Qualitative Analysis of Student Perceptions: "Some Advisors Care. Some Don't."

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University-based academic advising at a large, Great Lakes state institution was designed to support first-year students' transition to college. We conducted individual interviews and facilitated story circles with 162 students to determine their perceived effectiveness of advising. Analyses revealed four overarching themes: student difficulty making the distinction between roles of high school guidance counselors and postsecondary academic advisors, advisor communication, student desire for a relationship, and advisor accessibility. On the basis of data gathered, we developed a model for understanding the formation and maintenance of student advising perceptions.

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Decreased student attrition is a most important outcome of adequate academic advising for students (Alexitch, 2002; Bitz, 2010; Dahl, 2004; Grites & Gordon, 2000; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2005; Noel-Levitz, 2009; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2014). As stakeholders of colleges and universities value high student retention rates (Bitz, 2010) and institutions compete for student enrollment, leadership focuses on the best advising practices for students. First-year students experience the highest rates of attrition, and those at large, public universities, especially those of first-generation status or from low-resource households, may find the transition from high school to college particularly difficult (Alexitch, 2002).

For this study, we explored student perceptions of advising at a large, public, Great Lakes state university in an urban area. At the time of data collection, freshmen entering the university encountered one or more different advising pathways. High-performing students who entered the university with declared majors see advisors at the university, admitting college, or selected program or department level. Other students, or high performers without a declared major, are directed through other channels to (in the best case) one, but sometimes a choice, of advising centers. In 2013, this complicated advising system was undergoing reorganization, which compelled administrators to seek data on student perceptions.

In this study, the use of qualitative methods for data collection allowed us to hear students in a way that cannot be captured solely through quantitative methods. Through *story circles*, a group interview alternative to focus groups (Behrman & Spickard Prettyman, 2017), and interviews, participants shared detailed descriptions of their high school advising experiences, the ways these previous encounters aligned with their advising expectations and episodes in college, and the characteristics they believed effective advisors should possess. Through this study, we conducted a thematic analysis of these qualitative data and herein provide an in-depth look at university advising from the viewpoint of students. Drawing from this analysis, we offer a model of the way student perceptions of advising are formed and maintained. This model is intended to assist administrators and advisors in tailoring their advising practices to specific student needs.

Method

Participants

We conducted 24 story circles with 162 freshmen from 10 different advising centers on campus. Two participants reported going to supplementary advising centers without professional academic advisors, such as centers for military services personnel or student-athletes; however, the other 8 centers employed professional advisors. Of the 8 centers, 2 specialized in assisting students whose college entrance credentials qualified them for preparatory or emergent status and their direct admission to a college or major depended on fulfillment of specific requirements after initial university admission. Students accepted into the honor's college,

regardless of their declared major, were assigned to a single center designated for them. The other 5 department-based centers accommodated students with declared majors in engineering, applied science and technology, arts and sciences, business administration, education, or health professions. Participants in the current study were recruited with flyers, e-mails, and instructor-donated class time. They received class credit or refreshments for their participation in story circles.

In addition, we conducted 24 individual interviews with 5 male and 19 female full-time students, between 18 and 49 years old, from eight different advising centers, including one supplementary advising center with no professional advisors, two for students not directly accepted into a major or college because of their college-entrance credentials, one for students admitted into the honor's college, and four that handled major-based advising. Interview participants were recruited from story circles and introductory psychology courses. Seventeen participants identified as White, 3 as Black, 2 as Biracial, 1 as Multiracial, and 1 as Portuguese. All participants received a gift card; some students also received class credit.

Procedure

This study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, we used a story circle approach, and in the second phase, we conducted in-depth interviews. Story circles were chosen because of their usefulness for collecting descriptions of individual experiences and perceptions while devoting time for group discussion and analysis with the participants during the story circles (Behrman & Spickard Prettyman, 2017). Through this method we collected data on many individual experiences while recognizing the participants as co-analysts in the research process. Each story circle participant was given 3 minutes to tell a story about a personal experience with advising. After everyone in each circle shared a story, group discussion and analysis followed. Story circles encourage listening to others' narratives, allowing participants to act as co-analysts in identifying common and divergent themes from the stories. This type of insiders' analysis provides insight on the topic of interest and serves as a form of validity check in a way that differs from standard text analysis.

Themes identified from story circle participant discussions and researcher text analysis shaped the development of the individual interview guide that was used for in-depth exploration of topics mentioned in the circles. One-on-one interviews were conducted in private locations and ranged in length from 6 to 42 minutes, with an average length of 15 minutes. Interview participants were asked about the following: their experiences with high school guidance counselors, expectations for advising prior to enrolling at the university, experiences with advising at the university, and thoughts about their futures and the likelihood of ongoing enrollment at the university. This study was approved by the university institutional review board, and all participants gave informed consent prior to participation.

Analysis

We engaged in focused coding and constant comparison methods to analyze these data (as per Charmaz, 2006). Throughout the data analysis process, we documented ideas, questions, and comments, and created a master list of themes, which was maintained during the coding process according to the memoing procedures recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990). We developed a codebook on the basis of agreement of two members of our research team (Walker and Strnad), who also coded multiple story circles and interviews together to establish coding reliability. Finally, we collaboratively grouped the codes into overarching themes; in cases of discrepancy, we discussed and negotiated until agreement was reached.

Results

We identified four main themes: student difficulty making the distinction between roles of high school guidance counselors and college academic advisors, advisor communication, student desire for a relationship with an advisor, and advisor accessibility. We discuss the themes by including the frequency counts and percentages to quantify the emergence of each theme.

Difficulty Making the Distinction Between Counselors and Advisors

We found that the transition from meeting with high school guidance counselors to working with college academic advisors challenges students ($F = 154$, 17%) because the distinction between the two professions remains unclear (Smith, 2002). Some students explained that their interactions with high school guidance counselors involved more than scheduling, checking grades, and

preparing for college. They talked about their high school counselors "catching up" with them during their meetings by asking about both academic and personal concerns. One student related that her high school guidance counselor helped her "fill out scholarships. She helped me apply for jobs and then find different job things that I could get into. She helped me with my homework. She basically helped me with everything." Because of the structured nature of position assignments in high school settings, many students received advice from the same guidance counselor for sufficient time to develop a personal relationship. "I came from a small school. There's about 300 of us, but advisors [sic] or teachers—they all made time to have one-on-one. And I know that here at [this university] it's 30,000 kids." Not only did this student highlight the differences in attention she received from her high school and university experiences, but she referred to her high school guidance counselor as an *advisor*, thus, highlighting the difficulty students experience in making the distinction between the two professions.

One student described disappointment with the structure of advising at the university: "I thought college would be a little bit more better because I'm paying more." Because the student is paying for her education, she anticipated receiving more guidance from a college advising office than she had received in high school. Students discussed their expectation that advisors would help them schedule classes, choose a major if they were undecided, answer questions, suggest resources available on campus, and generally be supportive. Because of their high school experiences, some students also expected to consistently interact with the same advisor, develop a relationship with the advisor, and receive personalized attention.

In contrast, other students expected less personal attention from college advisors than they received from their high school guidance counselors because of the high number of students attending the university:

> I mean, I didn't—I kind of expected my relationship—maybe we could be like mutual friends. But in reality I was like "they are my advisor, they see hundreds, hundreds of students." A lot. I'd probably be a number to them.

These students realized that developing a close-knit relationship with their college advisor might be relatively difficult because the advisor–student ratio is much larger than the counselor–student ratio at their high school.

Advisor Communication

Positive aspects of the advising experience. Students reported both positive and negative experiences with communication and their college advisors ($F = 347$, 38%). Some students indicated that their advisors clearly communicated the classes they needed by using supplemental resources such as handouts, flowcharts, booklets, and pamphlets. Students who mentioned these tools appreciated that information was clearly and consistently transmitted and communication was framed to support timely graduation:

> She gave me a 5-year flowchart of what I needed to follow each year and what classes I needed to graduate. I met with her last semester, and she gave me the same flowchart, and told me the same stuff, so she's good to her word and knows what she's talking about.

According to the students, clear communication was facilitated by their advisors taking the time to help them plan for graduation, despite their status as freshmen, rather than simply focusing on planning for the next semester.

Good communication between students and advisors involves more than giving students accurate and understandable information. One student described the way the advisor communicated, "Like I said, she's very forward, but in a caring, motherly way. So she would let me know, 'well this needs to be done, and you need to make sure you do this.'" These students perceived that information delivered in a personal or caring fashion resulted in better communication with their advisors. Furthermore, some students did not feel the need to return to advisors, particularly those who reported that advisors showed them how to schedule classes online and took the time to discuss long-term course requirements. One student explained, "As long as I know what the requirements are, I don't think I need your help."

Room for improved advisor communication. The experiences students related varied among participants. Some students described advising as ineffective. Lack of understanding of the general advising process in college created a major roadblock for some advisees:

> One of the many reasons why I haven't gone back to academic advising, I just even don't know where to start. Like I don't know when I should go, who I should go to, or how many of those people I should go to.

Of those accessing advising, several students reported that the supplemental materials (e.g., flowcharts) were not uniformly used, and some students indicated that they received no or few supplemental materials. Furthermore, not all advisors explained to students the courses that they needed. Some students reported that their advisors scheduled their classes for them rather than showing them how to schedule their own. Approximately one quarter of the surveyed students ($n = 38$) cited semester-to-semester planning as a source of frustration and anxiety:

> My first semester she told me to take only 12 credit hours and I literally sat in my room bored. . . . Now I feel like I'm gonna be behind because I only took 12 credits my first semester. So it's like in the back of my mind the whole time, is that "I'm gonna be behind."

Information for course planning for a timely graduation was not clearly communicated to this advisee, and she was not alone in feeling frustrated.

When discussing their paths to graduation, other students mentioned that they felt behind in the pursuit of graduation ($n = 11$). They indicated that advisors did not schedule classes appropriately when suggesting that the student take few credit hours and not providing the student with correct information about the requirements for their individual degree programs. Advisors recommending that students not overburden themselves with too many classes did not consistently communicate with students about the impact of this choice on graduation. Variation in information among advising centers, especially between general university advising centers and department- or program-specific advising centers, eroded student confidence in advising and risked damaging relations between the students and the university:

> She was helping me with my spring schedule, this semester, and there was this one class, and she, I was just over the required amount of credit hours to be a full time student, but she said, "I recommend not taking this class because you don't want to overburden yourself." Then, I went later to the engineering department and I asked, "Am I supposed to take this class?'" and they're like "Oh yeah, you definitely want to take this class or else you're going to be falling behind and you might need to take another year in your schooling." So, I was kind of mad that she automatically assumed that I didn't need that course right away and she just left me off to, on the wrong path.

A subset of students reported that they received clear communication regarding the courses needed to obtain their degrees ($n = 7$). One student explained that her first advisor engaged in semester-to-semester planning but her second advisor, "Basically showed me the whole, my whole curriculum of what I needed to take to get, to obtain my degree." Lack of consistently communicated messaging from individual advisors and of uniform information from multiple advisors often resulted in student confusion.

Missing components in advisor communication. Concerns revealed by students also encompassed information that advisors were not sharing. Sometimes the complex, layered structure of the advising system seemed opaque to students or the training, experience level, and motivation of the individual advisor were perceived as the cause of missed opportunities to communicate. Students related feeling that their advisors were not explaining all of the available options or relevant opportunities. For example, students in regimented programs (e.g., engineering and nursing) referred to the lack of knowledge from general advisors about the specific requirements for their program, and they expressed frustration upon learning that they could speak to advisors in their specific disciplines despite having been assigned to other advising offices. In addition, a student in a story circle explained that her advisor helped her get scholarships to pay her tuition, and the other students in the circle subsequently voiced disappointment in their advisors, who had not mentioned scholarships or explained financial aid options to them.

Communication is a reciprocal process, and students conveyed the importance of feeling that advisors listen to them. Some students explained that questions and concerns they had raised in

meetings with their advisor remained unaddressed; others reported inability to participate in the decision-making process of scheduling their own classes. For example, one advisee described feeling unhappy because her advisor seemed uninterested that long breaks between her classes created real inconvenience and scheduled her classes without her input. Other students related situations in which advisors did not give them time to talk: "I went to meet with my advisor for the first time. He talked too much and never let me get a word out, and I didn't have a say in my classes."

The story circle participants explored these negatives narratives. The ensuing discussion revealed confusion of some individuals about practices that vary across advising centers and about the advisors' routine expedition of enrollment versus their pedagogical role in facilitating students' self-sufficiency and maturation. Students' levels of (mis)understanding may be connected to their advisor utilizing a developmental- or task-focused approach.

Multiple students disclosed lack of communication between advising centers and students when advisors left their positions. One student shared that her advisor helped her "through whatever I needed," but then, "she left and went to Louisiana for a better job and I was never even told, so when I would call her and leave voice mails and go into the office, she was never there." The student was particularly distressed that she learned about the advisor's move through unofficial channels instead of through direct communication from the university.

Students attributed the advisors' poor communication to three different reasons: (a) Advisors are poorly trained or resourced, and therefore, do not have the necessary knowledge to communicate with them; (b) advisors are knowledgeable but choose not to share information because of time constraints or disinterest in the students; and (c) the poor organization of the advising system interferes with successful communication. Unsure of the power dynamics in the system and the advisors' own attributes, students guessed about ways to seek recourse when advising failed them or left them perplexed.

Communication between advising centers. Several students voiced concerns with consistency in communication between advisors within the same advising center and in information shared between advising centers. One student complained, "My advisors are in completely separate buildings in completely separate parts of campus, so if I need to talk about multiple topics at once, it's very difficult because I have to make separate appointments to talk about each individual topic." Students also reported feeling that they must do more work because the communication between academic departments and academic advising centers fell below their expectations:

> I found it surprising the level of, well lack of, communication between the advising departments and how I had to do a lot of the legwork myself, just to get registered. I had to track down teachers to get them to sign the forms that I needed them to signed [sic], I had to go down to the Registrar's Office, get the e-mails that were going back and forth, the communications, make the connections so to speak. Whereas in my experience in schools that I've gone to in the past, the advisor could make a phone call to these departments and they would resolve these issues, and I didn't find that to be the experience here.

This dual major student reported that the advising center for one major provided the necessary information; however, the student also expressed disappointment that the advising center for the other major did not make needed connections. Describing a contrasting scenario, one student related that an advisor unable to answer a question called someone in another department to learn and give the student accurate information and guidance.

Student Desire for an Advisee–Advisor Relationship

Students reported various expectations for and satisfaction with their current relationships with advisors. Although some students expressed contentment with their lack of personal connection or felt comfortable with their superficial relationship with an advisor, others expected to develop a close relationship ($F = 220$, 24%).

A major source of dissatisfaction stemmed from the belief that advisors did not know their advisees: "I just have the same advisor I did when I went for my freshman orientation, and this lady has yet to remember my name. She talks at me, not to me. . . ." In contrast, students satisfied with their relationship with advisors reported that their advisors knew them: "She knew who I was when

I came back from orientation, and that shows me that she actually cares about the students that are coming into her office."

Findings reveal that some student dissatisfaction with their advising relationships was connected with the way they perceived communications with advisors. Students who reported being dissatisfied talked about problematic interactions: "I was an incoming freshman, and I didn't know how it worked, so like, I e-mailed her, and you know, like sometimes you can just sense hostility and anger? I just sensed that through an e-mail." Furthermore, students repeatedly described the importance of advisors taking time with them and showing genuine interest by connecting with them on a personal level. One student explained that the advisor "showed genuine concern. When [I was] asking a question, she showed her interest in answering my question, not just trying to give an answer to get me out of the office."

Another student, who met with her advisor only once, during orientation, related her surprise when the advisor contacted her regarding the courses she had independently scheduled:

> She sent me an e-mail that was asking me why I was taking classes that weren't in my major. Which, there are so many kids here, that the fact that she looked into that, made me feel very important. Ya know what I mean? Because I didn't expect that at all, so I would say that there is some, like, relationship there.

Some students reported feeling that their advisors wanted them to succeed, but also that advisors did not know them and that no genuine relationship had been established: "I feel like she wants to see everybody do well, but I feel like, you know, I mean we're just a name. Like we're not, like she doesn't really know us." This sentiment was echoed by other students: "I think she wants me to succeed, but I don't feel like she would go specifically out of her way for me because, I guess, I don't have that personal relationship with her." Multiple students discussed feeling as if they were "just a name" or "just a number." For example, one student stated, "I think they just treat kids, students, like numbers. 'You did a good job, pat on the back, walk out the door, *next*!' I don't think that deep down, I don't think they really like care."

Students who felt they had established a relationship with their advisors reported that their advisors were invested in their success in various ways, including tailoring classes to student interests, not rushing appointments, knowing information about the student, communicating politely, demonstrating support for students when personal issues were shared, and being knowledgeable about the student's programs and needs. Some students believed walk-in appointments reduced the likelihood that they would interact with an advisor who would make a personal connection with them. A student who had met with multiple advisors clearly explained: "I think it just, it depends on which advisor you get. Some care. Some don't." This student focused on the individual qualities of the specific advisor as the source for the success or failure in establishing the desired personal relationship.

Many students mentioned their dissatisfaction with meeting with multiple advisors: "It would be nice. I understand that they have a lot of people going on, but it would be nice to just stick with one person and work with them." Students mentioned frustration with being reassigned to new advisors or advising centers, which some experienced several times. Students who did not meet with the same advisor repeatedly explained feeling that they could not develop a relationship with an advisor, did not always feel the advisor cared about their success, and suspected that they were receiving contradictory information from multiple advisors.

Despite the value students placed on working with one person, meeting with the same advisor did not necessarily mean that a relationship will develop. One student said she had met with the same advisor three times in the semester, but when asked if she had a relationship with her advisor, she replied, "Not really, I guess. I don't think she really knows who I am." Hence, we contend that although many students prefer seeing one advisor over time, they really want to meet with a consistent advisor who is willing to develop a relationship with them.

Advisor Accessibility

Student perceptions of advisors accessibility varied ($F = 185$, 20%). Some reported experiencing no problem scheduling meetings with their advisors or communicating with them via phone or e-mail ($n = 20$); however, others ($n = 37$) said that they experienced difficulties scheduling meetings with their advisors or did not receive return phone calls or e-mails:

> Before this spring semester I went to [try to] meet with my advisor twice a week for three weeks. I even e-mailed her and never even got an appointment, and she never replied to any e-mails and that caused me to do scheduling on my own.

The students' perceptions about problematic appointment scheduling with advisors may be, in part, influenced by their previous experiences with accessible high school guidance counselors: "I could go to [high school guidance counselor] whenever. . . . She was available whenever I was available." When asked about her expectations for college advisor availability, this participant replied, "I expected to see her more." This student had met with her advisor 2 or 3 times in the fall and 1 or 2 times in the spring semesters, which she felt was insufficient.

Some students mentioned that, at certain times during the semester, they are unable to schedule meetings with advisors because of advising center walk-in appointment policies. The walk-in format benefits advising offices in handling heavy caseloads during peak times, but students noted the drawbacks of this approach: "Well, if we're gonna do a walk-in, how long is it gonna take? Who am I gonna meet with?" Students explained that the wait times varied between 20 and 90 minutes. For some students, the wait times posed no problem; however, for students who commute, need accommodation for accessibility issues, work, or have classes scheduled back-to-back, walk-in only appointments with such unpredictable and long wait times proved difficult to manage.

Students also pointed to other difficulties with walk-in appointments. Specifically, they explained that advisors tended to rush these meetings. One student said, "They were like, 'she has 15 minutes [the advisor], and at the 15 minute marker, she's going to say you have to go.'" The same student elaborated that the hurried nature of these meetings made her question her importance to the advisor: "I never know if she is being genuine, you know what I mean? I feel like I'm like imposing or just being a burden."

Another student specified a feeling that she was unduly taking up her advisor's time during their meeting: "I know they have other students that have problems that need their help, and I don't want to like, just be taking up their valuable time." It was clear that students, at some level, saw how workload for advisors or responsibilities outside of the advising office (i.e., teaching) placed advisors in a position to hasten through appointments:

> I just expected it to be more, I don't know how to explain it, she just seemed always in a rush, so I couldn't really sit down, talk to her and talk a lot of things out. I would just really sit down, say one thing and then go from there and then she'll have to go teach a class or something. It was rushed.

Student perceptions of whether their advisor spent sufficient time with them during their meetings did not necessarily depend on the duration of the meetings. Some students reported that advisors answered all their questions and spent enough time with them during a 5-minute meeting, while other students felt rushed out the door in 20-minute (or longer) appointment: "She always makes sure that we're covering what I want to talk about. . . . She always pauses and asks me if I have any questions or anything else that I'm concerned with."

The Model of Student Perception Development

This study highlighted a divide between advising practice and student expectations for and perceptions of the advising they experienced. The gap we describe may be difficult to bridge for large, public universities because solutions call for resources that are already stretched thin. In summary, the current practices in the advising setting discussed only partially met student expectations, and we suggest that a creative effort is needed to address student concerns and needs. To support this effort, we compared our findings to existing literature on student perceptions of advising practice and offer a processual model that explains the way students form their advising expectations.

Our study supports the work of other researchers that links student impressions of advising to their experiences with their high school guidance counselors. Propp and Rhodes (2006) suggested that students' preexisting expectations about academic counseling can influence their perceptions of advising quality. Hence, students' experiences with a high school guidance counselor likely affect their expectations and evaluations of the college academic advisor. For instance, Christian and Sprinkle (2013) and Broadbridge (1996) found that undergraduate students wanted advisors to tell them the courses to take while graduate students tended to

prefer taking an active role in choosing courses for themselves.

The model (Figure 1), derived from study data, illustrates the way student perceptions of academic advising are generated. Students begin to form their perceptions of college academic advising when in high school; that is, early experiences with high school guidance counselors inform their expectations, in part, because of the unclear distinction between the two professions. Their ill-informed perceptions are reinforced and guided by their college advisor's accessibility (e.g., responsiveness to e-mails, time spent during appointments), their relationship with their advisor (e.g., investment in student success, individualized attention), and the quality of their advisor's communication (e.g., accuracy, navigating bureaucracy, consistency). The culmination of these interacting processes shape the way students view their advisors, affect their satisfaction with advising, and influence their persistence to graduation. Unfortunately, any misperceptions created by their fuzzy conceptions of high school guidance counselors and university advisors remain unaddressed, or unacknowledged, until students transition to college.

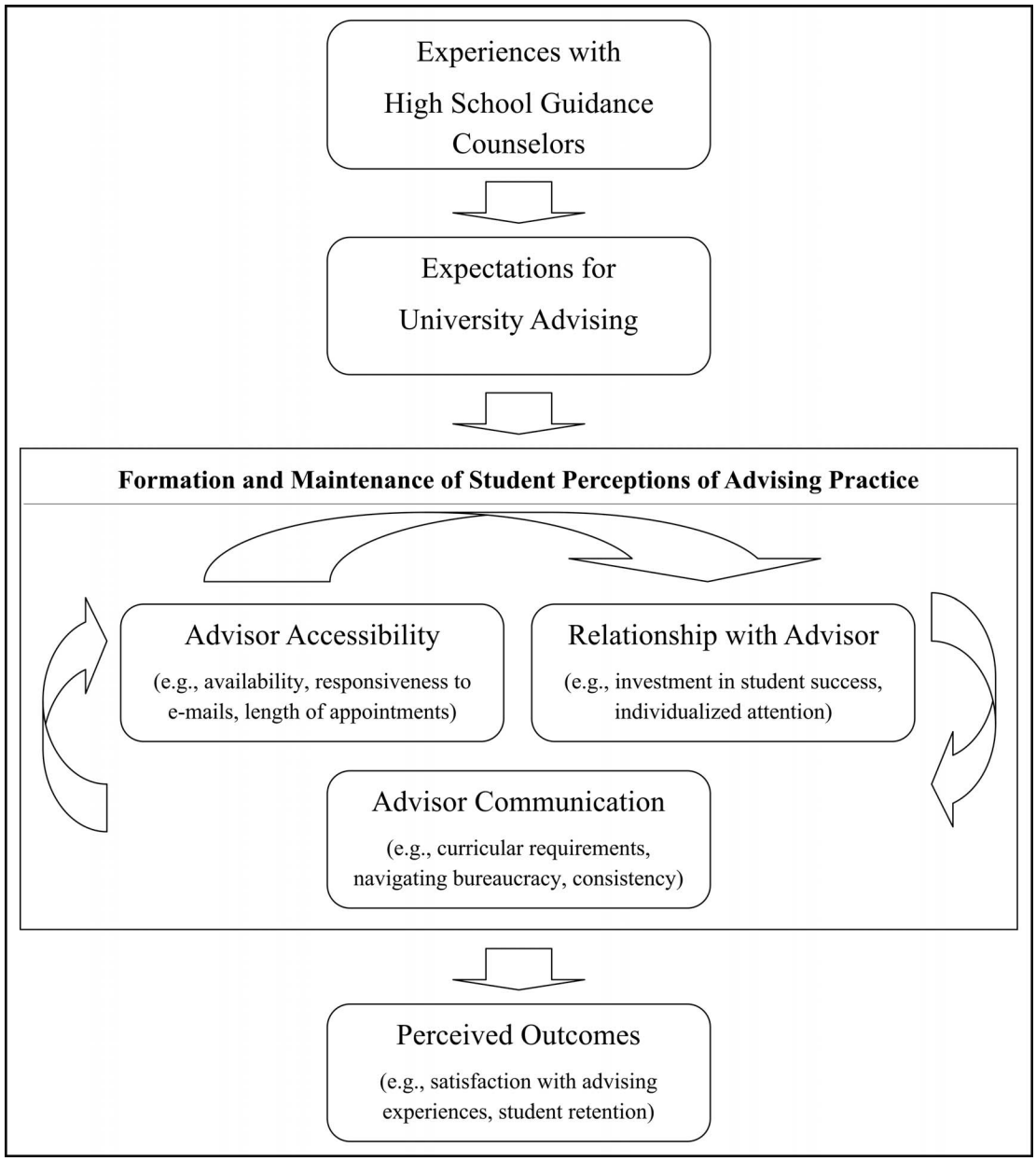
In our study, many students described high school guidance counselors who were responsible for telling them the classes to take to graduate, with very little choice aside from electives; students expected similar guidance and an outlined class structure from their college academic advisor. Their expectations are addressed within the context of the model, which shows that student perceptions of their advisors (i.e., perceived outcomes) are formed as a result of their experiences with their high school guidance counselor. These perceptions determine whether their current experiences with their university advisor (i.e., accessibility, communication, relationship) match their prior expectations. The perceived relationship between student expectations and current experiences does not guarantee an outcome; that is, a match between expectations and experiences does not portend positive outcomes, nor does a mismatch indicate negative outcomes. Students who expect perfunctory treatment because they enrolled at a large university will not find solace in experiences that match their expectations; however, they might express a positive perception of advising if their experience does not match their expectations (e.g., individualized attention from the advisor, advisor accessibility, or clear advisor communication).

In our study, students who had individualized attention from their high school guidance counselor typically expected the same level of attention from their college advisors. This finding is echoed in Smith's (2002) research, which supports the assertion that college students believe their college advisors take responsibility for functions similar to those of high school guidance counselors, such as knowing the easiest classes, structure and content of each course, and instruction style of the professor. Connecting our model to Smith's findings, we argue that expectations of university advising proceed from experiences with high school guidance counselors and also explain the way student interpretations of advisor accessibility, communication, and relational qualities are colored by the process experienced during their transition.

The current model connects to the three advising components identified by Habley (1986) as necessary for effective practice: conceptual, informational, and relational. When discussing the conceptual component, Higginson (2000) noted the importance of being aware of student expectations for advising as well as student personal and educational needs. The model reflects these concepts of advising. All three of Habley's components related to the process of forming and maintaining student perceptions of advising practice are highlighted in the model. The conceptual and informational components are based on student desire for effective advisor communication. Ultimately, advisors need to be both knowledgeable about student personal and educational needs and the ways to address those needs. The data in this study indicate that students view advisors as knowledgeable (i.e., conceptual and informational components) only when advisors effectively convey that knowledge to students via the relational component (e.g., individualized attention, accessibility).

This finding about the importance of the relational component in advisee perceptions of the informational and conceptual components of advising comport with research by Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino (2004) that showed that students perceive the developmental approach to advising, as described by establishing rapport and demonstrating care for and support of the student, more favorably regardless of any additional advising approaches utilized (e.g., prescriptive, directive). Hence, student assessments of ways advisors practice their craft are influenced by their experiences with advisor interpersonal skills and approaches.

Figure 1. Proposed model of student perception of advising practice



Summary

This study and the proposed model add to previous research by not only reaffirming findings of student desires for individual attention and personal experiences with their advisors (Montag, Campo, Weissman, Walmsley, & Snell, 2012; Mottarella et al., 2004) but by also suggesting that student perceptions of advisor conceptual and informational capabilities are influenced, formed, and maintained by the interaction with co-occurring perceptions of advisor relational capabilities (i.e., advisor accessibility, communication, and relationship).

Recognizing the pathways students have traced that shape their initial expectations of college advisors, those planning advising systems can

manage expectations and encourage positive student–advisor interactions at the university to serve both institutional and students' developmental needs. Our research yields evidence that the following factors influencing students' perceptions of adequate academic advising: advisor accessibility; the student–advisor relationship, including the specific components of that relationship; and communication channels and content. Previous research has related each of these factors to satisfaction with the advising process (e.g., accessibility [Lynch, 2004]; relationships [Harrison, 2009; Montag et al., 2002; Mottarella et al., 2004]; communication [Harrison, 2009]). Framing them in a single dynamic model, as we show herein, may contribute to more effective advising system planning.

Limitations

This study was based on a single university with an idiosyncratic advising system history, and therefore, not all of the themes may be generalizable to other colleges and universities. In addition, students recruited for interviews may have been more aware or appreciative of advising than students who did not agree to participate. The large sample size, compared to similar studies, for examining student narratives focused on perception of advising serves as a strength of this study; for comparison, Montag et al. (2012) studied 49 participants in eight focus groups, and Smith (2002) interviewed 34 participants in four focus groups. Additional strengths include the large variety of advising centers represented and the rich quality of the data from the qualitative approach used.

Future Research

Future research in this area might include investigations of the importance and impact of advisor relationship building on a student's well-being, academic progress, university connectedness, and retention. In addition, development of a scale to assess the additional facets of advising identified by the students in this study might prove worthy for delving deeper into their overall evaluation of advising. For example, Bitz (2010) developed a scale with subsections to measure advisor communication while touching on relational components (i.e., concern, listening, trust, and knowledge about advisee) as well as advisor accessibility (i.e., contact, comfort), but additional scales or subscales to assess student expectations for advising and perceptions of advisor knowledge might yield interesting results.

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