Education Doctorate Dissertations   Education

Spring 4-2-2020

The Relationship Between Academic Advising and Student Motivation on the Persistence of Freshman Exploratory Studies Students

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Recommended Citation

Advising and Retention:
The Relationship Between Academic Advising and Student Motivation on the Persistence of
Freshman Exploratory Studies Students

A Dissertation Presented to
the Faculty of the

Education Doctorate in Transformational Teaching and Learning Program of
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Education Doctorate

By Marlene Nanouh Fares

April 2, 2020
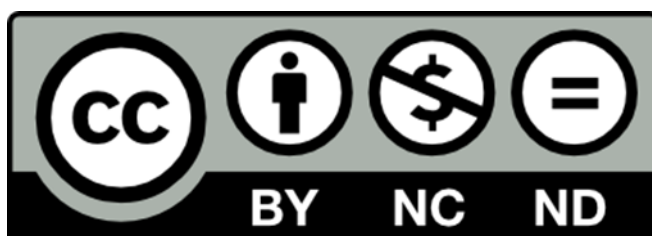
This Dissertation for the Education Doctorate in Transformational Teaching

and Learning Degree

By Marlene Nanouh Fares

as been approved on behalf of the College of Education

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Kathleen Stanfa, Committee Chair

Dr. Helen Hamlet, Committee Member

Dr. Edwin Nieves, Committee Member

April 2, 2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Relationship Between Academic Advising and Student Motivation on the Persistence of

Freshman Exploratory Studies Students

By

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Kutztown, Pennsylvania

Directed by Dr. Kathleen Stanfa

Academic advising is associated with increased student retention and academic success.

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate a relationship with the student-

advisor relationship and locus of control as an essential variable to understand Exploratory

Studies students' success. This study investigated the influence of the advising relationship with

Exploratory Studies students and their locus of control as it impacts their overall retention and

persistence. Based on Kutztown University (KU) institutional data sources, over 9 percent of

freshmen Exploratory Studies students fail at least one course in their first semester at KU. In

addition to satisfaction with advising and the student-advisor relationship being a predictive

measure of students' intent to persist, this study examined whether locus of control was a

predictor of Exploratory Studies students' academic success. This research was guided by the

theoretical framework of Tinto's (1975) model of student departure and Astin's (1985) theory of

student involvement. The results of this study suggest that both the academic advising

experience in association with Exploratory Studies students' motivation, impacts their

persistence beyond their first-year in college. The students' experiences and involvement,

specifically in their first year of college, influence their persistence or departure as a reflection of

their success or failure. Student engagement is a variable in student retention, and therefore

student's interaction with their academic advisor results in the probability of first-year

persistence for Exploratory Studies students.

Keywords: Academic Advisor, Retention, Persistence, Motivation, Academic Advising, Student Satisfaction, Locus of Control, Student Success, Exploratory Studies

Signature of Investigator _Marlene N. Fares_ Date 4/2/2020

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all students in higher education who recently had to endure radical

changes to their learning as a result of the global pandemic of the COVID-19. To my students,

in particular, I am so very proud of your resiliency as you navigated and persisted through virtual

learning in the Spring 2020 semester. I admire your capacity to adjust your lives and respond to

modifications as you continue to learn in a disaster.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank, those who provided guidance, support, friendship, and even sacrifice to see that I successfully complete this study. The accomplishment of this goal belongs to my entire family, who were there by my side throughout the process. I will forever be grateful to those that joined me on this journey and cheered me on through the finish line. My life is forever changed, thanks to these kind and selfless individuals.

- My children, Angelina and Dominic, for their constant love and patience with me. I love you so much and look forward to spending my newly found free-time with you both. Remember that anything is possible through hard work.

- My wonderful husband, Adnan, for always being there over the years, standing by my side in my decisions that disrupted our lives. You were very patient and supportive as sacrifices were made so I could focus on this doctorate and research.

- My parents, Joseph and Janet Nanouh, who taught me the importance of hard work and education. Thank you for your love, unwavering support, and encouragement to aim high and achieve my dreams.

- To my loving sister and confidant, Dr. Mervet Hachem, I love you and am truly blessed to have you in my life.

- My nephews, Christian, Aiden, and Grayson Hachem, and my nieces, Juliana Nanouh, Gabriella, Isabella, and Lillian Fares who fill my heart with tremendous love and joy. Spending time with each of you provided me with a perspective on the fundamental meaning of this work. Remember, you can do anything that you set your mind to.

- My sincerest appreciation to my dissertation Chair, Dr. Kathleen Stanfa, for providing such valuable feedback, assistance, patience, and mentorship throughout my study.

- To Dr. Helen Hamlet, my committee member, for providing me with support and encouragement.   Early on you encouraged me to shift my view on how to successfully carry out this research.

- A special thanks to Dr. Edwin Nieves, the role of committee member does not begin to describe the influence you have had on my career. You have guided me at work and through this research. With your tough-love approach, you pushed me to be better. Your guidance, support, and expertise throughout this study was immeasurable.

- I want to recognize all the faculty in the Doctorate of Education in Transformational Teaching and learning at Kutztown University, who provided endless inspiration and leadership throughout this experience.

- Dr. Germain Francois, my college Advisor, for your support and guidance, which was so invaluable to a first-generation girl who did not know who she was yet.

- Dr. Patricia Norred Derr, I am eternally grateful for the hours you spent editing my dissertation. I appreciate your expertise, time, and patience.

- A very special thank you to Angela Wolf and Nancy Brynildsen, who helped me collect my data and facilitate the Focus Group, I truly appreciate your time and effort.

- To my cohort and friends, it has been my profound privilege to walk alongside you in this journey. Thank you for the support and encouragement. Congratulations Cohort 1!

- Last and never least, to my writing sisters, Emily, Leila, and Patti, how would I have made it through without you? You challenged my thinking, helped me find my voice, and allowed me to use you as a sounding board throughout this process; I am eternally grateful for your love and support. My life is better because of you and I am blessed to call you my friends. A special congratulations to you, cheers!

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CHAPTER ONE: Leadership Context and Purpose of the Action

Introduction

The role of the academic advisor is crucial for all students. As an academic advisor, my objective is to make my Exploratory Studies (undeclared) freshmen advisees aware of the vast educational, cultural, and personal growth opportunities at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania (KU). Furthermore, the advising experience should create a productive relationship between advisee and advisor that promotes and encourages the student to take advantage of those opportunities. My action research explored the relationship with academic advising of freshmen Exploratory Studies students as it relates to their motivation and retention at KU. Student engagement is a variable in student retention, and therefore student's interaction with their academic advisor results in the probability of the first-year persistence for Exploratory Studies students. This study seeks to document the relationship between Exploratory Studies students' academic advising experience and their motivation as a predictive measure of academic success and persistence. By analyzing these two variables, this study will suggest ways to improve the effectiveness of advising freshmen Exploratory Studies students.

Action research differs from traditional research in that it is conducted within a specific context where the researcher has intimate knowledge and is intended to solve a problem of practice within that context (Herr & Anderson, 2015). My dual role as both the researcher and practitioner has allowed for both the collection and analyses of the associated evidence. As an action researcher, I am an insider. I planned and studied my student participants through both analysis of evidence and reflection on the role of their academic advisor (Riel, 2013). As an insider, I had the opportunity to identify a problem, take ownership, and make a change.

Conversely, an outsider would only be able to identify the problem and make a recommendation for change.

In the 2018 report by the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), Kutztown University's first-year retention rate was 73%, the four-year graduation rate was 38%, and a six-year graduation rate was 55%. The first-year retention rate for this cohort, as defined by Kutztown University (KU) and the State System of Higher Education, is the number of first-time, full-time freshmen returning to school one year later. For example, the first-year retention rate for fall 2017 first-year students is the number of first-time freshmen returning to school for fall 2018. The average retention rate for all Pennsylvania colleges is 78%, and nationwide the average is 72% (Education, 2019). As reported by the KU Office of Institutional Research, KU is ranked seven out of the fourteen PASSHE institutions from lowest to highest in the first-year retention. KU shares the same goal as other institutions of higher education, to retain their students.

Retention is everyone's job on a college campus (Infande, 2013). KU's plan toward financial sustainability has established the following four goals to move the institution toward financial stability: Recruitment, Persistence, Annual Budget, and a Comprehensive Campaign to provide additional funding for scholarships and building projects. Academic Advisors play a critical role in increasing student persistence which will allow KU to meet its goal:

Increase the university persistence rate to 68% by fall, 2023. Increase freshmen cohort retention by 1% annually, fall 2020 to fall 2023. Achieving this goal would bring the university back to 78%. 1% improvement to our retention rate equates to keeping an additional 14 to 16 students per year. Therefore,

targeted programs that impact smaller, more specific populations of students will also play an essential part in achieving this goal.

For Exploratory Studies first-year students, the Academic Enrichment department provides information and guidance throughout the exploration process. Academic advising is an ongoing process of clarification and re-evaluation of academic goals and plans with active participation between the advisor and the student. The advising relationship is more than just scheduling and registration. The department is committed to providing students with information about campus resources and encouraging major career exploration as well as making student support services referrals as needed.

Academic advising "provides the most significant mechanism by which students can directly interact with representatives of the institution and clarify their educational/career goals as well as relate these goals to academic offerings. While many models of advising now exist, a critical element to advising systems is ensuring advisees are connected to faculty who will mentor and guide them through their academic experience and help them meet their career and graduate education goals." (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008) Academic advising is vital in promoting student success and student development (Kuhn, 2008). Therefore, enhancing the traditional academic advising practices that guide students to select a program of study that meets their career and life goals will have a positive effect on students and retention (Tinto, 1975, 1993; Kuhn, 2008).

I refer to Crookston's (1994) description for student development as an opportunity in which the student may plan to achieve a self-fulfilling life. According to Crookston, students and advisors should share responsibility for the advising relationship and the quality of that experience (Crookston, 1994). Having established specific academic and career goals would

provide students to focus on their learning process and influence their retention (Khuong, 2014).

I enjoy making connections and building a rapport with my student advisees. A personal

connection is always more favorable over an impersonal form of media.

The participants in my research are my student advisees. My role as the researcher is

very similar to my role as an advisor. Although my lens as a researcher provides me a broader

perspective and understanding advising of the Exploratory Studies freshmen, my advisor

positionality is within the practice. That practice is to assist the students and assure them that

they have the information and support necessary to persist and be successful. On a personal

note, I was a first-generation college student who had the opportunity at higher education

because of a program created to support the underprepared students, known as ACT 101. The

Act 101 program is a state-funded program that allocates funds to Pennsylvania schools

(Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, 2018). Institutions utilize the funds to

provide services to academically and financially disadvantaged students to assist them in their

success in college. It is undoubtedly because of the ACT 101 program and the tremendous

support of an academic advisor that I persisted and graduated. That experience guides my

practice and research to this day.

I recall my undergraduate experience being both exciting and terrifying. I was eager to

experience college and proud to represent my family as a first-generation college student. That

representation sparked my motivation for achieving a bachelor's degree. I quickly learned that

wanting something and having the ability to achieve it were vastly different. I failed a course in

my first semester following an intensive summer program. I believed that I had disappointed my

parents. They were immigrants from Syria who worked very hard, long hours in factories, to

ensure their children would have the education and opportunities they did not have. They

supported me emotionally and financially. I had the privilege of achieving a college education because I had support both on and off-campus.

On-campus, I had formed a student-advisor relationship with the assistant director of the ACT 101 program. This individual was the driving force behind my success and persistence during my undergraduate experience. He did not allow me to sabotage myself and helped me overcome obstacles that could have prevented my success. I gravitated to him for support, and he referred me and encouraged me to utilize all campus support services. He connected me with a peer mentor who was an upperclassman who also encouraged me to take advantage of these resources. As a result, I changed my major in my freshman year and graduated in three and a half years. In short, my accomplishments were a result of the support and relationship I had with the assistant director of the ACT 101 program. With his support and encouragement, I persisted, despite of being labeled an "at-risk" student. He maintained a "tough love" approach that provided me with the right perspective I needed, and I am forever grateful.

In addition to the introduction of the study and my personal experience, this chapter will provide the context for this action research. It will also include the definition of terminology and share the purpose of the study. This section will also present the research questions which emerged from the problem statements, which are also described. Lastly, the chapter provides a basis for this study as guided by the theoretical framework.

Context

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania (KU) is a member of the State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and was founded in 1866. Formerly known as the Keystone State Normal School, it became Kutztown State Teachers College in 1928, Kutztown State College in 1960, and achieved university status in 1983. Today, Kutztown University is a modern, comprehensive

institution. (Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, 2018) KU is accredited by the Middle States

Commission on Higher Education, along with numerous professional accreditations for the

programs offered on campus.

KU is an NCAA Division II institution that includes eight men's sports and 13 women's

sports (Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, 2018). There are approximately 200 student

organizations and clubs, including civic engagement, faith-based, Greek life, media and

publications, a particular interest, and visual and performing arts. "Kutztown University's

mission is to provide a high-quality education at the undergraduate and graduate levels to prepare

students to meet the lifelong intellectual, ethical, social, and career challenges." (Kutztown

University of Pennsylvania, 2019) The vision for the institution is to serve as "a regional center

of excellence providing opportunities for advanced academic, cultural, and public service

experiences, within a caring community, designed to promote success in a global society."

(Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, 2019)

Demographics

KU's enrollment for 2018-2019 was approximately 8,309 full-time and part-time

undergraduate and graduate students, mostly from Pennsylvania. (Kutztown University of

Pennsylvania, 2018) There are 28 states and 40 countries represented by the student body,

including a gender ratio of 55% women and 45% men (Kutztown University of Pennsylvania,

2018). About 80% of students receive financial aid in the form of scholarships, grants, loans, or

campus employment. The Department of Academic Enrichment's freshmen Exploratory Studies

population for the 2018 - 2019 academic year was 292 students, which represents an increase

from the 2017 - 2018 academic year at 263 students and a decrease from the 2016 – 2017

academic year with 359 students, as reported by the Office of Institutional Research.

Fifty-two percent of Exploratory Studies freshmen are male. This percentage has remained stable for the past three academic periods. The racial demographics of this cohort are 71% white, 10% Hispanic, 9% Black, and 10% other. Traditionally aged students, 18 – 22 years old, make up 98% of the freshmen exploratory population for the 2018 – 2019 academic year. Out of the 292 students, 101 (n=35%) are classified as first-generation college students, as compared to 32% of the broader student population, per institutional data resources.

Table 1

Exploratory Studies Student Demographics

Cohort	2016	2017	2018
Female	178	133	139
Male	181	130	153
American Indian	2	0	1
Asian	0	3	4
Black	32	22	28
Hispanic	34	26	30
White	272	192	206
Multi-racial	15	18	9
Unknown	4	2	14
Age 17	5	7	6
Age 18	303	211	243
Age 19	46	43	36
Age 20	3	2	3
Age 21	0	0	2
Age 22+	2	0	2
First-generation	140	105	101
Cohort Total	359	263	292

Exploratory Studies students have been the second-largest freshman class in the past

three academic years. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has consistently been the

largest. Exploratory Studies students have had the lowest high school grade point average of

accepted freshmen over the past three academic years as compared to the other colleges at KU.

Moreover, they have also consistently had the lowest SAT scores, both verbal and math, as

compared to the other colleges. This further describes the vulnerability of this population and

why these students must connect with their advisors as freshmen when the advisor can have a

greater impact (Kuh, 1997).

The first-year retention rate (2017 – 2018) for exploratory freshmen is 68.82%, which is

the second-lowest when compared to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, College of

Business, College of Visual and Performing Arts, and the College of Education at KU.

Furthermore, Exploratory Studies freshmen have the lowest two-year retention rate (2016 –

2017) at 55.43% compared to the four colleges. Moreover, Exploratory Studies freshmen had

the highest rates of Ds, Fs, withdrawals, and incompletes (DFWI) at 27.78% in 2017 - 2018. In

2016 and 2017, Exploratory Studies freshmen performed the lowest in the average cumulative

grade point average (CGPA) for both their first semester as well as their first year as compared to

the four colleges at KU. Also, these students earned fewer credits after their first year when

compared to their peers in the broader cohort.

This discouraging data further highlights the need for an intentionally designed early

academic advising and registration approach to building relationships with Exploratory Studies

students' that will impact their retention and success. According to Spight (2019), academic

advisors should see students as unique individuals and develop approaches that are student-

specific. Thus, if we focus on forming a relationship with each student, understanding "who they

are and whom they want to be" (Spight, 2019), retention is more likely. This critical advising

practice is the initial step to correct in connecting with the advisees at new student orientation as

a way to begin forming relationships. The responsibility for creating the student's schedule is

also imperative to ensure that they have a positive start at KU along with being present at

functions such as accepted student days. Advising freshmen Exploratory Studies students and

forming a relationship to ensure student success and retention must be intentional.

Definition of Terminology

In this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Academic advising: A practice in which individuals working in education intermingle

with students as they progress through their studies. Advising helps students better understand

what choices they should make and follow actions to attain their learning and professional goals

(Roberts & Styron, 2010).

Academic advisor: A person who coaches students to become active in their choices and

has a positive impact on related outcomes (Elrich, Russ-Eft, 2011; McClellan & Moser, 2011;

Paul, Smith, & Dochney, 2012).

Exploratory Studies is another term for undeclared and described as a major status.

Students who either enter college or switch to Exploratory Studies do so because they are

undecided about their career path.

Locus of Control is a psychological concept that refers to how strongly people believe

they have control over the situations and experiences that affect their lives. (Nowicki, 2016; Hill,

2013; Rotter, 1966)

Motivation is the driving force by which we accomplish our goals, typically identified as

intrinsic or extrinsic (Sternberg, 2005).

Persistence is when a college student continues their enrollment and matriculation at the institution of higher education (Habley, Bloom, & Steve, 2012, p. 4).

Retention is the outcome of how many students remain enrolled from one fall semester to the next fall semester at an institution of higher education. This number is typically derived from first-time, full-time traditional day students, but can be applied to any defined cohort. (Tinto, 1975, 1993)

Student satisfaction: The favorability of a student's experiences associated with education (Letcher & Neves, 2010).

Student Success is defined as students persisting in the completion of their educational goals (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between academic advising of Exploratory Studies students on a college campus and compare their academic persistence success with their level of motivation. Student persistence is being defined as a college student who continues their enrollment and matriculation at the institution (Habley, Bloom, & Steve, 2012, p. 4) in this study. Utilizing a mixed-method design approach, I expect to confirm the importance of academic advising as one key strategy to improve the effectiveness and satisfaction of the advising relationship as it affects student persistence and the institutional retention rates for Exploratory Studies students. Academic advisors are productive when they are responsive to students' needs and essential in promoting success and development (Gordon, Habley & Grites, 2008, p. 81). Selecting an academic major as well as planning educational and professional goals with their advisor prepares students for academic success and encourages their persistence to graduation. "What students do during college generally matters more to what they

learn and whether they persist to graduation than who they are or even where they go to college."

(Kuh, et al. 2005 p. 3-4) Proactive academic advising is associated with increased student

retention and academic success.

Maki (2012) defines learning as "a process of constructing meaning, framing issues,

drawing on strategies and abilities honed over time, reconceptualizing, understanding,

repositioning oneself in relation to a problem or issue, and connecting thinking and knowing to

action" (Maki, 2012, p. 52). This robust definition of learning makes it clear that academic

advising is an integral piece of an institution's educational mission. It is through the advising

process that students learn the specific skills, abilities, and strategies necessary to navigate their

educational experiences, take control of their experiences, and make effective decisions

concerning their educational goals, choices, and needs.

The development and assessment of learning outcomes for the advising experience is a

new departmental policy in the Academic Enrichment department at KU. Developing learning

outcomes, and a subsequent assessment plan, will hopefully result in a renewed focus on the

advising experience and lay the foundation for the content of advisor development programs

(Nutt, 2014). Learning outcomes assessment provides a clear demonstration that academic

advising is a longitudinal process that reaches across the institution. Maki (2012) maintains that

a commitment to assessment of learning can determine the effectiveness of instruction, both

curricular and co-curricular, and the level of integration of learning and instruction across the

educational experiences. As Linda Darling-Hammond, a higher education research specialist for

the Rand Corporation once said:

If there is one thing social science research has found consistently and

unambiguously. . .it's that people will do more of whatever they are evaluated on

doing. What is measured will increase, and what is not measured will decrease.

(Cuseo, 2008)

The focus on assessment may offer new attention to advising, allowing advisors to make it a

priority to form an advisor-student relationship to improve first-year retention and overall

persistence.

Research Questions

In order to explore the relationship between academic advising of Exploratory Studies

students and compare their academic persistence with their level of motivation, I arrived at two

questions:

RQ1: How does the student-advisor relationship with Freshmen Exploratory Studies

students impact their first-year retention?

RQ2: What is the relationship between a positive academic advising experience and

student motivation as a predictive measure of success and persistence?

By addressing these questions, this study confirms the relationship between Exploratory Studies

students' academic advising experience and student motivation as a predictive measure of

success and persistence to discover ways to improve the effectiveness of advising Freshmen

Exploratory Studies students.

Problem Statement

The retention and graduation of students have always been a concern of higher education

(Waters, White, Wang, & Murray, 2015). These concerns increase as the focus of federal

financial assistance offered to students is being tied to the retention and graduation rates of the

institution (White, 2015). Therefore, improving enrollment, retaining students, and having a

high student success rate are important factors for institutions of higher education.

Based on KU institutional data sources, over nine percent of freshmen Exploratory Studies students fail at least one course in their first semester at KU. Exploratory Studies students consistently have had the highest percentage of first-term academic standing, which includes a warning, probation, and dismissal for the last three academic years. Exploratory Studies students consistently have had the highest percentage of Pell-eligible student recipients. A Pell Grant is a subsidy the U.S. federal government provides for students who need it to pay for their college education. Federal Pell Grants are limited to students with financial need, who have not earned their first bachelor's degree.

> Academic advising is the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate
> and retain students. For this reason, academic advising … should be viewed as the
> 'hub of the wheel' and not just one of the various isolated services provided for
> students…academic advisors offer students the personal connection to the
> institution that the research indicates is vital to student retention and student
> success (Nutt, 2014).

Currently, I am the primary advisor for all KU freshmen Exploratory Studies students. Students meet with me for registration and course selection, changing a major, adding or dropping courses, transfer planning, academic planning, and career counseling.

Evaluating the effectiveness of academic advising is a practice we exercise in the Department of Academic Enrichment. This research proposes to examine the relationship of academic advising on students' success as it relates to Exploratory Studies student's retention rates. According to Dr. Dan Greenstein, Chancellor for Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), the State System is transforming itself through a collaborative, highly-public process known as the system redesign. Phase 2 of the system redesign, which began in

Fall 2018, includes a holistic advising team that is reviewing and researching "university-specific

advising approaches and national best practices, as well as to identify components of holistic

advising, relevant technologies, and means for assessment that can be tested and replicated

across the State System to improve student and university success measures." (Pennsylvania's

State System of Higher Education, 2018). This team is tasked with understanding the

innovations to improve student success rates for the 14 state universities.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

I have selected Tinto's (1975) model of student departure and Astin's (1985) theory of

student involvement as the theoretical framework for this research study. According to Tinto,

voluntary student withdrawal is an outcome of the interaction between students' entering

characteristics, educational commitments, and experiences within the academic and social

communities of the institution. Astin's theory explains the effect college has on students. Astin

defines his theory of student involvement as physical energy, psychological energy, and

academic experience.

Theoretical perspectives on student success are divided into five categories (Kuh et al.,

2006), providing an organizational structure for higher education scholars seeking strategies and

techniques to improve retention. The sociological perspective includes scholars such as Spady

(1970), Durkheim (1951), Van Gennep (1960), Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), and Pascarella,

Terenzini, and Wolfe (1986). These theories inform one another applied to the framework and

model in future studies. Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement resides in the

physiological perspective, focusing more on students' characteristics. Habley, Bloom, and

Robbins (2012) effectively deconstruct and reconstruct the definition of student success. The

scholars provide data that demonstrates the importance of academic advising as one of four

foundational student success interventions, including assessment and course placement, developmental education initiatives, and first-year transition programs.

Tinto's theory of student departure (1975) draws from Emile Durkheim and Arnold Van Gennep. Durkheim's theories were founded on things external in nature, as opposed to those internal, such as the motivations and desires of individuals. Since my research involves issues of transition and adaptation of first-year students, Van Gennep's rites of passage theory (1960), which examined the transition process of students from high school to college is important. Tinto (1993) utilized this concept of rites of passage to explain "the longitudinal process of student persistence in college" (p. 94). Tinto's theory includes the impact of students' institutional and social context on their persistence rather than a student's potential weakness or lack of preparedness, which is a psychological perspective. Building on Spady's (1970, 1971) theoretical views on the undergraduate drop-out process, Van Gennep (cited in Tinto, 1993) argued that the transmission of relationships between succeeding groups is marked by the three stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. Tinto argued that students' experiences, especially in the first year of college, are also marked by these stages of passage. Accordingly, a student's persistence or departure is a reflection of their success or failure in navigating the stages towards incorporation into the community of the institution. Tinto claimed that during the stage of separation, new college students need to detach themselves from the groups of their previous communities, such as family and high school, which have different values, norms, and behavior to the new communities of their academic institution.

According to Tinto's theory, the decision to 'drop-out' arises from a combination of student characteristics and the extent of their academic, environmental, and social integration in an institution. Tinto's model contains five categories, with constructs interacting to determine a

student's drop-out decision. In many respects, the three primary principles of Tinto's model are to describe processes whereby institutions of higher education were committed to all the students they serve. The third principle describes an institution's commitment to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members (Tinto, 1975).

Further work by Tinto led to the development of a longitudinal, explanatory model of departure (Tinto, 1993) that expanded work on adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, finances, learning, and external obligations or commitments to this original model. Tinto (2012) addresses the actions that colleges and universities can and must take to improve student's completion through retention initiatives. Additionally, Tinto (2012) describes the benefits of a college education and the need for institutional action on student retention.

Vincent Tinto reminds us that some of the promises of higher education with regards to retention and completion have not come to fruition despite significant efforts to understand and address this challenge, which impacts many U.S. institutions. Tinto (2012) focuses on first-year students and their need for academic advising as it relates to their success and retention. As access to colleges and universities has increased, our institutions have lacked progress in student success and completion. An institution should provide resources and support services to help a student both persist and complete (Tinto, 2012). This is critically important for the student's relationship to the institution of higher education as they become aware of their expectations and understanding of their academic goals.

Tinto (2012) cited Metzner (1989) regarding the effect of students who participated in three advising sessions in their first semester were more likely to persist than those students who did not participate. Tinto explores key issues with student retention. He does this by reviewing

how the expectations are communicated, nurtured and managed. Another critical component is

how the different levels of support (academic, social, financial) are integrated into the very fabric

of the institution. Assessment and feedback are a vital element to increase the transformative

aspects of the student experience (Tinto, 2012). Involvement (Tinto's original preferred word for

engagement) is given a broader remit in this reformulation to include a personal and social sense

of belonging. The personal sense of belonging can be developed within the advising

relationship.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on Tinto's Student Integration Model

(Tinto, 1975). The core of this model is how a student is integrated into the social and academic

aspects of the university. This model argues that various types of cognitive and non-cognitive

factors affect students' pre-enrollment commitment as well as degree attainment. Tinto

discovered through his research that both cognitive and non-cognitive factors such as grade point

average, academic ability, academic attainment, gender, race, age, and social status have a direct

effect on students' educational expectations. Therefore, these expectations have a significant

influence on the likelihood of students returning or not returning to school. Correctly, the above

factors play a vital role in how long students attend an institution and the importance that

students place on a specific institution.

The above is also referred to as the interactionalist theory of student departure; Tinto

focuses on institutional impacts on a student's development (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Tinto views student departure as a longitudinal process that occurs because of the

meaning's individual students attribute to their interactions with the formal and

informal dimensions of a given college or university (Seidman, 2005, p. 67).

These interactions occur between the institution, both academic and social systems of a college and the student (Seidman, 2005). Tinto believes that an increase in social and the academic integration will increase students' commitment to their goals as well as towards the institution, subsequently increasing the rate of retention (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p.273). The integration in this study is referred to as the student-advisor relationship.

Tinto believed that the students who persisted in college have different reasons for attending college compared to those students who did not persist. Tinto's model (1975) includes goal and environmental commitment factors, such as place of residence while attending college and highest degree sought. Moreover, there is a significant variance in how committed students are to their specific educational institutions. Some students view the college that they attend as pivotal to their chances of future employment; other students may be just as happy at another college as they are in the institution they attend.

Tinto argued in his theory of student departure that students leave higher education without earning a degree because of the nature and quality of their interactions with the college or university. College students, particularly freshmen, need guidance and a positive transition, which Tinto (2012) refers to as a "roadmap to success" (p. 17). We refer to this process as academic planning in our department, where advisors inform students what the requirements are for a degree and provide them with resources that will assist them in reaching that goal.

Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) identify studies that validated Tinto's theory. The authors concluded that while there is partial support for Tinto's theory for residential colleges and universities, the theory could not explain persistence at commuter institutions. Both Tinto and Astin describe engagement and involvement as key components of retention. Because commuter students often work and have external obligations and distractions, their level of

commitment and ability to be involved socially with the college campus is lower than those

students who reside at the institution. For this action research, Tinto's theory applies and

supports the population of students within the study.

According to Tinto, the decision to 'drop-out' arises from a combination of student

characteristics and the extent of their academic, environmental, and social integration in an

institution. Tinto's social integration model is known as the institutional departure model (Tinto,

1993), contains five categories, with constructs interacting to determine a student's drop-out

decision. The three primary principles of Tinto's model describe processes whereby institutions

of higher education were committed to the students they serve. This includes being committed to

the education of all, not just some of their students. The third principle is the commitment to the

development of supportive social and educational programming and services in which all

students are integrated. Further work by Tinto led to the development of a longitudinal,

explanatory model of departure (Tinto, 1993) that expanded work on adjustment, difficulty,

incongruence, isolation, finances, learning, and external obligations or commitments to his

original model. In discussing his longitudinal model, Tinto (1993, p.113) indicates:

Broadly understood, it argues that individual departure from institutions can be

viewed as arising out of a longitudinal process of interactions between an

individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational

experiences, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of

the academic and social systems of the institution. The individual's experience in

those systems, as indicated by his/her intellectual (academic) and social (personal)

integration continually modifies his or her intentions and commitments. Positive

experiences - that is, integrative ones - reinforce persistence through their impact

upon heightened intentions and commitments both to the goal of college

completion and to the institution in which the person finds him/herself (Cabrera,

Castaneda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992). Negative experiences serve to weaken

intentions and commitments, especially commitment to the institution, and

thereby enhance the likelihood of leaving.

According to academic student retention literature, Tinto's model is a highly regarded,

providing a heuristic and theoretical framework for understanding student behavior. Tinto's

theory has emerged as the most influential theoretical perspective among the theories and

conceptual frameworks developed in the last four decades to explain the college student

departure process (Braxton et al., 2014; Melguizo, 2011). In his theory, Tinto posited that the

levels of academic and social integration developed through the interactions between students

and institutional norms and culture influence departure or retention decisions.

Figure 1

A Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College
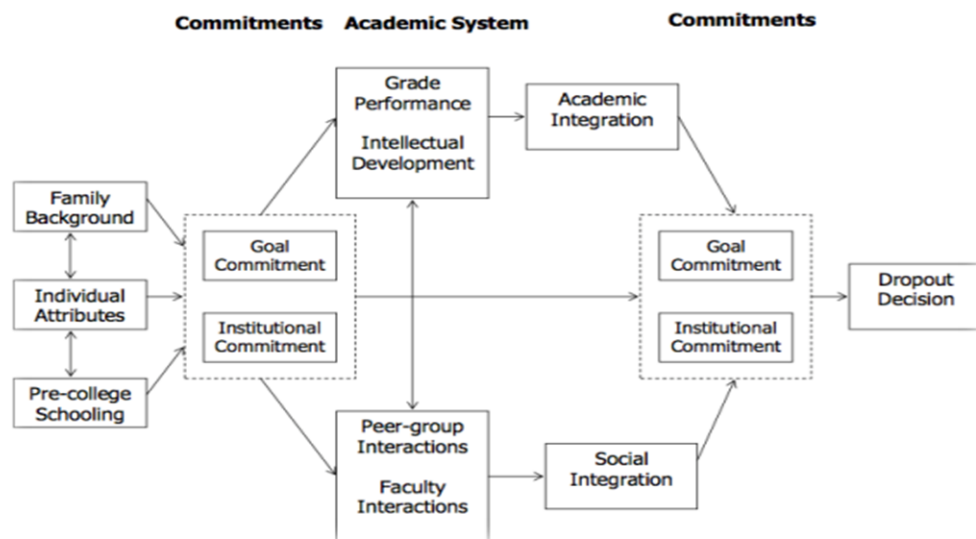
Source: Tinto, V. (1975) Dropout From Higher Education: A Theoretical
Synthesis of Recent Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, p. 425) concluded that theories emphasize "a series of academic and social encounters, experiences, and forces … [that] can be portrayed generally as the notions of academic or social engagement or the extent to which students become involved in (Astin 1985) or integrated (Tinto 1975, 1987, 1993) into their institution's educational and social systems." A theory of student development, Astin's (1984b) student involvement theory, focuses on both physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience. Thus, his theory essentially explains how a student who devotes more time to their academic experience with studying, social connection with the campus community, and forming relationships with faculty and fellow peers is more likely to persist.

Astin further discusses the pedagogical theories that informed this developmental theory: subject-matter theory (Astin, 1982), resources theory, and the individualized theory (Chickering & Associates, 1981, Grant et al., 1979). The subject-matter pedagogy only works with students who are highly motivated in their coursework. Therefore, the subject-matter theory will not serve my population well because they are undeclared students who may not be motivated in a particular course or investing the energy needed as a result of not having defined academic and career goals.

The resource theory is critically significant in assisting students with their academic success and persistence. In contrast to subject-matter theory, the individualized theory focuses on the student rather than the curriculum. It is with this pedagogical understanding that providing one-on-one advising is considered critical. The limitation of this theory is that its application can be costly as each student requires personalized attention. Astin's theory focuses on how the student develops in contrast to many other developmental theorists (Chickering,

1969; Kohlberg, 1971; Brown & DeCoster, 1982), which focus on the student's developmental

outcomes.

Figure 2

Astin's I-E-O Model
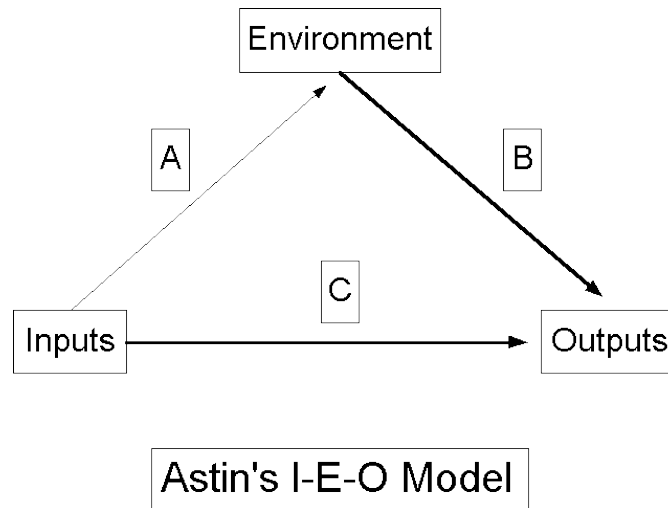
Source: Astin, A.W. (1991). Assessment for Excellence: The Philosophy and
Practice of Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education. Washington, DC:
American Council on Education/Oryx Press Series on Higher Education.

Astin (1999) describes the student involvement theory as holding the "effectiveness of

any educational policy or practice in developing student talent is directly related to the capacity

of that policy or practice to increase student involvement." (p. 519) Student involvement is a

variable in student retention. The core concepts of his theory are comprised of three elements.

The first element is a student's "inputs," such as their demographics, their background, and any

previous experiences. The second is the student's "environment," which accounts for all of the

experiences a student would have during college. Lastly, there are "outcomes," which cover a

student's characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values that exist after a student has

graduated from college. Astin's (1984, 1999) theory of student involvement focuses on the

importance of student's interaction with their environment. He describes these in 5 underlying

assumptions: (1) investment in physical and psychological energy, (2) involvement along a continuum, (3) measurable participation, (4) learning and personal involvement proportional to the quantity and quality of student investment, and (5) effective campus practices to increase engagement. This theory is often linked to Tinto's (1975) theoretical model of student persistence and departure.

Astin (1977) reported that students who interact more frequently with faculty report significantly higher satisfaction with the college environment. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe (1986) emphasize the influence of faculty involvement on student retention and satisfaction with education. Kramer and Spencer (1989, p. 105) state:

> Overall, faculty-student contact is an essential factor in student achievement,
> persistence, academic-skill development, personal development, and general
> satisfaction with the college experience.

They go on to urge faculty to get involved in the advising process, along with professional and peer advisors. They further state, "There is evidence that when freshmen and faculty become acquainted and interact, they form a foundation upon which future contacts can be established."

Accordingly, faculty advising is key to the notion of retaining students. Academic advising can provide the link between the college and the student, especially during the critical first year. Kramer (1999) indicate that academic advising can reduce alienation and enhance learning. If the advisors are available and well-informed, they can contribute to a student's sense of belonging to the campus community. Quality advising supports student learning and fosters student involvement in the institution, both keys to student persistence.

CHAPTER TWO: Review of Supporting Scholarship

A review of the literature revealed that academic advising can be a factor that could determine students' retention. Most studies on college persistence and student retention identified academic advising as essential to fulfilling the teaching and learning task of higher education (ACT, 2010; Hanover Research, 2011; and Noel-Levitz, 2008). Tinto (1993) affirms that institutions that deliver effective retention programs have come to understand that academic advising is at the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students. More specifically, research has shown that the advising relationship with Exploratory Studies students and their locus of control may impact their overall retention and persistence.

Improving enrollment, retaining students, and having a high student success rate are important factors for institutions of higher education. Kim and Sax (2014) and O'Keeffe (2013) found that negligent and unsupportive advising makes colleges and universities more susceptible to student attrition, e.g., students withdrawing before graduation. Retention is a cause of concern for institutions of higher education because it is expensive; the cost to recruit new students is higher than the cost to retain existing students (Waters, et al. 2015; White, 2015). This study explored the relationship between the student and academic advisor, satisfaction of the advising experience, and their academic locus of control and motivation.

Advising Undeclared Students

Academic advising for first-year students is critical in academic and career planning (Gordon, 2006). Academic and career planning, as well as goal-setting in general, are expected outcomes of good quality advising. These activities also impact a student's likelihood of staying in college. Research shows that most students, in fact, about 75%, enter college without having made final decisions about majors and careers, because even those who declare a major right

away are likely to change that major during their college experience (Cuseo, 2008 p. 6). So,

most students are making these decisions while they are in college, and the exploration of majors

should be part of the academic advising experience.

Advising First-Year Students

The demographic of higher education has changed significantly in the past century as it

has become increasingly necessary to have a college degree to reach financial stability and career

success (Fox & Martin, 2017). Therefore, the first-year college student is more diverse than

ever, and this presents challenges. The challenges include communication, engagement,

involvement, motivation, and financial, as colleges must provide additional campus services and

resources to help students be successful (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1999). Hence, the diverse

generation that makes up the first-year college students today appreciates the relationship formed

with their academic advisor and faculty on campuses (Campbell & Nutt, 2008). These

relationships allow them to be better connected and engaged to the campus community as well as

motivated to persist (Crookston, 1994). The change in the college student demographic "is

associated with matriculation of students ill-prepared to transition to college, persist, and

graduate" (Fox & Martin, 2017, p. 85). Therefore, retention is a concern for all higher education

institutions, and all higher education professional as the demographic of college students has

changed.

The Role of Advising

Much like the demographic of students has changed in the past century, the role of the

academic advisor has shifted as well (Fox & Martin, 2017). Years ago, in American universities,

academic advising was a role that university Presidents had before it became the role of faculty

(Gordon, 2006). Career planning was not a function of the academic advisor's role until the

nineteenth century as the function of the university had a focus on vocational preparation

(Rudolph, 1962 as cited in Gordon, 2006). Today, academic advisors are responsible for

educating students "in defining and reaching their educational goals." (Fox & Martin, 2017, p.

12) This is accomplished through the relationship that is built between the advisor and student.

Another form of academic advising that provides a holistic view that is individualized and

focuses on the whole student is known as developmental advising (Drake, Jordan, & Miller,

2013). A real-world example is The University of Wisconsin – Whitewater practices proactive

and developmental advising to assist students in reaching their academic goals (Tinto, 2012).

Proactive advising, also known as intrusive advising, is invasive in making contact with the

students, often as a means to provide resources early on to prevent discouragement (Drake,

Jordan, & Miller, 2013). The University of Wisconsin – Whitewater applies these styles through

frequent meetings during a freshmen's first semester to ensure success and improve institutional

retention.

     Providing academic advising is the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate

and retain college students. Academic advising has been consistently reported as a positive

influence on student retention (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). Academic advisors provide

students with the necessary connection to the various campus services and supply the essential

academic connection between these services and the students. Also, academic advisors offer

students the personal connection to the institution that the research indicates is vital to student

retention and success.

Exploratory Studies Students

This study includes all freshmen exploratory studies students at KU. Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory explains what changes these students may experience as they transition to college life. He does this in terms of four Ss: situation, self, strategies, and support.

Situation factors include key elements such as timing, duration of the transition, and one's experience with similar transitions. Self describes the person experiencing the transition, including demographic characteristics such as age, race, or gender, and psychological characteristics, such as optimism or self-efficacy. Strategies refers to the ways in which individuals cope with the transition. Support refers to the people, organizations, or institutions to which the person turns for help with the transition. Although these theories do not exclusively apply to college-age development, they appropriately relate to student adjustment to college life, in general, and specifically, the role of advising in that adjustment. (Workman, 2015)

At KU, we use the term exploratory versus undeclared as a positive identifier for our students. However, the literature refers to these students as undecided. When researching who the undecided students were, I found that Gordon & Steele (2015) had many characteristics that best describe this group. Students could be placed in one or more of the following categories: choice anxiety, career identity, career self-efficacy, career maturity, emotional intelligence, and other characteristics (Gordon & Steele, 2015). Choice anxiety, as defined in the text with supporting literature, is "the relationship between career indecision and anxiety." (Gordon & Steele, 2015, p. 34) Donald Super (1957) and John Holland (1997) were both significant to the contributions made in supporting students with their career identities through career assessments

established to help students identify their strengths, interests, and skills (Gordon & Steele, 2015).

Holland's theory maintains that students "flourish in academic environments" (p.54) that align

with their personalities (Gordon & Steele, 2015).

Virginia Gordon is a scholar whose work focuses on academic and career advising with

particular attention to undeclared students. In her most popular text, *Academic Advising: A*

Comprehensive Handbook is most helpful for advisors in successfully providing meaningful

advising to support the increase in retention and graduation rates. As academic advising evolves

from proactive, developmental, and now holistic advising, it is imperative that those in the

profession understand each approach and the foundation from where it came. From advising

first-year students, transfer, undecided, international, underprepared, and first-generation

students, Gordon (2006) surveys characteristics of those students. She provides methods in

advising the demographic of the public university student.

Although Exploratory Studies students are undeclared about a particular major, they are

not the only students on campus who are undecided. Approximately 50% of all incoming

freshmen are categorized as undecided, those who are uncertain, although they may have

declared a major (Tinto, 2012). Many freshmen, although they think they know what they want

to pursue as a future career, do not honestly know until they have started their major coursework.

"There is, perhaps, no college decision that is more thought-provoking, gut-wrenching and rest-

of-your-life oriented—or disoriented—than the choice of a major" (St. John, 2000, p. 22). It is

estimated that 25 – 30% of undergraduate students change their major at least once (Gordon &

Steele, 2015). The Exploratory Studies students, in my experience, make the right decision by

not declaring a major when they are unsure.

Influences for career decision making are family, career barriers, and work as a calling (Gordon & Steele, 2015). Career self-efficacy is about the student's confidence to approach their career goals through appropriate decision making (Gordon & Steele, 2015). I meet with freshmen Exploratory Studies students regularly to discuss their interests and create an academic plan. Through our conversations, I see the lack of confidence and insecurity they have regarding their ability to make a decision or know the direction they want to take. It is as if they forgot why they came to college and whether or not they can persist in their academic journey. This questioning relates to their level of career maturity, which is often the case when working with the freshman Exploratory Studies students. Unfortunately, many of these students are uninformed and lack the awareness necessary to make the appropriate decisions. This then transfers to their emotional intelligence because not only do some of the students lack the confidence and maturity but also the ability to make decisions based on "career interests, values, and needs." (Gordon & Steele, 2015)

The Exploratory Studies students at KU are the most vulnerable in that they are either selected undeclared as their major, which may be related to their motivation, or they did not meet the admissions criteria to be accepted into a particular major. The student may begin at the university with the intention to follow a career path because the university accepted them, but the academic major did not. Thus, we have students who are categorized as exploratory that are not undeclared but are not academically prepared for the rigor in a particular major based on their SAT/ACTs and/or high school GPA. These few factors impact our data in student academic performance. For example, majors and programs in the College of Education have GPA requirements that reflect positively on their student demographic and program success.

Our department has the lowest student population compared to the four colleges at KU, which can negatively impact our student data. Many of our "good" students can change and/or declare their majors and are then included in the new department's data. Retaining the students who cannot change or declare their major is systematic, and we must create and foster these advising relationships with our students to help and encourage them toward success and persistence. Klepfer and Hull (2012) identified three factors related to student success and persistence, and one of those factors can be controlled after the student is admitted to college with effective academic advising, which is associated with student persistence rates as high as 53% (p. 2). The Department of Academic Enrichment is one of the very few departments that accept internal student transfers with a CGPA below 2.0.

As with the advising mission, learning outcomes for advising must reflect the mission and purpose of the institution (Nutt, 2014). Once desired outcomes are determined, KU can move forward with the learning outcomes assessment process, mapping the advising experiences necessary for the achievement of outcomes across the Exploratory Studies student's educational experience and the development of multiple measures to assess this achievement. Mapping of these outcomes demonstrates that advising learning experiences are not merely based on in one or two advising sessions during a students' first year of college but instead are gained across the entirety of students' educational career (Nutt, 2014). Through outcomes mapping, an institution can communicate to all constituencies, i.e., students, advisors, faculty, staff, parents, and administrators, that learning is strengthened from a long-term advising relationship. This relationship includes educating the student how to access needed campus resources, how to make connections across all campus areas, and how to gain the knowledge and skills needed to successfully meet his or her goals and aspirations (Nutt, 2014).

The National Academic Advising Association's (NACADA) literature describes that our campus should create and maintain an advising syllabus (Smith, 2014). For accountability purposes, advisors should begin to examine and address the possible ambiguities between the institutional and advising missions. We must first determine the mission, purpose, or value of academic advising within the educational experiences of our students at KU. Any institution-wide mission for academic advising must answer two simple questions: "What does our institution value about academic advising?" and "What is the purpose of academic advising at our institution?" (Nutt, 2014). An advising mission crafted from answering these questions must reflect the overall mission and purpose of the department of Academic Enrichment at KU.

The department recently implemented a revised advising mission statement that ensures just that: Exploratory Studies academic advisors at Kutztown University provide students with information about coursework, university policies and procedures, and career options and educational opportunities. The advisors and students participate in the decision-making process to help students become lifelong learners and encourage self-reliant problem solving through the exploration of students' interests and values. The mission of the Academic Enrichment department is to provide comprehensive services to all undeclared students as our advisors are dedicated to enhancing each student's academic and career aspirations. The department's dedicated faculty advisors support and facilitate the undergraduate students' transition and integrate into college by assisting them in the development of appropriate educational plans consistent with their academic, career, and personal goals.

Student-Advisor Relationship

At KU, much like many other institutions, the role of the academic advisor for college students is an individual whom they can depend on for accurate information, providing

educational direction, support and guidance with goal setting and attainment, along with

assistance with their future aspirations (Higgins, 2017). This assumes a level of trust at the onset

of the relationship that is known to take time to build (Beck, 1999). However, students need to

engage with their advisors to create the potential development of trust. The early engagement

connects the student-advisor for the opportunity to form the relationship through communication

and personal contact. Communication includes both listening and conversing. Listening and

appropriate questioning is found to develop trust and rapport in creating the advising relationship

(Thornhill & Yoder, 2010).

       Ongoing communication can also support student and advisor connection that facilitates

the sharing of information along with the discussion about the student's goals, strengths, and

interests (Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, Hawthorne, 2013). Broad communications sent

electronically or via standard mail cannot replace the development of an interpersonal

relationship when sharing information. Results from the research study (Young-Jones et al.,

2013) explored the experiences of 611 students identified areas of support needed for student

success through conversations between the student and advisor that focused on their overall

academic experience. This study evaluated academic advising based on student needs,

expectations, and success rather than student satisfaction. Students completed a survey exploring

their expectations of and experience with academic advising. Advising conversations can also

support the development of a welcoming environment where a student feels comfortable and

supported to share information, ask questions, and experience self-reflection (Hughey, 2011).

       Campbell and Nutt (2008) suggest that academic advising facilitates the connection

students have with the campus community. Creating the connection between the student and the

advisor begins with understanding the definition of relational connection. Brown (2010) states

that "connection is when an individual feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment." Advisors are the individuals who can facilitate interactions where students can be acknowledged, listened to, and valued without judgment. When creating a trust-filled relationship with my advisees, like most developing relationships, I create a space for authentic sharing. I do this by sharing stories that include both personal triumphs and failures, offering a sense of hope and resiliency. I hope that students will then feel comfortable in sharing their stories with me. Sharing creates a level of vulnerability within the partnership that can be offset by trust and communication (Higgins, 2017). The sharing and actions of both relational partners highlight the need for advising to be a relationship where individuals share responsibilities (Allen & Smith, 2008; Crockett, 1985; Frost, 1991). These shared responsibilities and ongoing conversations promote an environment for relational growth that is critically needed with Exploratory Studies students.

I employ relational elements from the relational theory in advising to create my student-advisor relationships. To promote an engaged advising partnership, trust, communication, and connectedness are fundamental (Higgins, 2017). Trust has been found to create a bond between individuals as they work cooperatively and explore experiences (Bordin, 1979, 1983). This important concept is also highlighted in the NACADA (2006) concept statement: "the relationship between advisors and students is fundamental and is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and ethical behavior" (para. 1). Each advising interaction I have is an opportunity to build the foundational element of trust, and I do this by being transparent and authentic.

The Advising Relationship

The student-advisor relationship impacts student satisfaction and motivation to persist. Lack of interaction and trusting working relationships between students and academic advisors

can be discouraging to a students' motivation to persist in their educational experience (Siming, Niamatullah, Gao, Xu, & Shaf, 2015; Young-Jones et al., 2013). The literature shows there is a strong relationship between academic advising and student retention (Kim & Lundberg, 2015; Smith & Allen 2014). Furthermore, Fosnacht, McCormick, Nailos, & Ribera (2017), reported that a lack of student advisor interaction could influence student persistence. If students do not have consistent positive interactions with their academic advisors, this could harm the advising process and the institution as a whole.

According to White and Schulenberg (2012), academic advising is the human art of building relationships with students and helping them connect their strengths and interests with academic life goals. This includes issues such as time management, study skills, strategies on making informed career decisions, and how to make the best use of the many academic and social services available to them (Arhin et al., 2017). Academic advising is thus a service designed to help students reach their educational and career goals. Research has shown that students' frequent interaction with an academic advisor improves retention (Hester, 2008; Thompson et al., 2007). Increased focus on advising has improved the quality of research conducted on this topic because institutions of higher education are now acknowledging the importance of academic advising (Cook, 2009).

Academic advising sustains more solid relationships between students and faculty, which in turn makes the advisor's job an essential factor in the development of students' perceptions of the advising process and a successful collegiate experience (Coll & Draves, 2009). Shcokley-Zalabak (2012) described a successful college experience as students being satisfied with their advising experience, passing all courses with a "C" or better, and wanting to complete their degree at the same institution they started. Hence the importance of studying the relationship

with the Exploratory Studies students at KU who are, according to KU's institutional data, the weakest academically performing student. Advising is central in the student's path toward degree completion.

Successful Advising Programs

Barnes, Williams, and Archer (2010) found three advisor characteristics in successful advising programs. These characteristics include humanizing the practice of academic advising, acknowledging those who use a variety of approaches to advising, and being proactive. Successful advising programs ensure that academic advisors are accessible, helpful, sociable, and caring. According to Museus and Rovello (2010) and Siegel (2011), the rewards and significance of providing quality academic advising should be at the forefront for all institutions of higher education. Jaeger, Sandmann, and Kim (2011) and Starling and Miller (2011) explained that communication between a student and an advisor is beneficial to both parties involved. With student satisfaction and its relationship to advising being an essential part of college (Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2013), the need for continuous advising using a holistic approach is paramount. For academic advising practices to be successful, academic advisors must listen to each student's needs.

Brown and Kenney (2014) in *Matters of success: A deliberative polling approach to the study of student retention*, argued that, before participants attended the deliberative event, they perceived academic advising as unhelpful to them. After participation in a freshmen experience course, however, students' attitudes toward academic advising changed. Because the perception was that academic advising was not sufficient, the findings suggested the need for modifications in student advising programs were necessary to enhance students' retention.

Academic advising is mandatory for all freshmen at KU. This practice ensures that KU students enroll in the correct courses each semester, thereby saving them time and money. Currently, in the Department of Academic Enrichment, the proactive advising approach is used for outreach. Schwebel et al. (2012) conducted a study that took place over four years, with 501 students at an urban state university. Half of the students received a more proactive outreach from advising, and the other half of the cohort group received traditional campus announcements without the additional outreach. One significant finding of the study showed that with additional outreach, student contacts with their professional advisors increased. The study also found that the outreach did not have an impact on retention.

Schwebel et al. (2012) study employed a case-control experimental design that followed the students for four years. The variables considered were retention, academic success, and advising contacts of 501 students. There were three hypotheses for this study:

a) that the outreach group would be retained/graduated at a higher rate than the no-outreach group after four years of enrollment (or attrition),

b) that the outreach group would post higher levels of academic progress (fewer changes of major) and achievement (GPA) than the no-outreach group, and

c) that the outreach group would demonstrate more frequent advising contact than the no-outreach group. (Schwebel et al., 2012, p. 38)

The study found that after one year of enrollment, the advising outreach group increased their attendance to advising appointments. The study defined outreach as including all forms of communication attempted in making contact with the student.

The three significant variables considered in this study were retention, advising contacts, and academic progress and achievement. There were multiple measures and variables used to

assess the three areas of interest. The four measures for retention were enrolled/graduated, graduated by four years, terms enrolled, and credit hours earned. The two variables considered for advising contacts were individual contacts and semesters with contact. Academic progress and achievement were defined as cumulative GPA and changes of major. Schwebel et al. (2012) results suggested that the "advising outreach effectively increased student's number of professional advising appointments but was not associated with student retention or academic progress and achievement at a statistically significant level." p. 41 There was only a 5% increase in student retention for the outreach group as compared to the no outreach group. Although this may not seem significant, a 5% increase in improvement for retention.

<div align="center">**Best Practices**</div>

Though KU does not have best practices or guidelines established for academic advising, the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2015) and the National Academic Advising Association's (NACADA) Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising (NACADA, 2005) provide a framework that guides our advising practice. The Department of Academic Enrichment reflects the values of the advising profession in our daily interactions with students. All three academic advisors in the department are members of NACADA, where we have access to professional development opportunities as well as up-to-date literature.

In the profession of academic advising, there are three aspects of academic advising that are widely cited models: informational, relational, and conceptual (Habley, 1987). The informational component is often emphasized more so in advising training and development, while relational and conceptual are neglected (Habley & Morales, 1998). Out of the three, the relational component "is perhaps the most essential…since it seeks to address the actual process by which the information to a student is delivered" (Ford, 2007, para. 9). My approach follows

the relational component that includes intentional relationship building that embraces open lines of communication, trust, and transparency, all in which creates the connectedness between the student and advisor.

In our department, we practice both proactive and developmental advising, which is considered valuable when advising freshmen students (Crookston, 1994). "A genuine and caring relationship between an advisor and advisee provides a safe place for students to acknowledge failure, process the experience, and craft a solution." (Fox & Martin, 2017, p. 116) It has been my professional experience that students will seek guidance from someone they formed a relationship with and, therefore, trust. The student-advisor relationship supports a student's willingness to persist because he/she has had the sustenance and institutional support policies needed to be successful in college (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

Retention

As an advisor, I see the importance of creating a rapport with my student advisees. The literature outlines the major common theme is developing a good rapport between the advisor and advisee. "The measurement of academic integration as required in Tinto's model of college departure could be strengthened by including academic advising as a constituent of academic integration." (Padilla & Pavel, 1994) The objectives of the advising sessions are for the advisor and student to create an academic plan after discussing the students' program of study as well as career interests. This academic plan, whether it includes exploration or pursuing a specific program interest, is to ensure motivation toward their academic goals.

High-quality advising is related to lower attrition. Retention is the highest in first-year students, which further explains the significance of the participation of this sample and population in this study. Metzner (1989) collected data from 1,033 freshmen commuter students

who attended a public, urban university. In the study, Metzner draws from Tinto's (1975) theory,

Astin's (1984) model, and Pascarella & Terenzini's (1983) study to examine the relationship

between academic advising and student retention (Metzner, 1989). Academic advising is a

crucial component of the retention of undergraduate students. A questionnaire was employed in

the study along with institutional data, including registration data, GPA, and high school rank.

The results of the statistical analysis showed that 72% of the freshmen persisted (Metzner, 1989).

For the good advising cohort, the sum of the indirect effects on student dropout was significant,

however, the direct effects were not significant. The poor advising cohort failed to demonstrate

significant direct and indirect effects on the dropout rate, which did not meet the expectations of

the study's hypotheses of poor advising being associated with increased attrition. Good and bad

advising can be defined in many different ways, and for my action research, I focused on the

advising relationship as the primary construct.

Locus of Control

Sidelinger's (2010) study is framed in Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement and

references Tinto's (1997) model that indicates students who are involved are more apt to learn

and succeed. The study investigated "students' proactive personality and academic locus of

control (ALOC) and perceived teacher clarity and nonverbal immediacy as predictors of

willingness to talk in class (in-class involvement) and self-regulated learning (out-of-class

involvement)." (Sidelinger, 2010 p. 88) The study included Bateman and Crant's (1993) 17-item

proactive personality scale on a 7-point Likert scale. Trice's (1985) 28-item, 7-point Likert scale

ALOC questionnaire, a 10-item 5-point teacher clarity low inventory, and a 10-item, Likert-type

nonverbal immediacy behaviors (NIB) instrument.

The results in Sidelinger's (2010) study found a positive relationship between students and the perceived instructor characteristics and willingness to talk in class. The ALOC proactivity predicted both in-class and out-of-class involvement; however, instructor clarity predicted out-of-class involvement only. These assessments are, therefore, illustrating that students are developing a sense of control in their academic environments. The teacher's nonverbal immediacy promoted student's willingness to communicate in class. The study guided my approach with the ALOC instrument and advising satisfaction survey to show the relationship between a positive academic advising experience and student motivation as a predictive measure of success and persistence. Locus of control plays a mediating role in determining whether students get involved in the pursuit of achievement.

Student retention has been steadily decreasing for institutions of higher education for two decades. A longitudinal study by Slanger, Berg, Fisk, and Hanson (2015) viewed data from one Midwestern public land-grant university for ten years utilizing the Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory (CSI) data to study the role of motivational factors in predicting academic success and college student retention. The Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory (CSI) was designed to identify early intervention needs for first-year students who demonstrate the risk for attrition. The risks outlined in the study are similar to those that may be viewed as risk factors for the participants in my study. The risk factors included high school GPA, SAT scores, and being undeclared. The study in this article defined "academic success as a cumulative grade point average (CGPA), cumulative course load capacity (i.e., the number of credits earned divided by the number of classes for which a grade was given), the cumulative ratio of credits earned to credits taken, and retention to subsequent fall semesters through eight semesters of study." (Slanger et al. 2015) The results showed that lack of persistence was predictive of cumulative

GPA across all cohort groups throughout the study (Slanger, et al. 2015). Much like the

Academic Locus of Control (ALOC) scale used as a method for this study, the study connects

motivational factors as predictive of academic achievement and retention. The researchers and

authors recommended CSI throughout the students' academic careers to determine practical

academic advising support and intervention.

The literature suggests that an internal locus of control is a more optimal belief system.

In this case, the individual with an internal locus of control is taking responsibility for their

actions and understands that what happens is a direct result of the role they play. And therefore,

the end results are based on actions or inactions (Rotter 1966). Lack of acknowledgement that an

individual's behavior affects the results is a definition of external locus of control. Trice (1985)

created the academic locus of control (ALOC) which is a revision of Rotter's LOC and used as a

non-cognitive scale to measure student success predicted in both in-class and out-of-class

involvement. Rotter's (1966) contention that individuals with a high level of internal LOC are

often found to have "higher levels of personal satisfaction, motivation, and the achievement of

positive personal outcomes, including academic success" (p. 291).

Institutional Response

The research has confirmed that the more advising a student receives, the higher their

academic performance, as shown by an increase in their grade point averages (Schwebel et al.

2012). Although Exploratory Studies students may not be ready for academic planning, the

relationship created during advising allows students to be comfortable in sharing their interests,

their concerns, what motivates them, what discourages them, and/or what their needs are. This

relationship affirms Tinto's model of academic integration.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the current six-year graduation rate for four-year institutions is 60% (2019). Kutztown University falls below that average at 56.4% for six-year graduation based on data provided by KU's Office of Institutional Research. The first-year retention rate, as defined by the Office of Institutional Research and State System of Higher Education, is the number of first-time, full-time freshmen returning to school one year later. For example, the first-year retention rate for fall 2017 freshmen would be the number of first-time freshmen returning to school for fall 2018.

Tinto reviewed the demographics of students who persist and graduate. More women than men earn their degrees as well as more white and Asian students more frequently than students of color, which includes Hispanic and black students (Tinto, 2012). A higher socioeconomic status student is more likely to graduate than a low socioeconomic status student coming from families who previously attended college versus a first-generation student (Tinto, 2012). Furthermore, students who came in with a high school grade point average of 3.25 or higher were more likely to succeed than those who entered college with 2.25 or lower (Tinto, 2012).

"Despite our nation's success in increasing access to college and reducing the gap to access between high-income and low-income students, we have not yet been successful in translating the opportunity access provides into college completion, or what I refer to here as student success." (Tinto, 2012, p. 4) The implementation of an institutional action plan to address student success and retention is critical. Tinto (2012), provides a framework for this action as it focuses on the conditions for student success to include: (1) expectations, (2) support, (3) assessment and feedback, and (4) involvement. The institution is obligated to create opportunities for its students to understand their expectations and to keep them high while

assessing their performance and providing them timely feedback as well as encourage their

engagement (Tinto, 2012).

KU had an overall retention rate of 73% in 2018. Although this rate has increased over

the years, KU remains lower than the average as compared to other colleges in the PA university

system with similar demographics. The recent literature describes new initiatives used in other

university settings that have improved their retention rate through advising practices of

Exploratory Studies students. Many institutions attribute career development activities to

increasing Exploratory Studies student attrition (Gordon & Steele, 2015). Institutions, such as,

the University of Minnesota, Texas Tech University, University of Cincinnati, University of

Hawaii, Florida International University, the Ohio State University, Savannah State University,

Northern Illinois University, Purdue University and the University of Texas at Austin are among

those who have designated support for Exploratory Studies students that include a center and

living-learning community as well as required courses, workshops and other activities designed

to support them in their career directions and major selection (Gordon & Steele, 2015). The

Department of Academic Enrichment is the designated area dedicated to supporting and advising

Exploratory Studies students' however, as compared to the college as mentioned above's

initiatives, we fall short in assisting the student's success in persistence.

Transitioning successfully into college is critical, and particularly vital for Exploratory

Studies students who do not have a career path. The freshmen population is the most vulnerable

as they "enter college unable, unready, or unwilling to commit themselves to a specific academic

direction." (Gordon & Steele, 2015, p. 102) One of the most critical conditions in the retention

of first-year students is student engagement (Tinto, 2012). KU requires attendance at their

designated orientation for both freshmen and transfer, incoming students. At KU's orientation,

the students are exposed to numerous campus organizations and resources as well as advised on

course selection and registered accordingly based on major. Freshmen Exploratory Studies

students register for general education courses, including a first-year seminar course (FYS). This

course is viewed as vital in the student's transitional period on KU's campus and paramount to

their retention (Tinto, 2012).

   The FYS curriculum is new at KU, began in the fall of 2018, and is structured

thematically. The goal is to better prepare students for the kind of academic work expected in

college. The design was proposed for small-class settings where students would work closely

with their professors and peers to explore a particular topic selected by the professor. There is

also a component to encourage the development of study skills that are essential for success at

the university. Unfortunately, there is no structured consistency in the way faculty implement

this component. The hidden curriculum and overarching goal of FYS courses are to prepare

students for college as well as increase retention and graduation rates for the institution. (Gabriel,

2008) Research has shown that consistency, support, and motivation from faculty and staff in

the student's first year encourage their overall retention. First-year "students are more likely to

persist and graduate in settings that provide clear and consistent information about institutional

requirements." (Tinto, 1999) The consistent information provided in a relationship between the

advisor and the student is beyond what they may receive in the classroom or at an orientation

where it is impersonal and public.

   Brown and Kenney's (2014) study, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, included students

from a midsized state university. Using a polling method called deliberative polling, respondents

were polled before and after a deliberate session to discuss pertinent issues to their academic

experience and needs. The purpose of the study was to identify actionable policy

recommendations for improving retention and graduation rates. The study revealed that before

participants attended the deliberative event, they perceived the advising system as unhelpful.

Conversely, students' attitudes toward academic advising changed after the freshman year

experience course. Students who participated in each phase of the study indicated that the

freshman year experience course was more unhelpful than helpful in promoting student retention

and graduation rates. This was a critical discovery given "that increasing these rates are the

primary goal of, and justification for, this course. If students consistently fail

to view the course in this light, then faculty and administrators have an obligation to understand

why this is the case and, if possible, to revise the course in order to make it more effective"

(Brown & Kenney 2014). This was an action research study aimed at improving student

retention.

The mixed-methods study by Allen, Smith, and Muehleck (2014) presented results from

students who either transferred or intended to transfer from community college to a four-year

institution utilizing a pre-and post-survey. Their surveys included Likert-type scales and open-

ended questions to assess student satisfaction and experience with transfer academic advising.

(Allen et al., 2014) The results suggested that pre-transfer students are more satisfied with their

academic advising than post-transfer students. The results also showed that students were

overall not satisfied with the academic advising they received throughout their educational

experience. "Results showed that pre-transfer students were more satisfied than post-transfer

students with the advising they received, but both groups were less satisfied with advising than

with their overall educational experience." (Allen et al., 2014) The qualitative analysis of

student comments explained the findings of their dissatisfaction with academic advisement. This

included receiving inaccurate and inconsistent information from their advisors, the lack of

individualization during the advising experience, and the inaccessibility of their advisor (Allen et al. 2014).

This previous research on academic advising, undeclared and first-year students, locus of control, and student retention and motivation provided significant insight into how KU should respond. The aforementioned studies conducted analyzed research results with findings that illustrate the critical relationship between students and their academic advisors on their ability to be successful. As the literature outlined, academic advising increases student development, which in turn can improve student success, retention, and persistence rates. Providing professional development opportunities to enhance the student-advisor relationship utilizing the holistic approach with the faculty will critically impact the advising experience for students, which may better their ability to persist.

Student Motivation

Although the student-advisor relationship plays a significant role in student retention, student motivation is another factor in persistence. A study by Alarcon & Edwards (2013) investigated differences in ability and motivation factors of retention on first-year students. The instrument used was a discrete-time survival mixture analysis to model university retention. The non-cognitive variables considered were parents' education, gender, American College Test (ACT) scores, conscientiousness, and trait affectivity as potential predictors of retention. The results of the study indicated that gender, ACT scores, and conscientiousness were significant predictors of retention, whereas parents' education level was not a significant predictor (Alarcon & Edwards, 2013). Tinto's theory of student integration aligns with the positive affectivity and negative affectivity being significant predictors of retention. The results of this study show that academic preparedness, as defined by the student's ACT score, can be a predictor of student

persistence. However, Tinto's theory informs this study as a student's characteristics and experiences, as well as interactions with others on a college campus, were a significant factor in retention and student success.

Another study on motivation is a revision of Trice's (1985) Academic Locus of Control (ALOC) by Nicholas Curtis and Ashton Trice, which included 21 of the original 28 items true/false format scale, which has a test-retest reliability of .92. This study included six different research studies and scholars that have used the original ALOC scale. Participants consisted of 322 college students from a midsized southeastern university who participated (Curtis & Trice, 2013). Additional methods used included the Academic Entitlement Questionnaire (Kopp, Zinn, Finney, & Jurich, 2011) which is an eight-item scale to measure students' academic entitlement and the Procrastination Scale (Tuckman, 1991) which is a "35-item questionnaire that is designed to provide a measure of student procrastination." (Curtis & Trice, 2013 p. 820)

The ALOC in this study included participants with similar demographics to my action research at KU, which included full-time, residential students with the vast majority being under the age of 21. The context, however, differed in that the institution had higher admissions criteria and graduation rates than the institution that my research participants attend. The revised ALOC scale used in this study showed similarities with the original results concerning students' academic performance. As predicted by Janssen & Carton (1999), "students with an internal locus of control (m=6.05 days) took fewer days to complete the assignment than students with an external locus of control (m=9.95 days)." p. 440. There was a significant difference in the data showing that students with an external LOC were more likely to procrastinate, beginning their assignment later than students with an internal LOC.

Also, research has shown that consistency, support, and motivation from faculty and staff to students in their freshman year encourages students' overall retention (Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013). Advisors that show support and provide the appropriate information related to graduation requirements, assist their students in their persistence toward a college degree. College satisfaction is often the principal predictor of student persistence (Noel & Levitz, 1995). As academic advising has evolved over generations, those in the profession must understand the best approaches that are effective in their context and with their population as a foundation to provide students with the encouragement and support to persist. The literature shows that student retention and persistence are positively affected by advisors when they focus on creating a personal relationship.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study investigated the relationship with the student-advisor relationship with Exploratory Studies students and their locus of control as it impacts their overall retention. Additionally, it explored the relationship between the student and academic advisor, satisfaction of the advising experience, and their academic locus of control and motivation. The following chapter includes information on the participants, a description of the research methods used, procedures for data collection, and the analytic strategies employed.

I explored the relationship between advising and student success by collecting data that includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. The mixed-methods approach was employed to add more value than a single method would to the study. To successfully assess academic advising, utilizing a variety of qualitative and quantitative assessment tools is essential (Demetriou, 2005). In addition to the focus group to gauge student perceptions of the advising relationship and experience, a survey was administered as a means to measure student satisfaction along with the academic locus of control scale used to measure non-cognitive factors on college students.

I employed a multi-methods approach because it would allow for a variety of means of gaining insight and student perceptions. The participants allowed their experiences to inform and deepen the understanding of this research inquiry. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to generate and collect data from participants sequentially. I used a focus group and a survey to demonstrate that there is a relationship with academic advising and student success. My population for all the methods used is freshmen Exploratory Studies students at

KU. The benefit of this population is that students may feel more comfortable speaking among

peers with similar backgrounds (Morgan, 1997).

The research process was initiated during the start of the mandatory advising period in

the spring semester of 2019. Consent forms were distributed via email to all freshmen

Exploratory Studies students who were also my advisees, informing them about the study. In the

third week of March 2019, I sent invitation letters to students to participate in the focus group

(see Appendix A). My goal was to have a group of five to twelve students by the beginning of

April. Although focus groups often have six to ten participants and may be conducted multiple

times depending on the size of the institution (Morgan, 1997), the focus group size was

determined based on this researching timeline and number of Exploratory Studies freshmen.

Once I had obtained consent documents, I provided the students with a formal invitation

regarding participating in the focus group in mid-April, during the university free hour.

Sample and Population

I collected data for 276 freshman Exploratory Studies students at KU during the spring

semester of 2019. To protect findings and avoid legal issues, I excluded freshmen Exploratory

Studies students who were under the age of 18 years old. In this research, adults are defined as

18 years of age or older. All freshmen Exploratory Students were used in this study.

The average entering high school grade point average (GPA) for this cohort is 3.0, which,

as compared to the four colleges at KU, is the lowest. The average college GPA for their first

semester, which was in the fall, was 2.60. This average GPA was the second-lowest when

compared to the four KU colleges. During the semester of this study, the student's average GPA

was 2.47, which places them in the second-lowest category along with another college. More

specifically, two colleges had a higher average GPA than Exploratory Studies. The two colleges

included the College of Education and the College of Visual and Performing Arts.

This cohort earned the least average credits in their freshmen year as compared to the

four colleges at KU. However, the first-semester retention rate for this cohort was 90.41%,

which was an increase over the past three years, from 87.74% in 2016 and 88.59% in 2017. In

the fall semester of 2018, Exploratory Studies students had a population of 25.30% who earned a

D grade, F grade, a Withdraw, and an Incomplete (DFWI). This percentage was third in

comparison to the four KU colleges.

Methods of Data Collection

Focus Group. A qualitative method employed to gain feedback from students in the

focus group. Focus groups are a form of qualitative research that involves organized discussion

with a selected group of participants to gather information about their perceptions, opinions,

beliefs, attitudes, and experiences towards a service, concept, or idea where the researcher is

actively encouraging of and attentive to the group interaction (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A

trained graduate assistant in the department facilitated the focus group and recorded it for

accuracy and validity. The researcher used *Moderating Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for*

Group Facilitation (Greenbaum, 2000) to train the facilitator to lead the focus group discussion

effectively. Questions were created ahead of time to ensure a schedule was followed to avoid

going over the one-hour time frame (see Appendix B). I used Krueger & Casey (2014) as a

guide to formulating my questions to seek understanding of the student's perception of the

student-advisor relationship. Formal invitations were sent out via mail and email to 30 randomly

selected freshmen Exploratory Studies students.

The objective of the focus group was to understand how Exploratory Studies students perceive their relationship with their academic advisor. The information gained from surveys and institutional research data can only provide a limited amount of information. This study was designed to examine student perceptions of academic advising and explore a potential link between perceptions of academic advising and student retention. Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure and Astin's student involvement theory guided the methodological approach selected for this study.

The focus group took place in the afternoon, and lunch was provided both as an incentive and an ice breaker. This reduced any barriers (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) for their attendance. Only the students who completed the participant consent forms were invited to the focus group. Reviewing the layout and format of the focus group with the participants and establishing ground rules were essential (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In order to obtain the information with greater breadth than that which is attainable from the satisfaction survey, it is imperative to design the focus group questions based on desired student learning outcomes of the advising experience (Demetriou, 2005). The questions concentrated on the "student behaviors, not just satisfaction, and require the student to be both reflective of the advising process" (Demetriou, 2005).

I transcribed the discussions of the focus group using a digital recorder. I also utilized the relevant notes that were taken by the notetaker during the focus group. I created a report, sorting the commonalities, and coded them by the participant, which helped develop an action plan (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher provided the digital recorder, and the recording was stored in a password protected digital file.

The advantages of using a focus group to gather data about the advising relationship and its impact on Exploratory Students' retention and success is an in-depth and detailed analysis

based on the participants' perception and understanding without assumptions of pre-judgments (Cuseo, 2008). The focus group is an economically, time-efficient method for collecting the data from multiple participants as opposed to utilizing interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Another advantage to focus groups is the environment, which is socially oriented (Krueger & Casey, 2014). In addition, the feeling of belonging to a group can increase participants' sense of cohesiveness and allow them to feel safe in sharing their opinions.

A student focus group, in addition to a satisfaction survey or as a part of a program employing a variety of assessment tools, can provide data concerning student learning from the advising experience and the overall advisement process of the institution. Carefully composed questions that engage students in a conversation to reflect on what they have learned from the advising experience was the strategy in the outcomes-based assessment. The data collected from an informative, well-executed focus group can be help generate topics for surveys and other assessment tools. (Demetriou, 2005)

Academic Locus of Control. I administered a non-cognitive measure to determine whether locus of control (LOC) is predictive of how a student will perform academically in their freshman year as a quantitative measure. Trice (1985) developed a more specific tool to measure LOC, known as the Academic Locus of Control (ALOC). The tool measures LOC in relationship to the academic performance of college students. The ALOC creation was based on Rotter's recommendation that "specific scales of locus of control need to be developed to predict behavior in specific contexts" (Ogden & Trice, 1986, p. 649). This tool is highly correlated with Rotter's Internal-External (I-E) Scale (Ogden & Trice, 1986; Trice, 1985). Studies have supported ALOC and its relationship to academic achievement (Trice, 1985).

The ALOC consists of 28 statements related to academics and student motivation (see Appendix C). The ALOC scale for college students is a 28-item true or false scale completed by the student advisee measuring the construct of LOC in the college/university context. This tool was selected based on its relationship with LOC and academics. Trice sought to develop a tool that would more accurately reflect a college students' LOC. Rotter supported the belief that tools more specific to the area being studied would more accurately reflect the individuals' LOC, which resulted in Trice's development of the LOC tool specific to academics (Janssen & Carton, 1999). Trice's (1985) original instrument utilized 89 questions based on Rotter's (1966) work on locus of control. Julian Rotter (1966) was part of the social learning theory movement back in the 1950s. In the 1960s, Rotter believed that an individual's behavior or beliefs were prefaced by reinforcements he or she might have had, and led individuals to identify the probable cause of his or her action. I selected this measurement scale because of its validity and appropriate application to measure college student success based on their locus of control. Trice found the test-retest reliability was .92.

Trice (1985) developed a 28-item ALOC tool to assess LOC as it related to a student's academics. The tool asks the student to decide whether or not the statement is more like them (true) or less like them (false) related to their academic abilities and performance. A person with a score of 14 or higher is said to have an external LOC. A student with an ALOC score of 13 or less was said to have an internal LOC. An individual with an internal LOC would be expected to take more responsibility for their actions in terms of achieving a good grade and understand that performance in a course is related to the amount of preparation (Rotter, 1966; Trice, 1985) Students' academic performance has been linked to LOC (Rotter, 1966; Trice, 1985). A student who has an internal LOC takes more initiative and interest related to their preparation and

performance in a class. This student understands that the amount of effort put into a class will

influence the outcome, whereas, an individual with an external LOC may leave performance to

chance or belief that the poor grade they earned is due to extrinsic factors rather than their

responsibility (Rotter, 1966; Trice, 1985).

Based on the aforementioned information, I hypothesize that students with an internal

locus of control are more likely to be successful in their freshman year in college than those with

an external locus of control. The ALOC was administered between March 18, 2019, and May

10, 2019, to all my student advisees. The students completed the questionnaire and then saw me

for advisement. Following our advising session, the student then completed an advisor

evaluation survey.

Advisor Evaluation Survey. The survey was a quantitative method administered as a

tool to assess student satisfaction (see Appendix D). Student engagement and a positive

transition to college and a university are often linked to academic advising (Teasley &

Buchaman, 2013). The survey uses a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 indicates strongly disagree, 3

indicates unsure, and 5 indicates strongly agree). The participants in the Teasley & Buchaman

(2013) study took a similar survey to measure advising satisfaction using a 7-point Likert-type

scale. Five out of the thirty questions listed in the survey are also repeated in the 10-question

internally formed survey for this study. The additional five questions in the survey align with the

department's mission statement and the university's goals.   The survey also includes a comment

section that encourages an open-ended statement to suggest improvements for the advising

experience. "Advising surveys can be helpful in identifying areas of strength and opportunities

for growth for individual advisors and the overall department. While surveys can be used to

gather quantitative data, they can also be used to capture the essence of the advising experience."

(Ohrablo, 2018) Survey results can illustrate trends and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the advising component of the department.

Data Collection

During the advising period in the Spring 2019 semester, starting on March 18, 2019, students were given the ALOC questionnaire to complete prior to meeting with their academic advisor. The Administrative Assistant in the department greeted the student coming in for their advising appointment and asked the freshmen exploratory studies students only to complete the anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire was then collected by the Administrative Assistant and kept in a locked filing cabinet in the department. Once the student completed the ALOC, the advisor met with them for their advising session. The advisor did not see their completed questionnaire, and therefore, the student was not addressed or treated differently based on their answers. All participants were treated similarly regardless of their ALOC score, which indicated their level of motivation.

Following the advising session, a department advisor evaluation survey was administered to the student to ascertain their satisfaction with and effectiveness of the advising session. This survey is referred to as a summative evaluation as its purpose is to assess whether the objectives were met as a measure of the effectiveness of the advising process (Woodbury, 1999). After completion of the anonymous survey, the advisee deposited the survey in a labeled bin located in the department office. The survey was a 10 question, 5-point Likert-type scale, in length, and took about one to two minutes of the participant's time. The surveys were collected and recorded using an excel spreadsheet and saved in a password-protected file in the Department of Academic Enrichment folder/drive.

The focus group was a subset of the participant group, which was intended to include a minimum of five students and up to a maximum of twelve freshmen Exploratory Studies students at KU that were randomly selected using an excel spreadsheet, which lists all exploratory freshmen students. The focus group was initially planned for about an hour, which took place during the university free hour. The focus group had three student participants, and the duration was 26 minutes. A carefully composed script was written for the facilitator, who is not an academic advisor, prior to the focus group session. The script was semi-structured as the graduate assistant facilitator had some freedom to ask follow-up questions that have been created ahead of time for clarification of student responses at her discretion (Demetriou, 2005).

The facilitator was advised to refrain from responding to student comments that did not include confirmation of the response. She described her role and objective to only lead the session and not offer any opinions or make judgments (Demetriou, 2005). The students were informed of the purpose of the focus group. They were "treated with professionalism and seriousness as it shows them that their opinions and experiences are important to the department." (Demetriou, 2005) The participants were also informed of the goals as we solicited their help and cooperation to improve the department's advising services as it relates to their persistence.

Morgan (1997) advises that at the start of the focus group, the facilitator should begin with an icebreaker question in which each participant answers. Although this is not something that was done as a result of time constraints, students were asked to introduce themselves so that they felt comfortable sharing within that setting. The focus group was recorded using an audio recording device for transcription purposes, and permission was obtained from all participants. I transcribed the digital recordings and coded them manually using affective methods with

emotion codes in combination with In Vivo codes (Saldaña, 2016). Member checks included

comparing audio transcription with the notes from the recorder and notetaker in the focus group.

Both electronic audio and transcript copies were maintained, and as the transcriber, I

double-transcribed a subset of the audio to verify inter-rater reliability. Raw data were coded

with a numbering system so that participants are not identifiable (Saldaña, 2016). Each

participant was given a unique number for data recording purposes (01; 02; or 03). The

evaluations/surveys were anonymous. The institutional data obtained on participants were

masked for purposes of the study, and no identifying data is used in the presentation of the

results. I have quoted student's remarks from both the survey, and the focus group in this

research. A pseudonym is used to protect the student's identity.

As the researcher, I have a student/advisor relationship with the participants as their

assigned academic advisor in the Department of Academic Enrichment. Thus, I excluded myself

from facilitating the focus group methodology of the research further to ensure the benefits of the

research against the subjects. As the students' academic advisor, it is a possible limitation, in

that capacity, to hold an imbalance of power over the subjects that will continue past the focus

group. Additionally, the focus group would not remain anonymous, thereby risking damage to

the student/advisor relationship and bringing the study's findings into question by introducing

potential bias. Having a graduate assistant facilitate the focus group reduces the potential, risked

the participants, and eliminated bias.

Data Analysis

By using both transcription-based analyses along with note-based analysis for analyzing

the focus group data, I interpreted the experiences of the research participants as they told their

stories and shared their opinions about their relationship with their advisor. My approach to data

analysis was:

1. Within 72 hours of the focus group, transcribe.

2. Review advisor evaluations.

3. Write a summary of significant statements, and within one week.

4. Develop a list of significant statements that represent the meaning and depth of the

   experiences recorded and collected.

Immediately following the focus group, I made descriptive and reflective notes from the

audiotaping to avoid the loss of important details from this research method (Marshall &

Rossman, 2016). I coded for common themes and categorized the comments by these themes

with the surveys as well as the focus group (Saldana, 2016). Dominant themes emerged and are

illustrated in table three of chapter four. This approach ensured accuracy and supported a more

valid and reliable research study.

Similar to Teasley & Buchanan's (2013) advising satisfaction survey, an exploratory

analytic approach (EFA) was used to analyze the survey data for this study. The EFA explores

the data to find an acceptable set of factors. The goal is not so much to formally test a

hypothesis as it is to discover likely factors or trends (Costello & Osborne, 2005). The study

includes all advisees who took the survey following their advising sessions, which can be a large

sample. EFA is an error-prone procedure that works best for the participant size (Costello &

Osborne, 2005).

In qualitative research, it is critical to use codes, categories, and themes to analyze data.

Because a code is the smallest point of meaning assigned to an excerpt of text, categorizing the

similar codes are merged to get a broader sense of the data collected. I manually coded the focus

group, reading the transcript twice. I began the coding process by pre-coding, highlighting

notable quotes the participants shared (Saldana, 2016). Preliminary jottings from the raw data of

words or phrases help select the themes (Saldana, 2016). In this step, I identified the themes and

code categories. Themes were divided by primary and secondary for concepts that constituted

many categories concerning the research questions. I used main themes related to student

persistence and success and qualities for the student-advisor relationship when categorizing

analyzed data. After all codes and themes were identified, the data was developed, and patterns

were recorded.

While the study was underway, all surveys and questionnaires were kept by the

researcher, locked in a filing cabinet. At the conclusion of the focus group, all data and audio

recordings were kept locked in a filing cabinet and on a password-protected file on the computer

in the researcher's office at Kutztown University. Only the researcher and departmental faculty

and staff had access to records. All data collected during this study, as well as all records related

to the study, will be maintained for a minimum of three (3) years and then destroyed.

It is imperative to preserve reliability and validity when collecting and analyzing data for

research. The internal validity is the assurance that you measure what the research is supposed to

measure, avoiding confounding variables (Patton, 2002). Inter-rater reliability considers that two

similar and reasonable people would record similar scores based on viewing, reading, or

interpreting the data (Patton, 2002). Therefore, to establish inter-rater reliability, I re-read, re-

listened, and maintained all jottings and notes when analyzing data to ensure reliability across

different people, eliminating any potential bias. To address any potential issue with consistency,

I had multiple coders test for inter-rater reliability.

Limitations

A limitation of the study is the sample and population. All Exploratory Studies students at KU are advised utilizing a holistic approach in the Department of Academic Enrichment, although only freshmen students were included in the data collection. The focus group data were collected from three students as a representation for the population of 276 Exploratory Studies students. Another limitation was the result of keeping the survey and ALOC anonymous, and therefore, I was unable to match the scores. Moreover, the data in this study are not generalizable. Because the results from this study only applied to Exploratory Studies students at KU, the results have poor generalizability.

Along with the many advantages of a focus group, there are also challenges. Patton (2002) refers to them as interviews that are not one-on-one but are a group setting where participants get to hear each other responses. Because the participants are in a group setting, they can influence each other with their responses. "The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their views in the context of the views of other." (Patton, 2002, p. 386) Although interactions among participants enhance data quality (Krueger & Casey, 2014), the researcher is not typically able to generalize the outcomes because of the smaller number of participants.

The focus group was facilitated to gain input on the advising relationship and its relation to student success and retention. The focus group is a subset of the participant group, which was to include a minimum of five students and up to a maximum of twelve freshmen Exploratory Students at KU that were randomly selected using an excel spreadsheet. The focus group was scheduled during the university free hour. Due to the low number of participants, the focus group only lasted for about 26 minutes. I had six students who confirmed their participation, and

only three attended. I would say that one limitation is only having data from three students as a representation for the population of 276 exploratory Studies students. Lack of participation could also indicate a lack of engagement. The focus group was ideal because it is both an economically and time-efficient method in collecting the data from multiple participants. As I began the preliminary coding process, I do believe that the focus group went well. The students were all engaged in discussion, and they were able to answer all questions because there was only three of them. Although I had hoped for more student input, the focus group data provided a minimal perspective in addition to the quantitative methods in the study.

A limitation regarding the survey results, in comparison to previous scholarly studies conducted, was the context. More notably is that the survey data was only an evaluation for one faculty advisor, the advisor being the researcher. Another limitation was the anonymity of both the survey and the ALOC because the study could not confirm that a student participated in both research methods. This limited the generalizability of the research findings by not being able to connect each participant's ALOC score and level of satisfaction with their advising experience with their academic performance.

As the researcher, I was aware that my current role as the participant's academic advisor could potentially impact responses provided during data collection. The participants were protected through anonymity with the ALOC and the survey. Although I did not facilitate the focus group, it was recorded. It is possible that students withheld complaints, knowing that I would be listening to and using the recording. I also believe, however, that the prior relationships established with the participants were built on mutual respect and could be considered as a strength that added to this study.

Creswell (2014) points out that in qualitative research, interpretation of the data, and personal views are never kept separate. As a college advisor for over ten years and advocate for marginalized students, I have been influenced by these past experiences. I recognize the following biases and possible concerns:

- I am a member of the faculty and academic advisor at the institution where the participants I researched were my advisees.

- I believe that a holistic academic advising model will enhance the relationships between advisors and students.

- I have strong feelings about the need to form a relationship with the students to improve persistence.

Researcher Positionality

Because both freshmen and undeclared students are the most vulnerable demographic of students for persistence, I wanted to explore my positionality as an academic advisor. I believe its vitally important for someone in my role to re-consider dimensions of under-performance that operate silently in our minds. This action research directly impacts my work and the students I serve. I have a personal investment in this work and plan to continue to pursue more scholarly work in the area of advising and retention. As an advisor to freshmen Exploratory Studies students, I must approach issues and concerns analytically. There is a great need to listen more carefully and critically and also have a genuine concern for our students as they transition to college. The development of greater awareness and sensitivity towards issues of social justice is imperative.

Throughout my higher education career, I have worked and supported students with their career decision making. This has included ten years of academic and career services in private,

public, community college, and for-profit institutions. During that time, retention and student

success have always been at the core of the institution's strategic planning as it impacts the

institution's ability to serve its students effectively.

CHAPTER FOUR: Analysis and Results

Introduction

The goal of this study is to substantiate the importance of academic advising for Exploratory Studies freshmen students to enhance advising at KU to improve retention, student success, academic success, and performance concerning the effectiveness and satisfaction of the advising relationship. Throughout my career as an academic advisor, I have gained a great deal of insight about making connections that form relationships with students, creating a rapport built on honesty and compassion to improve retention. However, since the beginning, this action research, these types of insights and discoveries have grown exponentially. The research process has allowed me the opportunity to infuse my traditional reflective practice with the more purposeful examination and systematic advising approach utilizing the holistic approach.

In this chapter, I share my research findings which include the results from a focus group (n=3), an advising evaluation survey (n=192), and a non-cognitive measure called the academic locus of control (n=160). The research methods explored the relationship between academic advising for Exploratory Studies students and student success with their level of motivation and academic achievement. First, I present results from the quantitative data. Then, second, I share results from the qualitative data. The qualitative data assertions are presented and reinforced with themes, theme-related components, and quotes from participants.

Table 2

Methodology

Focus Group	3	4/23/2019	MSU room 324	25:53	10
Survey	192	3/18/19 – 5/10/19	RL room 27	N/A	N/A
ALOC	157	3/18/19 – 5/10/19	RL room 27	N/A	N/A

Findings

Survey

The quantitative data includes findings from the academic advisor evaluation survey as a tool to assess student satisfaction. The survey is a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 indicates strongly disagree, 3 indicates unsure, and 5 indicates strongly agree). There were 192 freshmen Exploratory Studies students who completed a survey. These students took the survey following their Spring 2019 advising session. The advisor evaluation survey had a 99% satisfaction rate. In the following quote by Dr. Sue Ohrablo. she explains the importance of using students' voices: "surveys can be helpful in identifying areas of strength and opportunities for growth for individual advisors and the overall department. While surveys can be used to gather quantitative data, they can also be used to capture the essence of the advising experience." (Ohrablo, 2018)

Table 3

Spring 2019 Advisor Evaluation

	Question	Strongly Agree #	Strongly Agree %	Agree #	Agree %	Unsure	Unsure?	Disagree #	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A #	N/A %
1	I am satisfied with the academic advising I received.	179	93.23%	12	6%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
2	My Academic Advisor is prepared for my advising appointments.	174	90.63%	17	9%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
3	I am given the time I need during my academic advising appointment(s) and do not feel rushed.	180	93.23%	11	6%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
4	My Academic Advisor is knowledgeable about academic and graduation requirements.	179	93.23%	12	6%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
5	My Academic Advisor answers my questions.	183	95.31%	8	4%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
6	If my Academic Advisor does not know the answer to one of my questions, he/she makes the effort to connect me to someone who does.	170	88.54%	15	8%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	6	3%
7	My Academic Advisor suggests steps I can take to help me decide on a major and/or minor to help me clarify my academic and career goals.	180	93.75%	10	5%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
8	My Academic Advisor provides accurate assistance in selecting appropriate courses.	181	94.27%	10	5%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
9	My Academic Advisor listens and respects me as an individual.	182	94.79%	9	5%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
10	My Academic Advisor is a helpful, effective Advisor who I would recommend to other exploratory studies students.	181	94.27%	10	5%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Average		93%		6%		1%		0%		0%		0%

All participant evaluations were anonymous. As indicated in the survey, there was a high satisfaction rate for the academic advising experience. There was not one participant out of the 192 who indicated disagree or strongly disagree as a category for any of the ten questions. The question with the highest rated score of responses was number five: my academic advisor answers my questions. This is consistent with the question which had the lowest score of responses being number six: if my academic advisor does not know the answer to one of my questions, he/she makes an effort to connect me to someone who does? Students are getting their questions answered and, therefore, do not need to go elsewhere.

A majority of the students wrote comments about their advising experience. About 45% of the student evaluators decided not to leave a comment. Coding is the process of labeling and organizing your qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them Saldana, 2016). For this study, the labels were words for organizational purposes. Coding qualitative research to find common themes and concepts is part of thematic analysis, which is part of qualitative data analysis (Saldana, 2016). Based on the 105 survey comments, four major themes emerged.

Table 4

Survey Themes

Themes	Codes	Description
Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable Advice	Students expressed their appreciation for their advisor providing them guidance and answering their questions.
Caring	Nice Understanding Encouraging	The characteristics and traits of a warm demeanor which describe their thoughts and feelings about their advisor and the advising experience.

Helpful	Helpful Supportive	A positive feeling used in describing their advising experience. The way the students both thought about or felt about their advisor and the advising session.
Advising	Classes Experience	The one-on-one process and/or relationship a faculty has with their student advisee as they are guided through the registration process as well as academic planning. Interactions include guidance and information about course selection, choosing a major, steps or processes, and referrals to resources.

Knowledgeable was mentioned frequently as a descriptor by the students in their feelings about their advising interaction. The perception explains the results where students are appreciative of getting their questions answered. During their advising session, a rapport is being built, and trust is being formed. The trust allows for an open dialogue where students are encouraged to share concerns and ask questions. Being first-year students with over a third identifying as first-generation, come with many questions and uncertainty. "When both variables, first-generation and undecided, are combined, students may experience even greater difficulty in connecting to the institution than students who identify as either first-generation or undecided; thus, they may face a higher likelihood of attrition than their continuing-generation or decided peers" (Glaessgen et al., 2018) Having an advisor-student relationship where their concerns can be addressed, and the student becomes more aware of their expectations and/or resources, supports their understanding of how to be a successful student. The following statements are student comments related to the knowledgeable theme:

Marlene is a very caring and knowledgeable advisor. She has done nothing but set

me up for success and help me get through my academic career.

My advisor is knowledgeable and helps me with all of my concerns.

Marlene Fares is a wonderful academic advisor to have. She makes an effort to answer all of my questions, and she made my freshman year easy for me. Thank you.

Super understanding, gives good advice and knows what she is talking about.

She is very helpful and respectful about my concerns regarding credits and is very knowledgeable about the classes I should take.

She is very helpful and respectful about my concerns regarding credits and is very knowledgeable about the classes I should take.

My academic advisor does an outstanding job when providing advice and answering my questions.

Overall, a very good experience. Extremely helpful and provided great suggestions for next semester. Very knowledgeable about courses/open to what I have to say.

It was a truly humbling experience to read these comments made by the students. I believe that the connections being made are a result of the intentional relationship building, genuine concern for student success, and making the advising session an educational experience with the information shared and discussed. Aside from faculty in their courses, the students are not interacting personally with faculty to learn about their higher education journey. The students refer to knowledgeable in the above comments as merely a person who gave them an answer to the question(s) they had. For them, having these answers provided them with a positive perception of the advising experience.

The theme of caring is defined as a perception of comfort and success from a warm and compassionate demeanor experienced during the advising session. If a student has not

experienced higher education prior to this experience, showing them that their advisor cares

about them can contribute to their overall collegiate outlook. This outlook can provide them

with the confidence to propel them to make informed decisions that will enhance their

motivation (Eaton, 2020). Extrinsic motivation is the key to success, and this translates into

caring for their future, which drives their persistence. The following statements are student

comments related to the caring theme:

> Marlene Fares is a very well-respected advisor who is always on the clock for my
>
> help. She guides me down the right path, and has kept me positive through my
>
> first year!
>
> Very helpful and friendly. Wants me to succeed.
>
> She is extremely helpful, and caring, and I enjoy having her.
>
> I love talking with you, and I just wanted to say keep doing what you do.
>
> Mrs. Fares is very helpful, and I also feel comfortable going to her with any
>
> questions I have.
>
> Mrs. Fares is very persistent in assuring that I am satisfied and comfortable with
>
> my personal situation.
>
> She is very nice and respectful. She understands everything that you say to her.
>
> She helps you with everything.
>
> My advisor had helped me through a lot, and pulled me back on my feet when I
>
> was at my lowest.
>
> She is very nice and reliable, and helps me get the courses I need and is very
>
> encouraging.

My experience is always very good. I felt listened to and understood. I also feel

like I am always being pointed in the right direction.

My experience was uplifting. My advisor gave me hope for next semester.

Amazing, always helps me, wants the best for all her advisees.

A sincere consideration for a student's successful transition to college can be comforting.

As illustrated through the student's words in an optional comment section, they value their

advisor's willingness to show care and concern for their overall well-being. Relationships are

built on a foundation of trust and comfort (Higgins, 2017; NACADA, 2017).

The word helpful was repeated numerous times in the student's comments. Their

perception of helpful is getting their questions answered, having a dialogue about their courses

and major selection, and future academic planning or exploration based on their interests.

Additionally, the student's perceptions expressed in their comments confirm their feelings

regarding creating the rapport needed for the advisor-student relationship. It is from that

established relationship that the students feel comfortable to reach out to the advisor when they

have another question or need to discuss their overall college experience. The following

statements are student comments related to the helpful theme:

I found this advisement appointment very helpful. She answered my questions

and provided me with encouraging words like not to worry about failing a course.

She helped me a lot in figuring out my classes and made it easy to do. It was

quality.

I feel like my advisor was very helpful with my courses and major, and I feel very

informed and confident after my appointment.

Marlene Fares has always been super helpful to me. I strongly like her as an

academic advisor.

My advisor really helped me pick my classes that I really need to take, and she

always pushes me to do my best.

She is always so helpful, and even when it is not advisement time, she is usually

checking with me about other majors I would be interested in.

Very helpful. Wants the best for her advisees.

She has been extremely helpful and kind every time I come to see her, and I really

appreciate it.

Being helpful does overlap with caring, knowledgeable, and good advising experience.

Students repeatedly expressed that their questions were answered, and they were given the time

needed and felt listened to. Although the advising period is a time to connect with your advisor

and select courses for the following semester, being helpful with Exploratory Studies students

means to discuss interests, encourage career exploration, discuss options and requirements for

majors and minors along with the change of major/minor process. The students often do not

have the information they need or have any questions about their future career decision making.

It is critical for an advisor to make the time for the Exploratory Studies student to have the

dialogue necessary to inspire a timely declaration of a major and/or minor. Not receiving the

appropriate help, guidance, and support can alter a college students' trajectory.

The fourth and final theme of the advisor evaluation survey is simply advising. This one-

on-one process and relationship are critical to a student as they are guided through the

registration and academic planning process. Advising interactions include guidance and

information about course selection, choosing a major and/or minor, requirements, and referrals to

resources as needed. As previously stated, KU requires students to meet with their advisor once

a semester for next semester course registration. This is strategic and a key to reducing retention

and supporting student success. Advisors use this time to advise their students accordingly,

reducing the potential mistakes, i.e., taking the wrong courses, taking required courses out of

sequence, which may extend their graduation and discourage a student from persisting based on

the requirements for that particular program. The following statements are voluntary comments

made by the students and related to the advising theme:

> Very helpful in figuring out classes I am interested in.

> My Advisor really helped me pick the classes that I really need to take, and she
> always pushes me to do my best.

> My advisor helps me to feel comfortable during meetings and prepared for course
> selection.

> She was great and helped me understand the levels and what I needed to do/take
> to declare my major.

> Marlene Fares does an amazing job. She helped me declare my major and finding
> my classes.

> Marlene is great! I feel confident about my next semester!

> My academic advisor does everything she can to help me stay on track, and she
> makes scheduling very easy and understandable.

> My academic advisor was very polite and encouraging. She was prepared and had
> a good plan for me.

> She was very helpful with registering for my classes next semester and concerned
> about my future classes and major.

My experience with Marlene is always helpful. She provides the appropriate

guidance for me, which allows the process of choosing classes to be easiest!

Helped me work through my difficult schedule and was very nice and considerate.

Academic advising is an essential component of success for undergraduate students and

more so for freshmen students. Freshmen students have the highest retention rate, and this

indicator informs us of the need to provide advising support. Exploratory Studies students are

undecided which adds a layer that may be considered "at-risk" for dropping out as a result of low

motivation. The survey results in this study presented a different view where students felt that

the advising experience benefitted them. Providing the time and space within the advising

session for forming a student-advisor relationship encourages future dialogue with students as

they persist in their college education. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that academic

advising, particularly when students perceived the advising to be good, was positively related to

student retention.

The four themes from the student comments on the survey represent one of the two

quantitative data, which were sufficient in sample size and quality to inform this study. The

questions in the advisor evaluation are directly related to both research questions in this study.

As the advisor, I made it a point to create an advising relationship with the freshmen Exploratory

Studies students, which is hypothesized to impact their motivation and influence their success

and persistence. The advisor plays the critical role of being a transformational leader in the

student's "learning process by focusing on the individuality of the student, assisting them in

thinking independently, motivating them through inspiration, and acting as a role model

(Barbudo, Story, Fritz, & Schinstock, 2011) in (Higgins, 2017). The advisor-student relationship

involves both individuals. Although the advisor takes the leadership role, the relationship

translates to a partnership when both individuals are engaged.

Academic Locus of Control

Julian Rotter's (1966) psychological construct is known as the locus of control (LOC).

Locus of Control is considered to be an important aspect of personality. The concept refers to an

individual's perception of the main underlying causes of events in a person's life. His

questionnaire was widely used as a predictive measure to show perseverance, which is also

known as internal locus of control. As previously described, internal LOC is defined as having

control over one's actions and future, and external locus of control is defined as having other

forces that may predict outcomes. Students who have an internal LOC believe that they control

their fate and take responsibility for the outcomes. Students with an external LOC, blame others

for their fate rather than accept responsibility. The 28 item ALOC tool used in this study that

Trice developed (1985) was designed to assess LOC as it related to a student's academics. The

measurement tool asks the student to decide whether or not the survey statement is more like

them (true) or less like them (false) based on their academic abilities and performance. The tool

measures LOC in relationship to the academic performance of college students. The total score

range is 0 to 28; students who score between 0 and 13 demonstrate an internal locus of control,

while those who score between 14 and 28 demonstrate an external locus of control.

Table 6

ALOC Responses N=157

ACADEMIC LOCUS OF CONTROL QUESTIONS	TRUE	%	FALSE	%	Forgot Back Side	%	Other Response	%
1. _____College grades most often reflect the effort you put into classes.	133	83.13%	26	16.25%			1	0.63%
2. _____I came to college because it was expected of me.	80	50.00%	76	47.50%			3	1.88%
3. _____I have largely determined my own career goals.	103	64.38%	57	35.63%				
4. _____Some people have a knack for writing, while others will never write well no matter how hard they try.	72	45.00%	88	55.00%				
5. _____At least once, I have taken a course because it was easy to get a good grade.	115	71.88%	45	28.13%				
6. _____Professors sometimes make an early impression of you and then no matter what you do, you cannot change that impression.	66	41.25%	93	58.13%			1	0.63%
7. _____There are some subjects in which I could never do well.	111	69.38%	47	29.38%			2	1.25%
8. _____Some students, such as student leaders and athletes, get free rides in college classes.	69	43.13%	90	56.25%			1	0.63%
9. _____I sometimes feel that there is nothing I can do to improve my situation.	53	33.13%	107	66.88%				
10. _____I never feel really hopeless—there is always something I can do to improve my situation.	113	70.63%	45	28.13%			2	1.25%
11. _____I would never allow social activities to affect my studies.	101	63.13%	58	36.25%			1	0.63%
12. _____There are many more important things for me than getting good grades.	79	49.38%	79	49.38%			2	1.25%
13. _____Studying every day is important.	129	80.63%	31	19.38%				
14. _____For some courses it is not important to go to class.	38	23.75%	122	76.25%				
15. _____I consider myself highly motivated to achieve success in life.	125	78.13%	33	20.63%			2	1.25%
16. _____I am a good writer.	91	56.88%	66	41.25%			3	1.88%
17. _____Doing work on time is always important to me.	146	91.25%	13	8.13%			1	0.63%
18. _____What I learn is more determined by college and course requirements than by what I want to learn.	96	60.00%	61	38.13%			2	1.25%
19. _____I have been known to spend a lot of time making decisions which others do not take seriously.	114	71.25%	46	28.75%				
20. _____I am easily distracted.	125	78.13%	30	18.75%	4	2.50%	1	0.63%
21. _____I can be easily talked out of studying.	101	63.13%	55	34.38%	4	2.50%		
22. _____I get depressed sometimes and then there is no way I can accomplish what I know I should be doing.	63	39.38%	92	57.50%	4	2.50%	1	0.63%
23. _____Things will probably go wrong for me some time in the near future.	68	42.50%	87	54.38%	4	2.50%	1	0.63%
24. _____I keep changing my mind about my career goals.	98	61.25%	57	35.63%	4	2.50%	1	0.63%
25. _____I feel I will someday make a real contribution to the world if I work hard at it.	148	92.50%	8	5.00%	4	2.50%		
26. _____There has been at least one instance in school where social activity impaired my academic performance.	114	71.25%	42	26.25%	4	2.50%		
27. _____I would like to graduate from college, but there are more important things in my life.	83	51.88%	81	50.63%	4	2.50%	1	0.63%
28. _____I plan well and I stick to my plans.	94	58.75%	59	36.88%	4	2.50%	3	1.88%

In evaluating how motivation contributes to persistence, the findings illustrate the importance of students taking responsibility for their actions (Trice. 1985). The questionnaire responses demonstrated that Exploratory Studies freshmen students who scored an internal locus of control, had a higher degree of academic achievement when measured by GPA (Table 6). "Scores can range from 0 to 28 with high scores indicating a more external orientation." (Curtis and Trice, 2013) Results indicated that the ALOC was a predictive measure of the freshmen outcomes of the end of semester GPA and retention. The scores ranged from 3 to 26, with a mean of 8.05 (SD=5.89).

Table 7

ALOC Results

ALOC findings	
Score	**frequency**
1	
2	
3	1
4	
5	2
6	6
7	17
8	15
9	8
10	16
11	10
12	16
13	14
14	12
15	8
16	12
17	2
18	8
19	2
20	1
21	2
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	1
27	
28	
St Dev	5.8923084
N =	153
Mean	8.0526316

Scoring of the inventory is the sum of the matched items. The scores were significantly

related to the grade point average in this study. Low scores can be associated with higher GPAs,

and high scores can be associated with lower GPAs. Students with internal LOC are more likely

to be successful and persist. Sixty-seven percent of the Exploratory Studies students who took

the ALOC had an internal LOC. A student with an ALOC score of 13 or less is said to have an

internal LOC. Students with internal ALOC are more motivated and, therefore, more likely to

succeed. An individual with an internal LOC would be expected to take more responsibility for

his or her actions in terms of achieving a good grade and understand that performance in a course

is related to their amount of preparation (Carden, Brynat & Moss, 2004; Cook & Brown, 2009;

Landis, Altman, Gavin, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 1998; Rotter, 1966; Trice, 1985; Trice &

Hackburt, 1989).

A person with a score of 14 or higher is said to have an external LOC. Of the 157

students who completed all 28 items on the ALOC, 67% (n=105) had an internal LOC (score 13

or less), while 31% (n=48) had an external LOC. Four students did not complete the back page

of the ALOC tool, so their ALOC score was not able to be calculated. The following table

illustrates a significant relationship between locus of control and grade point average:

Table 6

Exploratory Studies GPA

Average First Term CGPA	2016	2017	2018
Exploratory Students	2.35	2.44	2.60
COB	2.52	2.49	2.46
COE	2.99	3.08	3.12
COLAS	2.43	2.50	2.64
COVPA	2.77	2.94	2.94
Grand Total	2.56	2.65	2.73

Average Second Term CGPA	2016	2017	2018
Exploratory Students	2.46	2.52	2.47
COB	2.61	2.54	2.28
COE	3.15	3.08	3.14
COLAS	2.59	2.55	2.47
COVPA	2.88	3.02	2.90
Grand Total	2.69	2.71	2.61

Results indicated that the ALOC was a predictive measure of the freshman outcomes of both first and second semester CGPAs. The relationship was found with the ALOC score (67% internal), their advising satisfaction, and their academic performance because of the positive linear relationship. As student motivation increases, students' academic performance increases, showing that positive relationship.

LOC has been linked to student academics in terms of performance (Neill, 2006; Rotter, 1966; Trice, 1985). A student who has an internal LOC has been believed to take more initiative and interest related to his or her preparation and performance in a class. This student understands that the amount of effort put into a class will influence the outcome, whereas, an individual with an external LOC may leave performance to chance or belief that the poor grade he or she earned is due to extrinsic factors rather than his or her responsibility (Carden, Bryant, & Moss, 2004; Eksterowicz, 1999; Rotter, 1966; Trice, 1985). Using the ALOC scale,

procrastination was found to be decreased for those with an internal LOC (Carden, Bryant, &

Moss, 2004; Janssen & Carton, 1999; Trice & Milton, 1987). Absenteeism was also determined

to be less for those with an internal LOC (Trice & Hackburt, 1989). The use of study skills was

found to be greater for those with an internal LOC (Landis, Altman, & Gavin, 2007;

Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 1998).

Focus Group

My objective with the focus group was to understand how Exploratory Studies students

perceive their relationship with their academic advisor. The findings of the focus group included

student satisfaction with regards to their advisor-student relationship, along with their

dissatisfaction with other relationships they may have had in their first year of college. These

results reveal limited information concerning students' experiences with both academic advising

and the college classroom. In the current academic climate of a large public institution, students

must navigate a complex network of academic rules and requirements mandated by legislative

policy. Immersed within the world of prerequisites, course sequencing, and exceptions to the

rule, academic advisors are capable of providing immediate and accurate assistance. The quote

"without them" was mentioned by each student describing how difficult it would be to navigate

through their freshman year without the guidance from their advisor.

As the students reflected on the question of how they felt about their overall academic

experience, using word choice of "frustrating," "confusing," and "overwhelming," made me

reflect on how they view the role of their advisor. Each time the students strayed away from

talking directly about their advisor, they expressed these feelings, which made me conclude that

they felt lost in higher education. Students feel a disconnection from their professors, which

hampers their understanding of how to navigate the higher education system, and without their

advisor, they may not be able to overcome those obstacles.

Saldaña (2016) described coding of qualitative data as a heuristic process, "an

exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow. Coding is only the

initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation of a report.

Coding is not just labeling, it is linking" (p. 9). Employing Saldaña's framing of qualitative

coding data as a cyclical process that was "context specific" (p. 3) justified trying out various

coding types to facilitate the analysis of these data sets appropriately. As part of the first coding

cycle, "first impression" (p. 5) topics and phrases were highlighted and mapped out. The

Descriptive Coding method was utilized to "document and categorize the breadth of opinions

stated by multiple participants" (p. 8).

The major topics that surfaced were subsequently organized into a variety of matrices,

which enabled examination of individual and categorical selections. The participants'

experiences were coded by framing ideas as perceptions and emotions. In Vivo coding, "that

prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 75) categorized verbatim text as

key quotes. The second cycle of coding examined pattern coding as a means of grouping the text

into themes. I also practiced focused coding in which I searched and selected the most frequent

and significant codes (Saldaña, 2016) to determine reliability for the themes. The data sets were

presented as a cross-case analysis as a means to holistically link the data together and capture the

richness and depth of both participant groups' perspectives as they related to the themes. This

interweaving of participants' voices was reinforced by the triangulation that was created by their

shared understanding and perception of the advising experience.

Themes

The participants (n=3) often agreed about their perspectives with their experiences. They

shared what they liked and disliked about advising and their first-year of college. They were

confident as they expressed what they wanted in their advising relationship as it benefited them

in their academic success. A thematic analysis was performed on this qualitative data, and

member checking was used to improve data quality. Three themes emerged from the focus

group on the academic advising experiences and the advisor-student relationship: (a) emotions,

(b) advisor character traits, and (c) engagement (people and things related to college).

Table 7

Focus Group Themes

Themes	Codes	Description
Emotions	Overwhelms(ed)(ing) Frustrating(ed) Safe Comfortable	Students expressed their feelings about their experiences during their freshmen year as Exploratory Studies or Undeclared.
Advisor Character Traits	Helpful Guide(ance) Nice Knowledgeable Patient Understanding Personable Trust Relationship(s) Energy Welcome(ing) Honest(y) Open(ess)	These character traits describe their thoughts and feelings about their advisor and the advising experience.
Engagement (people and things related to college)	Advising D2L/Grades Professor(s) Conversation	The engagement students have in communication and with people and other college-related matters such as their grades and campus management system.

I will describe my interpretation of the themes and how they were developed and assessed. I will also provide supportive definitions along with quotes from students utilizing a pseudonym (01,02,03) to protect the participants.

Emotion

Goleman (1995) defines emotion as "a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states, and range of propensities to act" (p. 289) in Saldana (2016). As I transcribed the focus group, I repeatedly heard the students explain how they felt about their first-year in college. I applied the affective method of coding (Saldana, 2016) to include these expressions of emotions as they are directly related to matters of social relationships. Participants made the following statements in the focus group in response to question 2: how do you feel about academic advising?

> Student # 2 – I feel that it was very helpful because like I am one of those that
>
> kind of needs some direction when it comes to that kind of stuff, and if I were to
>
> just have that stuff presented in front of me, I feel that I would be frustrated and
>
> lost with the whole process.
>
> Student # 3 - throughout high school like you had people telling you what to do
>
> and how to do things and you just had so much guidance, so when you come here
>
> (KU), it is the very opposite. You are on your own, and so I feel that without an
>
> advisor, you would be overwhelmed and especially for undeclared students who
>
> do not know what they want to do. Having that guidance and just help towards the
>
> bigger picture helps.

In addition to how they felt about academic advising in general, question four inquires further about their feelings during their interaction with their advisor: how did your Advisor

make you feel during your advising appointment? This question ignited the student's feelings of

frustration with their professors and grades in addition to the use of the learning management

system. I have included a few short statements from each participant:

Student # 3 - it took a lot to adjust to not knowing your grades because it is not

always in D2L. In high school, we have an online portal, and your grades were all

right there.

Student # 2 – the advising process is very welcoming, but I have the same issue

where some of my Professors do not put grades in D2L, and I have a Professor

that uses another system rather than D2L.

Student # 1 – a complaint that I had and is a frustrating point is that I do not really

know what my grades are and not all Professors post grades.

Advisor Character Traits

Advisor character traits were another theme that developed in the coding process of the

focus group. The participants provided many descriptions and impressions of their advisor and

the advising experience. Dalton State College conducted an extensive survey within their

University System in which both students and faculty advisors agreed on six characteristics of

good advisors.

Successful advisors are:

1. Student-oriented, having an interest in and concern for students as individuals;

2. Knowledgeable about the requirements and policies of the College;

3. Skilled in counseling and interpersonal relationships, able to listen, able to be

directive and non-directive, able to demonstrate patience and tolerance;

4. Available to students;

5. Careful about details such as record keeping, follow-through, and follow-up;

6. Positive about and committed to advisement. (Dalton State College, 2020)

The advisor character traits listed above are consistent with the student responses in both the survey and the focus group data of this study. In both questions seven and eight (appendix B), the students provided what most significant attributes of an academic advisor are as well as what they felt was an essential characteristic in building a relationship. Each student (n=3) responded with the following:

Student # 1 - I think honestly is very important, just like being honest, not only about the courses and their description but what is going to be best for you, having that dialogue. I also think being accepting and patient as well as providing a more relaxed environment.

Student # 2 – I would say honesty and personable because that is where you get the relationship from which really benefits the whole process. Also knowledgeable of the whole process itself.

Student # 3 – I would also say honesty because I think that is very important. But I also think being understanding because everyone has different paths that they want to follow. I also think just making a relationship is really important because you get to know them personally, so I think just having that personal relationship is really helping them.

One of the questions in the focus group which directly relates to an advisor character trait was question five; reflecting on your advising meeting(s), please share your thoughts about the trust you have or do not have with your advisor. As previously explained, trust is a foundation for

building a lasting relationship. The following were the responses from the students related to

their trust in their advisor:

>   Student # 1 – I trust my advisor, and I do not have issues. She is a very nice and
>
>   genuine person. There was not any sort of energy that she did not care about me;
>
>   she actually cared, which I think is important.
>
>   Student # 2 – I think that as well because I felt very safe, like expressing my
>
>   concerns and my thoughts towards my courses and my grades, and felt very
>
>   welcome doing it.
>
>   Student # 3 - Adding on to what both of them said, when I was applying to
>
>   colleges, I had a lot of people tell me that because I was undecided, I was not
>
>   going to have the best advisor. I disagree because I am the kind of person that is
>
>   just very straight-up about things, and I like it when people are the same way with
>
>   me. So, when talking to her, not only did she listen to what I wanted out of
>
>   everything, but she gave her honest input. She was very honest with me, and she
>
>   did not just beat around the bush, she was up-front with what she thought was best
>
>   for me, and I liked that.

Engagement

The third and final theme in this focus group is connected to Tinto's theory, where there

is a personal and social sense of belonging, in other words, engagement. As previously stated in

the theoretical framework, this personal sense of belonging can be developed within the advising

relationship. Both Tinto and Astin describe engagement and involvement as key components of

retention. The following excerpts are related to the student's engagement with professors,

courses, and grades when asked if they had recommendations or suggestions for improvement

for academic advising:

> Student # 2 – Because I am undecided, there were a lot of classes that I wanted to
>
> take but could not take because I was not declared, so I was not able to get a feel
>
> of the major itself because I am undeclared.
>
> Student # 3 – I completely agree with that. There were a few classes that because
>
> I was undeclared and not in that specific major, I could not take. So even reaching
>
> out and emailing the professors to ask for permission to get into the classes that I
>
> was interested in was not an option. Because I am undecided, their answer was
>
> no, and that was frustrating for me because, again, I am so unsure and indecisive
>
> about what I want to do, so not being able to explore what I wanted was
>
> frustrating.
>
> Student # 1 – I forgot to pay this one bill, and they dropped all of my classes, and
>
> since I was undeclared, I could not take the second semester of art classes because
>
> I am not an art major. I had to go to all of my professors and ask to be signed in. It
>
> was very frustrating because ironically, the undeclared majors are supposed to be
>
> open to exploring, yet they cannot.
>
> Student # 3 – There needs to be a new system where at least all of the professors
>
> are on the same page as far as grades. Setting up a new system where it is easier
>
> for you to see your grades and understand what your current grade is, that would
>
> be really helpful because not all my professors tell me how to calculate my
>
> grades. Luckily for me, I had something similar to D2L, but for those who do not,
>
> they have no knowledge of and do not know what they are doing or how to find

their grades. I just think that the biggest problem is that no one is on the same

page, and not all professors are using the same online resource. Each professor

has different methods of how they do grades, and some of my professors do not

have anything online. Making connections with professors is important, but I

think it is just very frustrating when you're so busy with work, and you have no

idea what your grade even is or what you got on a test or an assignment; it is just

frustrating.

Student # 1 – Your focused on doing the work, not focused on figuring out how

your being graded.

Student # 2 – I agree with that because, especially now, with finals coming up, I

am trying to study, and I do not feel like scheduling an appointment with my

professors to know where I stand in the class.

Student # 1 – They do not even know

Student # 3 - They do not know themselves because they do not have a direct spot

that tells them our grade. A lot of them will not discuss it over email, so I think it

is kind of frustrating that there is no easier way going around the situation.

Student # 1 – I definitely think there should be a program every professor should

follow. That would make things so much easier and would solve a lot of issues.

The framework that describes the results in the focus group is critical in describing the

student's first year experience with advising as an undeclared student. There is a great deal of

transition, and the students are made aware of their expectations along with school policies and

procedures from their advisor-student relationship. Many of the terms and language used in the

survey comments are repeated in the focus group. The focus group allowed the students to share

more and clarify their descriptions with their advising experience in addition to their college experience as a whole. The purpose of the advising relationship is to gain a better understanding of degree options and programs, general education requirements, institutional policies and procedures, and campus resources, which all support student success.

A thematic analysis was performed on the qualitative data, and member checking was used to improve data quality. Findings revealed that Exploratory Studies freshmen students were satisfied with the positive attitude, relational skills, and honesty of their advisor. Findings also revealed that students were dissatisfied with their limited access to explore courses as a result of not being in the major. Being exploratory does not allow you to explore.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: *How does the advising relationship with freshmen Exploratory Studies (Undeclared) students impact their student success and persistence?*

Participants in the focus group (n=3), along with the Advisor Evaluation Survey (n=192), illustrated that there was significant evidence of student satisfaction with regards to their student-advisor relationship. These results revealed the critical influence of the student-advisor relationship to their first-year retention. The cohort in this study had an improvement of 3.44% increase in their first-year retention from the previous cohort year (2017). In the spring semester of 2019, Exploratory Studies students had a 21.72% DFWI rate, which was a decrease. However, in comparison to the four KU colleges, this cohort remained in the number three position. The first-year retention rate for the cohort who participated in this research study was 76.44%, which is higher than the national average at 74% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019).

Table 8

First-Year Retention Rates

First Year Retention Rates	2016	2017	2018
Exploratory Students	67.13%	68.82%	72.26%
COB	74.84%	74.52%	69.49%
COE	87.50%	81.86%	84.42%
COLAS	68.39%	68.07%	68.47%
COVPA	80.93%	85.32%	83.51%
Grand Total	73.68%	74.44%	74.19%

Research Question 2: *What is the relationship between a positive academic advising experience and student motivation as a predictive measure of success and persistence?*

Based on Exploratory Studies students' performance during the semester of the study, the research found that when a student believes they have control over the result, they are more motivated and therefore, not allowing outside forces, or outputs (Astin, 1985) to distract from their ability to persist. Exploratory Studies student's first-year retention improved, placing them only behind two other colleges at KU. It could be a result of motivation, locus of control, the holistic approach, and/or the advisor-student relationship. The research findings demonstrated that students with an internal locus of control as being more likely to be successful in their freshmen year in college than those demonstrating an external locus of control. Sixty-seven percent of the Exploratory Studies students who took the ALOC exhibited internal LOC. Students with an internal ALOC were more motivated and were, therefore, more likely to achieve.

CHAPTER V: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the student and academic advisor, satisfaction of the advising experience, and their locus of control and motivation. Research has demonstrated the impact that academic advising has on student retention. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), "Research consistently indicates that academic advising can play a role in students' decisions to persist and in their chances of graduating" (p. 404). Although retention is everyone's job on a college campus (Infande, 2013), academic advisors play a critical role in assisting with student persistence. In the Department of Academic Enrichment, we maintain intentional efforts to participate in meeting the identified needs of our students and assist with the overall retention initiatives at KU.

In order to assess the relationship between academic advising and student retention, data from a subset of freshmen Exploratory Studies students were examined utilizing a mixed-method approach. I analyzed data that included a focus group for the qualitative method and a survey and the ALOC questionnaire as the quantitative measure to demonstrate that advising and motivation are directly correlated to student success. My population for all the methods used was only freshmen Exploratory Studies students at KU. The following chapter provides a summary of the findings, the limitations of the study, followed by the implications for practice.

Implications for Practice

Professional Development at Kutztown University

The results of this study provide important implications for university administrators and researchers in their efforts to gain a better understanding of the undeclared student population. Based on these research findings, I am recommending that KU implement a new advising model founded on a philosophy of holistic advising that will support our universities' academic and co-

curricular advising and focus on strengthening our students' personal and professional

development. Advising is currently required, and rather than viewing this as just another faculty

responsibility, faculty will approach it as an opportunity to form relationships with our students.

This practice ensures that our students' risk for taking the wrong courses is lower because they

do not self-advise, thus decreasing cost and time to attain a degree. Moreover, this approach will

get students excited about linking their academic coursework with what they do outside of the

classroom to meet their professional goals after KU.

      I will assume the leadership role when creating and facilitating a Professional Learning

Community (PLC) for the KU faculty who advise students. Further, I will solicit support and

feedback about the design of the content of the PLC from the Deans, APSCUF Committee on

Advisement Chair, and the faculty director of the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching. I

will organize and recruit a group of KU faculty advisors, ideally one from each department, who

are identified by their Dean and Department Chair as someone who has had success with

advising their students to participate.

      As with the holistic approach to advising, my role will be reflective of the student-advisor

relationship as it impacts student satisfaction and motivation to persist. If students do not have

consistent positive interactions with their academic advisors, it could harm the advising program

and the institution as a whole. I, too, will allow my relationship with the PLC to be mission-

driven, student-centered, and supportive as we begin to implement this new initiative.

      My leadership style with the PLC will be that of a learner. I plan to schedule and

organize the PLC at a convenient time and place for all involved. The team and I will discuss

what we think is essential for our students, and assessment for advising will be something that

will be a significant focus. As we attempt to create change, I will adopt a systemic leadership

approach known as a new way of learning. "New ways of learning involve leveraging diverse perspectives into collective or shared group intelligence and integrating theory, new capacities, and practice with one another" (Senge, 1996 in Allen & Cherrey, 2000). I hope to communicate the PLC concerns, discuss our vision for the future for our students, and further discuss ways in which we could impact the change that is needed to improve their success and retention.

I believe that my leadership style will allow for transparency and reflection, along with suggestions on how to improve advising on our campus that will impact our institutional retention. While we are colleagues, I anticipate that we will have different perspectives on what successful advising approaches should be used. I hope to guide KU faculty through reflections and conversations as differing thoughts and opinions are shared and to encourage members of the group to listen thoughtfully to one another and offer individual perspectives honestly.

While I will be responsible for finding the literature and data, I anticipate the group of KU faculty members will begin to take on a leadership role within the group to contribute to the conversation and incorporating what we are learning in our practice and relationships with students. The group will begin to offer input into the direction of subsequent meetings and topics or sources that need to be explored further. My goal will be to have our meaningful conversations regarding the data and to offer ideas on how to assist faculty in creating relationships with their student advisees as our collective commitments and values are to be student-centered through the advising experience. The objective is to allow the data to lead the PLC in the direction to improve services, generate active initiatives that will positively impact the advising experience for all students as well as improve their persistence and academic success.

I created a draft of an action plan to implement a holistic advising approach on KU's campus and is briefly described below. The implementation team will be taking a cue from National Academic Advising Association's (NACADA) statement of core values of academic advising (2005): advisors need to take a holistic advising approach and, "help students integrate information so they can make well-informed" (para. 5) decisions, both academically and co-curricular. The professional development training will include techniques to improve advisor communication skills and knowledge of effective advising practices. Implementation of this professional development opportunity could bring about positive social change by improving the effectiveness of KU's advising program and the quality of graduates.

With the holistic advising approach, advisors will be encouraged to provide students with the necessary connection to the various campus services and supply the essential academic connection between these services and the students. Also, advisors will offer students the personal connection to the institution that the research indicates is vital to student retention and student success. Moreover, this approach will get students excited about linking their academic coursework with what they do outside of the classroom to meet their professional goals after KU.

Short Range Objectives will include:

1. Form a PLC to discuss the implementation of the holistic advising approach - establish meeting dates/times.

2. Discuss what each department's current protocol and procedure is for advising

3. Create a mission and establish objectives.

4. Introduce the holistic advising approach – provide reading material and studies of student success on college campuses who have implemented this approach.

5. Consult the faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement for the expectations of advising students.

A potential obstacle I see will be buy-in from the faculty. The buy-in is critical, and here is where I would ask for suggestions and action steps from the PLC members that need to be taken to move toward change. The committee will need to listen to their concerns and give thoughtful consideration while being transparent about the difficulties we will all face while establishing new practices and implementing a new advising approach. I believe that collaboration is vital, as well as sharing the retention data. This provides a context for the faculty to brainstorm ideas with the data as well as contribute. This will encourage the buy-in, whereas telling the professionals how to do something without listening to input could be met with resistance.

Tensions may exist between or among the faculty on the committee. For this reason, staying on task and establishing a culture for the group, along with the development of norms and objectives, will be paramount. I hope that we can be productive with our conversations, but I do not know how open and transparent the team members will be in the group. I do realize that challenges may arise. I will remain a learner by listening, engaging, and reflection. As a practitioner-scholar, I will utilize my resources, experiences, and literature as a means to come to an agreement or compromise, as necessary. Establishing shared values will be strategic and direct.

My goal for the Professional Learning Community (PLC) committee is for it to lead to a deeper level of shared decision-making and follow-through. We will discuss ideas and formulate an implementation plan for the holistic advising approach. Also, faculty participating in this PLC will consider outreach efforts as well as collaboration opportunities with other

campus/faculty groups. The PLC is an opportunity where we approach the problem of students

reporting that their advising experiences have not been positive, which may be a direct

relationship to retention. The PLC members will all bring different strengths, weaknesses, and

perspectives as professionals working collaboratively will allow for the designing of goals to

improve advising services (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 15). There has been a shift in

higher education for professionals from teaching to learning (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 713). To

be an effective leader and teacher in the classroom, professors must learn through scholarly

work, professional development, and training that is applicable and transformative for their

students.

This PLC is designed to start a cultural shift within the context of KU by starting with a

small group of faculty members. One of my most important takeaways for a leader

implementing the change would begin with creating a culture on campus that would be team-

oriented, positive, and forward-thinking. If we want to change institutional results, we must start

by changing the culture (Ready & Mulally, 2017). By creating a culture of accountability, we

can re-create our institutions that are filled with people who can produce game-changing student

outcomes (Ready & Mulally, 2017). I find this to be vital because not only do leaders need to

create a sense of urgency; more importantly, they need to provide the necessary support for their

faculty to achieve the change or improvement.

Development and growth need encouragement to reach positive outcomes or performance

(Ready & Mulally, 2017). Faculty support of this model will increase the student success rate.

The cultural shift on campus is to implement a new advising model to improve the advising

relationship as it impacts Exploratory Students' retention and student success. To change our

practices, we must change our norms and values (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 108). The entire

campus community must embrace this initiative in order to continue to provide the best academic

support services to our students and have the assessment results to direct us in the path most

effectively needed.

In order to demonstrate a change is taking place, there would need to be continued

dialogue within the PLC group. Also, I see this PLC as a collaborative committee of

collaboration, which will have a profound impact on the structure and culture of KU. "PLCs

operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-

embedded learning for educators." (DuFour et al., 2008) As a higher education professional, I

see professional development playing a vital role in quality and success in teaching and learning

in universities. The community of practice is essential to continue rejuvenating teaching and

learning by continuously exchanging ideas and best practices. Significant professional

development is required at the college level to provide faculty and staff with the skills to use

current methods that will enhance their pedagogical skills.

To measure success, an evaluation is needed. After the holistic advising approach is

implemented across campus, the first step is to monitor its success. We can do this by collecting

and comparing the data. We can examine the data of student holds, schedules created, number of

advising contacts, and retention rates. If adjustments need to be made to improve student

success, then we want to know about them so we can make updates and/or changes. Moreover,

in the worst-case scenario, we want to know if it is an utter failure so that we can terminate the

initiative. For these reasons, evaluation and consistent monitoring of the program is extremely

important.

The evaluation system chosen needs to address simple questions that are important to all

the stakeholders, such as the students, staff, faculty, and administration. Identifying the best

possible methods and strategies to assess the information is vital. The committee will also select

a reasonable and realistic timeline for evaluation. These guiding elements are essential to

determine the success of the proposed holistic advising approach and the overall improvement of

academic advising at KU.

Proposed policy: Intervention to improve retention for Exploratory Studies students

Another recommendation would be to allow access for Exploratory Studies students to

take first-year level courses in most majors and/or minors at KU. Currently, at KU, students may

either elect Exploratory Studies as a major because they are undeclared or required to declare as

Exploratory Studies because they did not meet the admissions requirement for their particular

major of interest although the institution granted them acceptance. Therefore, providing the

student's access to first-year level courses will allow them to better understand their interests and

skills for a particular major or field. Choosing a major is a process that includes knowing

oneself, exploring majors and careers that match a student's ability and interests, and making an

informed decision. Including Exploratory Studies majors in the course enrollment requirements

for all first-year level courses in majors and/or minors at KU where they meet the prerequisites

are essential for students to explore their academic options. Not only will the students benefit

from knowing whether or not they want to pursue a major based on a first-year course, but the

department and major may also grow as a result of this exposure.

The popular majors and courses may need to be scheduled in larger classrooms to

accommodate both Exploratory Studies students and major students, if necessary. Placing

students with a potential interest with other students who have a great interest, may lead to

greater motivation and planning for the undecided student. The exposure to a core course that is

not a general education course may provide the student with greater meaning and purpose for

their professional future as they consider what they enjoy, what they are good at, and what is important to them. This is a vision that they otherwise may not have had because of the access provided to them. Increased motivation for Exploratory Studies students may lead to increased retention for this particular student population but also for the institution as a whole (Cuseo, 2007; Spight, 2019).

I recommend that freshmen Exploratory Studies students have the opportunity to explore and take courses in the majors that they meet the requirements for at KU as a means to improve retention and student success. The Department of Academic Enrichments' Exploratory Studies program aims to provide the students with the flexibility to search for a major without falling behind on credits. Students beginning in Exploratory Studies as a major should have the opportunity to graduate in four years provided, they have shared all academic interests with their academic advisor, declared a major by their sophomore year, completed all required courses, and taken a full-time course load each semester (15 credits). Moreover, college students are 6% more likely to graduate on time if they wait to declare a major (Fox & Martin, 2017). The Exploratory Studies program empowers students to make a well-informed decision in choosing a degree program, getting involved on campus, and following their ambitions. The academic advisors' request to provide academic options and courses to the students before selecting a major enables the student to make the well-informed decision in selecting the right degree program and career path.

Implications for the Department of Academic Enrichment

Outreach is key. Proactive outreach practices have proven to support the student-advisor relationship (Fosnacht et al., 2017). Outreach includes soliciting feedback through an e-mail, a phone call, and/or social media, as well as through generated reports to target specific

populations of students, a survey, or anecdotal. An Advisor Satisfaction Evaluation is administered each semester to Exploratory Studies students to solicit feedback and ensure student satisfaction. Following this study, outreach efforts have increased. An Instagram account has been created to communicate with the students better. We have also been utilizing google voice to text our students.

In addition to social media and technology, the Department of Academic Enrichment recently implemented a new initiative to increase outreach with the development of advising workshops that are mainly in a group format and open to all Exploratory Studies students. Topics are offered in real-time to assist students with common questions, such as "how do I register for courses" or "how do I change or declare a major and/or minor." Also, in addition to the workshops, the former Department Chair was able to have me advise the incoming Exploratory Studies students in KU's orientation program (Connections) for the 2019/2020 cohort. This opportunity afforded me access to connect with freshmen Exploratory Studies students before the start of the fall 2019 semester. This major change in the Connections program provided our students with the opportunity to meet their academic advisor and get the proper information to start their academic experience at KU successfully. During this event, I promoted a newly created Instagram to increase communication between the academic advisor and student throughout the academic year.

Academic advising plays a key role in the success of students as they transition to our institutions. Tinto (1999) suggested that advising is integral to student development. Academic advisors must understand the informational, conceptual, and relational aspects of their roles and how these aspects affect their interactions with first-year students. The Academic Enrichment department intentionally makes an effort to improve retention utilizing the holistic approach.

The department created and implemented the following retention initiatives in the spring

semester of 2019 to respond to the need for Exploratory Studies students to improve both

academically and with persistence.

Table 8

ACTION ITEM:	Analyze retention data for all exploratory studies students and determine which students may be at risk and recommend strategies.
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:	Exploratory Studies Advisors
TIMELINE:	On-going and Fall 2019
OUTCOME:	Creation of strategies and activities to support students in achieving academic success

ACTION ITEM:	Poll students by utilizing an improved and updated satisfaction survey
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:	Exploratory Studies Advisors and Graduate Assistants
TIMELINE:	On-going and Spring 2019
OUTCOME:	Collect data and feedback on the advising experience and the student-advisor relationship.

ACTION ITEM:	Institute consistent, timely communication with students demonstrating high-risk academic performance markers, including poor performance in first-year courses, dropping a class in the first fall semester, and maintenance of less than full-time status.
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:	Exploratory Studies Advisors
TIMELINE:	Spring 2019
OUTCOME:	Allow advisors to target students who need assistance and provide resources for success.

ACTION ITEM:	Initiate strategic communications and interventions with students who:
	• Do not register in a timely way during the course registration period

	• Attempt to drop their last class during the add/drop window of each fall/spring semester
	• Do not register and who achieve a 3.0 grade-point-average or higher in their first or second year
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:	Graduate Assistants
TIMELINE:	Spring 2019
OUTCOME:	Ability to collect information from students who are not satisfied with their KU experience and/or assist students who need help in overcoming any obstacle to continue their education (financial, etc.)

ACTION ITEM:	Evaluate and amend methods of messaging to students and determine common contact points and streamline communications.
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:	Administrative Assistant and Graduate Assistants
TIMELINE:	Spring 2019
OUTCOME:	Improved communication with students allowing for more informed choices and a successful transition.

ACTION ITEM:	Require first-year students to meet with academic advisors prior to spring course registration. Encouraged topics for discussion to include: academics (i.e., course scheduling), career goals and plans, activities other than coursework (i.e., committees, student groups) and course topics, ideas, or concepts.
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:	Freshmen Exploratory Studies Advisor
TIMELINE:	Initiate Fall 2019
OUTCOME:	A better understanding of academic requirements, and improved persistence rate

ACTION ITEM:	Provide a congratulatory letter to students who achieve a 3.0 grade-point-average or higher after the first semester. Encourage major exploration/declaring a major. Host a recognition event for students who have a 3.5 or above at the start of the spring semester.
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:	Freshmen Exploratory Studies Advisor

TIMELINE:	Initiate Fall 2019
OUTCOME:	Improved sense of belonging to students and engagement in high impact and/or academically-focused activities.

ACTION ITEM:	Require that students who earn below a 2.0 GPA in their first fall semester meet with their advisor to create a success plan. The plan will involve regular check-ins and participation with the academic coaching program.
PERSONS RESPONSIBLE:	Freshmen Exploratory Studies Advisor and Academic Coaches
TIMELINE:	Initiate Spring 2020
OUTCOME:	Early, consistent assistance provided to vulnerable and marginalized students; improved retention of Freshmen Exploratory Studies students.

Implications for Future research

I would like to expand the breadth of this research study, considering the limitations. I plan to replicate the study by dividing the study into two studies; one being qualitative and the other being quantitative. The qualitative study will include three to four focus groups. I plan to collaborate with faculty who teach First -Year Seminar courses. This will increase participation and include all freshmen, not just Exploratory Studies students.

The quantitative study will include the locus of control questionnaire (ALOC) and the Advisor Evaluation (survey). Each participant will be assigned a numeric code. This will provide analysis for each participant's ALOC score in combination with their level of satisfaction with academic advising to their GPA, being their academic performance. The ALOC will be administered to a captive audience. The ideal context would be at Connections, which is KU's orientation program. This would remove influence from the KU community and increase the validity of the research.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that the student-advisor relationship and locus of control can be used as important variables to understand Exploratory Studies students' success. Academic advising satisfaction can be used as an attempt to understand the students' intent to persist beyond their first-year in college. In addition to satisfaction with advising and the student-advisor relationship being a predictive measure of students' intent to persist, this study sought to examine whether locus of control was a predictor of Exploratory Studies students' academic success. The findings support the work of Astin and Tinto that students' experiences and involvement, specifically in their first year of college, influence their persistence or departure as a reflection of their success or failure. Student involvement is a variable in student retention, and therefore student's interaction with their academic advisor results in the probability of the first-year persistence for Exploratory Studies students.

First-year students who are well-advised are likely to continue enrolling in classes, staying on track by following their academic plan and remaining motivated all while enjoying their time as a college student. Being well-informed and aware of what it will take to be successful is the value of being well-advised. The role of the academic advisor is crucial for all students. Students feel comfortable with sharing their needs with a welcoming academic advisor. Some characteristics of good-quality academic advisors are highlighted throughout this research. A good advisor should listen to the student and give them all the available options. Students will appreciate the value of useful advice and are therefore likely to return for more advice, which in turn will help increase student enrollment, engagement, and retention rates.

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APPENDIX A

From: Fares, Marlene N

Sent: Thursday, March 21, 2019 11:21:00 AM

To: Student

Subject: Your Invited!

Dear Student,

As you know, I am an Academic Advisor here at Kutztown University and I have the privilege in

advising freshmen Exploratory Studies students. I am also a doctoral student here at Kutztown

University in the EdD in Transformational Teaching and Learning program. I am conducting an

action research study that will impact students from improved departmental practices.

As part of my dissertation, a focus group is being conducted to engage freshmen Exploratory

Studies students at KU that were randomly selected using an excel spreadsheet. You were one of

the students randomly selected to participate.

When: Tuesday, April 23rd, 2019 at 11am (during the common hour)

Where: MSU room 324. It is 50 minutes in length and will begin promptly

FOOD: Pizza and drinks

GIFT: $10 Starbucks gift card for your participation

A trained graduate assistant in the department of Academic Enrichment is responsible for

facilitating the focus group. Because of my role as the researcher and your academic advisor, I

will not be facilitating the focus group to eliminate potential risk and bias. The focus group will

be audio recorded for accuracy and validity.

Please find attached a consent form for your review. Your willingness to participate in this study

is greatly appreciated. I am seeking your input to improve the advising experience.

I ask that you please respond with either a Yes or No to your interest, or lack thereof, in

participating in this study.

Thank you kindly,

Marlene

Marlene Fares, M.Ed.

Academic Advisor

Academic Enrichment

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

27 Rohrbach Library | PO Box 730 | Kutztown Pa. 19530

Phone: 484-646-4179 | Email: fares@kutztown.edu

APPENDIX B

Exploratory Studies Advising Focus Group Questions:

1. How would you describe your experience with academic advising at Kutztown University?

2. How do you feel about academic advising?

3. What do you like best about your academic advising experience?

4. How did your Advisor make you feel during your advising appointment?

5. Reflecting on your advising meeting(s), please share your thoughts about the trust you have or do not have with your advisor?

6. Suppose you were traveling in the elevator for 60 seconds with the President of Kutztown University and you were asked about your relationship with your academic advisor, what would you say?

7. Please describe the top three attributes of an academic advisor?

8. What do you think are most important characteristics in building a relationship with your advisor?

9. Are there recommendations you have or suggestions you would like to make regarding academic advising?

Probing Questions:

Can you share a bit more about that?

Can you give an example?

How about other folks?

What do you think?

What have you observed?

Could you explain what you mean about that?

Can you tell me something else about ____?

APPENDIX C

Trice, A. D. (1985). An Academic Locus of Control Scale for college students. *Perceptual &*

Motor Skills, 61, 1043-1046.

Academic Locus of Control Scale

Please answer each question below by placing T for "true" or F for "false." Do not leave any

blank. Thank you for your participation in this college survey.

1. _____College grades most often reflect the effort you put into classes.

2. _____I came to college because it was expected of me.

3. _____I have largely determined my own career goals.

4. _____Some people have a knack for writing, while others will never write well no

matter how hard they try.

5. _____At least once, I have taken a course because it was easy to get a good grade.

6. _____Professors sometimes make an early impression of you and then no matter what

you do, you cannot change that impression.

7. _____There are some subjects in which I could never do well.

8. _____Some students, such as student leaders and athletes, get free rides in college

classes.

9. _____I sometimes feel that there is nothing I can do to improve my situation.

10. _____I never feel really hopeless—there is always something I can do to improve my

situation.

11. _____I would never allow social activities to affect my studies.

12. _____There are many more important things for me than getting good grades.

13. _____Studying every day is important.

14. _____For some courses it is not important to go to class.

15. _____I consider myself highly motivated to achieve success in life.

16. _____I am a good writer.

17. _____Doing work on time is always important to me.

18. _____What I learn is more determined by college and course requirements than by

what I want to learn.

19. _____I have been known to spend a lot of time making decisions which others do not

take seriously.

20. _____I am easily distracted.

21. _____I can be easily talked out of studying.

22. _____I get depressed sometimes and then there is no way I can accomplish what I know

I should be doing.

23. _____Things will probably go wrong for me some time in the near future.

24. _____I keep changing my mind about my career goals.

25. _____I feel I will someday make a real contribution to the world if I work hard at it.

26. _____There has been at least one instance in school where social activity impaired my

academic performance.

27. _____I would like to graduate from college, but there are more important things in my

life.

28. _____I plan well and I stick to my plans.

APPENDIX D

Department of Academic Enrichment
Spring 2019 Advisor Evaluation
(Advisement period 3/18/19 - 5/10/19)

Student Advisement Evaluation for __Marlene Fares__   **Date:** _____

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
1.	I am satisfied with the academic advising I received.						
2.	My Academic Advisor is prepared for my advising appointments.						
3.	I am given the time I need during my academic advising appointments(s) and do not feel rushed.						
4.	My Academic Advisor is knowledgeable about academic and graduation requirements.						
5.	My Academic Advisor answers my questions.						
6.	If my Academic Advisor does not know the answer to one of my questions, he/she makes the effort to connect me to someone who does.						
7.	My Academic Advisor suggests steps I can take to help me decide on a major and/or minor to help me clarify my academic and career goals.						
8.	My Academic Advisor provides accurate assistance in selecting appropriate courses.						
9.	My Academic Advisor listens and respects me as an individual.						
10.	My Academic Advisor is a helpful, effective Advisor who I would recommend to other exploratory studies students.						

Please comment on your experience with your Academic Advisor and provide suggestions for improvement.

APPENDIX E

KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY
CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Study Title: The Effects of Academic Advising on Students' Success

Principal Investigator: Marlene Fares

I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at Kutztown University as well as an Academic Advisor in the department of Academic Enrichment. I am conducting a research study, which I invite you to take part in. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what I will ask you to do if you decide to participate in this study, and the way information about you will be used if you choose to be in the study.

Why are you doing this study?
You are being asked to participate in a research study about your experience with academic advising in relation to your academic success.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between academic advising for Kutztown University's freshmen exploratory (undeclared) students and students' academic success. Utilizing a mixed-method design approach, I hope to substantiate the importance of academic advising as a strategy to improve the effectiveness and satisfaction of the advising relationship as it relates to the academic success and the institutional retention rates for exploratory college students.

What will I do if I choose to be in this study?
You are being asked to participate in a focus group.

Study time: Focus group participation will take approximately one hour on one day.

Study location: All study procedures will take place at the Rohrbach library at Kutztown University.

I would like to audio-record this focus group to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will store these tapes in a locked filing cabinet and they will only be used by a transcriber and then researcher. It is required for participation to be audio recorded.

I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?
To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached – I will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

What are the possible benefits for me or others?
You are not likely to have any direct benefit from being in this research study. This study is designed to learn more about the effects of academic advising on students' success. Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but we may learn new things that will help others.

How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used. The only individuals with access to identifiable student data will be the transcriber and the researcher.

While the study is underway, all digital recordings will be kept by both the transcriber and the researcher, locked in a filing cabinet. Only the researcher and the departmental staff will have access to records. Data will be recorded from audiotape recordings from the focus group. Raw data will be coded with a numbering system so that participants are not identifiable. Each participant will be given a unique number for data recording purposes (01; 02; or 03).

Audiotaping will be conducted using a digital recorder provided by the researcher. The recorder will be kept by the facilitator while the focus group is underway. At the conclusion of the focus group, the digital recorder will remain with the transcriber to both transcribe and code the conversations and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Once the transcription has concluded, the transcriber will return the records and digital recorder to the researcher. After three (3) years all data collected during this study and all records related to this study will be destroyed in the Department of Academic Enrichment's shredder.

We may share the data we collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; however, if we share the data that we collect about you, we will remove any information that could identify you before we share it.

Financial Information

Participation in this study will involve no cost to you. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Participation in the focus group is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in the

focus group, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. You may withdraw from the focus group at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation. Both voluntary participation and non-participation in the focus group will have no impact on the quality of advising you will receive.

If you decide to withdraw from the focus group, the researcher will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used.

<u>Consent</u>

I have read the information described above and have received a copy of this information. I have asked questions I had regarding the research study and have received answers to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date