Challenges and institutional support for advisors of academically underprepared students

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A Thesis
entitled
Challenges and Institutional Support for Advisors of Academically Underprepared Students
by
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This study focused on the challenges academic advisors encounter when working with academically underprepared students and the institutional support provided to them. The challenges and institutional support were explored through the perspective of 142 advisors, who were members of the First-Generation College Student Advising and the Probation, Dismissal, and Reinstatement distribution lists of the National Academic Advising Association. The study aligned with prior research on academic advising in general and revealed that few academic advisors of underprepared students received specialized training to prepare them for their work with underprepared students, that academic advisors need more institutional support, specifically more funding and more advisors to work with academically underprepared students, and that the most important characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship are that the relationship be ongoing and purposeful. In light of the growing number of academically underprepared students entering colleges and universities and the central role of advising for their success, it is necessary to better understand challenges facing advisors of academically underprepared students.
students and the resources necessary to those advisors that help them be effective at their jobs to foster students’ growth and development.
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Chapter One

Overview of the Study

This study explores, through the perspective of the advisors, the challenges and needs of academic advisor who work with academically underprepared students. In light of the growing number of students entering higher education institutions not ready for college and the central role of advising for the success of these students, our understanding of the challenges these advisors face and the institutional support will give higher education administrators and other academic advisors a better idea of the necessary resources advisors need to be successful at their jobs and to foster student development.

This chapter presents background information on the growing number of students who are academically underprepared for college, on the institutional support offered to advisors working with students who are not ready for college work, and on the challenges these advisors face. This chapter also outlines the purpose of the study, its significance, and the research questions that guided the study. Included in this chapter are also the
definitions of key terms that will be used throughout the study. Lastly, chapter one
discusses the assumptions and limitations to this study.

Background of the Problem

Over the past several decades, institutions of higher education have increasingly
become more accessible. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, the GI Bill, the Civil
Rights Movement, and the Women’s Suffrage Movement, all have gradually expanded
the opportunity for more people to attend institutions of higher education (Stephens,
2001).

As a result, enrollment numbers in higher education have grown tremendously,
from 8.5 million students enrolled in 1970 to 12 million students enrolled in 1980, and to
18 million students in 2007 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). At the same
time, the increased opportunities for access have led to the enrollment of more students
who are academically not ready for college. According to The American Association of
Colleges and Universities (Tritelli, 2003, as cited in Miller & Murray, 2005), “53% of
students entering our colleges and universities are academically underprepared” (para. 5).
This trend has also been documented in Crisis at the Core: Preparing All Students for
College and Work (ACT, 2004, para. 7), a report issued by ACT, according to which,
“most of America’s high school students are not ready for either college or work” (para.
7). College readiness scores are based on the test scores from the Explore, Plan, and ACT
tests. Recent tests indicate that only 68% of high school graduates are prepared for
English Composition courses, 40% are prepared for college Algebra, and only 26% are
prepared for college Biology. In terms of all three subject areas, English, Mathematics,
and Science, only 22% of high school graduates meet the college readiness standards (ACT, 2004).

Higher education institutions base their own admission standards on all or a combination of grade point average, ACT score, SAT score, and COMPASS score. If a student does not meet the admissions standards of the institution he or she is attending, that student could still be admitted, but may be considered underprepared or have academic stipulations. Such stipulations included that a student may be required to take developmental education courses, be limited to the number of credit hours he or she can take, and may be required to earn passing grades in all for his or her coursework.

Students who are considered academically not prepared for college vary in age, gender, ethnicity, and education level. However, these students often share common characteristics. Gordon, Habley, Grites, and Associates (2008) describe underprepared students as individuals who “tend to come from lower-income socioeconomic backgrounds, be first-generation college students, and have ethnic backgrounds other than white European” (p. 172). McCabe (2003, as cited in Wilmer, 2008) further described these students as being “more female than male, as ranging in age and mainly Caucasian, although a greater proportion of the Hispanic and African-American students attending college are underprepared” (p. 8). McCabe (2003, as cited in Wilmer, 2008) also stated that “one-third are deficient in only one area, a third in two areas, and a third in all three areas, but that the level of their deficiency varies tremendously” (p. 8).

There are a number of institutionally organized support programs that assist students who are deemed not ready for college. These programs include comprehensive and intensive orientation programs, freshman seminar courses, mentoring programs, early
warning programs, advising programs, specially designed courses, learning community programs, and federally funded Student Support Services Programs (SSSP) (Walsh, 2003). According to Habley (1994, as cited in Miller & Murray, 2005) amongst all available support programs, “academic advising is the only structured activity on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for on-going, one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution” (para. 11).

The role of academic advising in higher education has evolved dramatically over the years. The introduction of elective courses in the late 19th century, credited to President Charles Eliot of Harvard whose elective system served as a blueprint for many colleges and universities (Thelin, 2004), resulted in a growing necessity to offer special guidance to students in their choice of courses and programs. During this time, the role of the academic advisor was to “give direction to a student concerning an academic, social, or personal matter” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 5). Gradually, institutions began comparing their advising methods to other institutions, which led to the creation of a national organization of academic advisors called the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) (Kuhn, 2008). NACADA emerged in 1979 “to promote the quality of Academic Advising in institution of higher education” (Beatty, 1991, p. 5).

One step in the evolution of academic advising was the development of the Student Personnel Point of View (SPPOV) by the American Council on Education Studies (ACE) in 1949 (Kuhn, 2008). The SPPOV broadened the concept of education and service to students including advising to bring “attention to the student’s well-rounded development—physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually, as well as intellectually” (ACE, 1949, p. 17). The Student Personnel Point of View transformed the
role of student personnel, including academic advisors, emphasizing the importance of having “skilled counselors trained in the art of stimulating self-understanding without directing decisions,” and giving “vocational counseling based on insight, information, and vision” (ACE, 1949, p. 24-25). The Student Personnel Point of View helped define academic advising.

Today academic advising plays an important role in higher education. According to Crockett (1987) as cited in NACADA (2003),

Academic advising is a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals. It is a decision-making process by which students realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchanges with an advisor; it is ongoing, multifaceted, and the responsibility of both student and advisor. The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary. (para. 5)

Academic advisors can have a variety of job responsibilities including “advising on general education requirements, serving as a liaison to academic departments and schools, and maintaining academic records (Tuttle, 2001, p. 17).

Academic advising is only one service provided to students in higher education, but it is a vital service in helping students succeed. Academic advising is extremely beneficial for academically underprepared students. Tinto (2004) states that effective advising is essential and advising must concentrate on the “needs of the large numbers of first-generation students who, unlike youth from college educated families, may not have the same knowledge of how to successfully navigate postsecondary education” (p. 8).

In academic advising, the advisor-advisee relationship is one of the central components in efforts to address the needs of academically underprepared students and
support their academic progress. According to Anderson and McGuire (1997, as cited in Miller and Murray 2005), “students are more likely to achieve when their strengths are affirmed and they are encouraged to develop their abilities;” a strong advisor-advisee relationship can foster this growth in students (para. 11). Along with the benefit of structured meeting,

King (2004) suggests that we help underprepared students become resilient when we: assist students in planning a program consistent with their abilities and interests, provide choices, work in tandem with developmental education program personnel across the institution, interpret and provide rationale for instructional policies, procedures and requirements, monitor student progress toward goals, teach problem solving techniques, use intrusive methods when appropriate, and refer students to campus and community resources as needed (Miller & Murray, 2005, para. 21).

Research on academic advising (Ender and Wilkie, 2000; Tinto, 2004) has identified several different approaches to advising of academically underprepared students. Scholars suggested that advisors aim at establishing a developmental advising relationship when working with underprepared students. This developmental advising relationship should be ongoing and purposeful, challenging for the student, but also be supportive, goal-oriented, and intentional (Ender & Wilkie, 2000). According to Tinto (2004), successful advising programs should provide underprepared students with clear guidelines, support for academic and career decision-making, knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education, and empowerment of the student to access support when needed. Successful advising programs should also make sure the support program is connected to everyday student learning needs.

The establishment of a beneficial developmental advisor-advisee relationship is a challenge that all advisors face; it is even more of a challenge when advisors work with academically underprepared students. Advisors face challenges of at least two kinds: 1)
challenges associated their professional preparation and 2) challenges related to the available institutional support offered to them. Some of the professional preparation challenges academic advisors encounter, especially new academic advisors, include the need to absorb too much information in a short period of time, the need to develop the ability to distinguish between enabling a student and advising a student, and the necessity of telling students things they do not want to hear (Morano, 1999). According to Gordon (1992), other professional preparation challenges include working with students who lack maturity and motivation, have personal or family issues, have issues adjusting to college life, have a low academic self-concept, and do not place education as their top priority. These challenges can be displayed through resistance to suggestions from advisors, excuses from advisees about low test scores or grades, not showing up for an appointment, and a lack of motivation to go to class or study.

Academic advisors need institutional support in order to build a strong advisor-advisee relationship and overcome the challenges they encounter. According to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), “academic advising is one of the few institutional functions that connect all students to the institution” and since “academic curricula [has] become increasing complex and as educational options expand, pressure to make the academic experience as meaningful as possible for students has increased as well” (CAS, 2008, para. 2).

Problem Statement

Since 1997, there has been a 26% increase in the enrollment of students in higher education institutions (NCES, 2008). According to The American Association of College and Universities (Tritelli, 2003, as cited in Miller & Murray, 2005), “53% of students
entering our colleges and universities are academically underprepared” (para. 5). With the growing number of students coming to college academically underprepared, colleges and universities are faced with the challenge of providing the services and support to help all students develop and reach their full potential.

Advisors are crucial to underprepared students, but advisors face many challenges related to professional preparation and institutional support. Although research (Morano, 1999; Gordon, 1992; CAS, 2008) has identified a number of challenges that advisors face and have studied the different types of institutional support provided to them, there is little research on the needs of advisors working with academically underprepared students, specifically research from the perspective of the advisors.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges academic advisors encounter when working with underprepared students and the institutional support provided to them. The study explored these challenges and the institutional support through the perspective of the academic advisors who work with academically underprepared students.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guide this study:

- What main challenges do advisors working with academically underprepared students face?
- Do advisors feel prepared to work with academically underprepared students?
- Is there a relationship between the challenges academic advisors face and their experience and training?
• What types of institutional support do advisors find most beneficial?
• What institutional assistance programs for academically underprepared students do advisors find most beneficial?
• What roles and characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship do advisors find important to help students succeed?

Significance of the Study

This study sheds light on the professional preparation challenges and the institutional support provided to academic advisors of academically underprepared students through the perspective of the advisors. The study contributes to literature by exploring the perspective of academic advisors, the challenges advisors face, and the institutional support provided to these advisors. In addition, the results of this study will have practical implications for academic advisors, higher education professionals, and the education community by providing them with insights that strengthen their ability to determine the support needed by academic advisors. Through gaining a better understanding of the advisor-advisee relationship, the challenges academic advisors face, and the impact institutional support has on advisors, academic advisors can gain knowledge on the resources necessary to be successful at their jobs and support student success and development.

Definition of Terms

The following terms have been most frequently used throughout the study:

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) is an association devoted to the promotion and support of quality academic advising in higher education institutions to enhance the development of students. NACADA was founded in 1979 at
the first National Conference of Academic Advising. There are now over 10,000 members from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, Canada, and several other countries (NACADA, 2006a).

Academic advising is a planning process that helps students approach their education in an organized and meaningful way and brings together all of the major aspects in a student’s life. Advising is the process of teaching students how to become responsible for their education by giving students guidance, support, and encouragement. Lastly, advising is the process of helping students reduce the confusion that comes with a new environment, clarify their goals, and get the most out of their education (Noel-Levitz, 1997 as cited in NACADA, 2003).

Underprepared student is a student found to be lacking the basic skills in at least one of the three basic areas of reading, writing, or mathematics (Miller & Murray, 2005).

Assumptions

This study has two assumptions. First, the author assumes that all respondents to this study’s survey advise or have advised academically underprepared students at some point in their career. Secondly, the author assumes the members of the NACADA distribution lists, who were surveyed, have a vested interest in the development of underprepared students and advising. As a result of this vested interest, members of the NACADA distribution lists would complete the survey.

Delimitation

This study is delimited to the perspectives of the members of two distribution lists of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). NACADA is an association devoted to the promotion and support of quality academic advising. The association has
over 10,000 members nationwide and internationally with over 70 distribution lists and interest groups. The two distribution lists chosen for this study were the First-Generation College Student Advising distribution list and the Probation, Dismissal, and Reinstatement distribution list. The research was delimited to these distribution lists at the recommendation of an associate director of NACADA. None of the distribution lists of NACADA are designed to specifically include advisors of underprepared students. The majority of advisors working with academically underprepared students would be members of one of these two distribution lists, which is why these distribution lists were chosen.

Limitations

There are three specific limitations to this study. First, this study is limited to the members of two distribution lists, the First-Generation College Student Advising distribution list and the Probation, Dismissal, and Reinstatement distribution list accessible directly through the National Academic Advising Association website. As a result, the study only explores the perceptions of the members of these distribution lists. Another limitation is that members of the Probation, Dismissal and Reinstatement distribution list may also be members of the First-Generation College Student Advising distribution list. The researcher was not able to separate the two lists by membership. Lastly, members of these distribution lists may no longer be working with underprepared students and their responses might reflect past activities. In addition, those not currently working with underprepared students might choose not to complete the survey.

Summary
Over the last several decades, student enrollments in higher education have grown tremendously. The increased access and enrollment has gradually led to growing numbers of student who are academically not ready for college. Although there is not a specific definition of academically underprepared students, one common characteristic they share is that they are required to go through developmental education courses. There are several services provided to students who are academically not ready for college. Academic advising is one of the most important services provided to these students. Academic advisors play a vital role in higher education. Academic advisors, especially advisors of academically underprepared students, face a number of challenges related to their professional preparation and the available institutional support offered to them. It is important for universities and colleges to understand the challenges facing academic advisors working with underprepared students and what types of institutional support is needed to support these advisors in their goals to help underprepared students succeed.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of these challenges and help voice the opinion of academic advisors.

Chapter two reviews the past and current literature about academic advising, students who are not academically ready for college, and the academic advising services provided to these students. Chapter three explains the methodology, participants, and survey tool used in the study. Chapter four summarizes the results of the study and chapter five presents a discussion of the finding and recommendations for further research.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter discusses current research on academic advising, underprepared students, and advising of underprepared students. The analysis of academic advising includes the history of academic advising, academic advising models and structures, the CAS standards and core values of academic advising, the challenges facing academic advisors, and the institutional support provided to them. The chapter then centers on underprepared students including the characteristics of underprepared students, the history of this population, the factors that contribute to low levels of readiness for college work, and the student services offered to these students. The literature review ends with a discussion of academic advising of underprepared students focusing on the advisor-advisee relationship, the advisor roles and responsibilities, and the importance of training and institutional support for academic advisors working with academically underprepared students.

Academic Advising

Evolution of academic advising.
Frost (2000) divides the historical development of academic advising into three eras. The first era, which falls between the establishment of the Colonial colleges through 1870s, is termed the “Higher Education Before Academic Advising Was Defined” era (Frost, 2000, p. 4). When the Colonial colleges appeared in the United States, academic advising was not an available student service. Students took the same courses and since they were given no choice in course selection, advising was not a necessity. Academic advising emerged in the 1870s, when course electives were first introduced as a part of the curriculum. President Charles Elliot first introduced the elective system at Harvard University (Thelin, 2004). The development of electives marked the beginning of the second era of academic advising, termed by Frost (2000) “Academic Advising as a Defined and Unexamined Activity” (p. 7). This era began in the 1870s and ended around 1970 (Kuhn, 2008). One main function of academic advising during this time period was to ease the fears of the critics who were afraid the elective system would be “used unwisely by students” and that electives would result in students pursuing a “less focused education” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 5). Academic advisors were viewed as individuals who “gave direction to a student concerning an academic, social, or personal matter” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 5).

During the second era, several institutions began focusing on “perfecting various systems of freshman counseling, freshman week, and faculty advisers” (Rudolph, 1962, p. 460). Some of these institutions included the University of Oregon, The Ohio State University, Columbia University, and Stanford University. The focus on freshman activities began the movement of defining the purpose of academic advising. Also, during this era, a more student-centered philosophy of higher education developed called the
Student Personnel Point of View (SPPOV) (Kuhn, 2008). According to the American Council on Education (ACE) (1949), the “student personnel point of view encompasses the student as a whole. The concept of education is broadened to include attention to the student’s well-rounded development—physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually—as well as intellectually” (American Council on Education Studies (ACE), 1949, p. 2). SPPOV went on to discuss the importance of having “trained, sympathetic counselors to assist [the student] in thinking though his educational, vocational, and personal adjustment problems” (ACE, 1949, p. 8). This philosophy helped establish academic advising as a profession.

The third and final era in the evolution of academic advising began in the 1970s and continues to the present day. This era was defined (Frost, 2000) as the “Academic Advising as a Defined and Examined Activity” era (p. 10). During this period academic advisors compared their advising styles to other institutions’ advising styles. In 1977, 300 people attended a national conference to discuss academic advising (Kuhn, 2008). These annual meetings stimulated the establishment of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) which emerged in 1979. The purpose of NACADA is “to promote the quality of Academic Advising in institution of higher education, and to this end, it is dedicated to the support and professional growth of academic advising and advisors” (Beatty, 1991, p. 5). The NACADA mission (NACADA, 2006b) is based on five major components:

- Address the academic advising needs of higher education;
- Advance the body of knowledge of academic advising;
• Champion the educational role of academic advising to enhance student learning and development;

• Affirm the role of academic advising in supporting institutional mission and vitality;

• Encourage the contributions of all members and promote the involvement of diverse populations. (p. 1)

The role of academic advisors has evolved over the years and NACADA has been created to assist advisors when advising students.

**Academic advising models and structures.**

Every institution of higher education has some system of advising that it offers to its students. There is no one academic advising delivery model for every four-year institution, two-year institution, private, public, or online educational system. There are several elements that influence the organization and delivery systems at each institution. These elements include: “the mission of the institution, the nature of the student population, the role of the faculty, and the programs, policies, and procedures of the institution” (King, 1993, p. 47).

Researchers have identified several models of advising (Paredee, 2004; King, 1993). These models include:

• Faculty-Only Model: All students are assigned to an instructional faculty member for advising. There is no actual advising office in this model.

• Supplementary Model: All students are assigned to an instructional faculty member for advising. In addition, there is an advising office that provides general
academic information and referrals for students, but all advising transactions must be approved by the student’s faculty advisor.

- **Split Model**: A specific group(s) of students e.g., undecided, underprepared, etc. are advised in an advising office. All other students are assigned to academic units or faculty advisors.

- **Dual Model**: Each student has two advisors. A member of the instructional faculty advises the student on matters related to the major. An advisor in an advising office advises the student on general requirements, procedures, and policies.

- **Total Intake Model**: Staff members of an administrative unit are responsible for advising all students for a specified period of time or until some specific requirements have been met. After meeting these requirements, students are assigned to an academic subunit or member of the instructional faculty for advising.

- **Satellite Model**: Each school, college, or division within the institution has established its own approach to advising.

- **Self-Contained Model**: Advising for all students from the point of enrollment to the point of departure is done by staff in a centralized unit. (Kuhn, 2008)

The advising model at a university or college is usually incorporated into the organizational structure of the institution. Three kinds of organizational structures have been identified:

- **A Centralized Organizational Structure**: Where professional or faculty advisors are housed in one academic or administrative unit.
• A Decentralized Organizational Structure: Where professional or faculty advisors are located in their respective academic departments.

• A Shared Organizational Structure: Where some advisors meet with students in a central administrative unit (i.e., an advising center), while others advise students in the academic department of their major discipline. (Pardee, 2004)

Regardless of the advising model and structure used at a given institution of higher education, the underlying goal of the system is to support students in their academic journey.

**Guidelines for Academic Advising**

Two major sets of guiding standards for academic advising programs and academic advisors exist. The two standards are the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) and the Statement of Core Values of NACADA. While CAS focuses on the way effective advising programs are structured and incorporated into the institutional framework, NACADA’s guidelines focus mostly on the main principles of professional practice and the responsibility of advisors. These two guiding forces give academic advising programs and academic advisors guidelines for their work and resources for their success.

**CAS standards for academic advising.**

The Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) has developed universal guidelines in 13 areas for every academic advising program in the country. The 13 areas include mission of the academic advising program, the components of the advising program, the academic advising program leadership, the organization and management of the academic advising program, the human resources employed by the
academic advising program, the financial resources available to the academic advising program, the facilities, technology, and equipment available to the academic advising program, the legal responsibilities of the program’s staff members, equity and access for all students, campus and external relations, diversity, ethics, and lastly assessment and evaluations of the academic advising program (CAS, 2008). These guidelines are “designed to provide suggestions and illustrations that can assist in establishing programs and services that more fully address the needs of students” (CAS, 2008, para. 5). The most important CAS standards for this study are program, financial resources, human resources, facilities, equipment, and technology, and campus and external relations. These CAS standards are discussed in depth below.

**Program.**

The academic advising program “must assess relevant and desirable student learning and development outcomes and provide programs and services that encourage the achievement of those outcomes” (CAS, 2008, p. 4). These outcomes include knowledge acquisition, integration, construction, and application, cognitive complexity, intrapersonal development, interpersonal competence, humanitarianism and civic engagement, and practice competence (CAS, 2008).

**Human resources.**

Academic advising programs must be staffed with highly qualified personnel. These programs should have established procedures for staff selection, training, and evaluation, set expectations for supervision, and provide professional development opportunities (CAS, 2008). Academic advisors “should have a comprehensive knowledge
of the institution’s programs, academic requirements, policies and procedures, majors, minors, and support services” (CAS, 2008, p. 7).

**Financial resources.**

An academic advising program must have sufficient funding in order to accomplish its mission and goals. The academic advising program must “demonstrate fiscal responsibility and cost-effectiveness consistent with institutional protocols” (CAS, 2008, p. 12). Also, programs should consider setting aside money to provide professional development to their advisors.

**Facilities, technology, and equipment.**

Academic advising programs “must have adequate, suitably located facilities, adequate technology, and equipment to support its mission and goals efficiently and effectively” (CAS, 2008, p. 13). The facilities, technology, and equipment must meet the standards of federal, state, and local requirements as well as provide a safe, healthy, and secure environment (CAS, 2008).

**Campus and external relations.**

In order for an academic advising program to work effectively it must work with other campus offices and external agencies. Academic advising programs must establish and maintain good working relationships with campus offices and external agencies. One of the job responsibilities of academic advisors is to refer students to the appropriate department when other services are needed. The referral for help will come more easily when there is a good functioning working relationship between the departments. Also, academic advisor should be given a comprehensive list of the departments they may need to work with over the academic year (CAS, 2008).
All in all, these 13 guidelines are used to evaluate and assess academic advising programs that work for all students, including underprepared students. These 13 important guiding principles assist institutional efforts in creating effective advising programs, successful in their main function of supporting the students and serving as a resource throughout their time at an institution.

**Core values in academic advising.**

Along with the CAS standards, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) has developed several important values that guide academic advisors. NACADA’s Statement of Core Values “provides a framework to guide professional practice and reminds advisors of their responsibilities to students, colleagues, institutions, society, and themselves” (NACADA, 2005b, para. 5). The statement includes the following values:

- **Core value 1:** Advisors are responsible to the individuals they advise: academic advisors should have regular contact with their students, recognize and respect that students come from diverse backgrounds, and encourage self-reliance.

- **Core value 2:** Advisors are responsible for involving others, when appropriate, in the advising process: academic advisors must develop relationships outside the academic advising departments.

- **Core value 3:** Advisors are responsible to their institutions: academic advisors should advocate for change, keep others who are not directly related to academic advising informed on the process, they respectfully share their opinions about advising techniques and philosophies, and respect the opinions of others.
Core value 4: Advisors are responsible to higher education: academic advisors should support academic freedom, base their work off the most up-to-date theoretical perspectives and practices, and establish a partnership with their students.

Core value 5: Advisors are responsible to their educational community: academic advisors should support institutions initiatives of learning such as community service and study abroad programs.

Core value 6: Advisors are responsible for their professional practices and for themselves personally: academic advisors should seek opportunities to grow professionally (NACADA, 2005a).

The core values guide the professional practices of academic advisors, which allow the student to develop confidence in their advisor. This confidence can help build a successful relationship between the advisor and advisee.

The Growing Majority: Students Not Ready for College

Academically underprepared students.

According to Moore and Carpenter (1985, as cited in Wilmer, 2008), the students who enter college academically underprepared form a group that is “large and diverse in terms of age, socioeconomic condition, previous academic performance, standardized test scores, and emotional health, and is enrolled in colleges and universities of all types nationwide” (p. 8). Researchers have attempted to capture some common characteristics of academically underprepared students. Gordon, Habley, Grites, and Associates (2008) described underprepared students as students who usually “tend to come from lower-income socioeconomic backgrounds, be first-generation college students, and have ethnic
backgrounds other than white European” (p. 172). According to McCabe (2003, as cited in Wilmer, 2008) also found that academically underprepared students tend to be “more female than male, as ranging in age and mainly Caucasian, although a greater proportion of the Hispanic and African-American students attending college are underprepared; as being both married and single; and including both parents and non-parents” (Wilmer, p. 8). McCabe (2003, as cited in Wilmer, 2008) also stated that “one-third are deficient in only one area, a third in two areas, and a third in all three areas, but that the level of their deficiency varies tremendously” (p. 8). According to the report *Crisis at the Core: Preparing All Students for College and Work*, “most of America’s high schools students are not ready for either college or work” and only 68% of high school graduates are prepared for English Composition course, 40% are prepared for college Algebra, and only 26% are prepared for college Biology (ACT, 2004, para. 7). The term academically underprepared student can have a different meaning at different institutions. Higher education institutions set their own admission standards including grade point average, ACT score, SAT score, and COMPASS score. If a student does not meet the admission standards of the institution he or she is attending, that student could still be admitted, sometimes on academic probation, but will be classified as underprepared and may have come academic stipulations. These stipulations may include being required to take developmental education courses, being limited in the number of credit hours he or she can take each semester, and being required to receive all passing grades in coursework.

**Increase of the number of students not ready for college.**

With the expansion of the higher education system and the gradual democratization of access, more and more students exhibiting low levels of college
readiness have started enrolling in colleges and universities. Throughout the years, several legislative acts have helped expand educational opportunities to diverse populations. The first Morrill Act of 1962, signed by President Lincoln (Stephens, 2001), gave 17 states land grants ranging from 100,000 to 46,080 acres. The land from the government was not just a gift, but also formed a partnership between the federal government and the states. States had to use the land to develop “advanced instructional programs” and were required to establish programs in areas such as agriculture, mechanics, mining, and military instruction (Thelin, 2004, p. 76). In 1890, a second Morrill Act expanded the land grant to other states, including southern states that were not able to receive land during the first Morrill Act and to Historically Black Colleges and Universities in southern states (Thelin, 2004, p. 135). Also, the second act “prohibited the distribution of federal funding to states where discrimination persisted in Higher Education” (Casazza & Silverman, 1996, p. 13). The increase in government funding and the inability of these institutions to discriminate against students applying for admission opened access to higher education for many people.

Women’s increased access to college nationwide marked another period of growth in higher education. By 1860, about 45 institutions offered degrees to women (Thelin, 2004, p. 83). According to Stephens (2001), when women were first allowed access to higher education, opponents “argued that admitting women to existing colleges would lower the colleges’ standards” (para. 10). As a result, women’s institutions were established with a variety of names including “colleges, academy, female seminary, and literary institute” (Thelin, 2004, p. 83). These institutions had lower academic standards because of the lack of secondary education available to women at that time (Stephens,
However, when the second Morrill Act was passed, institutions of higher education could no longer discriminate against women and other underrepresented groups applying to universities. According to Brubacher and Rudy (1976), by the early twentieth century, only three states, Georgia, Virginia, and Louisiana, did not admit women. The acceptance of women to the majority of institutions further opened the doors of higher education to diverse populations. As a result of these developments, towards the end of the nineteenth century, college enrollment was increasing at a rapid pace. In 1890, the student population at all college and universities was around 157,000, which was about 1.8% of the 18-24 age population (Cremin, 1977).

Higher education continued to expand throughout the twentieth century. After World War II, the GI Bill was passed. This bill was developed to offer financial support to veterans who wanted to attend college. At first, the veterans who attended the institutions of higher education on the GI Bill were considered underprepared (Stephens, 2001). However according to McCabe and Day (1998, as cited in Stephens, 2001), these men “systematically outperformed their younger, selectively admitted classmates, and demonstrated a model of educational success that could come with greater maturity and a second chance” (para. 21). Along with the financial resources given to these veterans, financial assistance was given to universities to develop tutorial centers, academic advising and guidance services, and programs to help veterans improve their reading and study skills (Casazza, 1999). The veterans paved the way for more students to be allowed to come to college and, even more of these students needed some sort of developmental course (Stephens, 2001).
One of the first programs developed to assist underprepared students was the “Special and Continuing Studies” program at the University of Minnesota, introduced in 1948. The majority of students participating in this program were military men who had a high school grade point average of less than 2.0. These men had to take fewer courses than regularly admitted students, were required to take a study skills course, and had to stay in the program until their GPAs were above a 2.0 (Maxwell, 1979).

Prior to the 1960s, African Americans were able to attend certain college and universities that were established specifically for them. However, some institutions still did not accept African Americans into their institution. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s helped open the doors of segregated institutions to many African Americans. Also, during the 1960s and 1970s, many institutions started raising their admissions standards because of the number of students wanting to attend college in the baby boomer era. At the same time, junior and community colleges multiplied, which in turn allowed more students, many of whom were not prepared for college-level courses, to attend college (Stephens, 2001).

The increase in access to higher education opened the door for more students from diverse backgrounds with varying levels of academic preparation. Increased enrollment rates were also accompanied by a growth in the number of students who underperformed on academic tests. According to the American Association of College and Universities (Tritelli, 2003, as cited in Miller & Murray, 2005), “53% of students entering our colleges and universities are academically underprepared” (para. 5). Also, only 22% of high school graduates meet the college readiness standards in all three subject areas, English, Math, and Science.
College readiness is the “level of achievement a student needs to be ready to enroll and succeed-without remediation-in credit-bearing first-year postsecondary courses” (ACT, 2008, p.1). The College Readiness Standards are standards developed by ACT to link “what students have learned, what they are ready to learn next, and what they must learn before leaving high school in order to be prepared for college” (ACT, 2010, p. 3). College readiness scores are calculated by the scores of three tests, Explore for 8th and 9th graders, Plan for 10th graders, and the ACT for 11th and 12th graders. These tests are used to predict the college readiness of students graduating high school.

According to Dzubak (2006), several factors can explain why more and more students are coming to college unprepared. These factors include the gap between the skills and requirements needed for graduation from high school and the skills needed for college, and the broad heading of societal and cultural changes that can negatively impact educational progress (pp. 6-7).

The first factor, the gap between the skills and requirements needed for graduation from high school and the skills needed for college admissions and academic success, has generated much debate about whether high schools are lowering their standards for graduation. Although there is much support to claim that high schools are lowering their standards, there is no clear evidence to prove this claim. Even without clear evidence, students are graduating high school without the skills necessary to succeed in college (Dzubak, 2006).

The second factor is related to the societal and cultural changes that often negatively impact educational progress. Dzubak (2006) lists several of these societal and cultural changes:
• more children in this country are born to single mothers and live in a single parent home;
• low income is a primary cause of educational underpreparation and underachievement;
• more low income, first-generation students are attending college;
• children from two-parent homes spend less time with their families now than in the past and have less emphasis on academic achievement;
• it appears that educational standards in high school have been gradually lowered during the last two decades, especially in the area of writing and critical thinking;
• the issue has been raised regarding grade inflation in high schools and whether a high grade point average accurately reflects learning and mastery of skills; and
• there has been a society trend in which parents are less supportive of public education and school personnel, expecting to see grades on report cards but not inclined to prioritize study and academic achievement. (pp. 6-7)

According to Dzubak (2006), all of these trends listed above “result in a large group of students who are not as well prepared for college as they could be” (p. 7). These characteristics along with the lowering of graduation standards can lead to low levels of preparation for college level work.

**Student services for underprepared students.**

Colleges and universities offer different types of student services for underprepared students. According to Walsh (2003), some of these services include tutoring, counseling, academic advising, and residence life. Students who come to college underprepared can receive tutoring for many of their classes. Often the transition to
college and the stress of performing well can overwhelm the student. When that occurs, students can seek help from the counseling center.

There are several programs that assist underprepared students. One example of such programs can be seen in the comprehensive orientation programs that are specifically geared towards underprepared students. Some other services include freshman seminar courses, mentoring programs, early warning programs, early entry programs, learning communities, and federally funded student support services (Walsh, 2003). These services and programs can benefit underprepared students by giving these students the resources needed to succeed in college.

**Academic Advising Services for Underprepared Students**

Academic advising is one way to support students who are not ready for college and help retain them. According to Habley (1994, as cited in Miller & Murray, 2005), “academic advising is the only structured activity on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for on-going, one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution” (para. 11). Although crucial for all students, well-structured academic programs are especially important for academically underprepared students. According to Tinto (2004) and Boylan (2001), in order for institutions to help students be successful and keep these students at the institution, colleges and universities should integrate a developmental education approach designed according to three conditions. The advising approach should lay the groundwork for successes with effective academic advising, providing content and structure, and developing resilient students (Miller & Murray, 2005).

**Major challenges before academic advisors**
Professional preparation and institutional support are two important factors that impact the work of academic advisors. According to Gordon (1992), “advisers are only as effective as the materials and resources at their disposal,” and “effective advising today requires more extensive, ongoing training activities” (p. 59, 139). According to the ACT’s Fifth National Survey of Academic Advising (1984, as cited in Koring, 2005), “many institutions are providing only a minimum of training to those involved in advising” (para. 2). Several reasons can account for the inadequate training of advisors including time, money, and lack of trained trainers (Koring, 2005). According to Koring (2005), “the most common form of advisor training is the single workshop that takes place during one day or part of a day” (para. 3). Advisor training needs to be as effective as possible, especially when the training session only lasts one day. According to Koring (2005), the most effective form of training is interactive advisor training. Interactive training not only gives new advisors the chance to work hands on; it is also more enjoyable for the advisor being trained and the trainer.

Although some institutions of higher education may provide training to their academic advisors, advisors still encounter challenges when working with students. Academic advisors, especially new academic advisors, face challenges related to professional preparation, such as the necessity to learn and manage too much information in a short period of time, and the need to learn the difference between enabling a student and advising a student, as well as telling students things they do not want to hear (Morano, 1999).

Several factors might explain some of the challenges illustrated above. The challenge of having to know too much information in a short period of time can be
attributed to the fact that advisors need to manage a lot of information in order to do their jobs. Also, it can be related to the little amount of training received or to not knowing whom to contact when issues arise. The challenge of enabling students versus advising them is impacted by the necessity to determine how much information is too much information, when the advisor is giving too much information, and lastly when the advisor is doing more work than the student. Working with difficult people, helping students re-interpret bad information given by someone else, and explaining to students that they do not meet the requirements to enter a specific program, are a part of telling students things they do not want to hear (Morano, 1999). According to Gordon (1992), other professional preparation challenges include working with students who lack maturity and motivation, have personal or family issues, have issues adjusting to college life, have a low academic self-concept, and do not place their education as a top priority. These challenges can be displayed through resistance to suggestions from advisors, excuses about low test scores or grades, not showing up for an appointment, lack of motivation, and lack of interest in education and advising.

Institutional support is one way academic advisors get the resources necessary for success. The CAS standards “provide suggestions and illustrations that can assist in establishing programs and services that more fully address the needs of students” (CAS, 2008, para. 5). Institutional support is critical if academic advising programs are to meet these guidelines. According to the standards, academic advising programs should “be staffed adequately by individuals qualified to accomplish the mission and goals,” should have “adequate funding to accomplish their mission and goals,” should provide private space to conduct advising appointments, adequate computers, advisors should have
access to students academic and engagement records, access to curricular change, and access to campus activities (CAS, 2008, pp. 3-13). All of these types of institutional support help advisors be effective on their jobs, allowing them to meet with students in a confidential manner, have access to the records needed to help students through challenges, and provide students with helpful campus resources.

**Main roles of the academic advisors of underprepared students.**

Ender and Wilkie (2000) suggest that advisors working with underprepared students use a developmental advising relationship focusing on academic competence, personal involvement, and developing or validating life purpose. In order to have a developmental advising relationship, the relationship between the adviser and advisee should be:

- ongoing and purposeful;
- challenging for the student, but also supportive;
- goal-orientated; and
- intentional, as it maximizes the use of university resources (p. 119).

Tinto (2004) found that effective advising is extremely important for underprepared students. According to Tinto (2004), effective advising will address the “needs of the large numbers of first-generation students who, unlike youth from college education families, may not have the same knowledge of how to successfully navigate postsecondary education” (p. 8). He concluded that successful advising programs should provide students with the following information:

- clear guidelines;
- support for academic and career decision-making;
• knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education;
• empowering students to access support when needed; and
• making sure the support program is connected to everyday student learning needs (Tinto, 2004, p. 8).

Another role the academic advisor will need to play when advising underprepared students is to look for warning signs that the student is struggling with their current coursework. Scholars identified the following symptoms that advisors should be on the lookout for: “weak academic performance in one or more area, low academic self-concept, unrealistic graduate and career expectation, unfocused career objectives, extrinsic motivation, external locus of control, low self-efficacy, inadequate study skills for college success, belief that learning is memorization, and a history of passive learning” (Steele & McDonald, 2008, p. 172). According to Steele and McDonald (2008), academic advisors should be on the lookout for the following 10 triggers:

• student has lower than institutional average for ACT or SAT scores;
• student has lower then institutional average placement scores;
• student explains that it is difficult to study because of his off campus job which he needs to help pay for his college education;
• student declares a major that has the same core requirements as the student’s area of academic unpreparedness;
• student is doing poorly in several or all courses after the first term;
• student transcripts show a pattern of poor grades in courses that share a common characteristic, such as writing or heavier reading load;
• student is doing poorly academically, admits she studies infrequently, but spends a great deal of time seeking out course professors to reconsider grades and permission to turn assignments in late;
• student expresses difficulty after first set of midterms, and from his record it appears he attended high school that has consistently low scores on statewide proficiency exams;
• student is a returning adult who expresses concern about pursuing a major that requires any amount of math or writing; and
• student with high ACT scores and below average placement scores confesses concern about how to study (pp. 172-173).

Awareness of these triggers can benefit both the advisor and the student. If the student gets academic help when he or she first begins to struggle, he or she will have a higher chance of success.

The advisor-advisee relationship can positively impact academically underprepared students. The interactions with advisors can assist in the development of the students. Advisors can provide resources and guidance to underprepared students to help with their transition and growth. Also, advisors can be on the lookout for warning signs that their advisees are struggling and need some extra help.

The importance of training and institutional support.

Professional preparation and institutional support are critical to academic advisors, especially academic advisors of students who are found not ready for college courses. Petress (1996) concluded that advisors “need training and guidance to do a competent job” (p. 91). In addition, Borns (2002) suggested that “developing effective
training opportunities for academic advisors is important for student satisfaction and persistence” (p. 1). Academic advising “has become an important function on most college campuses and requires well-planned training and development activities if academic advisors are to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to the task” of successfully advising students (Gordon, 1992, p. 139). Academic advising is “an essential element of a student’s collegiate experience. Advising evolves from the institution’s culture, values, and practices and is delivered in accordance with these factors” (CAS, 2008, p. 1). For academic advisors to be successful in their role in the institution, they need the space and technology, access to various records, and collaboration with other departments (CAS, 2008).

Summary

Academic advising has evolved over the years and is now a vital component of higher education. Academic advisors face various challenges related to their professional preparation and to the institutional support they receive. Training is essential to the development of the advisor, but funding and resources are limited. Whatever the challenge, academic advisors must develop a strong advisor-advisee relationship with academically underprepared students to help them succeed and develop.
Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges academic advisor encounter when working with underprepared students and the institutional support provided to them. The study explored these challenges and the institutional support through the perspective of the advisor. Six research questions guided the study:

- What main challenges do advisors working with academically underprepared students face?
- Do advisors feel prepared to work with academically underprepared students?
- Is there a relationship between the challenges academic advisors face and their experience and training?
- What types of institutional support do advisors find most beneficial?
- What institutional assistance programs for academically underprepared students do advisors find most beneficial?
- What roles and characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship do advisors find important to help students succeed?

Research Method
This study employed a quantitative research method. Researchers began using quantitative research at the end of the 19th century. Throughout the 20th century, quantitative research was primarily used in education (Creswell, 2008). Quantitative research “is a type of educational research in which the researcher decides what to study; asks specific, narrow questions; collects quantifiable data from participants; analyzes these numbers using statistics; and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased, objective manner” (Creswell, 2008, p. 46). There are three characteristics of quantitative research:

- an emphasis on collecting and analyzing information in the form of numbers;
- an emphasis on collecting scores that measure distinct attributes of individuals and organizations; and
- an emphasis on the procedures of comparing groups or relating factors about individuals or groups in experiments, correlational studies, and surveys (Creswell, 2008, p. 48).

Also, in quantitative research “the research problem can be answered best by a study in which the researcher seeks to establish the overall tendency of responses from individuals and to note how this tendency varies among people” (Creswell, 2008, p. 51). The quantitative research method was suitable for this study because the study aimed at understanding the distinct attributes of the advisor-advisee relationship, the challenges advisors faced, and the institutional support provided to them. The study also analyzed the relationship between the experience and training advisors received and the challenges they faced.

**Research Design**
Survey research designs “are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population (Creswell, 2008, p. 388). The major types of survey research used in education are mailed questionnaires, electronic questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and telephone interviews (Creswell, 2008).

A survey is a “system for collecting information” (Sue & Ritter, 2007, p. 1). Surveys are “an effective way to gather information quickly and relatively inexpensively from a large geographic region” (Sue & Ritter, 2007, p. 9). This method of gathering information is fast, economical, and can reach a large audience (Sue & Ritter, 2007).

There are several advantages to using an Internet-based survey. The first advantage is speed. Surveys sent in an email or posted on a webpage have the potential of gathering a large number of respondents in a short period of time. Secondly, the cost associated with web surveys is normally limited. The question type used in the survey is another advantage of Internet-based surveys. There can be a variety of questions and respondents may even be able to skip a question if the researcher develops the survey to allow that function. Lastly, if conducted through a designated Internet site, there are no email addresses linked to the responses; therefore, privacy and confidentiality are ensured (Sue & Ritter, 2007).

Although Internet-based surveys are simple, cost-effective, and fast, there are also several limitations to using this type of survey. First, the population of people using the Internet is growing rapidly, but the probability that the entire sample or population has access to the Internet and a computer is small. As a result, there may be a bias in
socioeconomic status of the respondents of electronically-distributed surveys. Secondly, respondents of the survey can leave the survey at any point. In order to decrease the likelihood that the respondent will leave the survey, it is important that the researcher makes the survey as short as possible. There are several software programs available to develop the survey and the researcher may have to investigate which software meets his or her needs the most (Sue & Ritter, 2007). Also, over the years, response rates on e-mail surveys have decreased significantly. According to Sheehan (2006), in 1986 the average response rate for e-mail surveys was 61.5% and in 2000 the average response rate was 24%; recent average response rates have plummeted further down.

In the present study, an Internet-based survey was used to collect information on the challenges and institutional support provided to academic advisors working with underprepared students. The academic advisors who were sent surveys could be located all over the country and world. As a result of the unknown location of these advisors, the researcher decided that using an Internet-based survey would give the most valuable feedback and reach the largest number of people. The Internet-based survey was also the most cost-effective way of reaching people spread around the country and beyond.

There are several types of questions that can be used when implementing an Internet survey. These questions include open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, and semi-closed questions (Creswell, 2008). Open-ended questions are “questions for which researchers do not provide the response options; the participants provide their own responses to the questions;” closed-ended questions are those in which “the researcher poses a question and provides preset response options for the participant;” and semi-closed questions are questions that “ask a closed-ended questions and then ask for
additional response in an open-ended questions” (Creswell, 2008, p. 398-399). This study’s survey instrument included a mix of all three types of questions.

The data was collected using Vovici Survey Software. After the data was collected it was exported to SPSS and analyzed using SPSS Data Entry Builder. The frequencies and test results reported from SPSS were exported to Excel and tables were created to display the results.

**Participants**

The population for this study consisted of 1,215 higher education professionals, specifically academic advisors, who were members of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), which was developed “to promote the quality of Academic Advising in institution of higher education, and to this end, it is dedicated to the support and professional growth of academic advising and advisors” (Beatty, 1991, p. 5). The participants were members of two of the NACADA distribution lists: the First-Generation College Student Advising and the Probation, Dismissal, and Reinstatement distribution lists. Both of those lists were chosen for the study at the recommendation of an assistant director of NACADA, according to whom these distribution lists would reach advisors of academically underprepared students. This recommendation was made because there was not a distribution list specifically designed for advisors of academically underprepared students and the members of the First-Generation College Student Advising and the Probation, Dismissal, and Reinstatement distribution lists would be the ones most likely to work with academically underprepared students. There were 565 members of the First-Generation College Student Advising distribution list and 650 members of the Probation, Dismissal, and Reinstatement distribution list. There were
two challenges of using these distribution lists. First, there was no way to see who the members of the distribution lists were. As a result, the researcher was not able to determine whether there were duplicate members on the lists. Secondly, there was no way to distinguish who completed the survey and who did not complete the survey, which required the researcher to send reminder emails to every member of the distribution lists.

**Instrumentation**

The instrument was an on-line survey that was created using Vovici Survey Software. Vovici is an online software program used to create, distribute, and manage the responses of the survey. The Vovici Survey Software was used to develop the survey and to distribute it to the participants through a link inserted in an email invitation. Before the distribution of the survey, the University of Toledo Institutional Research Board approved the survey and allowed the researcher to conduct the research.

The survey consisted of 21 questions including two open-ended questions, 11 close-ended questions, and eight semi-closed-ended questions (See Appendix A). Closed-ended questions are practical, the responses are easily compared, and are helpful when asking sensitive information. Open-ended questions allow the participants to create their response within their experience, but require the researcher to code the data into themes. Semi-closed-ended questions allow participants to list a response that is not listed in the closed-ended part of the question, but does not overburden the researcher with information to code (Creswell, 2008).

Two survey questions addressed Research Question 1: What main challenges do advisors working with academically underprepared students face? One of the survey
questions was a closed-ended question and the other was a semi-closed-ended question. In the first question, the participants were given seven challenges to rate the frequency of occurrence from never, sometime, and always. Also, participants could write additional comments if a challenge they encountered was not listed. The list of challenges incorporated Gordon’s (1992) discussion of challenges that advisors often encountered. The second question asked the participants to identify the two challenges they most often faced.

Three survey questions were developed to address Research Question 2: Do advisors feel prepared to work with academically underprepared students? Two of the questions were closed-ended and one was semi-closed-ended, and explored the availability of prior training, its length, and the respondents’ perceptions about the accuracy of their training. These questions were guided by Morano’s (1999) and Gordon’s (1992) research which focused on effective training programs for advisors.

Six survey questions were developed to answer Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between the challenges academic advisors face and their experience and training? Two of the questions were semi-closed-ended questions and four were closed-ended questions, and collected the participants’ length of work experience, challenges they encountered, and the training they received. These questions were guided by Morano’s (1999) and Gordon’s (1992) research which focused on the challenges and training experiences of advisors.

Two survey questions were developed to answer Research Question 4: What types of institutional support do advisors find most beneficial? One question was closed-ended and the other was open-ended, and collected the participants’ opinion and rating of
the level of institutional support provided to advisors at their institution. These questions were guided by CAS’s (2008) standards focusing on the important and necessary institutional support resources needed to have a successful academic advising program.

Two questions were developed to answer Research Question 5: What institutional assistance programs for academically underprepared students do advisors find most beneficial? One of the questions was a closed-ended question and the other was a semi-closed-ended question. The participants were asked to identify the assistance programs that their institution offered to its underprepared students and to distinguish the top three they found most beneficial. Walsh’s (2003) research on the assistance programs for academically underprepared students guided the design of these questions.

Three survey questions were developed to answer Research Question 6: What roles and characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship do advisors find important to help students succeed? Two questions were closed-ended questions and one was a semi-closed-ended question. The participants were asked to identify advising roles they found important when working with underprepared students, and share their opinions on the effective characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship. These questions were based on research by Ender and Wilkie (2000) and Tinto (2004).

The remaining questions were used to acquire consent from the participants, obtain demographic information, and provide the participants with the opportunity to receive the results of the study if desired. Seven questions were asked to gain demographic information. The questions included the position of the participant, the highest level of education, the institution type and size, the experience level, the number
of professionals working with underprepared students at their institution, and whether underprepared students were required to see an academic advisor.

**Field Procedures and Data Collection**

The survey was distributed through an electronic link inserted in an invitation email sent to all 1,215 members of the two NACADA distribution lists. The invitation email message discussed the purpose of the study and the significance of the study. The invitation email message gave the researcher the opportunity to explain the importance of the study to the participants and to convince the reader to take the survey (Sue & Ritter, 2007). Also, the email stated the timeframe the survey would be available for the participants to respond, the minimal risks to participating in the survey, the right of the participant to withdraw from the survey at any given time, and the contact information of the researcher if the participant had questions.

The first question of the survey asked the respondents for their consent. The consent form included information about the study, its purpose and significance, the potential risks, and the opportunity given to the respondent to leave the survey at any given time. Also, the consent form discussed the option of the respondent to leave the survey and complete it at a later date if he or she were using the same computer. At the end of the consent form the respondent could click “Yes” if he or she agreed to participate in the survey or “No” if the respondent did not want to participate in the survey. If the respondent selected “No” he or she were withdrawn from the survey.

The survey was divided into six sections. The sections included questions about demographics, assistance programs, challenges, training, the advisor/advisee relationship, and institutional support. Participants moved to the next section by selecting the next
Completed surveys were submitted by clicking on the next page button of the last question. A screen appeared letting the respondent know the survey was successfully submitted. Completed surveys were submitted electronically to a Vovici Survey Software site.

The survey was available to the members of the distribution lists from December 17, 2010 to January 17, 2011. The first invitation email was sent on December 17, 2010. There were several reminder emails sent out over the open period. The researcher expanded the collection data period to January 25, 2011 to collect more responses. Respondents were not offered any type of compensation for their participation. The survey remained anonymous in order to protect the participants’ privacy and confidentiality. The only contact information gathered from the participants was voluntary at the end of the survey if the participants wanted to be informed of the results. There were no risks involved for those completing the study.

**Data Analysis**

The completed surveys were submitted anonymously and compiled on the Vovici Survey Software website. There were no recording identifiers used to code the participants. Data was summarized on the website and exported into the SPSS software. Once the data was transferred to the SPSS software, the researcher used the frequency option in SPSS to gain descriptive statistics about the demographics of the participants, as well as gather information to provide answers to the research questions. Then, correlation tests were run to determine the correlation between several variables.

First, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics are used to “describe the basic features of the data in a study. They provide summaries about
the sample characteristics and responses to individual survey questions” (Sue & Ritter, 2007, p. 109). Descriptive statistics helped answer Research Questions 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6. Inferential statistics were used to explore the relationship between the challenges advisors encounter and their experience and training and answer Research Question 3.

**Limitations**

One of the main limitations of this methodology was related to the way the researcher distributed the survey. Using two distribution lists made it impossible for the researcher to determine which members of the distribution lists had taken the survey and which ones had not. The researcher had to email both distribution lists follow-up emails instead of just the members who did not take the survey.

Another limitation of this method was the number of emails sent back to the researcher explaining that the member of the distribution list was no longer working with underprepared student. The change in career could not be tracked, and therefore a large group of members were ultimately not reached and were not able to take the survey.

**Summary**

This study explored the challenges and the institutional support provided to academic advisors of academically underprepared students. The survey instrument used to explore these aspects was an electronic survey, which used open-ended, closed-ended, and semi-closed-ended questions. The results of this analysis are discussed in the Chapter 4. A discussion of the results, recommendations, and future research are discussed in Chapter 5.
Chapter Four

Results

This study focused on the challenges facing academic advisors working with academically underprepared students from the perspective of the advisors. The purpose of the study was to explore the various challenges related to the professional preparation of advisors and the institutional support provided to these advisors. The following research questions guided the study: (1) What main challenges do advisors working with academically underprepared students face? (2) Do advisors feel prepared to work with underprepared students? (3) Is there a relationship between the challenges academic advisors face and their experience and training? (4) What types of institutional support do advisors find most beneficial? (5) What institutional assistance programs for academically underprepared students do advisors find most beneficial? (6) What roles and characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship do advisors find important to help students succeed?

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study. Data corresponding with the research questions will be presented through discussion of results and with the support of
tables. Conclusions about the results and recommendations for future research will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Findings

Over the six-week period during which participants were able to take the survey, 149 responded to the invitation email. Of those, 144 (96.6%) agreed to the conditions of the consent form and four (2.7%) did not agree to the conditions of the consent form and were withdrawn from the study. Another three respondents were withdrawn from the survey due to lack of questions answered. As a result, 142 valid responses were collected.

Demographic information of the respondents.

The majority of the respondents in the study were academic advisors (65%); 2% of the respondents were full-time or part-time faculty members; and 33% of the respondents considered themselves as “other.”

Table 4.1: A summary of the respondent positions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic advisor</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty member</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 4.1 shows, 33% of the respondents did not consider their job position to be an academic advisor, a faculty member, or a part-time faculty member. The clarification of those “other” responses included a broad array of positions which are presented in Table 4.2 and separated into six categories: 1) dean/coordinator/director/vice president, 2) counselor/advisor, 3) specialist, 4) administrator/staff member, 5) faculty member and 6) other.
Table 4.2: A summary of the positions listed as “other.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Positions Category</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dean/Coordinator/Director/Vice President</td>
<td>Director Student Support Services&lt;br&gt;Director of Student Services&lt;br&gt;Academic Dean (3)&lt;br&gt;Director of Learning Support&lt;br&gt;Program Director for Disadvantaged Students&lt;br&gt;Coordinator of Academic Support&lt;br&gt;Director of Academic Support Services&lt;br&gt;Advising Coordinator&lt;br&gt;Assistant Director of SSS Grant&lt;br&gt;Assistant Vice President for Educational Services&lt;br&gt;Coordinator of Academic Advising&lt;br&gt;Director of Diversity&lt;br&gt;Coordinator of Retention Services&lt;br&gt;Associate Vice President&lt;br&gt;Director of Advising&lt;br&gt;Associate Director of Academic Advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor/Advisor</td>
<td>Educational Opportunity Center&lt;br&gt;Counselor (2)&lt;br&gt;Retired Advisor&lt;br&gt;Student Success Advisor&lt;br&gt;Career Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Student Success Specialist&lt;br&gt;Instructional Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator/Staff Member</td>
<td>Advising Administrator&lt;br&gt;Administrator of Faculty Advising&lt;br&gt;Administrator Academic Advising Center&lt;br&gt;Administrator&lt;br&gt;Administration&lt;br&gt;Staff&lt;br&gt;Academic Advisement Administrator&lt;br&gt;TRiO Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Faculty Member&lt;br&gt;Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Success Mentor&lt;br&gt;Program Manager&lt;br&gt;Supervisor of Advisors&lt;br&gt;Admissions Supervisor&lt;br&gt;Developmental Studies Case Manager&lt;br&gt;Associate Registrar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of respondents, 72%, indicated that their highest level of education was a master’s degree. Compared to the 13% of participants with a bachelor’s degree, 9% with their Ph.D., and 6% classifying themselves as “other.”

Table 4.3: Summary of the level of education of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 6% of respondents who considered themselves “other” listed the following levels of education: currently working towards earning a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree or doctoral degree, and earned an Ed. D and earned a master’s degree and a professional diploma.

The majority of respondents (63%) had been working with underprepared students for over 5 years. From the remaining respondents, 1% had been working with underprepared students for one semester or one year, 4% for 1-2 years, 9% for 2-3 years or 4-5 years, and 13% for 3-4 years.

Table 4.4: Summary of the number of years the respondents had been working with underprepared students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Work</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Around 1 semester</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around 1 year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Half of the participants worked at 4-year public institutions (50%). From the remaining participants, 26% worked at community colleges, 13% worked at 4-year private institutions, 2% worked at for-profit institutions, and 9% classified themselves as working at another type of institution.

Table 4.5: Summary of the institution type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-year public</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year private</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For profit institution</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The institutions that the participants identified as “other” included 4-year public regional campuses, 4-year public regional campuses with open enrollment, 2-year transfer institutions, technical colleges, 2-year state colleges, and private universities with master’s degree programs, and institutions with comprehensive degrees and graduate programs.

The institution size varied from less than 5,000 to more than 25,000 students. The highest represented institution size was between 5,001-10,000 students with 27% of the respondents, compared to 23% with a student population of less than 5,000 students, 17% with a student population of more than 25,000 students, 12% with 15,001-20,000 students, 11% with 10,001-15,000 students, and 10% with 20,001-25,000 students.
Table 4.6: Summary of the institution size.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Size</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5,000</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,001-15,000</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,001-20,000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,001-25,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 25,000</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Half of respondents worked at institutions where 1-10 people worked with underprepared students; specifically 26% had 1-5 people working with underprepared students and 24% had 6-10 people working with underprepared students. Only 13% of the represented institutions had 11-15 people working with underprepared students and 8% had 16-20 people working with these students. The majority of participants, 29%, worked at an institutions where there were over 20 people working with underprepared students.

Table 4.7: Summary of the number of professionals working with underprepared students at the respondents’ institutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of professionals</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 people</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 people</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 people</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 people</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 20 people</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, 55% of all institutions required underprepared students to see an academic advisor. Only 29% did not require underprepared students to meet with an academic advisor. Also, 16% of respondents selected “other” when asked if underprepared students were required to meet with academic advisors at their specific institution.
Table 4.8: Summary of the requirement of underprepared student to meet with academic advisors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement to see advisor</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the respondents who selected “other,” they clarified their selection by stating that all students were required to see an academic advisor; only specific groups were required to see an academic advisor; underprepared students are required to see an advisor for their first visit or if they were on probation; they were required, but there were no consequences; if the students went on academic probation; when the student first arrived at school and if they were put on at-risk status; full-time students were, but part-time students were not required; and, lastly, that it depended on the students’ major.

Addressing the research questions

The purpose of this study was to determine the professional preparation challenges and the institutional support challenges of academic advisors who work with underprepared students. Six research questions guided the study.

Research Question 1: What main challenges do advisors working with academically underprepared students face? The majority of the participants indicated that they encountered the following seven challenges sometimes when working with academically underprepared students (62%-90%): excuses about grades or low test scores from advisees, not showing up for an appointment, lack of interest in education, advisee uniformed about academic standards, resistance to suggestions from advisees, getting the student to understand the need to improve their basic skills, and lack of motivation to
study or go to class. Of these challenges, excuses about grades or low test scores from advisees was the most frequent challenge encountered by advisors (36%). Table 4.9 displays the frequency advisors encounter these challenges, ranging from never, sometimes, to always.

Table 4.9: Frequency of the challenges encountered by academic advisors working with underprepared student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuses about grades or low test scores from advisees</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to suggestion from advisees</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the student to understand the need to improve their basic skills</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation to go to class and study</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not showing up for an appointment</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest in education</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisee uniformed about academic standards</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents ranked the challenges they encountered most often. Of the respondents, 32% stated they encountered the challenge of hearing excuses about grades or low test scores from advisees most often. Another 28% said they faced the challenge of lack of motivation most often. From the remaining respondents, 17% listed getting the student to understand the need to improve their basic skill, 9% listed resistance to suggestions from advisees, 7% listed not showing up for an appointment, 4% listed lack of interest in education, and lastly 2% said lack of interest in advising was the challenge they encounter most often.
Table 4.10: Summary of the challenges the respondents encounter most often when working with academically underprepared students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#1 Challenge Encountered Most Often</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excuses about grades or low test scores from advisees</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to suggestion from advisees</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the student to understand the need to improve their basic skills</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation to go to class and study</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not showing up for an appointment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest in education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest in advising</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 2: Do advisors feel prepared to work with academically underprepared students? The majority of participants did not receive specialized training on how to advise underprepared students (86%). The 1% that selected “other” described the “other” training as training for working with undeclared and remedial students or cross cultural advising and counseling training.

Table 4.11: Summary of advisor training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The advisor was provided specialized training</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The length of training varied. Of the majority of the respondents who received specialized training, 35% of the training lasted for one day. Of the remaining respondents who received specialized training, 20% had 2-3 days of training, 10% had 4-5 days of training, 5% had 6-7 days of training, and 30% had 8 or more days of training.
Table 4.12: Length of specialized training for those who received some training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialized training length</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 days</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 days</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7 days</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8+ days</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the participants who were given specialized training, half of them thought they were adequately trained and the other half thought they were somewhat adequately trained. Of the participants who were not given specialized training, only 17% thought they were adequately trained, 41% thought they were somewhat adequately trained, and 42% did not think they were adequately trained to work with academically underprepared students.

Table 4.13: Advisor perception of preparedness for working with underprepared students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Preparedness</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisor was provided specialized training</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor was not provided specialized training</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between the challenges academic advisors face and their experience and training? The results of the correlation tests determined that there was a very weak negative relationship between the working experience of the advisors and the challenge of resistance to suggestions. This relationship indicated that the more years of working experience an advisor had the less likely he or she would be to face the challenge of resistance to suggestions from advisees.
Also, the tests showed a very weak positive relationship between advisors who were given specialized training and the challenges of resistance to suggestions and lack of motivation to go to class or study. These positive relationships indicated that the less training an advisor was given, the more likely he or she would face the challenge of resistance to suggestion from advisees.

Table 4.14: Correlation of the challenges advisors encounter and the experience and training of the advisors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>R</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>SU</th>
<th>LOM</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>IIE</th>
<th>AU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Resistance to suggestions from advisees (R), excuses about grades or low test scores (E), getting the student to understand the need to improve their basic skills (SU), lack of motivation to go to class and study (LOM), not showing up for an appointment (NS), lack of interest in education (IIE), and advisee uniformed about academic standards (AU). *p<.05.

Research Question 4: What types of institutional support do advisors find most beneficial? The majority of the respondents agreed that they were provided adequate computers (90.5%), private space (67.6%), access to academic records (87.8%), curricular change information (73.2%), and schedules of campus activities (69.6%) to assist them when advising underprepared students. However, 68.3% disagreed that they had an adequate number of advisors working with underprepared students and 76.9% disagreed that they had adequate funding to meet the needs of advisors working with underprepared students.
Table 4.15: Advisors’ perceptions of the institutional support provided to them by the institution in terms of agreement, neutral and disagreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Support</th>
<th>Perception of the institutional support provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate number of advisors</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate funding</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private space</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to academic records</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to engagement records</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to curricular change</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to schedule of campus activities</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents identified which type of institutional support they considered to be the most beneficial. These responses were categorized into professional development, access to information, technology, training, university support, funding, staffing, and “other.” Access to information was most often identified by respondents (18). Types of institutional support in this category included access to curricular change, access to data, access to engagement records, access to academic records, and access to campus resources. Professional development had 13 responses and university support had 13 responses. The majority of the responses (32) were included in the “other” category.
Table 4.16: Summary of the most beneficial types of institutional support by category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beneficial Categories of Institutional Support</th>
<th>Number of responses related to category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Information (i.e. curricular change, data, student records, campus resources, engagement records, academic records)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology (i.e. electronic records and data system)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Support (i.e. top level and administration support, open communication, campus awareness, collegial collaboration)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing (i.e. adequate number of advisors, manageable case loads, open communication among staff)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (See table 4.16 For specific types)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents (32) selected institutional support that did not fall into the professional development, access to information, technology, funding, university support, or staffing categories. Some of the “other” types of institutional support included adequate time to spend with students, adequate space to meet with students, and mentoring services.
Table 4.17: Summary of the “other” category of most beneficial institutional support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beneficial Categories of Institutional Support</th>
<th>Specific type of institutional support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Educating students on the crucial need for advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support for learning outcomes assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus for a new comprehensive advising model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All of the listed institutional support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support services for underprepared students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enough time to spend with students (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRiO (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Just having institutional support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Define underprepared students and provide assistance programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admission cut off dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open door policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentoring programs (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private space (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction between resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutorial Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding of transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resources staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic advising council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regular meetings between faculty and advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clearly defined policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clear advising model and infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative structure designed to align students services and academic affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early alert system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New system of selecting advisors working with underprepared students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective transfer of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group advising</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 5: What institutional assistance programs for academically underprepared students do advisors find most beneficial? The most offered assistance program was early warning programs (66%), and the least offered program was early entry advising (21%). Half of the institutions offered intrusive advising programs for underprepared students and 7% of the respondents listed “other” assistance programs that
their institution offered underprepared students. Some of these “other” programs included intensive advising in low-retention majors, developmental courses, tutoring, services for students with learning disabilities, midterm grades, academic support, and TRiO SSS.

Table 4.18: Summary of the assistance programs the respondents’ institutions offered academically underprepared students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistance Program</th>
<th>Offered</th>
<th>Not Offered</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early warning programs to detect underprepared students</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared student support services programs</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive advising programs for underprepared students</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifically defined courses for underprepared students</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared student freshman seminar course</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring programs for underprepared students</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared student orientation program</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared student summer programming</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared students learning communities</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early entry advising programs for underprepared students</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top three most beneficial assistance programs offered to underprepared students according to academic advisors were intrusive advising programs (45%), underprepared student support services (42%), and early warning programs to detect underprepared students (37%).
Table 4.19: The most beneficial assistance program for underprepared students offered at the respondents’ institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Beneficial Assistance Program</th>
<th>Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive advising programs for underprepared students</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared student support services programs</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early warning programs to detect underprepared students</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifically defined courses for underprepared students</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared student freshman seminar course</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring programs for underprepared students</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared student orientation program</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared student summer programming</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underprepared students learning communities</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early entry advising programs for underprepared students</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>269%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The total percentage is above 100% because the respondents ranked their top three most beneficial assistance program.

Research Question 6: What roles and characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship do advisors find important to help students succeed? The majority of the participants indicated that the following characteristics were important in the advisor/advisee relationship: intentional (58%), goal-oriented (59%), supporting (77%), challenging (53%), purposeful (58%), and ongoing (74%). Also, 4% of the respondents listed “other” as an important characteristic of the advisor-advisee relationship. The respondents indicated that “other” important characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship were honesty, a genuine and trusting relationship, availability of the advisor, mutual trust, the relationship empowers the student, and the student is involved in the decision-making process and caring.
Table 4.20: Advisors’ beliefs whether they believe certain characteristics are important of the advisor-advisee relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Characteristics</th>
<th>Perception of Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship supports the student</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is an ongoing relationship</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship is goal-oriented</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship is purposeful</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship is intentional</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship challenges the student</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship that were indicated as the most important by the respondents included that the relationship supports the student (75.9%), that the relationship is purposeful (60.5%) and that the relationship is ongoing (59.1%). Of the respondents, 36.5% indicated that the characteristics of the relationship that supports the student was the most important characteristics, 27% selected that the relationship should be ongoing, and 15.3% indicated that the relationship should be purposeful.

Table 4.21: Advisors’ ranking of the most important characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Characteristics</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The relationship supports the student</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship is purposeful</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is an ongoing relationship</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship is goal-oriented</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship is intentional</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship challenges the student</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>299.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The total percentage is above 100% because the advisors ranked their top three relationship characteristics.
The most important advisor roles when working with underprepared students were empowering the student to access support services when needed (90.3%), developing knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education (69.7%), and providing clear guidelines (59.5%). Of the advising roles, empowering the student to access support services was selected as the most important characteristics (44.3%).

Table 4.22: Advisors’ ranking of the most important advising roles when working with underprepared students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advising Role</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empower students to access support services when needed</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide clear guidelines</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support academic decision making</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sure the support program is connected to everyday learning needs</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support career decision making</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.1%</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The total percentage is above 100% because the advisors ranked their top three advising roles.

Conclusion

This study found that academic advisors of underprepared students received little specialized training. Also, it found that academic advisors of academically underprepared students faced several challenges including excuses about grades or low test scores, resistance to suggestions from advisees, and lack of motivation to go to class and study. Advisors, who participated in the study, indicated that the advisor-advisee relationship should be ongoing, purposeful, and supportive. Chapter 5 will summarize the results of the survey and provide conclusions and recommendations.
Chapter 5

Summary, Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges encountered by academic advisors who work with academically underprepared students and to analyze the institutional support provided to these advisors. There were six research questions that guided this study: (1) What main challenges do advisors working with academically underprepared students face? (2) Do advisors feel prepared to work with underprepared students? (3) Is there a relationship between the challenges academic advisors face and their experience and training? (4) What types of institutional support do advisors find most beneficial? (5) What institutional assistance programs for academically underprepared students do advisors find most beneficial? (6) What roles and characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship do advisors find important to help students succeed?

This chapter discusses the summary and findings of the study, and offers recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The following section summarizes the findings of this study by research question.
**Research question 1.**

The first Research Question asked, What main challenges do advisors working with academically underprepared students face? The majority of the respondents (62%-90%) indicated that they sometimes face these challenges: excuses about grades or low test scores from advisees, not showing up for an appointment, lack of interest in education, advisee uniformed about academic standards, resistance to suggestions from advisees, getting the student to understand the need to improve their basic skills, and lack of motivation to study or go to class. The most prevalent challenge that advisors pointed to was hearing excuses about grades or low test scores (32%).

**Research question 2.**

The second Research Question asked, Do advisors feel prepared to work with underprepared students? The majority of respondents (86%) did not receive specialized training to work with academically underprepared students. Of the respondents who were given specialized training, the length of the training session varied, 35% lasted one day, 20% lasted 2-3 days, 10% lasted 4-5 days, 5% lasted 6-7 days, and 30% lasted 8 or more days. Half of the participants who were given specialized training felt they were adequately prepared to work with academically underprepared students, compared to the 17% of advisors who felt adequately trained and were not given specialized training.

**Research question 3.**

The third Research Question asked, Is there a relationship between the challenges academic advisors face and their experience and training? The results indicated that there was a very weak negative relationship between the working experience of the advisor and the challenge of resistance to suggestions from advisees. This negative relationship
indicated that the more working experience an advisor had the less likely the advisor would be to face the challenge of resistance to suggestions from advisees. Also, the results showed there was a very weak positive relationship between the specialized training an advisor received and two challenges the advisors encountered: resistance to suggestions from advisees and lack of motivation to go to class and study from advisees. These positive relationships signaled that the less training an advisor had the more likely he or she would be to face these two challenges.

Research question 4.

The fourth Research Question asked, What types of institutional support do advisors find most beneficial? The majority of respondents agreed that they were given private space (67.6%), computers (90.5%), access to academic records (87.7%), curricular change (73.2%), and access to a schedule of campus activities (69.9%). Also, the majority of respondents did not agree with the statements of having an adequate number of advisors working with academically underprepared students (68.3%) and having adequate funding (76.9%).

Research question 5.

The fifth Research Question asked, What institutional assistance programs for academically underprepared students do advisors find most beneficial? The most offered assistance programs were early warning programs (66%), underprepared student support programs (54%), and intrusive advising programs (50%). Also, the respondents ranked intrusive advising programs (45%), under prepared student support services (42%), and early warning programs (37%) as the top three most beneficial assistance programs for academically underprepared students.
Research question 6.

The sixth Research Question asked, What roles and characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship do advisors find important to help students succeed? Over half of the respondents thought that the relationship should be intentional (58%), goal-oriented (59%), supportive (77%), challenging (53%), purposeful (58%), and ongoing (74%). Respondents thought the top three most important characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship were (1) supportive (75.9%), (2) purposeful (60.5%), and (3) ongoing (59.1%). The top three advisor roles identified were (1) empowering students to access support services when needed (90.3%), (2) developing knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education (69.7), and (3) providing clear guidelines (59.5%).

Discussion

Responses to the survey questions about the professional preparation challenges and the institutional support challenges advisors face, and the important aspects of the advisor-advisee relationship identified by the respondents are discussed in the following sections.

Professional preparation challenges.

Challenges related to the professional preparation of advisors can be grouped under two categories: (1) training challenges and (2) other professional preparation challenges. Each of these challenges impacts the advisors’ ability to do their job successfully.

Training challenges.

Training is an important factor that impacts the success of advisors. According to Gordon (1992), “effective advising today requires more extensive, ongoing training
activities” (p. 139). Many institutions of higher education are only providing their advisors with a minimum amount of training lasting about one day (Koring, 2005). The limited amount of training provided to advisors may become a challenge for these advisors. Academic advisors, especially new academic advisors, may be challenged by the necessity to learn and manage too much information in a short period of time. The overwhelming amount of information to learn and manage has often been attributed to the lack of training provided to these advisors (Morano, 1999).

The participants in this study were asked if they received specialized training that would prepare them for their work with underprepared students. If they were provided specialized training, they were asked how long the specialized training lasted, and if they felt adequately trained to work with academically underprepared student. The majority of the participants did not receive specialized training. Of the respondents who were given specialized training, 35% of the trainings lasted one day. Half of the participants who were given specialized training felt they were adequately trained to work with underprepared students and only 17% of advisors who were not given specialized training felt they were adequately prepared to work with underprepared students.

According to Koring (2005), the majority of training sessions provided to advisors lasts one day. The participants’ responses to the length of advising training supported Koring’s findings. Also, ACT’s Fifth National Survey of Academic Advising (1984, as cited in Koring, 2005) indicated that “many institutions are providing only a minimum of training to those involved in advising” (para. 2). The majority of the participants did not receive specialized training to work with academically underprepared students. Clearly, the findings of this study continue prior research findings that advisors receive a
minimum amount of training and that training sessions, when provided, usually last one day. Only 17% of the advisors who did not receive specialized training felt adequately prepared to advise underprepared students. The impact of limited training is further traced to the low self-evaluation of the preparedness of academic advisors working with academically underprepared students.

**Other professional preparation challenges.**

Other professional preparation challenges include working with students who lack maturity and motivation, have personal or family issues, have issues adjusting to college life, having low academic self-concept, and students not putting their education as their top priority (Gordon, 1992). Also, these students may have weak academic skills in a specific area, unrealistic graduate and career expectations, unfocused career objectives, inadequate study skills for college success, and believe that learning is memorization (Gordon, V. N., Habley, W. R., Grites, T. J., & Associates, 2008). These students can lack motivation, lack an interest in advising or education, resist suggestions from advisors, not show up for appointments, and not understand the need to improve their academic ability.

The responses from the participants clearly align with literature that has observed major advising challenges in general. The majority of advisors faced excuses about grades or low test scores from advisees, not showing up for an appointment, lack of interest in education, advisee uninformed about academic standards, resistance to suggestions from advisees, getting the student to understand the need to improve their basic skills, and the lack of motivation to study or go to class challenges when working with underprepared students. The challenge, excuses about grades or low test scores from
advisees, was encountered always by 36% of participants. Also, the participants encountered excuses about grades or low test scores and a lack of motivation most often when working with academically underprepared students.

**Institutional support challenges.**

Over 50% of the participants indicated that they received several types of institutional support. These types of institutional support included a sufficient number of computers (90.5%) and private space (67.6%) and access to academic records (87.8%), curricular change (73.2%), and a schedule of campus activities (69.6%). Also, only 43.7% of participants agreed that they had adequate access to engagement records. However, a strong majority of participants disagreed when asked if the institutions had an adequate number of advisors working with underprepared students and if they received adequate funding. The participants indicated that funding, professional development, and support services were the most beneficial type of institutional support. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2008) emphasized the importance of having adequate space and facilities for advisors to meet and work with students, access to academic and engagement records, access to curricular change, and adequate funding and number of advisors in order for academic advising programs to successfully meet their mission and purpose and help students develop and succeed at college. Although several types of institutional support are being provided to academic advisors of underprepared students, two important types of institutional support are not being provided to advisors. The participants indicated that there were not an adequate number of advisors working with academically underprepared students and that there was not adequate funding provided to academic advisors.
Advisor-advisee relationship.

Ender and Wilkie (2000) indicated that in order for advisors to develop a successful developmental advising relationship with their advisee, the relationship must be ongoing and purposeful, challenging for the student, but also supportive, goal-oriented, and intentional. Over half of the participants in this study agreed that it was important for the advisor-advisee relationship be purposeful, challenging for the student, goal-oriented, and intentional. A large majority of the respondents indicated that it is important for the relationship to be ongoing and supportive. Clearly, advisors of underprepared students believe in the development of a special relationship that will help support these kinds of students in their academic progress.

Tinto (2004) found that effective advisors provide students with clear guidelines, support academic and career decision making, knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education, empower the student to access support when needed, and make sure support programs are connected to everyday student learning. Several of the main advisor roles were also seen as important by the participants in this study. The participants indicated that the top three advising roles for advisors working with academically underprepared students were to provide clear guidelines, empower students, and develop knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education.

Summary of Discussion

The majority of respondents to the survey indicated that they did not receive specialized training. Also, they indicated that they did not feel adequately trained to work with students who are academically underprepared. Over half of the respondents encounter challenges from students, including excuses about grades or low test scores,
resistance to suggestions, lack of motivation or interest in education, not showing up for an appointment, and the student not understanding the need to improve their basic skills or being uniformed about academic standards.

Most participants believed that the advisor-advisee relationship should be ongoing, purposeful, challenging to the student, supportive, goal-oriented, and intentional. The most important relationship characteristics are ongoing, supportive, and purposeful. Lastly, the participants believed advisors should provide clear guidelines, develop students’ knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education, and empower students to access support services when needed.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study focused on the professional preparation challenges and institutional support challenges academic advisors encounter when working with academically underprepared students. In addition, this study focused on these challenges from the perspective of the advisors. There are four recommendations that emerged as a result of this study.

First, training is necessary to develop effective advisors (Gordon, 1992). Many institutions are not providing their advisors working with underprepared students with specialized training (Koring, 2005). Training does not have to be a long tedious process, but as long as the training is effective, it will positively impact the advisor working with students. From the study, advisors found that it was important to have ongoing training and professional development opportunities. These ongoing training sessions and professional development opportunities would allow advisors the chance to enhance their skills. The researcher suggests institutions should develop and institute specialized
training sessions for academic advisor working with academically underprepared students. Also, providing interactive training sessions throughout an advisor’s career will afford them the opportunity to better assist students.

Second, institutional support programs are beneficial to academically underprepared students (Walsh, 2003). In this study advisors have indicated that the majority of their institutions do provide a variety of support programs for academically underprepared students. The advisors indicated that the top five most beneficial assistance programs for academically underprepared student were intrusive advising programs, underprepared student support programs, early warning programs, specifically defined courses for underprepared students, and underprepared student freshman seminar course. The researcher recommends that institutions develop these programs for academically underprepared students.

Third, a strong advisor-advisee relationship can positively impact students. Tinto (2004) suggests that effective advising is extremely beneficial to underprepared students and that advising should provide students with clear guidelines, support for academic and career decision making, knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education, empower the student to access support when needed, and make sure the support program is connected to everyday student learning. The respondents of this study found all of these characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship to be important. The researcher recommends that institutions provide advisors with the resources necessary to develop these strong relationships. These resources may include training sessions, professional development sessions, and suggestions from advisees.
Lastly, this research revealed that advisors did not agree that they were provided enough funding and that there were not enough advisors to meet the needs of academically underprepared students. Research (CAS, 2008) emphasizes the importance of funding and staffing in the success of academic advising programs. The researcher recommends that institutions review their budget and spending to see if they can allocate more funds for academic advising. The researcher understand that because of the economic status of many institutions, the likelihood of having more funds to allocate to advising is slim, but even the smallest amount may help advising programs for underprepared students.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

This research focused on the professional preparation challenges and the institutional support challenges that advisors who worked with academically underprepared students faced. The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze these challenges. The following suggestions are made for policy and practice.

Institutions should conduct studies from the perspective of their academic advisors, specifically advisors working with academically underprepared students. The results of the present study supported the literature on the importance of training advisors, the necessity of assistance programs for academically underprepared students, the important aspects of the advisor-advisee relationship, and the important types of institutional support. A study conducted by the institution itself can analyze in-depth the available training methods and make adjustments when possible. Also, an in-depth analysis at institutional level will provide the institution with the specific challenges that occur on the respective campus and the advisors’ perceptions of the important types of
institutional support. These findings will allow institutions to know which support is most important to advisors. The ability to know specifically what advisors need on their campus will help institutions provided the necessary support, which will positively impact the advisors’ relationship with the advisee and will assist advisors in successfully supporting students.

**Future Research**

Respondents of this study indicated that they encountered several challenges from academically underprepared students. However, more research on the ways in which these advisors confront these challenges or work to decrease the occurrence of these challenges on their campus is necessary. A study exploring and analyzing these techniques will provide advisors and higher education professionals more tools for working with underprepared students.

Also, the majority of the respondents did not receive specialized training and do not feel adequately prepared to work with academically underprepared student. More research on the successful training programs and the training sessions advisors feel would be the most beneficial to them should be completed. According to the literature, training is very important and institutions should be aware of what their advisors need to be successful at their jobs.

**Conclusion**

This research aimed to gain a better understanding of the challenges academic advisors encountered when working with academically underprepared students and the institutional support provided to them. The responses to the survey provided insight on the training and institutional support provided to academic advisors as well as the
challenges they encountered and their perspectives on the important characteristics of the advisor-advisee relationship.

Through gaining a better understanding of the challenges academic advisors face and the institutional support they deem necessary, many institutions can begin to offer advisors the necessary resources and tools they need to be successful at their jobs. By providing training and institutional support, academic advisors will be able to better meet the needs of academically underprepared students.
References


Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). (2008). The role of academic advising. Received from www.cas.edu


Welcome! You are invited to participate in the research project entitled, Challenges and Institutional Support for Advisors of Academically Underprepared Students. This research, conducted by the University of Toledo, under the direction of Dr. Snejana Slantcheva-Durst will be available from December 17-January 17. The purpose of this study is to analyze the challenges and institutional support of academic advisors working with underprepared students. Through this analysis, we hope to be able to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing these advisors and the institutional support needed to help these advisors succeed at their jobs. Your participation will take about 15-20 minutes. Please feel free to consult other professionals on your campus if needed. For your convenience, you may stop and resume this survey at anytime during the four week window and your responses will automatically be saved (as long as you are still working from the same computer).

Potential Risks and Benefits: There are minimal risks to participation in this study. The data gathered through this survey is being collected anonymously. We will make every effort to protect your confidentiality leaving a minimal risk of loss of confidentiality. In addition, at any point in the survey, you can decide to leave the survey. You may benefit by learning about the results of this research.

Contact Information: Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions, before, during, or after taking the survey, please do not hesitate to contact Megan Miller at megan.miller2@rockets.utoledo.edu and (419)530-1361 or Dr. Snejana Slantcheva-Durst, thesis advisor, at snejana.slantcheva-durst@utoledo.edu.
By continuing to the next page and completing the attached survey you are giving your informed consent to participate in this research project.

The research project described in this consent form has been reviewed and approved by The University of Toledo Social, Behavioral & Educational Institutional Review Board for the period of time specified below.

SBE IRB #: 107175    Number of Subjects: 1200
Project Start Date: 12/17/10   Project Expiration Date: 1/17/10

☐ Yes
☐ No, I do not wish to participate in this survey.

2) What is your position?

☐ Academic Advisor
☐ Faculty Member
☐ Part Time Faculty Member
☐ Graduate Assistant
☐ Other (please specify)

If you selected other, please specify
____________________________________________________________________

3) What is your highest level of education?

☐ Specialist Degree
☐ Bachelor's Degree
☐ Master's Degree
☐ PhD
☐ Other (please specify)

If you selected other, please specify
____________________________________________________________________

4) At what type of institution do you currently work?
4-year Public
4-year Private
Community College
For Profit Institution
Other (please specify)

If you selected other, please specify
______________________________________________________________________

5) What is the size of your institution?

Less than 5,000
5,000-10,000
10,001-15,000
15,001-20,000
20,001-25,000
More than 25,001

6) How many years have you been working with underprepared students?

Around 1 semester
Around 1 year
1-2 years
2-3 years
3-4 years
4-5 years
More than 5 years

7) How many professionals at your institutions advise underprepared students?

1-5 people
6-10 people
11-15 people
16-20 people
Over 20 people

8) At your institution, are underprepared students required to see an academic advisor?

Yes
No
Other (please specify)
9) In regards to underprepared students, are any of the assistance programs listed below provided by your institution?

- Underprepared student orientation programs
- Underprepared student freshmen seminar courses
- Mentoring programs for underprepared students
- Early warning programs to detect underprepared students
- Intrusive advising programs for underprepared students
- Early entry advising programs for underprepared students
- Specifically defined courses for underprepared students
- Underprepared students learning communities
- Underprepared student support services programs
- Underprepared student summer programming
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other, please specify

If you selected other, please specify

10) Which of the following services do you believe to be the most beneficial to underprepared students' success at your institution? Please rank your top three.

Underprepared student orientation programs
Underprepared student freshmen seminar courses
Mentoring programs for underprepared students
Early warning programs to detect underprepared students
Intrusive advising programs for underprepared students
Early entry advising programs for underprepared students
underprepared students

Specifically defined courses for underprepared students

Underprepared students learning communities

Underprepared student support services programs

Underprepared student summer programming

11) Please tell us which of the following challenges you face when working with underprepared students and how often do you deal with them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to suggestions from advisees</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuses about grades or low test scores from advisees</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the student to understand the need to improve their basic skills</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation to go to class and study</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not showing up for an appointment</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest in education</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Advisee uniformed about academic standards

12) Which two of those challenges do you face most often?

- Resistance from advisees
- Excuses from advisees
- Getting the student to understand the need to improve
- Lack of motivation
- Not showing up for an appointment
- Lack of interest in education
- Lack of interest in advising

13) Were you provided specialized training focusing on underprepared students when you started your job?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other, please specify

____________________________________________________________________

14) If yes, how long was your training?

- 1 day
- 2-3 days
- 4-5 days
- 6-7 days
- 8+ days

15) Do you feel you were adequately trained to perform your job successfully at this specific training?
16) Please rank the following advising roles and characteristics when working with underprepared students (with 1 being the most important).

- Provide clear guidelines
- Support academic decision making
- Support career decision making
- Develop knowledge on how to navigate postsecondary education
- Empower students to access support when needed (i.e. tutoring, counseling, etc.)
- Make sure the support program is connected to everyday learning needs

17) Please choose the important characteristics of the advisor advisee relationship.

- It is an ongoing relationship
- The relationship is purposeful.
- The relationship challenges the student.
- The relationship supports the student.
- The relationship is goal-oriented.
- The relationship is intentional.
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other, please specify

18) Please rank the following characteristics of the relationship between the advisor and advisee. (With 1 being the most important).

- It is an ongoing relationship
- The relationship is purposeful.
The relationship challenges the student. ___________________

The relationship supports the student. ___________________

The relationship is goal-oriented. ___________________

The relationship is intentional. ___________________

19) Please provide your opinion on the following statements about institutional support for advisors at your institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are an adequate number of advisors working with underprepared students.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is adequate funding to meet the needs of advisors working with underprepared students.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a private space available for all advisors to meet with students.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisors have the computers needed to advise students.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisors have the access to</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
academic records needed to advise students.  

Advisors have the access to engagement records needed to advise students.  

Advisors have access to curricular changes and program changes that occur at the institution.  

Advisors have access to a schedule of campus activities that may be used during advising.  

20) What is the most beneficial type of institutional support provided to advisors in your opinion?

_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________

21) If you would like to be informed on the results of this survey please list your contact information (name and email).
Appendix B

Invitation Email

Dear Advisors,

As a member of NACADA, you are cordially invited to participate in a thesis project entitled Challenges and Institutional Support for Advisors of Academically Underprepared Students. The purpose of this study is to analyze the challenges and institutional support of academic advisors working with underprepared students. Our definition of underprepared students is students who are not academically prepared for college. These students may need to take developmental education courses, have low test scores, or may not meet the academic standards of the institution. Through this analysis, we hope to be able to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing these advisors and the institutional support needed to help these advisors succeed at their jobs. With this study, we aim to contribute to the knowledge of the needs of academic advisors, to recognize them and suggest ways to meet these needs. This study is conducted by Megan Miller, a master’s student in the Higher Education Program at the University of Toledo. The on-line survey will be available between December 17th and January 17th at the following link:

Completing this survey should not take more than 15-20 minutes. For your convenience, you may stop and resume this survey at any time during the open period and your responses will automatically be saved (as long as you are still working from the same computer). There are no risks in result of your participation. The data gathered though the survey is being collected anonymously and we will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. In addition, at any point in the survey, you can decide to leave the survey.

I hope you will consider participating in the survey and I appreciate you taking the time to support my research. Thank you in advance for your time. If you have any questions, before, during, or after taking the survey, please do not hesitate to contact Megan Miller at megan.miller2@rockets.utoledo.edu and (419)530-1361 or Dr. Snejana Slantcheva-Durst, thesis advisor, at snejana.slantcheva.durst@utoledo.edu.

By continuing to the survey and completing the survey you are giving your informed consent to participate in this research project.

Thanks again,

Megan Miller