. 317). Viewed from a revenue-producing perspective, students who pay less than others, who receive more institutionally funded aid, or who demonstrate underpreparedness academically, financially, or emotionally cost the institution more funds than they produce. The need for institutional resources requires student relationship managers to invest time and energy in developing loyalty in current students to ensure they support the institution as alumni. Considerations about advisees as profit generators (or not) put academic advisors and other college educators at odds with a holistic or developmental approach to student learning; however, concerns over profitability warrant attention because of the financial stress and burden many administrators claim to face in the current U.S. higher education landscape.

Academic Advising as Relationship

The recently published *Academic Advising Approaches: Strategies That Teach Students to Make the Most of College* focuses on asserting the necessary and deep connection between academic advising and student success (Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013). Most of the chapters center on relationship-building strategies, including appreciative advising (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2013), advising as teaching (Drake, 2013), developmental advising (Grites, 2013), advising as coaching (McClellan, 2013), and proactive advising (Varney, 2013).

Rawlins and Rawlins (2005) had taken the idea of relationship further than those in the Drake et al. (2013) book by advocating that academic advisors should be civic friends with their advisees:

> The more we rely on technology in this increasingly bureaucratic world, the more we need truly interpersonal communication

Table 1. *Student University Loyalty Instrument* subscales, the number of items, and a sample of each

Subscale	No. of Items	Sample Item
Quality of Instructors	8	My instructors are considerate of students.
Quality of Staff	7	Staff at my university treat me with care.
Quality of Student Services	7	My university provides high-quality academic advising.
Quality of Facilities	3	My university provides high-quality recreational facilities.
Perceived Skill Development	8	My university is helping me refine my interpersonal communication skills.
Frequency of Student Engagement	6	I communicate with my instructors about academic concerns.
Initial Impressions	9	I knew this university had a good reputation.
Institutional Fit	4	I feel connected to my university.
Satisfaction	4	This university was the right choice for me.
Intent to Leave	3	I plan to withdraw from my university within 6 months.
Student Loyalty	8	I care about my university.

Note. The subscales are listed in the order in which they appear in the SULI survey.

> conveying the feeling of belonging, of being recognized and treated as a unique individual. When students reflect on their university years, they remember people—friends, teachers, and significant others, such as academic advisors—who have made a difference in their lives. (p. 18)

Kuh et al. (2005) suggested that academic advising must connect students with their institutions. Kimball and Campbell (2013) specifically suggested that academic advisors employ strategies to help students create meaningful relationships with faculty members and staff as well as advocate for the implementation of high-impact practices that aid student success (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). Drake (2013) asserted that academic advisors should approach students with care and affection:

> Everyone in the institution needs to address students' deep human need to feel recognized. Advisors, in particular, play a powerful and central role in student success by providing the opportunity (sometimes the only one) for an ongoing, durable relationship with someone who cares about their academic goals. (p. 22)

The academic advising literature features many studies that discuss the advisor–advisee relationship (Drake, 2011) and ways academic advising positively affects student outcomes, including persistence (Elliott & Healy, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013), satisfaction (Anderson, Motto, & Bourdeaux, 2014; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Sutton & Sankar, 2011; Teasley & Buchanan, 2013), and overall success (Smith & Allen, 2006; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). In light of this research, we examined the relationship between perceived academic advising quality and student loyalty.

Methods

Instrument

We gained permission from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) to adapt the original 86-item RQSL to create the SULI. In keeping with the original study, 10 of the SULI subscales were based on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). One subscale was based on frequency intervals to measure student engagement (1 = *never* to 6 = *more than once a week*).

Table 1 shows the SULI subscales, which included items defining institutional characteristics (quality of instructors, quality of student services, quality of staff, quality of facilities) as well as student attitudinal and behavioral characteristics (intent to leave, perceived skill development, frequency of student engagement, initial impressions, institutional fit, and satisfaction). Values for items in each subscale were summed to

create individual subscale scores for use in additional analyses.

In addition to the subscales, the SULI captured student pre-college characteristics, including classification (i.e., academic year), gender, age, race, and international student status. It also recorded respondents' ranks of their current institution among alternative choices prior to enrolling (university rank), parental education, and driving time from the institution to the students' home. Analysis of the scales revealed appropriate reliability indices at or above .70. For more detailed information on the SULI, refer to Vianden and Barlow (2014).

Data Collection

We administered the SULI to a randomly selected sample of 7,500 undergraduates enrolled at three comprehensive public master's universities in the same midwestern state. At the time of the research, the total combined enrollment amounted to more than 26,000 undergraduates, including 7% students of color and 56% women. Combined data from the three institutions indicated average first- to second-year retention rates of 82% and average graduation rates (within 6 years) of 63%. The SULI was administered via a secure online Qualtrics site. As an incentive to participate, respondents who fully completed the survey within 48 hours of its launch were included in a random drawing for fifteen $20 gift cards.

Sample

The sample consisted of 1,207 undergraduates who fully completed the SULI (16% response rate); the average age was 20.9 years; most respondents were White (88.9%) and female (73.4%); and year classifications were equivalent across all undergraduate years (from 22 to 29%). Fourteen students (1.2%) identified as international students, two fifths (42%) of respondents were first in their family to attend college, and 9 of 10 respondents lived within a four-hour drive from their respective institution. The sample overrepresented women compared to the combined enrollments of the three institutions, and students of color in the sample were representative of enrollment at the research sites. The majority of respondents (93%) were not interested in transferring, withdrawing, or dropping out of college. Relative to initial institutional commitment, 88% of respondents had enrolled at their first- or second-choice institution as measured by the university rank item.

Data Analysis

Data analysis focused on responses to the SULI item "My university provides quality academic advising" (advisequal) related to student loyalty, SULI subscales that measure the student–university relationship, and student demographic variables. First, we calculated the mean scores across each of the SULI subscales and adjusted the means to indicate the average item score based on the number of items in each subscale. We also conducted reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha. Next, we used Spearman's rho to analyze the correlations between student perceptions of advising quality and loyalty as well as the constructs measuring the student–university relationship. We calculated Spearman's rho because the advisequal variable is treated as an ordinal. The relationship between advisequal and intent to leave, a subscale indicating the intent to transfer, withdraw, or drop out within six months of completing the SULI, was also analyzed with Spearman's rho.

To facilitate additional review of the effect of positive perceptions of academic advising on the SULI subscales, we created the variable, advise_hilo. To do this, we recoded responses to advisequal (measured on a 6-point scale, 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*) into two groups based on a median split. One group indicated a high level of agreement on the original advisequal item (responses equal to or greater than 5), and the other indicated a low level of agreement (responses less than 5).

Next we calculated crosstabs using advise_hilo to identify the possible demographic characteristics of respondents in the high or low scoring groups according to advise_hilo. We looked at gender, classification, university rank, age, parents' educational status, race, and college major. We concluded the data analysis with a series of *t* tests to detect the effects of positive perceptions of advising on the SULI subscales.

Results

Data analysis revealed a relationship between respondent perceptions of the quality of academic advising and student loyalty. In addition, certain demographic characteristics aligned with positive perceptions of academic advising.

Table 2a. *Student University Loyalty Instrument* subscales, standard deviations, adjusted means, and reliability estimates

Subscale	Mean (*SD*)	Adjusted Mean	Cronbach's α
Quality of Instructors	39.90 (6.38)	4.99	.93
Satisfaction	16.58 (3.12)	4.84	.75
Quality of Staff	33.68 (6.60)	4.81	.93
Quality of Student Services	33.59 (6.04)	4.79	.87
Initial Impressions	45.35 (6.63)	4.78	.87
Student Loyalty	36.45 (7.70)	4.56	.89
Quality of Facilities	13.45 (2.76)	4.48	.72
Perceived Skill Development	35.50 (7.97)	4.44	.93
Institutional Fit	17.54 (4.12)	4.38	.68
Frequency of Student Engagement	20.65 (5.08)	3.44	.67
Intent to Leave	4.23 (2.80)	1.41	.82

Note. Adjusted mean indicates the averaged means of all the items per subscale because each subscale is based on a different number of items.

Means

Subscales. Table 2a shows that the quality of teaching subscale registered the highest adjusted mean ($M = 4.99$) on a 6-point scale, indicating overall high satisfaction with teaching at the three research sites, all of which are teaching-focused institutions. The lowest adjusted mean score was given to the intent to leave subscale ($M = 1.41$), indicating that the majority of SULI respondents were not interested in leaving their respective institution.

Quality of student service items. Respondents' ratings on the quality of academic advising ($M = 4.58$) tied with ratings of perceived quality of financial aid assistance; these two items showed the lowest score on the quality of student services subscale (which includes the advisequal item) (Table 2b). This result indicates that although they agreed that academic advising was of high quality, respondents were more satisfied with all other student services assessed by the SULI. The highest average score was associated with the perceived quality of opportunities to study abroad item ($M = 5.21$).

Table 2b. Individual quality of student services items (summarized) of the *Student University Loyalty Instrument*

Item	Mean (*SD*)
Quality Study Abroad Opportunities	5.18 (0.92)
Quality Leadership Opportunities	4.98 (1.02)
Quality First-Year Registration Process	4.79 (1.15)
Quality Student Health Services	4.77 (1.20)
Quality Career Advising	4.67 (1.22)
Quality Financial Aid Advising	4.62 (1.22)
Quality Academic Advising	4.58 (1.29)

Correlations

Respondents' perceptions of the quality of academic advising appeared to relate to all of the SULI subscales except for intent to leave, which indicated a negative, yet nonsignificant relationship (Table 3). This finding suggests that respondents who ranked the quality of academic advising as high also reported relatively high perceptions of other indicators of the student–university relationship. The correlations reflect medium strength, implying meaningful relationships between the variables, but none that indicate too much conceptual overlap.

The quality of student services subscale showed the strongest relationship ($r = .78$, $p \leq .001$) with advisequal; however, this finding was expected because quality of advising is an item in the subscale. The satisfaction subscale also showed a weaker, yet statistically significant, correlation with advisequal ($r = .19$, $p \leq .001$), suggesting that students conceptually review academic advising differently than their institution. Most important, the relationship between student loyalty and advisequal was positive ($r = .31$, $p \leq .001$) indicating that the way students perceive the quality of academic advising is meaningfully related to the level of loyalty they feel to their university. Thus, improving the quality of academic advising may improve the overall quality of the students' commitment to and bond with their university.

Table 3. Intercorrelations of advisequal and SULI subscales

Subscale	Advisequal
Quality of Student Services	.78**
Perceived Skill Development	.42**
Quality of Staff	.41**
Quality of Instructors	.35**
Initial Impressions	.35**
Quality of Facilities	.34**
Student Loyalty	.31**
Institutional Fit	.26**
Satisfaction	.19**
Frequency of Student Engagement	.07*
Intent to Leave	– .50

Note. Values were calculated using Spearman's rho.
*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$.

Crosstabs

The correlational analysis showed a relationship between advisequal and student loyalty. To identify potential advisee characteristics to advisors, we used crosstab analyses (see Table 4) between specific demographic variables and advise_hilo. The demographic variables of university rank, class, age, and field of study each demonstrated a meaningful relationship with advise_hilo. More students who indicated highly positive perceptions of advising also indicated that their current institution was their first choice among the alternatives prior to enrolling. The opposite pattern emerged for those indicating they attend their third-institution choice; that is, more of these respondents fell into the lower advise_hilo group.

For first-year and senior respondents, we found higher numbers in the positive advising group, and a similar (nonsignificant) pattern emerged for sophomores and juniors. Finally, more students in the field of social sciences indicated positive perceptions of advising than did students in the humanities, the only field in which a higher percentage of responses was found for the low-quality-of-advising group.

Tests of Mean Differences

A series of *t* tests show that respondents who held positive perceptions of advising also rated

Table 4. Crosstab results of demographic variables and advise_hilo categories, $N = 1{,}207$

	Advising Category Count (%)		Significance of High/Low Column	Overall
Demographic Variable	**High**	**Low**	**Difference**	**Chi-Square (*df*)**
University Rank				
1st	455 (63)	263 (37)	Y	
2nd	179 (57)	134 (43)		
3rd	39 (48)	42 (52)	Y	
4th	8 (50)	8 (50)		
5th or Lower	6 (67)	3 (33)		
Not on List	35 (53)	31 (47)		11.34 (5)*
Classification Year				
1st	223 (71)	89 (29)	Y	
2nd	163 (59)	112 (41)		
3rd	153 (57)	116 (43)		
4th	185 (53)	164 (47)	Y	25.39 (3) ***
Field of Study				
Humanities	41 (47)	46 (53)	Y	
Social Sciences	137 (67)	66 (33)	Y	
Natural Sciences	101 (62)	63 (38)		
Formal Sciences	20 (51)	19 (49)		
Professions & Applied Sciences	338 (59)	232 (41)		12.48 (6)*

Note. Pearson chi-square values indicate the presence of a relationship between advise_hilo and the listed demographic variable. Differences in column proportions were evaluated by a *z* test, and significant differences are marked with Y.
*$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .001$.

Table 5. Mean score differences on *Student University Loyalty Instrument* subscales based on advise_hilo categories

Subscale	Advise_hilo	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*t* Value	Effect Size (*d*)
Quality of Student Services	High	410	36.63	3.82		
	Low	256	28.72	5.74	19.55***	1.62
Perceived Skill Development	High	481	37.85	6.78		
	Low	726	31.96	8.33	12.92***	.76
Quality of Staff	High	722	35.32	5.70		
	Low	465	31.15	7.10	10.65***	.65
Initial Impressions	High	726	46.82	5.65		
	Low	481	41.27	7.34	9.32***	.56
Quality of Instructors	High	726	37.83	6.80		
	Low	481	31.96	6.78	9.16***	.55
Quality of Facilities	High	580	14.09	2.57		
	Low	389	12.50	2.77	9.12***	.60
Student Loyalty	High	726	38.02	6.74		
	Low	481	34.08	8.42	8.60***	.52
Institutional Fit	High	726	18.22	3.86		
	Low	481	16.51	4.27	7.23***	.42
Satisfaction	High	726	16.90	2.94		
	Low	481	16.09	3.32	4.35***	.26
Frequency of Student Engagement	High	726	20.94	5.09		
	Low	481	20.22	5.06	2.40*	.14
Intent to Leave	High	726	4.10	2.69		
	Low	481	4.41	2.96	–1.87	NA

other indicators of the student–university relationship positively (see Table 5). The higher mean scores for advising correlate with higher means scores on the SULI subscales, except for intent to leave. The largest difference was found for ratings of student services, followed by ratings of quality of staff and perceived skill development. This may indicate the positive effect of high-quality academic advising on outcomes other than immediate student success, persistence, or graduation.

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The analysis of the SULI data about the perceived quality of academic advising at the three research sites points to three specific implications for academic advising practice. First, a relationship exists between academic advising, loyalty, and other meaningful indicators of the student–university relationship. Second, academic advising of perceived high quality may affect student outcomes beyond persistence and graduation. Third, the analysis of the data can help identify specific students or student groups who, through academic advising, may develop loyalty and an overall good student–university relationship.

Connections Between Academic Advising and Loyalty

Respondents' ratings of the perceived quality of academic advising show a relationship to meaningful indicators of the student–university relationship (see also Bean, 2005). Empirical research in academic advising has not focused on this relationship despite scholars' assertions that academic advisors play a role in connecting or binding students to institutions (Drake, 2013; Kuh et al., 2005). The results of our study provide empirical underpinnings for the claims (Bean, 2005; Graunke et al., 2006) that academic advising offers a relationship-building strategy for encouraging college students to develop loyalty to their institutions. Students who receive good academic advising may value the personal investment provided them and consider ways to reciprocate to the institution. For example, they may exhibit pride and recommend the institution to prospective students, and later they may contribute financially to the institution or otherwise remain connected beyond graduation. We

recommend that academic advisors appreciate that their relationship with and commitment to each student may produce lasting consequences for the institution such as alumni favor, time, and financial support.

Most academic advisors carry large caseloads of advisees, which may hinder their abilities to undertake additional commitments outside of those established for day-to-day advising. Faculty advisors, in particular, may feel conflicted about the call to conduct relational advising (Hemwall & Trachte, 1999). However, simple bonding strategies can help the busiest and most reticent establish the relationships valued by students. As Rawlins and Rawlins (2005) indicated, advising environments that express care and interest in the individual student may establish the circumstances that promote connections. In advising settings that encourage friendship, break down boundaries between students and institutional authority figures, or create an atmosphere in which students open up, advisees and advisors become partners in student success and growth. Keeping track of students' out-of-class engagement and sending simple messages inquiring about students' well-being (e.g., "How did that career fair go?" "How is your grandmother doing after her surgery?") ties students more strongly to the advisor and the institution. Academic advisors should also follow students throughout their college careers and congratulate them upon graduation.

Institutions should celebrate professional academic advisors at activities such as convocations or commencement. Academic advisors should be invited to such events, recognized by institutional leaders, and encouraged to regale and process together with faculty members their role in students' successes.

One of the institutions participating in our study offers first-year student advising in the residence hall. Although not a new practice, academic advising on students' turf rather than in a staff or faculty office breaks down barriers. Employing graduate students or undergraduate peers to help facilitate advising may help overcome perceived or real walls between the institution and students.

Effects of Academic Advising on Student Outcomes

The existing correlations between the quality of academic advising and the SULI items suggest that improving the advising relationship potentially improves student perceptions of several categories represented by the SULI subscales. Because the sample was representative of more than 26,000 college students during the time of data collection, we propose that academic advising has the potential to increase student commitment to (Graunke et al., 2006) and satisfaction with their institution (Anderson et al., 2014; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Sutton & Sankar, 2011; Teasley & Buchanan, 2013) and to provide a sense of fit or belonging (Bean, 2005; Soria & Stebleton, 2013).

Especially at this time in postsecondary education history, institutions need alumni who advocate for higher education in general and who are true to their school (Bean, 2005) because everyone at the institution benefits from giving, committed, and loyal alumni. For instance, enrollment management divisions and all academic units need alumni who recommend the institution to prospective students. Career services units are enriched when alumni hire graduates or provide internship opportunities to current students. Finally, the annual fund as well as future students, staff, and faculty members benefit from alumni who donate money to their alma mater.

To help achieve the advantages proffered by alumni, which extend beyond goals for student success, academic advisors must reach out to college educators with whom they can collaborate to increase student loyalty. More than likely, academic advisors have established connections with academic and student affairs professionals who help create positive first impressions (e.g., in admissions and orientation), provide a sense of belonging or fit (e.g., in residence life, multicultural student support, student activities), or ensure that students appreciate their learning in and out of the classroom (e.g., with faculty members as well as academic and student affairs administrators). Yet, the present study suggests they can also work with enrollment management, career development, and alumni affairs professionals to help promote successful students who will donate time, energy, and money to the institution as alumni.

New students do not think about college in the compartmentalized ways that educators do. To students, questions such as "What job can I get with a major in psychology and where should I do an internship?" are not reflective of either career development or academic advising, but they are associated with college in general. Therefore, academic advisors should answer simple questions without needing to refer students. At one of

the research sites, academic advising and career advising share a physical space in the most prominent classroom building on campus. This proximity benefits students who need referrals from academic advisors to career services. It also makes cross training and collaboration between professionals easier than they are for those separated by physical distance. A key to efficient academic advising, collaboration encourages advisors to focus on student relationship management and the resulting student loyalty.

Which Students Benefit Most?

We found that three specific demographic variables correlated meaningfully with respondent perceptions of the quality of academic advising: university rank, student classification, and major field of study. Respondents who had ranked their current university as second or lower among alternatives before initial enrollment indicated that they were not studying at their preferred institution. In our previous study (Vianden & Barlow, 2014), we found that students who ranked their institution first or second among alternatives exhibited a higher potential for demonstrating student loyalty than those attending less-preferred institutions. In our present study, the general pattern between university rank and advising quality suggests that students who attend their first- or second-choice institution rate the quality of academic advising in proportion more highly than their counterparts who enrolled at their third-choice (or lower) institution.

However, nearly 400 respondents who attended their first- or second-choice institution perceived their academic advising to be of low quality, indicating that not all students initially committed to the institution perceive to be receiving quality academic advising. We recommend that academic advisors, in collaboration with persons in admissions and records, identify the rank that incoming students give their institution among a list of alternatives and refer to it before seeing first-year students. This assessment can be undertaken during summer orientation when students can easily remember the other institutions they were considering. Coupled with analyses of satisfaction with academic advising, as conducted by many advising programs, data on students' initial commitment to the institution will help advisors identify the students toward whom to direct more advising efforts.

We argue that maintaining student commitment to the university through positive perceptions of academic advising is easier than improving the perception of students attending an institution that was not among their top two choices. This strategy may best apply at institutions seeking to retain the most profitable students (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007-2008); that is, under this paradigm, students not emotionally committed to their institution would not usurp time or resources best devoted to their counterparts attending their most-preferred institution. Moreover, our previous study showed that students attending institutions they considered a third (or worse) choice indicated significantly lower levels of loyalty toward their current institution and expressed higher levels of intent to leave (Vianden & Barlow, 2014). Certainly, academic advisors should help all students with their educational goals, but when under pressure to increase retention and graduation rates in the face of dwindling state and donor support and upon hearing doubts about the value of higher education, administrators may direct advisors to devote the most resources to the most profitable students and thus increase the chances of securing advantageous outcomes for the students and the institution (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007-2008).

In addition, more first-year students and seniors in our current study indicated that they received high quality academic advising, but more second- and third-year students indicated dissatisfaction with academic advising. We contend that the value of academic advising in the second year may supersede that of the first year, when students engage in course exploration or general education requirements and their missteps seldom jeopardize their overall collegiate success. We have observed that more upper division students leave than do those in their first year. Sophomores enjoy less leeway for mistakes than first-year students, and classes taken out of order, lack of general education requirement credits, or mistimed college, department, or program applications can negatively affect timeliness to graduation. Therefore, perceived lower quality of academic advising by sophomores and juniors may signal that students know the importance of advising and may be expressing disappointment on the advising they have received.

We recommend that academic advisors assess the needs of sophomores and juniors, specifically as they choose their majors or transition from

professional to faculty advisor. Faculty advisors specializing in guiding students in their own program of study may want to send students switching majors or colleges to general academic advising centers rather than negotiate the many details that accompany a smooth transition. These strategies, especially in combination, may contribute to higher student ratings of academic advising. In addition, the resulting strong advisor–student relationship may bolster students' sense of fit, satisfaction, and loyalty to the institution in sophomore and junior years when the initial strong commitment to the institution inevitably wanes.

Institutional stakeholders should explore requirements of sophomores to participate in academic advising, or they might consider turning first-year experience programming into a two-year experience initiative. The present study refutes any argument that students need less advising after the first year; undergraduates need continued advising, if for no other reason than to boost their perceptions of advising.

Finally, a greater proportion of students in the humanities than in social science programs perceived academic advising as low quality; a greater proportion of students in social sciences indicated the quality of advising as high. Because the participants came from three different institutions, we make no assumption that advisors or faculty members in the humanities offer poorer quality advising than their counterparts in the social sciences. However, because a disproportionate number of humanities majors on all three campuses rated advising as low quality, we recommend further investigation of the specific advising strategies used in the humanities field. Perhaps students rate the quality of academic advising in the humanities relatively low because of fewer potential job prospects, indirect sequencing of courses to earn degrees, and the potential inefficiencies created by many choices of topics, courses, or degree programs.

We recommend that the advising administrators monitor student perceptions of advising quality in specific program areas and determine and provide appropriate professional development for advisors. They also need to encourage best practices, perhaps by reviewing those in the social sciences or other areas deemed by students to be particularly good. Additional research focused on the loyalty levels of the humanities student cohort is also warranted.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this article adds to the few studies that describe the relationship between perceived academic advising quality and student loyalty, a few limitations exist. First, the study was conducted with students from three similar institutions in the same state system of higher education thus limiting generalizability to other institutional or state contexts.

Second, respondents uninterested in leaving their institutions dominated the sample. Therefore, the perceived quality of academic advising and institutional loyalty of nonrespondents remains unexplored. Offering stronger incentives for reticent students may have improved the response rate and ameliorated this limitation.

Third, generalizability is limited by the relatively homogeneous cohort. More conclusive inferences about student loyalty could be made from a study in which the SULI is administered to a more racially diverse student population.

Finally, the SULI survey did not capture student perceptions of academic advising as based on their interactions with professional academic advisors, faculty advisors, or both. Information about the sources of advising may have provided more targeted recommendations for practice.

Almost two thirds of the respondents regarded the quality of academic advising received on their campus as high. However, future research that addresses the reasons for low ratings of advising would benefit advisors and students.

Summary

Student perceptions of the quality of academic advising are connected to student loyalty and other meaningful indicators of the student–university relationship. College educators who commit to improving academic advising by focusing on a strong interpersonal relationship, trust, mutual commitment, and student satisfaction pave the way for students to connect with the institution beyond immediate outcomes of retention and graduation; they develop the potential for advisees to become loyal students and supportive alumni. By providing quality academic advising, students perceive that the institution invests in them, and in turn, students may reciprocate this investment after they graduate.

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Authors' Notes

Jörg Vianden is associate professor in the Department of Student Affairs Administration at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse. He holds a doctorate in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Indiana University and teaches most of the graduate courses in his department, including Assessment in Student Affairs, History of Higher Education, and Student Development Theory. His research focuses on the student–university relationship, on men and masculinities in higher education, and on social justice in higher education. He can be contacted at jvianden@uwlax.edu.

Patrick Barlow is the University Assessment Coordinator in the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse. He holds a doctorate in psychology from Iowa State Univer-sity and supports faculty, staff, and departments with learning outcomes assessment. His research focuses the role of positive psychological con-structs in and the impact of teaching and student services on student success. He can be contacted at pbarlow@uwlax.edu.