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Getting Connected...Again: a Phenomenological Study of Student Experiences of Transition Within a Shared Model of Academic Advising

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GETTING CONNECTED...AGAIN:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF TRANSITION
WITHIN A SHARED MODEL OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF TRANSITION
WITHIN A SHARED MODEL OF ACADEMIC ADVISING

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Higher Education

By

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ABSTRACT

Shared models of academic advising that involve the use of both professional and faculty advisors represent the most widely used type of advising structure. Many of these models require students to change advisors once they have satisfied certain criteria, such as earning specific number of credits or declaring a major. Thus, college students across the United States are forming connections with academic advisors during their first few years on campus only to have to repeat the process again with a new advisor. Despite its routine occurrence on college and university campuses across the United States, the issue of mandated advisor transitions within shared advising models has mostly been ignored in higher education literature.

To address this gap in the existing research, this study used a phenomenological design to explore how students experienced the transition from centralized, professional advising to decentralized, faculty-based advising within a shared advising model at a public research university in the Mid-South. Participants of this study included 17 students in their senior year in the arts and sciences college who have experienced the advising transition. Data were collected via focus groups and in-depth personal interviews. Peer debriefing, member checks, triangulation analysts, thick descriptions, and reflexive journaling were used to ensure trustworthiness. The analysis of data revealed four common themes experienced by participants in the process of advising transition: 1) an evaluation of advisor trustworthiness based on perceived professional responsibilities, followed by appropriate coping mechanisms, 2) a preference for a personalized advising relationship, 3) an apprehensiveness towards the unknown, and 4) reliance on previously developed advising expectations. The findings of this study inform academic advisors, faculty members, and administrators on how to effectively

manage the advising transition to ensure students' positive advising experiences and their continued sense of connectedness.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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DISSERTATION DUPLICATION RELEASE

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No accomplishment occurs in isolation – to think this way would be foolish. I am indeed proud of this dissertation, but I take so much more pride in the collection of amazing individuals whose positive influence on my life enabled me to write it. I have in this section the rare opportunity to formally and publically thank these individuals. Like an Academy Award winner cutoff by the music, I do not intend to waste it. I must first thank my mother, Leigh Ann Barker, and my father, John Barker. Throughout my life, your loving guidance has been ever-present. I would not be who I am without both of you. Today I am the proudest son. I also thank my brother, Nicholas Barker, for serving his family and his country, and in doing so providing a quiet reminder to live the right way when it's most important. And of course to Meghan Adams for your loving support – I will bring you water if you will bring me wine.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to the thousands of academic advisors across the globe who influence millions of lives on a daily basis.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Context of the Problem

If the essence of the average student body on the average college campus were distilled down to one word, it would quite likely be *connected*. Students are connected to each other through online social networks, to news and information through their smartphones, and to their parents via text message. Most scholars and practitioners of higher education hope that students are also enjoying some type of positive connection with their respective institutions. Perhaps they have bonded with a student organization, a frequent study partner, or a particularly engaging faculty member. In the past few decades, academic advisors have been increasingly recognized as an ideal connecting point for students (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Light, 2001, Tinto, 1993). Through frequent one-on-one interactions, the advisor can quickly become a vital link between students and institutions. But what if this newly formed connection is unexpectedly shattered? The forms of connectedness mentioned above are, for the most part, consistent and reliable. Cell phones, Facebook, and the Internet are always ready and waiting. Academic advisors, however, may be unavailable when they are needed most, and found in their place may be a strange and unfamiliar face. Though it is rarely a focus of discussion, this happens every day on campuses across the United States; students switch from one advisor to another, from one advising office to another, or from a professional advisor to a faculty advisor. The qualitative exploration of student experiences with advisor transitions may provide valuable information to scholars and practitioners alike.

The quality of academic advising on any given campus is worth monitoring and improving for at least one compelling reason. Many researchers have noted that academic

advisors have a unique opportunity to impact student success and student persistence (Ender, Winston, & Miller 1982; Forrest, 1985; Frost, 1991; Habley, 2004; Hardee, 1959; Kuh et al., 2005; Light, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Advising sessions are typically a one-on-one interaction that occurs once or twice every semester. In such a setting, goals can be identified, barriers to success can be discussed and eventually removed, a clear path to graduation can be agreed upon, and open conversations about subject matter and campus life can occur. All of these things can increase the likelihood of graduation (Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Light, 2001). Given its potential impact, the cost of advising seems relatively cheap compared to the cost of other efforts such as elaborate summer orientation sessions, extravagant student activities, and expensive student-tracking software. However, only *effective* academic advising leads to positive results. Ineffective advising practices that lead to negative student experiences can have a disastrous impact on student persistence. A poor advising experience wastes both the opportunity for a positive student-campus connection and the opportunity to help students understand vital information that would increase their chances of being successful. Thus, the true cost of poor advising can be astronomical. It is therefore essential that academic advising on any campus lead to positive educational experiences that foster meaningful connections between the students and a trusted campus official.

Research Problem Statement

The issue of mandatory advisor transitions within shared advising models has, as of yet, been mostly ignored in research. Because little is known about this particular phenomenon despite its routine occurrence on campus, a qualitative study was warranted to explore how students experience and perceive this transition within a shared academic advising model. As the emphasis on providing reliable academic advising has increased, several distinct models of

advising have been designed and implemented around the United States (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Some institutions use faculty members as advisors while others utilize professionally trained staff members. Some assign advisors by major, while others do so by cohort (such as residence hall, learning community, honors affiliation, athletic team, etc.). Some incorporate specific advising theories and a wide array of advising objectives, while others are more traditional and focus mostly on course scheduling. This variety in advising models is a natural reflection of the variety in academic departments, budgets, staff members, advising philosophies, and institutional needs.

A large number of institutions use shared models of advising that include a combination of faculty advisors and professional advisors. Many also use a combination of centralized and decentralized advising structures. Within these advising models, students typically switch advisors at some predetermined point, perhaps after they have reached a certain number of credits or declared a major (Habley, 2004). Thus, during the first part of their time on campus, students might go through the process of developing a healthy relationship with their advisor only to have to repeat that process once they cross a certain threshold. If fostering a positive student-advisor connection was important to the institution during students' first few semesters on campus, then, logically, a similarly positive connection to the new advisor after this transition is equally crucial.

Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how students experienced the transition from centralized, professional advising to decentralized, faculty advising within a shared advising model at a public research university in the Mid-South. In this pursuit, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How did students ascribe meaning to their lived experience of transition from centralized, professional advisement to decentralized, faculty-based advisement?
2. How did students ascribe meaning to their cumulative advising experience in a model that substantially altered their method of advisement at the approximate midpoint of their time as an undergraduate?
3. How did students ascribe meaning to their perceptions of connectedness during the process of advising transition?

Significance of the Study

Students' experiences within shared advising models need to be fully understood so that institutions can effectively manage this process to ensure a positive student experience, and, as a result, a continued perception of connectedness towards the institution. Advisors and administrators can use the findings of this study to improve students' advising experience at their institutions which in turn result in a variety of positive outcomes, such as graduation and retention rates, academic achievement, and overall student satisfaction with the institution.

While not overwhelming, a significant body of literature exists on broad aspects of academic advising, including delivery methods (Crockett, 1982; Habley, 2004; Hines, 1985; King, 1993), training (Brown, 2008; Kramer, 1985; McArthur, 2005; Nelson, 1997), advisement styles (Allen & Smith, 2008; Crookston, 1972; Daller, Creamer, & Creamer, 1997; Lan & Williams, 2005; O'Banion, 1972; Smith, 2002; Weir, Dickman, & Fuqua, 2005), and the relationship of academic advising and student retention (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Crocket, 1972; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; McArthur, 2005; Metzner, 1989; Noel & Levitz, 2009). However, few, if any, studies have focused on the impact of advising transitions on students. While the largest subsection of advising literature is concerned with

student perceptions of and satisfaction with academic advising (Barnes, Williams, & Archer, 2010; Bitz, 2010; Bloom, Cuevas, Hall, & Evans, 2007; Fielstein, 1992; Hus, 2007; Lowe & Toney, 2000; Mottarella, Fritzsche, & Cerabino, 2004; Propp & Rhodes, 2006; Saving & Keim, 1998), none of the studies have examined the effect of advisor transitions. I could not locate a study that was even tangentially related to the theme of transition within academic advising.

This qualitative study, which examined the experiences of students who, because of their institution's particular advising model, transitioned to a new academic advisor, helps fill this gap in the existing literature.

The findings of this study have implications for both practice and research. Advising administrators will be able to use these findings to re-evaluate their advising models. Professional advisors can be trained to better equip their advisees for a smooth transition. Faculty advisors should be encouraged by the findings to consciously facilitate a stronger relationship with their new advisees. Researchers should be able to build on this study, as it provides them with a ground-level understanding of a significant phenomenon that occurs routinely within higher education. Finally, in the broadest but most important sense, the findings of this study enhance the understandings of individual advisors concerning the advising experience of their students, which in turn make them more capable advisors.

Delimitations

This study was delimited in the following ways:

- Participants were classified as seniors at the time of selection.
- Participants were drawn from the college of arts and sciences at a single public research university in the Mid-South.

- Participants were limited to volunteers who were able to meet the scheduling confines of the study.

Limitations

This study sought to describe themes that arose from students' lived experiences at a single university, and therefore, it was limited in its broad applicability to students in other settings. The goal was to identify themes that were fundamental to the experience of advising transition examined in this study. The findings of this study may only be transferable to students with similar characteristics or to institutions comparable in terms of their size, type, mission, or advising philosophy. This is a fundamental limitation of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal was not to generalize the findings of this study to broader segments of student populations and institutions, but instead, to provide a rich description of the phenomenon and the setting so that readers can determine for themselves if the study findings can be transferred to other situations.

Another limitation of this study was that it only examined the perceptions and experiences of successful students. The participants of this study were successful to the extent that they had not fallen victim to academic dismissal policies or other negative experiences that might have caused them to leave the institution. All participants planned on graduating within one year. Furthermore, it is also possible that a disproportionate number of students who volunteered to participate in this study could have been motivated to share their experiences because they may have been either extremely satisfied or extremely dissatisfied with the advising at the institution. Another potential limitation was the fact that participants were aware that I was a professional advisor, though I had not met with any of them in that capacity. It is possible that my role as a professional advisor affected how they answered focus group and interview

questions. To address this, I made it explicit before each interview and focus group that my role as a researcher was entirely unrelated to my role as an advisor, and I strongly encouraged open and honest communication. Additionally, the fact that participants were asked to describe events that occurred in the past was another limitation of this study because it created the potential for recall bias. The accuracy of their descriptions depended on the degree to which participants were able to recall and describe past events. Finally, decentralized system of faculty advising at this institution may have presented another limitation in this study because each academic department handled both advisor selection and advisor training differently. Whether these differences influenced the findings of this study is not known.

Definitions

This study involved several key terms. The definitions of these terms are as follows:

- *Academic Advising* – Colleges and universities have offered assistance in course selection for students since the 1870s, when they began to allow students to choose electives (as opposed to using a rigid, uniform curriculum for all students) (Frost, 1991). During the 1970s, two influential researchers expanded this definition of advising to include advice and counseling related to all academic and emotional needs with the aim of facilitating holistic personal growth and development during the college years (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972).
- *Faculty Advisor* – Originally, only faculty members were charged with all advising duties on most campuses (Hemwall, 2008). Advising is typically not the primary duty of a faculty member, but rather, it is a secondary responsibility that is assigned on top of the research and teaching expectations (King, 1993; Self, 2008). Therefore, *faculty advisor*,

as the term was used in this study, referred to a faculty member who advised students but whose primary role on campus was instruction and/or research.

- *Professional Advisor* – A professional advisor is a campus official whose primary responsibility is academic advising (King, 1993; Self, 2008). This is most typically a staff member as opposed to an instructional faculty member. In this study, a *professional advisor* was defined as a staff member employed by a central advising office whose primary duty was the advisement of students.
- *Decentralized Advising Model* – A decentralized model has no central advising office, and instead leaves the responsibility of advising to individual advisors or academic units (King, 2008). Within the research setting for this study, a decentralized model was used to advise juniors and seniors.
- *Centralized Advising Model* – The centralized model, developed much more recently, involves a central office that handles all academic advising with a staff of advisors usually led by a director or dean (Crockett, 1982). Within the research setting for this setting, a centralized model was used to advise freshmen and sophomores.
- *Shared Advising Model* – This term can be used to refer to any of several delivery systems that combine the use of faculty and professional advisors (Habley, 2004). These systems often also combine centralized and decentralized components. A majority of institutions use some type of shared advising model though there is a tremendous amount of diversity within this group (Habley, 2004). The advising model implemented within the research setting of this study was considered a shared advising model as it involved the use of both professional advisors and faculty advisors.

- *Connectedness* – The term refers to the summation of students' positive relationships related to their institution, including relationships with classmates, faculty members, staff members, academic departments, student organizations, etc. Several researchers have addressed the significance of this general concept of connectedness as it relates to student satisfaction and persistence (Astin, 1975; Chickering, 1969; Kuh et al, 2008; Tinto, 1993).

Theoretical Perspectives

At the heart of this study was a transitional process in advising experienced by college students. Schlossberg's (1981, 1995) *Transition Model* provided a model for “analyzing human adaptation to transition” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 2) and is likely the most well known theory related to transition. According to Schlossberg, the model applied to drastic life changes as well as very subtle ones. She (1995) defined a transition as “any event, or non-event resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (p. 27). The philosophical underpinnings of Schlossberg's model align with those of this study: “a transition is not so much a matter of change, as of the individual's own perception of the change” (p. 28).

The first step in analyzing the transitional process is to identify the specific type of transition involved. *Anticipated transitions* are those that are foreseen by the individual. *Unanticipated transitions* are changes that are ultimately a surprise to the individual, such as illness or death. A *non-event transition* is defined as an anticipated transition does not occur, such as a miscarriage or the cancellation of a wedding. The next step is to assess the context of the transition, which involves a close examination of the individual's relationship to the

event/nonevent. Questions that might be asked during this step include: Does it involve an event at work, at home, or in some other setting? Did it occur to the individual directly or to a friend, loved-one, or coworker? Once these questions have been answered and the context of the transition is understood, the next step is to examine the impact of the event on the individual. A transition may substantially alter an individual's "relationships, routines, assumptions about self and the world, and roles" (Schlossberg, 1995, p. 33). In this way, the net impact of a transition is essentially the difference between the individual's overall environment before and after the event. Schlossberg (1995) asserted that of these three aspects of transition – type, context, and impact – impact is the most essential to an accurate understanding of the transitional process.

Because the transition under examination in this study involved student relationships with institutional representatives, I paid particular attention to the concept of connectedness in the context of Schlossberg's (1995) impact dimension. In the previous section, I defined connectedness as a summation of an individual's perceived positive relationships including those with classmates, faculty members, staff members, academic departments, student organizations, etc. Because students' relationships with academic advisors were at the center of this study, connectedness was one of the most significant ways in which their post-transition environments differed from their pre-transition environment. Thus, to understand the transition in advising using Schlossberg's model as a guide, particular focus must be given to student perceptions of connectedness when examining the impact dimension. Several researchers have explained the importance of the general concept of connectedness (Astin, 1975; Chickering, 1969; Kuh et al., 2008; Tinto, 1993). I used this as an umbrella term to include notions of student engagement (Kuh et al., 2005), congruence (Miller & McCaffey, 1982; Tinto, 1993), and academic/social integration (Braxton & Lee, 2005; Tinto, 1993). One of the most useful concepts, in the context

of this study, was Tinto's (1993) concept of congruence/incongruence as it related to academic and social integration, which he explained as part of his Theory of Individual Departure. Tinto (1985, 1993, 1999) explained that institutions of higher education are comprised of distinct social and academic systems, and that student satisfaction and well-being are largely a result of the degree to which students perceive that they are a part of those systems. If students do not achieve a perception of personal integration into these systems, then they are left with a sense of incongruence between themselves and the institution. Furthermore, if students perceive that no representative of the institution cares about their success and well-being, a sense of isolation may overtake them. According to Tinto (1993), these feelings of incongruence and isolation are the primary reasons that students leave their institution, and are responsible for a greater proportion of student departure than academic probation and dismissal.

Critical in causing or preventing students' sense of incongruence are their day-to-day interactions with students, faculty, and staff. According to Tinto (1993), these interactions "may influence individuals' judgments about the degree to which the institution, as reflected in the actions of its representatives, is committed to student welfare. These influence, in turn, the development of individual commitment to the institution and therefore decisions as to continued persistence" (p. 117). Because academic advising is a part of this process by virtue of consisting of routine non-classroom interactions between students and faculty or staff members, it plays a role in students' perceptions of connectedness. Habley (1994) highlighted this unique potential of the academic advisor when he observed that "academic advising is the only structured activity on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution" (p. 10). In Tinto's language, if academic advising produces a series of positive interactions between the students and institutional representatives,

this can reduce students' perceptions of incongruence and isolation. If instead advising experiences are mostly negative, an opposite affect may occur. Considering that academic advising is, as Habley (1994) pointed out, often a mandatory activity, it is almost certain to play a role in students' overall perception of connectedness.

Other researchers have written about the relationship between academic advising and connectedness. Light (2001) commented on the "obvious idea that part of a great college education depends upon human relationships" (p. 85) and then identified academic advising as a fundamental part of this process. Miller and McCaffrey (1982) suggested that institutions should focus on ensuring congruency between the needs of students and institutional environment, and, in that pursuit, should foster positive, intimate, meaningful relationships. Kuh et al.'s (2005) explanation of the role of academic advising in student engagement offered perhaps the most straightforward, concise treatment of the concept. Kuh et al. (2005) explained that advising is "a way to connect students to the campus and help them feel that someone is looking out for them" (p. 214). Terminology aside, the concept of connectedness is a fundamental part of how students experience college, and their interactions with academic advisors can greatly shape their perception of connectedness. In this way, connectedness is an important aspect of Schlossberg's (1995) impact dimension in the context of this study.

In addition to the three dimensions of the transition itself, Schlossberg (1995) explained that one must also examine factors related to the experiencing the transition. She identified four dimensions, which she referred to as the *4 S's*. The *situation* dimension refers to the details of the transition itself, including the cause, timing, duration, concurrent stressors, etc. The *self* dimension is comprised of characteristics related to the individual. Personal and demographic factors such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status are relevant, as are psychological factors

such as personal outlook and values. The third *S* is the *support* dimension, which refers to the social support system of friends and family that surrounds the individual and can help him or her adjust to the post-transition environment. Finally, the *strategies* dimension includes any personal coping strategies an individual may possess. Individuals will vary in their ability to control the transition, its meaning, and the personal stress it may create. Ultimately, each of these dimensions will be either an asset or a liability for the individual in terms of adjusting to the transition.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the purpose and general parameters of the study that explored the experiences of students who transitioned from a professional academic advisor in a centralized setting to a faculty advisor in a departmental setting. The study fills a distinct gap in existing research and has a variety of practical implications. In addition to the significance of the study, I described study delimitations, limitations, and definitions. Finally, I discussed the theoretical framework that informed the central concepts examined in this study, including the phenomenon of transition and sense of connectedness.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The body of literature that identifies academic advising as a significant topic within the realm of higher education is substantial (Ender et al., 1982; Frost, 1991; Forrest, 1985; Habley, 2004; Hardee, 1959; Kuh et al., 2005; Light, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These studies have focused on a wide range of topics including delivery methods, advisement styles, training, and assessment. Furthermore, academic advising has been a subtopic of a wide range of other studies focused on student success and retention. In this chapter, I reviewed the literature relevant to this study, which I organized into four broad categories: (a) a brief history of academic advising, (b) the significance of academic advising, (c) the delivery of academic advising services, and (d) the academic advising experience.

To locate references for this comprehensive review, I consulted several online databases. I accessed the *Ebsco Academic Search Premier*, *JSTOR (Journal Storage)*, and *ProQuest Direct* databases via the University of Arkansas Library website. I used the following keywords for each database with the results limited to peer-reviewed articles published in the United States: “academic advising,” “academic advisor,” “academic adviser,” “academic counseling,” and “academic counselor.” The results represented the full set of articles in each database that mentioned academic advising anywhere in the document. The number of articles was manageable to the extent that no further limitations or keywords were necessary. The *Ebsco Academic Search Premier* database contained 206 articles, the *JSTOR* database contained 85 articles, and the *ProQuest Direct* database contained 55 articles.

I used several other methods of locating relevant literature. I conducted a similar search as the one described above to locate 14 relevant books, chapters, and reports in the University of

Arkansas Library Catalog. Furthermore, I examined the contents of every issue of the *NACADA Journal*. This journal is published by the National Academic Advising Association and therefore every article is related to academic advising. Finally, I searched the reference lists of literature I had already acquired to locate additional items of relevance.

History of Academic Advising

Before the late 19th Century there was no need for academic advisors at institutions of higher education. Up to that point, a single curriculum was typically administered to all students (Kuhn, 2008; Thelin, 2004). By the 1870s, however, institutions began to allow students a degree of choice in their curriculum (Thelin & Hirschy, 2009). Upon becoming president of Harvard, Charles Eliot advocated in his inaugural address for the use of an “elective system,” in which students were permitted near absolute freedom in terms of which courses they took as part of their bachelor’s degree (Cook, 2009; Eliot, 1905). Eliot identified the need for advisement within this system in a speech he gave in 1885: “In choosing his course [the student] will naturally seek aid from teachers and friends who have intimate knowledge of him” (Eliot, 1905, p. 127). Eliot (1905) essentially defined what would become known developmental academic advising almost a century later:

When a young man whom I never saw before asks me what studies he had better take in college, I am quite helpless, until he tells me what he likes and what he dislikes to study, what kinds of exertion are pleasurable to him, what sports he cares for, what reading interests him, what his parents and grandparents were in the world, and what he means to be. In short, I can only show him how to think out the problem for himself with such lights as he has and nobody else can have (p. 127).

Over the next several decades, institutions such as Johns Hopkins University, Harvard University, Boston University, and Pennsylvania State University began implementing systems of academic advising, and by 1920 formalized advising systems were commonplace in American higher education (Cook, 2009).

Throughout the next few decades, student personnel systems proliferated, and with them the use of academic advisors as active facilitators of student development (Kuhn, 2008). In 1937, the American Council on Education (ACE) defined the activities it felt institutions of higher education were responsible for beyond traditional classroom instruction. Academic advisement was one of several activities listed: “assisting the student throughout his college residence to determine upon his courses of instruction in light of his past achievements, vocational and personal interests, and diagnostic findings” and “assisting the student to clarify his occupational aims and his educational plans in relation to them” (ACE, 1937, p. 41). An expanded report in 1949 further clarified the role of academic advising as an essential function of student affairs by identifying the need for “skilled counselors trained in the art of stimulating self-understanding without directing decisions” (ACE, 1949, p. 5).

By the 1970s, student development theories such as Chickering’s theory of identity development (1969), which described the holistic personal development that college students undergo as undergraduates, gained national attention. At the same time, colleges and universities were dealing with dramatically diversified student bodies (Thelin, 2004). These developments led many to redefine and expand the scope of academic advising (Crookston, 1972; Ender et al., 1984; O’Banion, 1972). This new approach, termed *developmental academic advising*, was aimed at incorporating personal, emotional, and vocational needs of students into advising. Combined with soaring enrollments and an increasing focus on advising as a factor in student

success and retention, the developmental approach led to further proliferation and diversification of academic advising systems throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Cook, 2009; Ender et al., 1984; Habley, 2004; Kuhn, 2008; Thelin, 2004). By the 1980s, seven distinct models of academic advising were in use (Habley, 2004), and the use of developmental advising approaches was widespread (Kuhn, 2008).

Frost (2000) summarized the history of academic advising by dividing it into three distinct eras. The first is pre-1870s, when a concept of academic advising did not exist and activities that might fit the modern definition of advising rarely took place. Throughout the second era, from roughly 1870 to 1970, academic advising became a defined activity on campuses nationwide, and was generally accepted as a service that institutions were responsible for providing. The third and current era began in 1970s when academic advising became a studied phenomenon.

Significance of Academic Advising

Academic advising is an aspect of American colleges and universities that has evolved over time into a significant topic within higher education research (Frost, 2000). This significance lies in the many potentially positive outcomes of academic advising. Many scholars have noted the role of academic advising in fostering student success (Addus, Chen, & Khan, 2007; Bahr, 2008; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001; Metzner, 1989). Others have pointed to the importance of student interactions with faculty and staff outside of the classroom, which is a fundamental result of academic advising (Chickering, 1969; Habley, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976; Tinto, 1993). Still others have focused on academic advising as a factor in student retention (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Crocket, 1972; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; McArthur, 2005; Metzner, 1989; Noel & Levitz,

2009; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2005). This section discusses each of these outcomes in detail.

Academic Achievement

A handful of studies have directly measured the impact of academic advising on GPA, or, more broadly defined, student success. Metzner (1989) did so in a quantitative study conducted at a public urban university in a large Midwestern city. During a fall semester, questionnaires were filled out by 1033 freshmen, of which 745 eventually persisted at least to the subsequent fall semester and 288 did not enroll for that semester. Twenty students that skipped the spring semester but re-enrolled for the fall were excluded. “Perceived quality of academic advising” was one of several variables measured by the questionnaires. By comparing this variable with registration data and GPA figures, Metzner (1989) reported, in part, that high-quality advising, as perceived by students, had a positive effect on GPA while low-quality advising had a negative effect, to the point of affecting student attrition.

Campbell and Campbell (1997) tested the effect of a mentor program at a large metropolitan university using a matched pairs design. After examining the performance of 339 pairs of undergraduate students (mentored with non-mentored), the researchers found that the students who had been assigned to a faculty mentor achieved higher GPA figures than those who had not (specifically, 2.45 versus 2.29). Kirk-Kuwaye and Nishida (2001) also measured the impact of advising on GPA. The researchers randomly assigned students within an arts and sciences college at a large public university who were on probation to one of two groups: one that would receive high advisor involvement and one that would receive low advisor involvement. This process was repeated with a new group of students for three consecutive semesters. Similar to Campbell and Campbell (1997), the researchers found that advisor

involvement had a positive impact on GPA outcomes. They further concluded that the effect was greatest when the level of advisor involvement was extremely high.

Most recently, Bahr (2008) measured the effect of advising on student attainment of educational goals as part of a larger study. He (2008) used a “three-level hierarchical logistic regression to execute the discrete-time event history analysis of successful remediation in math” (p. 78). Using institutional data from a single cohort of first-time college freshmen at a community college in California, Bahr (2008) tracked the students for six consecutive years regardless of institutional transfer. The two outcome variables involved were: 1) whether those students who were required to remediate in math did so, and 2) whether those students who indicated interest in transferring to a four-year institution did so. The researcher reported that academic advising had a significant positive effect on both of these outcomes, indicating a link between advising and educational attainment. This effect was even more pronounced in under-prepared students.

Student Interactions with Faculty and Staff Members

Academic advising is, by definition, a structured interaction between students and faculty or staff members that occurs outside of the classroom. Several researchers have noted the significance of these types of non-classroom interactions. Perhaps the most influential work done on the topic was that of Pascarella and Terenzini (1976, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1995), who have completed several studies on the topic. In a study (1976) conducted at Syracuse University, the researchers examined a random sample of 500 freshmen enrolled in the arts and sciences college. Analysis of questionnaire data indicated a relationship between students’ amount of informal interaction with faculty members and their perceptions of their college experience, both academically and non-academically. In a subsequent study, Pascarella and Terenzini (1978)

examined the effect of these interactions on freshman year educational outcomes.

Questionnaires were administered to a random sample of 1,008 incoming freshmen, follow-up questionnaires were given to 766 of those students midway through the fall semester, and a third wave of questionnaires were given to 528 students during the spring semester. These data were combined with freshman year GPA figures collected during the summer and various skills and aptitude information that had been collected during the year. Analysis yielded a statistically significant link between informal faculty-student interaction and academic performance, as well as self-perceived intellectual and personal development during the freshman year.

After these initial studies, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have continued their research on this topic. In an exhaustive review of related research, they identified several positive outcomes of non-classroom interactions between students and faculty members, including the following:

...perceptions of intellectual growth during college, increases in intellectual orientation and curiosity, liberalization of social and political values, growth in autonomy and independence, orientation toward scholarly careers, interpersonal skills and sensitivity, educational aspirations, persistence in college and educational degree attainment, and women's interest in, and choice of, sex-atypical (male-dominated) career fields (e.g., law, business, medicine, engineering, and academia)" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995, p. 31).

Student Retention

Student retention is affected by a myriad of factors, including student satisfaction, academic performance, and social integration (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Crocket, 1972; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; McArthur, 2005; Metzner, 1989; Noel & Levitz, 2009; NSSE, 2005). Academic advising impacts some of those factors, and therefore,

impacts student retention. For example, the previously mentioned study by Metzner (1989) illustrated how academic advising influenced student retention rates through increased GPA outcomes. Because of the complex nature of student retention data, however, studies that attempt to directly measure the relationship between advising and retention are scarce. Nonetheless, evidence does exist. Two national surveys (Habley & McClanahan, 2004; NSSE, 2005) conducted by well-known higher education research organizations provide the most authoritative evidence of a link between academic advising and student retention. Habley and McClanahan (2004) summarized the findings of a national survey of retention practices conducted by ACT. The survey was sent to 2,995 institutions with 1,061 responding. Academic advising was one of three broad categories of retention practices that had the most impact nationwide. Of 82 individual retention practices, *advising interventions with selected student populations* was viewed as the third most impactful practice, ranked behind *tutoring program* and *freshman seminar*.

A survey equally large in scope, the National Survey of Student Engagement, reported similar findings (NSSE, 2005). It surveyed randomly selected first-year students and seniors attending four-year universities and combined their responses with other institutional data. The participants included 844,000 students from 972 institutions. One of the findings was that students who were most satisfied with academic advising were also most likely to have high levels of engagement at their institutions. Student engagement is a well-documented predictor of student retention (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto 1993) and therefore, serves as an intermediary that links advising and retention. Finally, the 2009 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities survey conducted by Noel and Levitz (2009) can be used in a similar way to link academic advising to student retention via overall student satisfaction. The survey

was conducted over three years and involved 727 institutions and over 500,000 participants. In one section of the survey, students were asked to rate the importance of 11 institutional characteristics to their overall education experience. Academic advising ranked first (most important) among students at public four-year institutions, second among students at private four-year institutions, and third among students at two-year institutions.

Delivery of Academic Advising Services

A previous section of this chapter noted the proliferation of academic advising as a fundamental component of student success and retention efforts at most institutions in the United States. As a result, a myriad of delivery systems for academic advising is in use today. Some systems use faculty advisement, others use professional staff members, and many use both (Crockett, 1982; King, 1993). Administrative structures for academic advising can range from a simple, faculty-only model to an elaborate design in which cohorts of students are matched with advisors that can best serve them (Habley, 2004). In this section, I define faculty advisors and professional advisors, and illustrate the differences between the two. Then, I describe Habley's (2004) seven models of academic advising and discuss the prevalence of each.

Types of Academic Advisors

The most basic variable associated with the delivery of academic advising is whether the academic advisors used are faculty members or professional staff members. As noted earlier, all advising duties fell upon faculty members until the second half of the 20th Century when institutions began to hire professional advisors. Between 1987 and 2003, the use of full-time professional academic advisors versus faculty advisors had risen from 39% to 64% (Habley, 2004). The difference between these two types of advisors is fairly intuitive. King (1993) summarized these differences. A faculty advisor was a faculty member whose primary duty was

teaching and/or conducting research with academic advising as a secondary duty, while professional advisors were staff members hired with academic advising as their primary duty. Because faculty members must divide their time among multiple tasks, they tended to spend only between 1% and 5% of their time advising students, whereas professional advisors were able to devote the majority of their time to advising duties. Also, faculty and professional advisors were considered experts in different areas. A fundamental requirement for all faculty members was that they be experts in their particular discipline. As a result, faculty advisors excelled in helping students understand the importance of their major, career options within that field, choosing potential research topics, etc. Professional advisors tended to be well-versed in student development and counseling theories, and thus were better equipped to assist students with emotional and social needs, personal and career development, and understanding campus culture and procedures. A final, dramatic difference concerned advisee load. Faculty members were typically only assigned a small number of students, which allowed them to get to know their advisees on a more personal level. Professional advisors, however, often advise 300 or more advisees at any one time, risking the loss of such a personal connection with each advisee.

The amount of time that faculty members had to devote to advising has even further decreased since King made these observations. Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) observed that the teaching expectations for most faculty members had increased over that last 30 years. A greater proportion of faculty members' time and resources were being allocated to teaching large undergraduate classes. Over the same time period, research expectations had also increased as the publication output had increased considerably, even at institutions not traditionally defined as research universities. This "sharpened focus" of faculty activity on teaching and research had resulted in other duties "being relegated more and more to the periphery" (Schuster &

Finkelstein, 2006, p. 123). As academic advising is one of several other faculty duties, the fraction of time left for faculty members to advise students is miniscule.

There have been several studies that compared the effectiveness of faculty and professional advisors. Jaffe and Huba (1990) developed and administered a survey to 404 of 528 graduating seniors in an engineering program to compare perceptions of faculty and professional advisors. Analysis revealed that students who were assigned to faculty advisors sought out advising more often and were more satisfied than those who were assigned to professional advisors. In a strikingly similar study, Miville and Sedlacek (1995) drew essentially the same conclusions but at a different university. They also developed their own instrument based on the institution's advising mission statement. Like Jaffe and Huba (1990), they found that students, when given a choice, sought the advice of faculty advisors more often than that of professional advisors.

Davis (2001) used a standardized survey instrument related to advising with 198 students who were randomly assigned to either a faculty advisor, a residence hall advisor, or a professional advisor. While students were generally satisfied with both types of advisors, professional advisors were rated higher on all items of significance and were generally viewed as being more developmental in their approach. One final example is Lynch's (2004) study that used data involving 28,895 students at a large public university who completed an online survey during course registration. The results of this study contradicted some of the traditional characterizations of professional and faculty advisors. The researcher reported that students perceived faculty advisors as more accessible and more willing to help than their professional counterparts. Lynch speculated that, in this case, the advantages of faculty advisors (e.g., low advisee load, flexible schedule, etc.) outweighed the disadvantages.

Academic Advising Models

At the broadest level, organizational models of academic advising can be divided into three groups: *decentralized*, *centralized*, and *shared* (Pardee, 2004). Just as faculty advisors were at one time the only variety of advisors, the decentralized model was the only variety of advising model. In this model, all advising happens in the advisor's office without the use of any coordinated advising office. As one might suspect, the fully centralized model is the opposite – all advising in this model happens within a formal advising office typically lead by some type of full-time advising coordinator. A shared model is simply a mixture of centralized and decentralized characteristics, typically involving both professional and faculty advisors (Pardee, 2004). These characteristics (centralized versus decentralized, faculty advisors versus professional advisors) can ultimately be mixed in different ways to produce several distinct advising models. By 1983, with the Second National Survey of Academic Advising, Habley (2004) had identified seven distinct organizational models for the delivery of academic advising services that were in use at that time. The majority of researchers, when describing or studying advising models, have since used this typology (Frost, 1991; Habley, 1997, 2004; King, 1993; Kuhn, 2008). It is summarized below with the prevalence of each model:

- *Faculty Only (25%)*: All students are assigned to individual faculty members for advising. Advising in this model is completely decentralized without any type of an advising office or a coordinator.
- *Supplementary (17%)*: Like the Faculty Only model, all students are assigned to individual faculty members, but a central advising office is also used to provide general information. Students can find general advising support in the central office, but are still formally advised by their assigned faculty advisors.

- *Split (27%)*: A central office advises defined groups of students while faculty advisors handle all other students. In this model, an advising center might handle all undeclared students or probationary students, while all students with majors and good standing are advised by assigned faculty advisors.
- *Dual (5%)*: In this model, all students are assigned to two advisors – a professional advisor and a faculty advisor. Each advisor covers his or her area of expertise; students will meet with a faculty advisor to discuss their major and related issues, and with a professional advisor to discuss general policies, degree requirements, major selection, etc.
- *Total Intake (6%)*: All students begin in a centralized advising office and are advised by that office until they meet certain requirements. Once those requirements are satisfied, students transition to an assigned faculty advisor.
- *Satellite (7%)*: No institution-wide advising system is in place. Instead, each college, school, or department decides how to handle the delivery of advising services.
- *Self-Contained (14%)*: This model uses a central advising office from start to finish. All students are advised by professional advisors throughout the entirety of their enrollment at the institution.

Academic Advising Experience

Several factors shape students' experience of academic advising. Firstly, the style and approach of the academic advisor has a significant impact on how students perceive the advising experience (Allen & Smith, 2008; Crookston, 1972; Daller et al., 1997; Lan & Williams, 2005; O'Banion, 1972; Smith, 2002; Weir et al., 2005). The other half of the equation is how students perceive these advising services, specifically the expectations they have of advisors, the criteria they use to judge them, and the language they use to describe them. Such topics have been

widely studied (Addus et al., 2010; Bitz, 2010; Bloom et al., 2007; Fielstein, 1992; Hus, 2007; Lowe & Toney, 2000; Mottarella et al., 2004; Propp & Rhodes, 2006; Saving & Keim, 1998). In this section, I explore research involving both the styles of advisement implemented by academic advisors and the perceptions of their students.

Academic Advising Styles

Two articles of the same year (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972) appear to have been remarkably influential in advancing the idea that multiple styles of academic advising exist, and that one method may be more effective than another. Crookston (1972) defined the style used in traditional academic advising as *prescriptive*, which comprised the majority of academic advising that had occurred up to that point. He observed that using this style, an advisor acted in much the same way as a medical doctor would. The advisor addresses the immediate needs of the student (typically assistance in the selection of courses) and then selects a remedy (a list of appropriate courses). The communication in this type of advising session is essentially one-way. Crookston (1972) then defined and advocated an alternative advising style based on two-way communication and a mature relationship between advisors and students. This *developmental* advising style seeks to address a variety of developmental tasks and to facilitate a dynamic, educational process.

O'Banion (1972) reported many of the same observations. He (1972) wrote that the modern purpose of academic advising was “to help the student choose a program of study which will serve him in the development of his total potential. As such, academic advising is a central and important activity in the process of education” (p. 62). O'Banion (1972) identified a logical progression of advising tasks that should occur during any advising session: “1) exploration of life goals, 2) exploration of vocational goals, 3) program choice, 4) course choice, 5) scheduling

courses” (p. 62). Thus, both Crookston and O’Banion, in their respective articles, were some of the first scholars to observe and categorize multiple advising styles.

Other researchers have since defined additional advising styles based on a mixture of theory, student preferences, and observed behavior. Most often, these advising styles are essentially sub-categories of the broad *developmental* style defined by Crookston (1972) and O’Banion (1972). Daller et al. (1997) used qualitative methods to identify several distinct advising styles used by professional advisors at a large mid-Atlantic research university. The researchers observed ten advisors as they conducted one-on-one advising sessions with a total of 35 students. After the observation period, they conducted personal interviews with the advisors. Using qualitative analysis, they identified three distinct styles. Three of the observed advisors exhibited the *counselor* style, as their primary objectives were to ensure that students felt comfortable with them and to address the full range of academic, social, and emotional needs. Four of the advisors used the *scheduler* style in which the advisor’s main focus was to be knowledgeable about university policies and campus resources. These advisors typically focused strictly on academic issues. Finally, three of the advisors employed the *teacher* style in which the main objective was facilitating self-sufficiency in students. This type of advisor initiated conversations about topics he or she felt that students should understand, regardless of whether they specifically inquired about those issues. Obviously the goal of this style was education.

Lan and Williams (2005) also identified several distinct advising styles but did so based on the perceptions of doctoral students. Based on the information from five personal interviews with doctoral students, the researchers identified four advising styles using terms traditionally associated with parenting styles: *authoritative*, *authoritarian*, *permissive*, and *uninvolved*. A sample of 131 students at a large, public, Mid-Southwestern university drawn from each

academic college was given a questionnaire with a combination of Likert-scale and open-ended questions concerning their advisors. Data from the questionnaires indicated that all four styles were in use by advisors at that institution which, according to the researchers, validated the typology they had developed.

Still other advising styles have been identified. Glennen and Baxley (1985) defined an *intrusive* advising style, which is now widely used (Smith, 2007). Advisors who are extremely proactive in initiating contact with their advisees exemplify this style. The goal is to increase the frequency of interactions between students and their advisor to monitor progress and quickly resolve problems. More recently, Bloom (2002) applied the organizational development theory known as Appreciative Inquiry to academic advising to define an *appreciative* advising style. When implementing this appreciative approach, the advisor maintains a markedly positive tone, and focuses on doing “whatever [the advisor] can to empower [students] to fulfill [their] goals and dreams” (Bloom, 2002, p. 1).

Finally, Smith and Allen (2006) defined advising style in terms of the possible academic advising functions in which an advisor might engage. The researchers examined relevant literature since 1972 (the year when Crookston and O’Banion articles were published) and identified 12 possible advising functions: *overall connect* – helping students connect to academic, career, and life goals, *major connect* – helping students choose and connect with a major, *gen[eral] ed[ucation] connect* – helping students value and understand general education, *degree connect* – helping students select the type of degree to pursue, *out-of-class connect* – helping students with non-classroom activities, *referral academic* – helping students utilize campus resources that will help them academically, *referral nonacademic* – helping students address nonacademic issues, *how things work* – helping students understand the policies and

procedures of the institution, *accurate information* – helping students by providing accurate information about degree requirements, *skills abilities interests* – helping students choose courses based on their own skills and abilities, *know as individual* – getting to know students on an individual, personal level, and *shared responsibility* – helping students by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own education. The importance of these functions as perceived by students has been verified in two separate studies conducted by the researchers (Allen & Smith, 2008; Smith & Allen, 2006).

Student Perceptions of Academic Advising

Recent research examining student perceptions of and their experiences with academic advising is plentiful. Studies that identify specific characteristics of advising that students either like or dislike represent the largest subgroup. Lowe and Toney (2000) surveyed 600 students within a teacher education program to determine, in part, which advising responsibilities were perceived as most important by various groups of students. Students who were sophomores and juniors valued *certification requirements, graduation requirements, scholarship information, career options, and advisor availability* the most. Seniors valued the same list of items with the subtraction of *career options* and the addition of the *advisor's ability to listen to problems*. Post-baccalaureate and graduate students also exhibited similar results. Alexander, Kukowski, and Dexter (2003) identified several desired advising characteristics by conducting qualitative interviews with 14 graduating senior business students. The researchers reported that students want *advising sessions that lasted at least 30 minutes, advising sessions that were one-on-one* (as opposed to a group advising session), *advisors that have been well-trained, advisors that build personal relationships, and advisors that enjoy their job and helping students*. In addition, students preferred to have a constant advisor rather than having to frequently switch advisors.

Mottarella et al. (2004) employed a policy capturing approach, which was intended to examine how individuals weighed options to make decisions and to identify advising characteristics that affected student satisfaction with advising. By studying 468 participants, the researchers determined that students prefer an advisor that knows them and provides warmth and support during advising sessions. This preference was more important than the actual advising approach used, and it did not significantly fluctuate across various student personality differences. The relationship between student characteristics and student advising preferences was the focus of a study conducted by Chun-Mei Zhao, Golde, and McCormick (2007) involving doctoral students and their advisors. Specifically, they sought to determine whether discipline affects students' preferences for advisor and/or advising behaviors. By analyzing data from a national survey that included 27 universities and 11 disciplines, the researchers confirmed that both of these types of student preferences varied significantly according to the academic discipline of the students.

Two recent quantitative studies have resulted in more systematic ways of organizing student perceptions of advising (Barnes et al., 2010; Bitz, 2010). Bitz (2010) collected survey data from 113 freshmen at a small public university to examine their views on the advising relationships they had experienced. Factor analysis yielded three constructs of advising: *level of advisor concern*, *frequency of contact*, and *quality of advising relationship*. According to the researchers, student perceptions in these categories comprised their overall satisfaction with advising. Barnes et al. (2010) had similar goals but used qualitative analysis of open-ended survey questions from 2,391 graduate students at a large public university. From these data, the researchers identified four positive and three negative advisor attributes that were routinely

mentioned by students. The positive attributes were *accessible, helpful, socializing, and caring*. The negative attributes were *inaccessible, unhelpful, and uninterested*.

Other researchers have sought to directly measure student preferences for developmental or prescriptive advising approaches (Hale et al., 2009; Smith, 2002). Smith (2002) used a qualitative study involving 34 first-year students at a large public university that participated in one of four focus groups. The researcher found that overall the students preferred a prescriptive style, and this preference may evolve over time towards a more developmental approach as students became more experienced. A quantitative study conducted by Hale et al. (2009) used survey data from 429 undergraduate students at a large public university to determine whether students preferred a developmental or a prescriptive advising style. Analysis of the data exhibited a very strong preference for developmental advising, and revealed that 80% of the students were receiving the type of advising they preferred.

Chapter Summary

In this review of the literature, I summarized research findings related to four aspects of academic advising that were relevant to this study. First, I examined the historical context of academic advising within the larger realm of higher education literature. I then explained the significance of academic advising by identifying the significant outcomes of academic advising. These potential outcomes of academic advising were: academic achievement, interaction among students and faculty or staff members, and student retention. Third, I summarized the possible methods of delivery of academic advising services. Two types of advisors and seven types of advising models were identified. Finally, I examined the academic advising experience itself. Two important factors were related to the advising experience for students: the style of

advisement implemented by the advisor, and the way students perceived the advising experience, including their language and evaluative criteria.

The review of relevant literature revealed that student experiences with academic advisors were complex and multifaceted. However, much of the literature used the simplistic, one-dimensional measure of general student satisfaction to evaluate various advising practices or delivery methods. A study that further dissected the advising experience was therefore well-warranted to provide a more complete sense of why students are satisfied or dissatisfied with the academic advising they have received and what impact this may have on their development, motivation, and relationship with their institution. The current study attempted to fill this void in the existing research by examining student perceptions of a very specific aspect of the advising experience – mandatory advising transitions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The issue of mandatory advisor transitions is an unstudied phenomenon within higher education literature despite its routine occurrence at institutions of all types. This study attempted to provide insight into this phenomenon as it was experienced and perceived by students. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students within a shared academic advising model who had transitioned from a professional academic advisor in a centralized advising office to a faculty academic advisor in a decentralized system.

The study sought to answer three primary research questions:

- How did students ascribe meaning to their lived experience of transition from centralized, professional advisement to decentralized, faculty-based advisement?
- How did students ascribe meaning to their cumulative advising experience in a model that substantially altered their method of advisement at the approximate midpoint of their time as an undergraduate?
- How did students ascribe meaning to their perceptions of connectedness during the process of advising transition?

This chapter provides an overview of the methods used in this phenomenological study, including a description of the central phenomenon, research participants, research setting, role of the researcher, data collection and analysis procedures, and strategies used to establish trustworthiness.

Research Design

This study warranted a qualitative, phenomenological research design. Creswell (2008) explained that qualitative research was appropriate when the study was “an exploration in which

little is known about the problem” or “a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon” (p. 51). Within qualitative research, several distinct designs exist including case study, biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, hermeneutics, and heuristics (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is most appropriate when the research problem involves a lived human experience and is nearly or completely unstudied (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1984). Moustakas (1994) characterized phenomenological research as the “first method of knowledge” (p. 41) because it establishes a ground-level understanding of a particular human experience.

Phenomenology was the most appropriate approach for this study because it examined the phenomenon of advising transition within a shared advising model as experienced by students, which had been previously ignored in the existing research. The goal of phenomenology is not just to produce general descriptions of an experience, but rather, it is to reach a particular type of understanding based on the existential philosophy of the 19th and 20th centuries. Edmund Husserl is widely credited with providing the original philosophical underpinnings of modern phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1983). According to Husserl, every conscious human experience is comprised of two fundamental components: *noesis* and *noema* (Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, 1991). The noema is the object of an experience as that object exists in the natural world. The noesis is one’s perception of that object. If the noema is the object itself, then the noesis is the idea of that object (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology explores both the noesis and the noema of a singular human experience. It seeks to fully describe what was experienced and how it was experienced.

Many authors and philosophers have offered examples and metaphors to help illustrate this notion of subjective human experience (Hammond et al., 1991). Husserl’s preferred

metaphor involved a common six-sided die used in games of chance. He described how one can come to a complete perception of these dice only after looking at all sides (Hammond et al., 1991). Moustakas (1994) used as his example a scenario involving an individual's perception of a tree in nature. The example that I have found most useful was in Walker Percy's (1975) essay "Loss of the Creature." Though he used this metaphor to advance his own existential philosophy and did not address phenomenology directly, it was nonetheless a very useful way of understanding the general concept of subjective perception. Percy compared how two individuals might have experienced the Grand Canyon. The explorer credited with discovering the Grand Canyon, Garcia Lopez de Cardenas, came across the now infamous geologic formation unexpectedly. He had no previous thoughts about the canyon because he had not known it existed. Modern-day tourists, on the other hand, come upon the Grand Canyon with their own set of preconceptions about what it is. They have seen postcards, read guidebooks, and discussed it with other travelers. Percy asserts that because of these preconceptions, tourists have lost the ability to truly see the Grand Canyon for what it is. They will each have their own subjective experience as they come upon it.

Generally speaking, Percy's metaphor outlined the two roles phenomenological researchers must assume. The first task is to experience the phenomenon as an explorer would, from an absolutely naïve state of mind, in order to discover the "creature" itself. To achieve this, they use Husserl's *epoché* and *reduction* processes to suspend all preconceptions they may have in order to return to the experience with an unfettered mind (Moustakas, 1994). This allows a noematic description of the experience – an objective description of the phenomenon itself. The second task for researchers is to experience the phenomenon as a tourist would. They use the process of *imaginative variation* to reflect upon how the phenomenon was subjectively

experienced from all possible perspectives. It is therefore more accurate to say that researchers explore the phenomenon from the perspectives of as many tourists as possible. The result, then, of phenomenology is a description of the object itself and the object as it is perceived; the explorer's experience and the tourist's experience; the noema and the noesis; the thing and the idea of the thing.

Therefore, in the context of this study, the essential tasks for which I was responsible as a phenomenological researcher were:

- To suspend all preconceptions I may have had regarding the experience of a mandated transition from one advisor to another within a single advising system
- To then return to and describe this experience from a fresh, utterly naïve frame of mind based on data collected using phenomenological methods
- To describe the experience from the subjective perspectives of the students I interviewed
- To combine these perspectives into one authoritative description of the true essence of this experience.

Description of Central Phenomenon

The phenomenon explored in this study was how students experienced and perceived a mandatory transition in advisors within shared advising models. Specifically, I explored the transition from a centralized advising office that used professional academic advisors to decentralized, departmental advising that used faculty members which occurred when a student reached the rank of junior. Since this study entailed a qualitative exploration of a relatively unstudied research problem, it did not involve the examination of specific variables or constructs. The findings of this study were in the form of rich descriptions, not comparisons.

Accordingly, the research questions were intentionally open-ended to allow the true essence of the student experience to come to light.

Description of Research Setting

The research setting for this study was a public research university in the Mid-South with a total enrollment of slightly over 23,000 students at the beginning of the 2011 fall semester. It was a comprehensive, doctorate-granting institution with a large proportion of undergraduates and served as a flagship institution for the state. According to the most recent Carnegie Classifications (2010), the undergraduate profile for the institution was as follows: *full-time four-year, more selective, higher transfer in, and primarily residential*. The institution was a research university with *very high research activity*. The university was comprised of six colleges and schools (agriculture, architecture, arts and sciences, business, education and health professions, and engineering) as well as a graduate school and a school of law. This study was limited to students within the college of arts and sciences, which was the largest on campus. It consisted of 19 academic departments, which collectively offered 56 majors across five varieties of bachelor's degrees. Majors were offered in the humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and natural sciences.

At the university level, the academic advising model employed was technically, according to Habley's (2008) definitions, a satellite model. Each college/school was charged with handling all advisement services with the method its administrators saw fit. As a result, several of Habley's (2008) advising models were actually in use across the campus, including the self-contained, split, supplementary, and total-intake models. The college of arts and sciences was the only unit on campus to use the split model. Specifically, the majority of students with fewer than 60 earned credit hours (freshmen and sophomores) were advised in a centralized

advising center by professional advisors, while most students with 60 or more hours (juniors and seniors) were advised by faculty advisors within their individual academic departments. Thus, students who spent most of their time within the arts and sciences college navigated a mandatory advising transition at the approximate midpoint of their undergraduate experience.

The advising center was housed in the same building and on the same floor as the office of the dean of the arts and sciences college. It maintained a comprehensive website with information about degrees, majors, policies, campus resources, etc., and also utilized automated software to track academic progress and student demographics, communicate with students, and handle advising appointments. The center was staffed by six full-time, professional advisors and one director. These advisors all had advanced degrees in various fields such as counseling, higher education, liberal arts, social work, and law. They were trained extensively when hired, and were annually evaluated primarily on skills and abilities related directly to advisement. These advisors spent roughly two-thirds of an average day in face-to-face contact with students, and the majority of their remaining time communicating with students via email or telephone. Advisors were assigned their own advertised area of expertise, but students were ultimately given the freedom to meet with an advisor of their choosing. In addition to the professional advisors, the office employed a full-time administrative professional that handled phone calls, made appointments, and managed the welcome desk. Two graduate assistants were housed in the office and advised students on a limited basis as well as assisted with other assigned projects. The advising center also, when possible, utilized multiple student interns and up to eight undergraduate student volunteers (referred to as ambassadors).

Faculty members who advised juniors and seniors were chosen as advisors by their department chairs. As should be expected within decentralized advisement (Habley, 2008), the

following factors varied by department: method of advisee assignment, training/evaluation of advisors, method of appointment-making, length of appointments, system of record-keeping, location of advisement, and objectives of advisors. Most faculty advisors within the college were instructional faculty members, and many were tenured professors. A small number of graduate teaching assistants were also used. As such, the primary areas of evaluation for faculty advisors were teaching and/or research. No formal mechanisms were in place for departments to evaluate individual advising performance. There was no central, college-wide coordinator of departmental advisors, and formal training was limited to a handful of seminars offered by the advising center and university-wide advising council each year.

Researcher's Role and Worldview

Phenomenological researchers recognize that they are unavoidably involved in the intersubjectivity that exists among research participants (Moustakas, 1994). Participants in phenomenological studies subjectively experience the examined phenomenon. Phenomenological researchers also have their own subjective understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, a degree of intersubjectivity is shared among the participants and the researcher. In the case of this researcher and this study, some of the most relevant sources of subjectivity came from the fact that I was currently employed as an academic advisor within the research setting. Throughout the study, I worked in the centralized advising office described in the previous section and I advised mostly freshman and sophomore students. My students eventually transitioned to faculty advisors as juniors, and I routinely communicated with both the students and the faculty advisors. Compared to the average researcher or reader, I had an atypically thorough knowledge of academic advising and related topics in higher education due to both my work experience and my status at that time as a doctoral candidate in higher education. I had

worked as a professional academic advisor for over six years total, first at a regional public university and then within the research setting.

I used the epoché (alternately known as bracketing), a technique characteristic of phenomenological research, to address potential biases and preconceptions of the researcher (Creswell, 1998; Van Manen, 1984). This technique is a prerequisite to proper phenomenological data collection and analysis, and allows researchers to recognize their own subjective interpretations in an effort to minimize their impact. It is vital for researchers to reveal any preconceptions or bias that might shape their understanding of the experience under examination. These preconceptions can contaminate researchers' ability to understand the phenomenon itself and the way in which individual research participants experience it. To avoid these contaminants, I used intense self-reflection to step outside my own understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Van Manen (1984) recommended that I "make explicit [my own] understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories in order then to simply not try to forget them again but rather to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character" (p. 9). This process is fundamental to the phenomenological research design – without it phenomenology could not take place (Creswell, 1998; Van Manen, 1984). Before data collection began, I listed all of my conceivable preconceptions and then, once aware of them, strove to suspend these preconceptions as much as humanly possible throughout the research process.

Selection of Research Participants

I used homogenous purposeful sampling to select a group of participants that had all recently experienced a transition from centralized advising to decentralized advising. Creswell (2008) defined this method of sampling as one in which "the researcher purposefully samples

individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics” (p. 216). Assembling such a subgroup is essential for this type of qualitative research. Ultimately, I chose 17 participants who : 1) were enrolled full-time within the college of arts and sciences at a public research university, 2) had been advised continuously in a centralized advising office for at least one year, 3) had transitioned to decentralized advising, 4) had been advised under a decentralized model for at least one year, and 5) were classified as seniors at the time of selection. I identified and recruited participants by attending senior-level courses as well as informational sessions concerning degree requirements. To protect confidentiality, all attendees in each course or session were asked to fill out brief informational forms regardless of if they planned on participating or not. This prevented participants from revealing themselves simply by the act of turning in a form. Willing participants were then contacted using these forms. The forms of uninterested or ineligible students were shredded. Gift cards worth \$35 were used as incentives for participation in the focus groups and personal interviews. I chose pseudonyms for each participant to ensure confidentiality. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of each participant.

Table 1

A Summary of Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Department
Mary	21	Female	Psychology
James	21	Male	Psychology
Linda	21	Female	Journalism
Barbara	21	Female	English
Maria	20	Female	Political Science
Helen	21	Female	Journalism
Susan	22	Female	Psychology
Nancy	22	Female	Journalism
John	21	Male	Biology
Karen	21	Female	Journalism
Donna	21	Female	Journalism
Carol	22	Female	Journalism
Daniel	21	Male	International Relations and Political Science
Elizabeth	40	Female	Mathematics
Betty	21	Female	Journalism
Gary	21	Male	Political Science
Paul	21	Male	Biology

Data Collection

Focus Groups

I conducted three focus groups comprised of five to eight participants each as the initial method of gathering student perspectives. All 17 participants attended one of the three focus groups. The focus groups were held in the same room on the same day but at different times. Only the participants and I were present during each session. Focus Group A consisted of 7 participants: James, Linda, Barbara, Carol, Daniel, Elizabeth, and Gary. Focus Group B consisted of 5 participants: Mary, Helen, John, Donna, and Paul. Focus Group C also consisted of 5 participants: Maria, Susan, Nancy, Karen, and Betty. All focus groups were recorded with a handheld digital recording device. The goal of these sessions was to encourage a group conversation among students who had experienced a similar transition. I began each session by facilitating informal conversation to get participants acquainted with each other and with me. I then formally introduced myself and stressed that my role as a researcher was, for the purposes of the study, entirely unrelated to my role as a professional academic advisor. I strongly encouraged open and thorough communication, discussed the purpose of the study, and informed them how the study findings would be disseminated. Once these preliminary items had been discussed, I followed the planned focus group protocol. I used only a limited number of open-ended questions to allow sufficient time for in-depth conversation and description. These questions were modified versions of the research questions that guided this study, and can be found in Appendix A.

Personal Interviews

I conducted follow-up personal interviews with 16 of the 17 focus group participants. Gary was unable to fit a personal interview in his schedule. All individual interviews were

recorded with a handheld digital recording device. For each interview, only the participant and I were present. As in the focus groups, I began each personal interview with informal conversation to increase the participant's comfort level. I discussed my role as a researcher and encouraged the participant to share as much detail as possible. I conducted the personal interviews in two stages. The first stage included an initial round of 10 interviews conducted shortly after the focus groups. The interview questions for this round of interviews were greater in number and more focused in scope than in the focus groups. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B. After analyzing data collected during the first round of interviews, I determined that additional information related specifically to the advising transition would enhance my understanding of the experience. I conducted a second round of personal interviews with six more participants in which I focused specifically on the advising transition by simply asking participants to describe their experience of transition in general. This was the only predetermined question during the final six interviews. After the opening question, I used a number of follow-up questions based on what participants had said in order to encourage them to explain various aspects of their experience in greater detail.

Informed Consent and Institutional Review

I obtained a signed informed consent form from each participant immediately preceding the focus groups. The study was approved by the institutional review board for the research site (IRB# 11-03-497). The informed consent form, the focus group protocol, the interview protocol, and the institutional review board approval forms are attached as appendices to this document.

Data Analysis

I had the recordings of all interviews and focus groups transcribed into individual documents. I then followed steps described by Moustakas (1994) and endorsed by Creswell

(1998) to analyze the extracted data. Specifically, I analyzed each written transcript using the modified *Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data* (Moustakas, 1994) listed here verbatim:

- [1] Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.
- [2] Record all relevant statements. [3] List each nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statement. These are the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience. [4] Relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes. [5] Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience. Include verbatim examples. [6] Reflect on [the] textural description. Through imaginative variation, construct a description of the structures of [the] experience.

Once each individual description has been analyzed, researchers are to “construct a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). Thus, in the context of the present study, this method prescribed the following actions:

1. I read through the transcripts with the goal of identifying statements that describe the transitional process itself.
2. I recorded every statement that is possibly relevant.
3. I removed duplicated statements to form a single list while still viewing each individual statement as having equal value to the study. At that point, all of my preconceptions about the phenomenon should have been suspended, so I had no basis on which to judge the validity or relevance of any single statement.

4. I reordered the list into groups of related statements, so that each group had a central theme that was evidenced by the statements assigned to it.
5. I synthesized the statements and themes into a written description of what took place during the transition. This was a factual description that told the story of the transition. In the language of Husserl, this was a noematic description. This description was similar to how the explorer would describe the Grand Canyon in Percy's metaphor.
6. I then constructed a second written description of the transition by reflecting on the factual description from a phenomenological perspective, imagining what the transition meant to the individual and how it caused the individual to feel. This was the noetic description. The individual participant is akin to the tourist in Percy's metaphor. My goal at that point was to understand the transition in the same way the participant understood it.
7. The final step was to synthesize these descriptions. I integrated all of the descriptions into single exhaustive description of the core essence of advising transition as students experienced it.

Data Quality and Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four aspects of trustworthiness for qualitative data: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I used several of the methods suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2002) to ensure trustworthiness in these areas. To ensure credibility of the data, I used *peer debriefing* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), *member checking* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and *triangulation analysts* (Patton, 2002). For transferability, I focused on creating *thick descriptions* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). And to help ensure overall

trustworthiness along all four of these dimensions, I kept a *reflexive journal* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) throughout the research process.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing involved the use of a true peer who was familiar with the research setting and the phenomenon being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A debriefer that fit the criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985) was selected prior to data collection and was informed of the goals of the peer debriefing process. The individual was a professional advisor with a doctoral degree in higher education who was familiar with the research setting. Through several structured meetings between me and the debriefer, he essentially played the roles of investigator and “devil’s advocate.” Meetings began before data collection and continued until the completion of this study. This process forced me to vocalize and defend all methodological decisions that I made in designing and conducting the study.

Member Checking

A second method suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure credibility was conducting member checks in which research participants were invited to scrutinize the data for accuracy. I provided all participants with the raw transcript, the textural analysis, and the structural analysis of their personal interview (except for the one participant who did not participate in a personal interview). Six participants replied and they all stated that they were satisfied with the accuracy of the transcript and the analysis.

Thick Descriptions

The findings of a qualitative study are transferable in a much different way than those of a quantitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal of a qualitative researcher is to be as descriptive as possible to allow readers to make decisions concerning transferability. In the spirit

of this concept, my descriptions of the participants, setting, and findings of this study are as detailed as I found possible. This will allow readers interested in relating these findings to another setting to use their own judgment in deciding whether the two settings are similar enough to allow such a comparison.

Reflexive Journaling

Throughout the entire research process, I made routine journal entries related to a wide variety of issues. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that three broad areas be addressed in the reflexive journal: (a) a daily schedule of all research activities, (b) frequent personal reflection about my own thoughts, judgments, hypotheses, preconceptions, etc., and (c) all methodological decisions and their underlying reasoning. I followed these recommendations to ensure overall trustworthiness and transparency of the research process.

Triangulation Analysts

One final method ensuring overall trustworthiness was the use of a panel of triangulation analysts. Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative researchers allow multiple qualified individuals to analyze data independently then compare results. After I completed my own analysis of the data, I assembled a panel of three individuals who were familiar with both academic advising and qualitative research methods. One was a tenure-track social work professor who also served as an advisor for that department, one was a professional advisor and doctoral student familiar with qualitative methods, and one was a professional advisor and licensed counselor. I also asked the peer debriefer to serve on the panel. Each of these individuals was asked to analyze the data and provide feedback on the conclusions I had reached from these data. Several issues were discussed throughout a two-hour panel meeting. Ultimately, the comments of each analyst reinforced the credibility of the findings of this study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the description of the methods used in this study. As indicated earlier, I used a qualitative, phenomenological design to study students' experiences of advising transition at a large public research university in the Mid-South. Research participants were seniors within the arts and sciences college who had experienced the specific advising transition being studied. I collected data via focus groups, and in-depth personal interviews – both of which were preceded by the epoché process that is fundamental to the phenomenological design. I then analyzed these data using specific phenomenological procedures outlined by Moustakas (1993). Finally, I ensured the trustworthiness of the data and findings by using several methods suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2002), including peer debriefing, member checks, triangulation analysts, thick descriptions, and reflexive journaling.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The phenomenon of advising transition is experienced by college students across the United States every year, yet it has never been the subject of exploratory research prior to this study. To explore the phenomenon of advising transition, this phenomenological study examined how students experienced the transition from centralized, professional advising to decentralized, faculty advising within a shared advising model at a public research university in the Mid-South. Three research questions guided the study: 1) How did students ascribe meaning to their lived experience of transition from centralized, professional advisement to decentralized, faculty-based advisement? 2) How did students ascribe meaning to their cumulative advising experience in a model that substantially altered their method of advisement at the approximate midpoint of their time as an undergraduate? 3) How did students ascribe meaning to their perceptions of connectedness during the process of advising transition? The following chapter provides a brief overview of the study methodology, presents a detailed description of the study findings, and concludes with a summary.

Overview of the Study Methodology

Because the focus of the study is a lived human experience about which little is known, an exploratory phenomenological approach was employed. The study was conducted in the arts and sciences college at a large public research university in the Mid-South. The model of advisement used in the college was a split model in which freshmen and sophomores met with professional academic advisors working in a central advising office. Once students attained junior classification (by accumulating over 59 credit hours), they transitioned to a faculty advisor working within students' academic departments. Homogenous purposeful sampling was used to

recruit 17 participants who met the following criteria: 1) were enrolled full-time within the college of arts and sciences at a public research university in the Mid-South, 2) had been advised continuously in a centralized advising office for at least one year, 3) had transitioned to decentralized advising, 4) had been advised under a decentralized model for at least one year, and 5) were classified as seniors at the time of selection.

Each participant attended one of three focus groups, and then all but one of the participants returned for a follow-up personal interview at a later date. I personally conducted all focus groups and interviews. To ensure trustworthiness, I used several methods recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2002): a peer debriefer, a reflexive journal, member-checking, thick description, and a panel of triangulation analysts. I analyzed the written transcripts from focus groups and personal interviews using the modified *Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data* recommended by Moustakas (1994). Analysis resulted in both a *textural* and a *structural* description of each transcript. Textural descriptions were factual summaries of the participant experiences, while the structural descriptions addressed the underlying meanings, known as structures. These cognitive structures represented the mental processes that were universal among participants and that framed each individual experience. The end result was a *composite textural-structural summary* that was a combined description of the experience based on each individual textural and structural analysis.

The sections that follow present the composite textural-structural description that resulted from this phenomenological study. I first provide a factual description of the advising transition as it was experienced by participants. Following this textual summary of the findings, I discuss the four themes that resulted from data analysis: 1) an evaluation of advisor trustworthiness based on perceived professional responsibilities, followed by appropriate coping mechanisms, 2)

a preference for a personalized advising relationship, 3) an apprehensiveness towards the unknown, and 4) the reliance on previously developed advising expectations.

Textural Summary of the Findings

Participants experienced the advising transition in their own unique way, and within their own personal context. Mary met consistently with the same professional advisor for two years then transitioned to a faculty advisor in her department. She found the experience to be frustrating because it was confusing, but speculated that other simultaneous changes in her life complicated the issue. She felt at the time that no one could answer her questions, and continued to email questions to her previous advisor. James was at first an engineering student, then spent one year under the jurisdiction of the advising center before transitioning to a faculty advisor. He characterized the transition as “nerve-racking” simply because it was yet another transition in his life. While he maintained a business-like approach to professional advising, he formed a very personal relationship with his faculty advisor. Maria had a very similar experience in that her professional advising experience was “more like a business thing” but after the transition she formed a positive connection with her faculty advisor who went “above and beyond what any other advisor would do.”

Linda, Barbara, Susan, Elizabeth, Carol and Helen were all very pleased with their professional advisors and maintained very regular communication with them during their first two years. Elizabeth used words such as “empathy,” “encouraging,” and “helpful” to describe her professional advisor. Carol appreciated that advising was her professional advisor’s full-time job. All six of these participants were ultimately disappointed after the transition. Linda was somewhat disappointed because her faculty advising was “not as efficient.” She characterized the transition as “weird” and “intimidating.” Barbara was unique in that she was an honors

student. She was able to continue to meet with her professional advisor even after the transition because she wanted to check the work of her faculty advisor. She also began navigating the curriculum more on her own. Susan seemed to focus on interpersonal skills. She felt her professional advisor was “warm and understanding” but she was disheartened to find her faculty advisor to be “a completely different person.” Finally, Helen found the transition, which took her by surprise, to be “kind of intimidating.” Despite thorough preparation, she still found the ten-minute time slots used by the faculty advisor inadequate.

John and Donna both would have preferred a more substantial advising relationship within both settings. In fact, John did not even meet with a faculty advisor until his senior year. This situation arose from confusion about the advising system coupled with the fact that he studied abroad part of that time. Donna also relied mostly on herself to decide which courses to take, but have preferred more guidance from both of her advisors. Nancy was also seeking a more meaningful advising relationship, which she did eventually find with her faculty advisor. She was visibly frustrated when discussing her professional advising experience, which she described as “hectic and chaotic.” Upon transitioning to a faculty advisor she was happy to meet with someone who “actually knew what they were talking about.” In contrast, Karen described a very positive experience on both sides of the transition. Both advisors exceeded her expectations.

Transitioning between academic advisors is a process. As with any formalized process, whether it occurs on a college campus or in a laboratory, there are inputs and outputs, and the latter is dependent on the former. Such was the case with the participants in this study. While all met the criteria defined above, and all ultimately shared in the structures discussed below, they nonetheless experienced the transition in their own way. Some were satisfied with their

professional advisor, some were satisfied with their faculty advisor, and some were satisfied with both. Some were sure of their major throughout their time at the institution while others changed it several times. Some were mostly interested in discussing their major-related requirements at the time of the transition, while others had questions about issues far outside of their major. As previously mentioned, one participant was an honors student, one was a transfer student, one participated in a study abroad trip his junior year, several were Psychology majors, one was a Math major, and one changed her major at the same time she transitioned advisors. Furthermore, individual differences among academic advisors influenced the process as well. The differences among participants represent some of the inputs in this process, and explain why the outcomes of this transition (i.e. meaningful relationships with faculty advisors, bitterness about the transition, complete self-advisement, persistent communication with an initial professional advisor, etc.) were so different.

Paul and Betty were unique in that they were both able to meet with faculty members other than their assigned academic advisors. Paul worked on campus and his boss was a faculty advisor, so he decided to meet with him. Betty chose to meet with one of her instructors. In both cases, they preferred to meet with someone they had previously met instead getting to know an entirely new individual. Daniel was unique because he actually had two very different faculty advisors because he had a double major. He did not completely trust one of them because that advisor seemed distracted by other duties, but Daniel was very satisfied with his other faculty advisor because he respected the fact that the advisor was also the head of the department.

This brief overview illustrates the differences among participant experiences. Phenomenological researchers anticipate these textural differences. The variance, in fact, is fundamental to the phenomenological process. Only by examining the experience via multiple

individual perspectives can the underlying cognitive structures come to light. These cognitive structures are elements of the experience that are common among participants and shape or frame their subjective perceptions. In this study, the cognitive structures identified in the following section governed how the differing personal characteristics described earlier produced 17 unique human experiences.

Structural Summaries of the Findings

Trustworthiness and Coping Strategies

Participants' transition from the professional advising setting to the faculty advising setting triggered an internal evaluation of advisor trustworthiness. In each case, the criteria used in this evaluation involved the perceived professional responsibilities of the advisor. Advisors were deemed trustworthy if their primary job duties, as perceived by participants, were aligned with the particular needs of the participant. Trust, in this context, was based on assurance that advisors could accurately explain necessary information and had the requisite knowledge or training to do so. Participants who were seeking information related to their major trusted faculty advisors based on their relative expertise in that field. In other words, the expertise derived from their roles as teachers and researchers allowed them to accurately articulate major-related information. Professional advisors were perceived as having a broader, comprehensive knowledge base about degree requirements, general education courses, or specific graduation rules, because they focused on academic advising the majority of their workday and worked with a broad array of students and issues. Participants seeking this type of broad knowledge were more likely to trust their previous professional advisor more than their faculty advisor. Many participants also assumed that job duties affected training and accessibility, which in turn affect advising ability. Some assumed professional advisors were trained in general counseling

techniques, and trusted them because of this. Participants actually differed in their perceptions of the issue of advisor accessibility. Some assumed professional advisors were less accessible because of their larger advisee loads, while others felt that faculty members had less time to devote to their advisees because of their other teaching and research obligations.

In all of these scenarios, trust was predicated on a perception of professional responsibilities. The fact that participants were encountering a different type of advisor caused this internal evaluation to occur when it otherwise may not have. Participants would have ostensibly been aware of whether they trusted an advisor, but without the forced comparison brought about by the transition, they may not have otherwise consciously reflected upon what this trust or lack of trust was based on. The evaluation of trust was implicit in their assessment of the new advising setting.

The evaluation was succeeded by one or more of three general behaviors based on the perceived trustworthiness of the new advisor. If participants trusted the new faculty advisor, then they fully engaged in and often expanded that relationship. If participants did not trust the new advisor, they employed one or both of the following coping mechanisms. If trust existed with the previous advisor, participants sought to preserve or resuscitate that relationship in some way, whether that entailed meeting them face-to-face or simply emailing them questions. A second strategy was to increase their level of self-reliance by navigating policies and requirements on their own. For many participants this was their only coping strategy while for others it was used in conjunction with an effort to preserve their professional advising relationship. Thus, this particular cognitive structure can include up to three parts – the initial evaluation and, if prompted, each of the two coping mechanisms. Evidence for each of these is provided below.

Evaluation of Trustworthiness. The evidence for students' evaluation of advisor trustworthiness lies in the explanations given by participants about whether they fully trusted specific advisors. Betty trusted both types of advisors, and provided an explanation of the advantages of each type:

I would say that I was satisfied, but I feel like it's because the phase I was in my education, like you kind of need someone to hold your hand more as a freshman and a sophomore and I feel like here at the professional advising center they do that better, like they know in general like what your requirements need to be and they're better at placing that and when you move further on and start moving towards a career path you can sit down and talk with someone that's like 'these are the best classes for you for after you graduate' and it's more personalized to where you want to go whereas in the beginning it's better because you are like - you don't know what to do at all.

A common explanation for not trusting a faculty advisor was that a faculty member is not a full-time advisor, but rather has many other competing responsibilities. Mary described what she perceived as the limit of a faculty member's advising ability:

I think it is... necessary that we see a faculty advisor as we are... kind of taking upper level classes and getting more... I guess narrowing down what we want to do and the specific classes we need because those people are going to have a little bit more knowledge on that, but I also... don't think those advisors should be teachers because it seems like there's a lot of conflict involved in having two of those jobs.... You can't be as efficient and effective at both of them at the same time... so it would be nice if there were just a couple advisors for each department that only advised.

Barbara held a very similar perception of her faculty advisor:

She knew about her department because she's been advising English for thirty years or more so she...was very good about English requirements... but we didn't talk about...anything outside of English requirements especially because I hadn't had this professor in a class yet....If I have specific questions [as a junior/senior] about whether this course will meet what I need it to meet I either need to kind of talk to the professor who's teaching it or someone else because my advisor's not going to know off hand.

A focus group participant held the perception that faculty members were not adequately trained to be advisors:

The training of those advisors - if you're going to have... professors advising, then, by all means, make sure that they have some empathy and some... idea of how to...steer a person,... and how to help a person. Because in addition to giving me the flu, my advisor left me sitting in the hall in high heels for five minutes because I was early, and then he put me in a class that I was clearly not ready for, clearly not ready for, and I just, I really... again, please train...them, you know?

Helen explained how her realization that she may not be of primary concern for her faculty advisor made her uncomfortable:

I felt more comfortable with my first advisor than I do with the one I'm with now because I feel like she is... a faculty member, she has lessons to plan and all kinds of other stuff she needs to be doing and I feel like it's just kind of like... a burden.

Donna also felt as though the other duties of a faculty member may distract them from advising:

It's just because it's professors, it's just not what they are there to do and I think for them it's a formality. They don't want to be there doing it because, they have homework to grade and tests to grade and you know, like lectures to prepare and you can tell that - I

think with a lot of people that they're just you know, like most of the times that I've done it it's just like 'well, here's what you need to take...sign it off and you're done.'

Mary, Barbara, Donna, and Helen each noted that faculty members are fluent in requirements related to their major, but less familiar with broader advising issues. This was a common sentiment among participants. Many perceived professional advisors as more trustworthy in explaining general advising issues outside of major-related coursework because a professional advisor's primary task is to maintain a comprehensive understanding of these issues. Susan also observed the relative importance of academic advising to each of her advisor's overall job expectations:

I just don't think that as a teacher, professor, doctor, and then you add advisor to that for like my departmental [advisor]. It's like one more thing on their plate where it *is* the professional advisor's plate. You know what I mean? ... I'm not saying that that's all that they do, but it's cool that that is all or the majority of what they [professional advisors] do because that would mean that they're probably better at it like just based solely on the fact that they've had more practice with it and it's more of a main focus... there's a difference in a professional and a professional in a different field like [my faculty advisor] is a professional doctor of philosophy and ... he wasn't trained on how to like communicate with people.

Linda offered a lengthy explanation of why she trusted her professional advisor, followed by her explanation that the professional advisor was able to consistently answer her questions because it was her primary duty:

My professional advisor...she was amazing. Like, basically, I would walk in and my first few times she would like walk me through the process and what was going on and

stuff like that. [The participant then gives a detailed description of several advising encounters during her freshman and sophomore years.] ...She [professional advisor] was really good about just being easy. Like it's easy to access her. She knew what she was talking about ... I had more confidence in her because like this is her job, she does it everyday, she knows about the hours, she knows just kind of like different situations and ways to do different things.

She contrasted that with her level of trust with her faculty advisor, again relating this back job duties:

My faculty advisor, I guess I semi-trust her ... I go to her mostly just for classes I would have never thought of or didn't know about because some of the ... journalism electives ... I'm debating about this next math class I'm going to take. So, ... ideally I want my math class to count for my [core] and for my business minor, so I know I should e-mail her about that but at the same time I just feel like she wouldn't know or she might advise me incorrectly so I really want to come back to the [advising center] because they probably deal with that. So I guess my current relationship is ... I respect her as a professor and enjoy her as a professor but at the same time ... as an advisor I'm not really sure I trust her completely just because she has so much else going on.

Daniel was similar to Linda in how he perceived each type of advisor:

With my professional advisor at the honors college I could really tell that was basically his one job. He knew exactly what he was talking about. He had obviously looked over my file or whatever it was. He knew what I was majoring in; he knew what I was concentrating in and he you know he had obviously been looking at this and studied this and said 'okay...what other people have been in same situation, same position, so this is

what I would suggest.’ He had, he was very well prepared and I had a real sense of comfort knowing he knew what he was talking about. I knew that he had experience with people in my situation, an unusual major, with IR it’s not strictly one poli-sci or economics, it’s a combination of all of them and he still knew about that. He knew that that was what I was, and he knew I was a minor in French maybe and so he had already looked at all those things and he knew; he knew what he was talking about, and I could tell that just from the way he acted and how prepared he was. And then my faculty advisor I had never met him, I had never had a class with him, so the experience there was - it seemed like he was a lot less prepared. He was more like, ‘yes, these are political science classes; you could take these. You should probably take this one and this one because they are important theories of political science and it’s a good class to take; you should probably take it,’ it was just very basic instruction and I think I know that there’s a whole lot of preparation or maybe just simply a time thing because there’s so many poli-sci majors. So I could tell that was the biggest difference. It was part of his job but it wasn’t his job.

Carol shared a similar observation as well:

It’s more just I trust [professional advisors]. I feel like I just had a lot more trust in knowing what they were doing because they do that all day long and so I think maybe there was just I mean you’re right aside the knowledge, I felt more, I just put more trust in them than I did maybe my professor.

One focus group participant clearly related her trust in advisors to her perception of their professional responsibilities:

I really like my advisor here like just in the [advising center] for the first two years, and, I feel like my faculty advisor doesn't know as much because she teaches... I feel like, 'cause, you're an advisor, all your time's devoted to that. You don't have to teach too, and I felt like she's just always in a hurry to get us in and out. She doesn't always have the right answers and that's, I mean I know, I don't expect everyone to have the right answers all the time, but it's frustrating sometimes, especially when I'm older and I need right answers, so I can graduate on time.

Another participant from the same focus group offered her own perception of her faculty advisor's priorities:

It's like because they're professors they really don't seem like they care about ... the advising part of what they're doing. It's like you just sign up and they have like a fifteen minute little timeframe for you to come in and they just kind of fill it out and you walk away.

Again, the key commonality is that trust was based on job duties. This is not to say that participants universally trusted one type of advisor over another. For example, in contrast to some of the students quoted above, many other students were focused primarily on understanding their major-related coursework. In these situations, a faculty advisor was perceived as a very trustworthy individual. Maria was one of these students:

[Meeting with my faculty advisor] gave me a better idea of what the classes I needed to take because I felt like with a faculty advisor who was a professor in my exact major - that person that advisor would know kind of more of exactly what I should take.

One focus group participant also valued the major-specific knowledge of a faculty advisor:

Advisors that are given in each college have more knowledge about intricate things, like I can understand why we switch right because like in my psych professors that are my advisors probably know more about telling me like what advanced research is.

Another participant from the same group concurred:

I really loved my first advisor [in the advising center], like she was really cool and helped me out a lot, but I kind of liked the switch too though because I felt like they helped more with the core and the switch to the more advanced classes, the teachers knew more about the advanced classes like the ins and outs of the sequence of my major more than the professional advisors would here.

A participant from another focus group trusted, above all, the faculty advisor's authority as a respected faculty member:

For me it was, I came from honors and then dropped, so I had like a really good advisor, but then I dropped honors and never had to be advised until I added a major. I started out IR which has, there's not very many people, it's a small major, so we all are advised by the head of a major, which is fantastic because he created the major and all the requirements for it, and so he can tell you exactly what will count and what won't count...and for me that was the most important part. Which of these classes will count, which of them won't? I can read the descriptions myself; I can email the professors myself and see if I want to take the class; I want to know if it counts; I want someone who works at the university to tell me, "yes, this will count and I can guarantee it."

Ultimately, Maria's experience is no different than that of Mary or Barbara. What differs is that Maria is more intensely focused on her major requirements. Furthermore, one student held the perception that professional advisors had less time to devote because their advising load was so

high. Nancy was unsatisfied with the amount of time she had with her professional advisor because she “always seemed rushed because it was always so busy. There was just so many people waiting in line or they always have tons of appointments.” Her faculty advisor was different because she “can just e-mail him whenever or go by his office.”

Inherent in all of these descriptions is an evaluation of trustworthiness based on the professional responsibilities of the advisors involved. Trust was not based on personal aptitude, intelligence, concern for students, or other criteria. This evaluation occurred during the advising transition, when the participants were faced with different type of advisor. Both Mary and Barbara saw the teaching responsibilities of faculty members as a distraction from their advising efforts. Helen felt so strongly about this that she assumed her faculty advisor thought of her as a burden. One focus group participant assumed faculty members were trained to be teachers, not advisors. However, Maria trusted faculty members as competent advisors because of their specialized knowledge related to their field. Several focus group participants shared her perception. Though participants may have reached differing conclusions, these evaluations were all related to professional responsibilities.

Participants who found their professional advisors to be trustworthy did so based on professional responsibilities as well. Susan, Linda, and several focus group participants all offered statements similar to “it’s their job.” They were aware that advising was the primary duty for professional advisors and assumed they had been trained accordingly. Many participants also assumed that professional advisors possessed a broader knowledge base. Again, the consistent theme is that participants chose to trust advisors based on their perception of job duties and how those related to advising ability.

Preservation of Relationships with Trusted Individuals. Participants who perceived an existing relationship with a trusted professional advisor were hesitant to sever that connection, and were quick to attempt to revive it if their faculty advising experience did not foster the same level of trust. Linda noted her urge to return to her professional advisor because of the positive experience she had:

I still wanted to come back to my [professional] advisor because she was my advisor my freshman and sophomore year because she really helped me more decide about my kind of career path and my, like where I wanted to go, whereas, I had never actually had major specific advisor yet my junior year.

Barbara described how returning to her professional advisor, whom she trusted, was her first instinct after feeling unsure about her faculty advisor's trustworthiness:

Either that [first] semester [after the transition] or the next semester I was having trouble with my language requirements and she wasn't as well equipped to advise me and I didn't feel confident with the decisions we were making together so I had her sign a paper that said I'd seen her and took that back to honors and said if the advisor has met with everyone else I'd like to see him again and was able to schedule an appointment at the tail end of his taking care of freshman and sophomores...for the first couple semesters [after the transition] I went to both advisors [professional and faculty]... I would sometimes feel like I should be able to take care of this by now or my advisor and I should be able to take care of this by now but I still need your time, I need your help.

One focus group participant was frustrated when she could not contact her previous advisor and could not get a response from her new faculty advisor:

I remember what I said the first time about having been not here and not being able to directly communicate with someone was extremely frustrating when I sent like five emails to my faculty advisor about, “I need help, can you tell me the name of the special class again. I can’t find it,” and I remember still til’ this day she never responded. And that was pretty frustrating. So I didn’t get to take that class.

Several other students, while unable to meet face to face with their previous professional advisor, nonetheless contacted them through email if they were unsure about the information they were receiving from their faculty advisor. Mary emailed her professional advisor several times despite her perception that she was busy with other students:

I still did e-mail my advisor [after first two years] that I had in the [advising center] a couple times directly and just asked some simple questions because I couldn’t find information... I do understand that like the advising center... is overloaded as it is and that’s understandable that they can’t sometimes take questions from people who are from outside ... the group that they focus on, but I mean it is frustrating, but I do understand because I know how crazy and busy it gets here.

John, who never actually met with a faculty advisor his junior year, did the same:

[After the transition] If I had any questions I’d even called. I called the advising center. I just asked them straight out and they told me they didn’t - they just sent me to somebody else or say, “you have to talk to your faculty...” I actually just called the advising center and said, “Yea, do I need this class?” and they told me...so I guess they were helpful in that process. [Later in the interview he remarked:] you should be able to use the professional advisors throughout college.

And finally, two participants noted their frustration that they could not contact the advising center with their questions. The first explained the feeling in this way:

It was annoying because I couldn't call my advisor that I had for two years to ask them simple questions that related to like just the [college] specific questions; I couldn't ask them, I had to ask the department person who didn't always know the answer, so... It was really inefficient.

The second participant agreed:

I just feel like there needs to be some way for people to ask simple questions and just get quick advice from people who actually know what they're talking about; it's their field. It's so frustrating that once you're past sophomore you can't call the advising center to ask them about advising. That's really frustrating.

If participants did not trust their new advisor, the first coping mechanism was to preserve existing relationships with other trusted individuals. Both Linda and Barbara immediately returned to their professional advisors because they did not trust their new faculty advisors. Mary did so via email. Several other participants attempted but were unable to restore communication with their professional advisors. Furthermore, many participants expressed frustration about the fact that the professional advising center was not universally available to students who had specific advising questions. In all of these situations, the participants exhibited a clear desire to return to a trusted advising relationship once they had decided that their new advisor was not trustworthy.

Self-Reliance as a Coping Mechanism. The tendency to rely on oneself after receiving unsatisfactory academic advising seems to be universal. The participants who did not trust their academic advisor, either in the professional setting or in the faculty setting, responded by

navigating curriculum requirements on their own and/or double-checking an advisor's course recommendation. While a certain degree of self-reliance should be expected from maturing students who have become more familiar with academic policies, the participants in this study specifically mentioned increased self-reliance as a response to unsatisfactory advisement.

Essentially, self-reliance was the primary tool used to fix difficult advising situations. As such, this was the preferred coping strategy employed by participants who found it difficult to transition from professional advising to faculty advising. Linda explained this inclination:

I definitely started doing my own research more [after the transition]. Like [more] than my freshman/sophomore year. Maybe it's because I wasn't thinking as much about graduation like that might be an element. But like I never double-checked on anyone when I came [to professional advising]. When I would go to my professor, like especially the first time, and now that I know her more, a lot more, I go through and like I get on [the student information system] and I look at the print out that I have to give her when I go and like I keep it. Afterward I go to the library and just sit through it and make sure I'm double-checking everything because I don't want to risk like she's missing something. And so mostly the only thing that changed was that I... mostly go to her only because she like suggests classes I never thought of, or if I need to fill a spot that's open... or like class is closed, she'll help me with that, but ... just basics, I pretty much just do my own and like double check all my requirements and stuff.

Barbara reacted very similarly after the transition:

In stepping out of [the advising center] one of the changes I actually had to make was becoming more self-reliant and just realizing I'm not going to get - there's no one for me to run and grab their hand and have them lead me through steps anymore. I just have to

know my requirements, know my catalog... I guess there were times when I felt like I was more on my own than maybe I needed to be or had anticipated being and just had to figure things out for myself when I would have liked to had my advisor helping me, but all of those things ended up being surmountable whatever I had to do by myself, my advisors were there when I got back, so it's not like they dropped me and then I was never heard from them again; it was more well, "I thought that I could have more help with this, but I guess I just have to do it myself." And then they helped me with something else next time.

Mary chose to rely more on herself after the transition because she was dissatisfied with the information she had received:

Honestly, I kind of just started advising myself. I just...I like doing that kind of stuff anyway and so maybe I'm the exception and not the norm, but I just got really familiar with all the requirements and all that kind of stuff and just started figuring out things myself...I do remember getting some suggestions, [meeting with faculty advisor] but I didn't really agree with them, so I kind of just went along with it and then took whatever classes I wanted to afterwards (laughter)... I was also switching my majors and doing that kind of stuff so I didn't like have anybody anymore who I could ask generic questions about graduating and being in this college. I mean I didn't, I don't think I even declared my current major that I'm going to graduate with until my junior year and then I added a bunch of other stuff after that so it was kind of just like there wasn't someone I could talk to about those basic questions.

For Helen, the transition reduced the value she placed on advising. She had always exhibited a high degree of self-reliance in navigating the curriculum as this was something that was part of

her overall personality. This pre-existing self-reliance combined with a diminished perception of trustworthiness led her to recategorize advising as more of a formality whereas she had previously perceived it as a valuable resource. The following two sections were taken from separate parts of her interview to illustrate this point:

I signed up on her [faculty advisor] sign-up sheet outside her door for a time and then I met with her and there were ten minute slots and I thought that was kind of , it doesn't take me ten minutes because like I'm like very organized; you know, I had everything planned out before I went in. I'm just a control freak about things like that. [Later in the interview:] I think it [advising] helps a lot and I think I would be okay if I didn't have to, well maybe not freshman and sophomore year. Freshman year definitely, it's a huge help, and then you know, sophomore year it helps a little bit, I don't think it's required in my department for junior and senior year, but I don't know because I always do it. But I know it's, I think I would be okay if I didn't have to do it

One focus group participant was unique in that she was originally a transfer student, which means that this was the second advising transition for her. She continued the self-reliance that had begun with her initial transfer experience:

It was a little bit...it was weird I guess because I transferred over here from...a community college and I'm just, I'm one of those people that has contingency plans for my contingency plans. So I plan out, I just go into my advisors and just, I literally just plan out and I'm like "good with my schedule?" and then I'm like "thanks". "Thanks for your time." (sarcasm, followed by laughter)... So... I'm just one of those kids, so my advising even when [in the advising center] and everything you're just like, I was like,

“okay here’s what I need because I, I read all the stuff, like I read the catalog a couple of times, the entire catalog, I was just like, “okay, now I have to do this and this and this.”

Finally, in the most extreme use of self-reliance of all participants, John simply stopped seeing advisors during his entire junior year:

I didn’t actually go to my assigned advisor because I didn’t even know I even had one...

I didn’t even know I was assigned an advisor like my junior year I just didn’t use it until my senior year when I wanted to make sure I...had everything I needed to graduate... I just used the, I don’t know, the degree plan and that seemed to help like pretty well.

An increased level of self-reliance was the second coping mechanism employed by participants who did not deem their faculty advisors trustworthy after the transition. Linda and Barbara very clearly stated that the transition caused them to put more effort into understanding academic policies and to then double-check the work of their faculty advisors. Mary met with her faculty advisor because it was expected, but subsequently disregarded that advice in favor of using her own judgment. John was confused about how faculty advising was handled, so he simply abandoned it all together. For all participants that did not trust their faculty advisors, the inclination to rely more on themselves was instinctual.

Preference for Personalized Advising Relationships

Participants consistently displayed a preference for personalization in their advising relationships. This preference was driven by a desire to be known as a unique individual. Their perceptions and behaviors during the advising transition were shaped in large part by how they were affected in this area. Participants gravitated towards advisors that could recollect personal details about the participant, or who were familiar with the participant’s academic abilities and goals. These personalized advising relationships differed, however, from the relationships with

trusted individuals described in the previous section. For the participants in this study, trust was based on accurate knowledge and ability to disseminate that knowledge. A personal connection was based on genuine interest in individual needs and characteristics. Furthermore, participants actively preserved relationships based on trust whereas the need for personalization, while strong, was passive in nature. Participants expected advisors to foster a personal connection and were pleased if they did so. But if an advisor did not make that attempt, participants were simply disappointed – no action was taken.

Participants desired a personalized relationship from professional advisors and faculty advisors alike. This substantially affected their advising transition in logical ways. Participants who had fostered a connection with professional advisors were apprehensive about forming one with a different type of advisor, and were disappointed if that did not happen. Participants who did not have that type of relationship previously were eager to form one with their faculty advisor. Barbara's description best illustrates a persistent desire for a personal connection. She found a satisfactory degree of personalization with her professional advisor:

My [relationship with professional advisor] was good, and he did remember me, but I never felt completely known because he had so many other people to remember and maybe if I had not been honors and just gone to the advising center and that would have been different because there are more advisors there. So, he did know me, but he also had to play catch up which I suppose anyone would have to like check the file and make sure this is the things that I associate with this person actually do belong to them or don't which is fine I never was upset at him for that.

After the transition, she was not satisfied until she reached a similar level with her faculty advisor:

I like that I've gotten to a point with her where she's actually a little bit more interested in my life than in my classes. Like what I'm going to do whenever I graduate and all of that and I feel like I have not necessarily an older friend, but an older friend-type person and that's what I was really hoping for...I had hoped to be integrated into the department that way by the time I was a senior and I do feel like she knows me. I feel like the people in the English office know me and that I actually am about where I wanted to be when I started.

She then spoke generally about her need for a personal connection:

I don't know how much time or if advisors have our files beforehand after we've made that transition, but I knew that she didn't know me because we hadn't met in that capacity but I also...felt even more like a stranger, wayward child taken in from the halls when she had to like sort of like go through my papers and like see what I had been doing and catch up with me.

Susan shared a very similar desire for her advisor to get to know her on a personal level:

You should sit down and talk to the kid for a second, just about life because I think that a lot of people are struggling with other stuff, and not that it's supposed to be a therapy session, but so then maybe if they are dealing with something super big you could probably pick up on that and I think that would work best if you were a professional advisor or a professional counselor. So, just, to have someone who is in the advising office say, "Hey, what is going on? Like, "how are you these days?" Or like, "what's going on? How's your semester?" You know? And regardless of whether they open up or not, I mean, you can't do anything about that, but at least try, and then I guess it would be, "What are you thinkin'?"

Elizabeth appreciated that, after transferring from a community college, her initial professional advisor catered to her unique situation:

I transferred here from [a local community college] so my first advising experience was here at the [advising center], yes, and you know I really liked the guy. I feel like he had some empathy for me and he understood where I was coming from as a student and not feeling perfect about my transcript, you know what I mean? And he was encouraging and helpful.

Daniel also appreciated the personalization that he received from his professional advisor:

Really with my professional advisor, I really felt like he had actually read up on me and that was really, that was definitely a good feeling. I liked that, it definitely helped me know that this is someone who cares about this, I mean he doesn't really care about me, but he cares about me. He's going to say, 'I know this is completely different than high school...so I'm here to help you, come talk to me any time.'" There's definitely a strong connection there. I can walk down the hall and he still knows my name; I haven't seen him for two and half, three years and that really was.

A focus group participant explained his despair when neither type of advisor provided the personal connection he was seeking:

This may be off subject but this makes me think of the campaign [refers to an institutional marketing campaign that portrays the institution as being very student centered]. I think that is awful and I want to hurt whoever did that because when I think of that and I see that commercial on TV, I am just like, that's not how my experience has...been. It is not, I mean that is not how it happens, and people that think that they're going to come here and it's going to be all perfect; they're just, I mean maybe some

people will, but I just did not agree with that at all. Most of my friends and family that have been here have had pretty, I mean, hectic experiences. It...does not run near as smoothly as they expected it to, and I think that campaign is just awful, like that is just so misleading. [Interviewer asks: Is there any way - because that is sort of what I'm talking about - does advising play any role in that?] I mean it really did; I didn't know what I wanted to do and I felt like no one was helping me like, no advisor that I had when I was in [the advising center], ...said, "well you should go and take this class to see if you like this." No one ever said that to me. They were just like, "well you should take this elective because it will count towards one of your upper level electives,"And so I don't know, it really did I think, I don't know, it kind of makes my experience, like I have a younger cousin who is thinking about coming here from a different school and I was like I really, you're first two years are going to be not fun, like I don't think you're going to enjoy it and it's, the campus is now so big, I can't even imagine how advising is now with all the students, with all the freshman.

Another participant from the same group was rescued from a similar experience of isolation because she was eventually able to truly connect with an advisor:

My first year sucked anyway. On top of it, I'm not going to lie, I mean like I, it was a big transition and I'm sure that having poor advising didn't help you any [referencing participant quoted above], but I remember just feeling so stinking lost about like pretty much everything... Dorm life I felt like I was at summer camp for ... a whole year and my R. A. felt like my counselor and I hated it. And I didn't feel like I had friends because the six people that came up here from my...high school, but that's why I came, but holy crap, I was just like "this sucks". And that's ... the most alone I've ever felt in

my entire life was my freshman year and so it was, it stinks that you had an advisor that didn't help you out because I feel like [my professional advisor] - first of all, he was pretty hot, and second of all... Yea, he was, but second of all, he was so helpful and kind, and when I would run into him... walking around campus it was always ... a good, conversation or just warm and welcoming and like I said, I was undeclared too and for some reason I was placed with someone who was able to actually point me in the right direction ... and be understanding about my undeclared ..., my indecisiveness or just my lack of not knowing what to do, which, like you said [again speaking to the participant quoted above], a lot of people don't know what they want to do.

Participants in this focus group continued to discuss, for a considerable amount of time, the importance of connecting with an advisor on a personal level.

The expressed desire for a personalized advising relationship was consistent, but which participants found one and where they found it varied. The fact that a faculty advisor shared a smaller community with the student, in terms of the academic department, facilitated this type of connection for several students. Karen explained how her faculty advisor got to know her on a personal level and then used that knowledge to enrich her college experience:

Just getting to know her, I don't know, she [faculty advisor] just makes it seem so friendly and inviting when you take her classes you, I don't know, it's just easier to talk with her and like anyone else in the setting with her you know it's just friendly and you can communicate easier with other people. That probably might sound weird but it's not awkward around her. You feel more open to talk openly and get to know people and get to know her and she talks about her home experiences and she knows a lot of people in the field which helps because she's given me recommendations of where to get

internships of, “oh well you should contact this faculty advisor with help for this” and she knows ... stuff on campus to help guide me in what I’m interested in, like joining, PRSSA, or Ad Club, she knows a lot about like the [journalism club] and organizations and stuff like that. She was just really good in helping guide me to what I was interested in, in my field, which was good.

Maria described her delight when her first meeting with her faculty advisor turned out to be a much more personal experience:

I had just started out... I needed to choose classes for my junior year and I met with my advisor and it was great. We talked for ... an hour about myself, the classes I was interested in, what I wanted to take, if there were any specifics within - my major’s political science - if there were any specifics within political science that I wanted to focus on and he actually really took the extra mile.

Maria’s faculty advising relationship developed in much the same way as Karen’s:

My advisor - stand up guy, great professor. He got me interested in Latin American politics which I never thought I would be interested in and I took a few courses in it, loved it, I got involved, I took Spanish. I got involved with the Spanish club, I got active within the Spanish club and then he suggested I take German. Loved German even more. And it’s just been great. I’ve gotten really active within student-life groups on campus and everything so I think...there’s definitely a correlation between having a good advisor and a student’s involvement within campus life because an advisor can encourage those things.

Helen also took time to point out that she appreciated the personal nature of her faculty advising relationship:

She [faculty advisor] actually knows my name, and that's nice because you know a lot of teachers don't and since I'll have her next semester she'll already know who I am and I like that and I feel like, you know, since she is my advisor I know her on a little bit of a different level than just being a student.

For James, he was satisfied with the fact that his faculty advising experience involved many different types of personal interactions:

It's great, [faculty advising] we have a great relationship. I talk to him outside of class, I go to his office hours all the time. We have, he's writing me a rec. letter...we have like a very friendly relationship outside of like the professional academic relationship.

Focus group participants spoke at length about personalized advising relationships. One participant appreciated the personal relationship with a faculty advisor:

It's been helpful for me because I feel like it has a more personalized approach,...my current advisor is - I consider him to be a friend. A professor, I'm a political science major, and I had him for a course and he has helped me out tremendously and I feel like that personal touch really makes a difference.

A second participant from that group agreed:

I think getting advised by the person I'm advised with now has enabled me to have a personal relationship with him, and therefore ask for things like rec. letters from them because I actually had one-on-one experience with someone who's in my department which even, like I'm not timid to go to a professor's office, so that's not a problem, but for students that maybe are, or just kind of adverse to going to talk to a professor for no good reason, not a grade, not anything, it does put you in contact with a professor and maybe actually let you see them in more like personal light. Because when I'm there,

usually, my professor is in jeans and a sweater because like on Fridays and he's in a different office because my advisor has like an advising office and just his normal office in the building which is kind of neat I guess, and so it's just like a completely different atmosphere. It allows me to have a little bit more dialogue, but I guess what I pick up on from everyone is relationships and I feel like regardless of where we go, I think that our relationship is very important and maybe switching after two years is kind of weird and kind of disrupts that relationship.

It was evident that other participants were able to find a more personal connection with their professional advisor. Susan described her professional advisor as “warm and understanding...funny...helpful” with “a very...high patience level.” She was disappointed upon discovering that her faculty advisor was “a really hard person to connect with.” Four different participants from one focus group shared similar stories. The first participant was unique in that she had the professional advisor as an instructor:

I knew the [advising center] advisor on more of a personal level. Like I took the [freshman orientation course, taught by the advisor] and like we kind of talked a lot about who we were and where we were from and actually got to know him and whenever I had a question ...I had him on Facebook and I had his phone number like I'd just text him and it was really easy really quick, but then like, last year I tried to ask him a question and he said...that I had to ask my faculty advisor and... he wasn't there, so I just wound up asking someone in the department.

The second participant did not receive the desired amount of personalized advice from the faculty advisor:

I think the first two years, it was okay. They kind of directed me in the right direction most of the time, then like going to the faculty advisors, like I don't know, it's frustrating, and you just kind of feel like part of the herd and even more when you're in the faculty advisor...which I think is like the opposite of what it's meant to be. I think like faculty advisors when you have like maybe a career goal that you want to go and he's ...in that career and maybe he'll help you go toward that but I don't know what I want to be junior year. I don't know. It's just difficult.

The third participant did not have the opportunity to interact with the faculty advisor in a classroom setting as some of the other participants did:

I had a better relationship with my advisor in the [advising center] just because like there was a longer time-period there and I felt like I could e-mail him just like simple questions. I could e-mail him and be like, "what about this and he would answer me but, with the faculty advisor it was kind of just like I'd go in there if I had to get something signed, but I've never, maybe it's just being older that you kind of know how things work, so you don't have as many questions, I don't know, but I've never had a relationship with a faculty advisor at all. Or had classes with them or anything.

The fourth participant also discussed the impact that having an advisor as an instructor might have had:

I really liked the advisor I had, like my [advising center] advisor and I - because like the first time I came they just like assigned her to me or whatever and I asked for her again because I thought she was really helpful and I enjoyed talking to her and stuff...I never would e-mail her unless I had questions specifically about advising or something, but, and then the advisor I have right now, I haven't had her in class yet, but I will. But I don't

know, I mean, I guess it's kind of hard to have a relationship with them if you've never had them in class. And then at the same time, even if you have had them in class, some of them just don't make that connection and that's fine, but I don't know.

In addition to evaluating the trustworthiness of their new advisor, participants sought a personalized advising relationship during the transition. For some, this connection would be a new experience while others had enjoyed such a connection with their professional advisors. Barbara and Susan described in great detail their perception of a personal connection with an advisor. A focus group participant spoke in equal detail about the desperate situation that resulted from not finding such a connection. Indeed, many participants found the level of personalization they were seeking during the transition, which enriched their advising experience. James, Helen, Maria, and Karen all achieved a personal connection with their faculty advisors, which made their transition a positive experience. Others, such as Susan, transitioned from a very personal connection with their professional advisors into a very impersonal faculty advising relationship, much to their dismay. Participants from Focus Group B spoke at length about this situation. For these participants, the transition was perceived as largely unsuccessful. Though some found the connection they sought and others did not, the underlying structure is their preference for a personalized advising relationship.

Apprehensiveness towards the Unknown

The particular transition at the heart of this study required participants to navigate a new situation. A universal theme among them was a general apprehensiveness towards situations about which little was known. To this end, participants assessed their previous knowledge about aspects comprising the new advising situation, such as the location of advising, the process of advising, and the individual characteristics of the new advisor. They were apprehensive about

any of these that were unfamiliar. Conversely, if they had previous knowledge of any of these aspects, their concerns were alleviated. Simply put, participants were discomforted by unknown situations and comforted by familiar ones.

The base of previous knowledge utilized in making this assessment was multifaceted and varied by participants. Naturally, the initial professional advising experience was a substantial factor. If the faculty advising setting resembled the professional advising setting in one or more ways, participants were less apprehensive. Other previous experiences were relevant as well. Some participants were familiar with their new faculty advisor because of that advisor's role as an instructor. Others were familiar with the location of advising if it occurred in the same building in which many of their classes took place. Some participants were surprised by the transition itself as they were unaware that they would be switching advisors after their sophomore year. Participants' overall level of comfort/apprehension was essentially a summation of aspects of the transition perceived to be either known or unknown.

Susan addressed the issue most directly, stating her disappointment over the fact that her new faculty advisor was "a completely different person." A focus group participant noted that he was frustrated because the transition came as a surprise: "They don't really prepare you for that switch. Nobody tells you that's going to happen until you try to make an appointment and they're like, 'oh yea, you can't come here anymore, sorry.'" Another focus group participant felt the same way: "It was really abrupt, like all of a sudden you're not a sophomore. 'Don't come here anymore. You have to go to a professor in your department.'" Betty actually chose to meet with someone other than her assigned faculty advisor because she preferred to meet with someone she knew: "Switching over, I didn't go with who I was assigned to, I went to a professor I was in class with and just to be like more comfortable, someone I already knew."

Paul chose to meet with a faculty member that he worked with one campus for the same reason, then later did the same thing when he chose to meet with an instructor, neither of which were his assigned faculty advisor. While Helen was ultimately pleased with her transition to a faculty advisor, as it was occurring the fact that it was something new and unexpected left her uncomfortable:

I was okay with [transitioning] but...it was like... all of a sudden it's time to pick classes and I got an e-mail from our listserv in our department that was like, "Oh, if you're an incoming junior or senior you're assigned to a faculty advisor and they're posted outside room number blah, blah, blah [sic],"...I was more like surprised, I guess that that's, it was just so like nonchalant and I just got an e-mail a couple days before where I needed to make an appointment and that I didn't know when [the advising center] even told me that was what was going on even when I met with her, she never said, "Okay, well this is our last time,"...the transition wasn't bad or anything I was just kind of surprised by it and that's how they did it. But it's been a smooth transition and it's fine ever since.

Similarly, Linda was unnerved by both the new advisor and the new advising process:

I did not even know who [the faculty advisor] was. So I actually got on the ... website and like looked her up to like see what she taught and like what she did or whatever so I at least kind of knew if I would ever have her. So, I walked in [for faculty advising] and it was kind of...weird because she had absolutely no clue who I was, which I guess is semi-normal, but for a professor I don't really know how it is, and it was really, mostly quick. I actually didn't know - oh this is funny, I forgot this - so I didn't know - at least in journalism - you have to go get a folder that they have up in the journalism department that has like everything printed off about you and all your courses and all that stuff and

you take that folder to your faculty advisor, so I didn't know. I sat there for an hour because she was like running an hour late behind all the advising. So I sat there for like an hour waiting for my advising appointment because she was late, get in, and she was like, "I can't advise you until you get the folder." Okay, so I have to get it. I went upstairs and I get my folder and apparently they hadn't - they were behind on their printing, so then I had to wait another like another fifteen minutes while my entire - I think it was my transcript, all my courses, all my transcript, everything on there - had to print off, and of course it's like this huge thing of paper, so I had to wait for all that to print off. Thankfully I get all of that and then I went downstairs and got advised and the advising took, you know, like ten minutes. But ... my first time I think I spent almost an hour and a half just waiting to get advised.

One focus group participant was discomforted by the idea of meeting one-on-one with a faculty member:

It was kind of weird for me, I don't know I mean I don't mind going to talk to teachers in their offices or whatever, but I don't know, they just want the advisor - pretty much the only advisor in the psych department was a teacher that, I could not talk to him, you know like if I didn't have him for classes and stuff I don't know if I would actually ever wanted to talk to him. He's just kind of intimidating, you know? He's pretty much the only option except this other girl who was there occasionally and so, yea, it was kind of tricky.

For James, the apprehension about meeting with someone new was compounded by the fact that he had recently changed his major. Virtually everything was new for him including the advisor, the subject matter, the location, etc.:

The first time I met with my faculty advisor I had just made the transition to or just made or just declared psychology as my major, 'cause I was ... a chemistry student and then I went into psychology, and so, it was just kind of odd because I hadn't taken any classes and trying to explain to him why my transition, why I felt comfortable. I felt like, I don't know, just like subconsciously I was, you know just like I hope this is what I really want to do, so I'm making it sound like this is what I really want to do regardless just so like he takes me seriously despite the [major] switches. So like I was a little bit nervous about that, about, you know, having another transition and then meeting this guy for the first time because he's an older professor and he's just kind of intimidating himself so... I hope me and this guy click or else its going to be weird for the next couple of years getting advised or at least not as comfortable.

Another focus group participant shared a similar sentiment, which for him was exaggerated by the fact that he had two new advisors:

My problem was, I'm pre-med, so I have the pre-med advisor and then the [advisor in the advising center] and then my pre-med advisor switched at that two years and so did, I got switched to a faculty advisor too, so it was like double, so I've gone from two people I've gotten to know to two people, you know, I just met over one summer. It was really frustrating.

Karen's description illustrates the level of comfort that came with transitioning to familiar situation. She felt as though she was transitioning into a more familiar situation, especially considering that she was already familiar with the advisor and the location, and also because the transition did not come as a surprise:

It [transitioning] was pretty easy for me because...I went into journalism and they sent out e-mails all the time saying, "sign up for advising." They told us where it was posted; it was pretty easy. And if I had asked my general advisor, I'm sure she would have helped me too...I liked the just signing up on the door like we did in journalism. I thought that was just really easy because that way you don't have to worry about like, "Well I e-mailed them but they haven't e-mailed me back for a week." I thought it was pretty efficient; it was easy for me...And then the building was more convenient than coming all the way here for advising...the first time I met my faculty advisor I was actually taking her class and it was really cool because she was bubbly and has a lot of personality and...I really enjoyed her class, and she was just a fantastic person, and so when I went to advising she was like, "Oh, I've seen you in class." You know, "you're a good student," and right off the bat it was just friendly and I don't know, but she was just... super friendly and has a great personality, so I think that just made it better.

For the same reason, one focus group participant actively sought out a faculty advisor because he already knew him from class. This was in lieu of his assigned advisor, whom he had never met:

I had taken a course with this professor, I enjoyed it very much, and it's interesting because for some reason the political science department assigned me to a different faculty advisor but I was able to switch back to the same advisor I had previously had, so I've been with that advisor ever since the switch, which was made and I am very satisfied with it. I enjoy meeting in that professor's office whenever I have to get advised and it's not something that I dread at all.

The underlying apprehension exhibited by participants during the advising transition took many forms. Helen was so unnerved by the prospect of meeting with a faculty advisor she knew

nothing about that she did her own research prior to their first advising session. Linda found both her new advisor and the new advising process to be completely unlike what she was accustomed to. Like Helen, she was discomforted by this. For James, the transition to a new advisor coincided with choosing a new major, making for a noticeably awkward advising session. Other participants had very different experiences as they transitioned to an environment of relative familiarity. Often this was because they had previously met their new faculty advisor or were familiar with the location of their office. For Karen, all mystery was removed because she had her new advisor as an instructor at the time of the transition and the building was much more convenient for her. Thus, during the advising transition, participants consistently assessed the degree to which they were familiar with the new advising setting. They found comfort in the aspects of the transition they had previous experience with, and were apprehensive about anything viewed as foreign to them.

Reliance on Previously Developed Advising Expectations

A final structure that is essential to this experience involved the fact that participants encountered the transition after having had ample time to develop their own personal advising expectations. They used this template to judge the new faculty advisor. Similar to their evaluation of trustworthiness, the transition forced these expectations into consciousness. When the participants began their studies at the institution, academic advising was truly a new experience. During their time with professional advising, they had the opportunity to develop their own personal template for what they expect out of academic advising. Some were based on poor advising experiences in which they were left wanting more, while some were based on positive experiences they deemed beneficial. Many were based on a combination of both. Equipped with this personal template, participants entered their first session with their new

faculty advisors with expectations based on previous experiences. Elizabeth illustrated this theme in saying “So what do I want in an advisor? I would say initially I didn’t know, but having been advised twice by really good advisors I want someone [begins listing several characteristics].”

This structure is entirely and inextricably related to the other three structures. For example, in assessing the familiarity of the faculty advising setting, participants focused on factors related to their own advising expectations. Furthermore, their evaluations of trustworthiness and their desires for a personal connection were both part of their own personal advising expectations. Thus, evidence of this structure is found in many of the excerpts that also support other sections of this document. Mary expects an advisor to treat her as an individual and to be able to adjust to her unique needs based on her professional advising experience. She was frustrated when faculty advising did not also fulfill these expectations. Linda explicitly stated that her professional advising experience represented an ideal advising situation for her. When the faculty advisor did meet these expectations, her level of trust in that advisor remained low (to the point that she double checked all of the faculty advisor’s work). Karen also felt that her professional advising situation represented an ideal experience, and because her faculty advising experience was very similar, she was equally pleased.

Participants who went from a negative advising experience to a positive one developed and used advising expectations in the same way. Maria met with several professional advisors but was not able to create a personal advising connection. During her transition to faculty advising, she was eager to form such a connection. Because she was able to do so, she was very happy with her faculty advising experience. Nancy felt that professional advisors did not take enough time in addressing her needs and thus expected more from her faculty advisor. She was

pleased when her faculty advisor lived up to those expectations by taking ample time and answering all of her questions. In both of these situations, the participant formed their own personal template for what advising should be based on the shortfalls of professional advising. They then used that template to judge their new faculty advisor.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed the findings of this phenomenological study. I first presented a factual summary of participants' individual experiences followed by the descriptions of each of the four structural themes that emerged from this research. The structural themes included: 1) an evaluation of advisor trustworthiness based on perceived professional responsibilities, followed by appropriate coping mechanisms, 2) a preference for a personalized advising relationship, 3) an apprehensiveness towards the unknown, and 4) the reliance on previously developed advising expectations. These themes were universal among participants despite the differing personal characteristics of both the participants and the advisors.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Most shared models of academic advising involve some type of transition from professional advising to faculty advising. If the student-advisor relationship is of any significance, then so too is any alteration in that relationship. Participants in this study provided rich, thorough descriptions of multifaceted human experiences of advising transition. By examining each participant's subjective experience, I uncovered four overriding themes common among them. These descriptions and themes, explained in depth in the previous chapter, provided an understanding of the true essence of this transitional experience. This knowledge should benefit scholars and practitioners alike. In this chapter, I explain these benefits and discuss this study in the context of existing knowledge. I first give an overview of the study and its findings. Next, I discuss these findings in the context of existing research, including the theoretical framework that guided the study. I then explore the practical implications of this study and suggest ways in which this study can lead to future research.

Overview of the Study and its Findings

I designed this qualitative, exploratory study for the purpose of examining students' perceptions and experiences within an academic advising model that required them to transition from a professional advising setting to a faculty advising setting. The specific type of shared advising model involved in this study was known as a split model (Habley, 2008). This model included a centralized office that handled the advisement of most incoming students and continued to do so through the sophomore year. Upon reaching the junior classification, students were reassigned to a faculty advisor. The phenomenon of advising transition within shared models of academic advising occurs regularly on campuses across the United States but had not

yet been the focus of scholarly effort. With this study I have attempted to provide a ground-level understanding of this phenomenon in order to better inform both scholars and practitioners.

The setting for this research was a large, public, research university in the Mid-South. Specifically, I examined advisement within the arts and sciences college, which was the largest of six colleges and schools at the institution. I utilized a phenomenological approach to explore how students experienced the transition from centralized, professional advising to decentralized, faculty advising within the research setting. Using homogenous purposeful sampling, I selected 17 participants who: 1) were full-time students within the research setting, 2) had been advised continuously in a centralized advising office for at least one year, 3) had transitioned to decentralized advising, 4) had been advised under a decentralized model for at least one year, and 5) were classified as seniors at the time of participant selection. I used both focus groups and personal interviews as data collection methods, the audio recordings of which were transcribed into individual documents. All participants attended one of three focus groups, and all but one of these same participants returned for follow-up personal interviews. For each individual transcript, I followed precisely the *Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data* defined by Moustakas (1994). The result of this method was an exhaustive, comprehensive description of both the subjective perceptions of participants and the objective themes underlying those perceptions. This combined description, termed a *composite textural-structural summary*, was presented in Chapter 4 of this study. I now discuss the findings as they relate to each of the three research questions the study was designed to answer.

Research Question #1: *How did students ascribe meaning to their lived experience of transition from centralized, professional advisement to decentralized, faculty-based advisement?*

As with any human experience, the participants perceived the transition subjectively, dependent on their own personal characteristics and worldviews. For example, some participants were very apprehensive about severing a bond with their professional advisor, while others were eager to meet with a faculty member. Some participants formed a meaningful, personalized connection with their new faculty advisor, while others were unnerved about transitioning to a new type of advisor, a new location, and a new method of advisement. However, from these differing perceptions arose several universal themes that governed how participants perceived the advising transition: 1) an evaluation of advisor trustworthiness followed by appropriate coping mechanisms, 2) a preference for a personalized advising relationship, 3) an apprehensiveness towards the unknown, and 4) reliance on previously developed advising expectations.

The initial encounter with a new type of academic advisor triggered within participants an internal evaluation of trustworthiness. Trust, in this context, was based solely on the participants' perceptions of each advisor's professional responsibilities and how those responsibilities related to the needs of the participants. For example, participants who were mostly interested in discussing major-related issues trusted faculty advisors as they regarded a faculty member as the ultimate expert in their field. Conversely, participants who mostly had general questions beyond their major did not trust faculty advisors as much because they perceived faculty members as having limited time for advising given their teaching responsibilities. If, after the transition, participants did not trust the new advisor, they relied on two coping mechanisms. The first was to return to a previous trusted advisor, if one existed. In other words, if participants trusted their previous professional advisor, they attempted to revive that advising connection. The second coping mechanism was an increased level of self-reliance.

A lack of trust in their faculty advisor prompted participants to place more trust in their own ability to navigate academic policies than they would have otherwise.

Participants' search for trusted advisors was accompanied by a desire for personalization. They wanted an advisor to know them on a personal level, to treat them as unique individuals, and to make recommendations based on their personal needs, characteristics, goals, etc. When transitioning to a new advisor, participants expected this type of personal connection. Their preference for personalization was separate and distinct from their search for a trusted advisor. A lack of personal connection did not lead to specific actions in the way that a lack of trust did. The preference for a personal connection was a strong but passive desire, placing the onus on the advisor to personalize their relationships with their advisees.

Personalization and trust were just two of several aspects of the transition that participants took into account as they assessed their new advising situation. Their previous knowledge about the new situation significantly impacted how participants experienced the transition. The more they knew about the new advising situation, the more comfortable they were when transitioning. Likewise, if they knew very little about the new situation, they were very apprehensive. The aspects they considered included the new faculty advisor, the advising style of the new advisor, the location of advising, the advising process, etc. Participants who had little prior knowledge about these aspects were very apprehensive about the transition. If, however, participants did have previous knowledge, the transition was a more pleasant experience. For example, some participants had already encountered the new faculty advisor as an instructor, and were already familiar with the new location of advising because it was in a building they frequented. In these situations, students were much less apprehensive about the transition.

Implicit in each of these themes was the use of personal advising expectations.

Logically, if students transition from one advisor to another, then they have already experienced at least one advising session, giving them the opportunity to form their own perceptions and expectations concerning academic advising. This process was evident among the participants of this study. They possessed advising expectations they had developed during their previous experiences with professional advising. When they had first met with an advisor as freshmen, they had no previous advising experiences with which to compare. In transitioning to a faculty advisor as a junior, they had by that point developed their own personal templates for what they expected academic advising to be. Both positive and negative experiences contributed to these personal templates. For example, some participants who lacked a personal connection with their professional advisor became aware of that void, were dissatisfied with it, and then expected to rectify the problem with their new faculty advisor. An opposite scenario was one in which participants did find a personal connection with their professional advisors, became aware that they valued this connection, and then expected a similar advising relationship after the transition. In both cases, participants developed personal advising expectations during their time with professional advisors and then applied these expectations to the new faculty advisor.

Students ascribed meaning to their transitional experience in the ways I have described. The unique characteristics, emotions, goals, and personal histories of each participant filtered through four cognitive structures that were fundamental to this experience. Descriptions offered by participants revealed these structures as the common foundation shaping their subjective perceptions. All participants defined trust in terms of the professional responsibilities of their advisors. They also expected advisors to personalize advising sessions. As they encountered their new advisor, they were more comfortable if they had some degree of familiarity with the

new situation. They used their own personal template, developed during the professional advising experience, to evaluate this new situation.

Research Question #2: How did students ascribe meaning to their cumulative advising experience in a model that substantially altered their method of advisement at the approximate midpoint in their academic career?

The advising transition also affected how participants experienced academic advising in general. The transition induced a kind of forced awareness in participants, and it gave them an opportunity to compare two different methods of advisement. In this way, the themes that framed their transitional experience also affected their overall advising experience. If participants distrusted their professional advisors but then trusted their new faculty advisor, their original disappointment was confirmed. Furthermore, participants who attempted to return to a professional advisor because they mistrusted their faculty advisor exhibited a general sense of frustration with the advising system overall. This awareness and comparison affected how participants perceived their cumulative advising experience because it informed and solidified those perceptions. If participants had forged a personal connection with their professional advisor but not with the faculty advisor, they were frustrated by the system in general. For them, the transition simultaneously made them aware of a valued personal connection and then severed that connection. Conversely, when students did not share a personal connection with a professional advisor but then found that connection with a faculty advisor, they became aware of their preference for personalization and were then retroactively frustrated that they did not initially enjoy such personalization.

The fact that participants used previously developed advising expectations to evaluate the new advising situation clearly illustrated the forced awareness and comparisons brought about by

the advising transition. Ultimately, all of the examples I have described in the preceding paragraph support this theme. This process made explicit the implicit desires participants had formed during their time in the professional advising setting, allowing them to actively apply those expectations not just to the new advisor, but the system as a whole. The transition allowed them to use their personal advising expectations to compare the two distinct methods of advisement they had experienced. That comparison was fundamental in shaping how participants ascribed meaning to their cumulative advising experience.

Research Question #3: How did students ascribe meaning to their perceptions of connectedness during the process of advising transition?

The preference for personalized relationships exhibited by participants was perhaps the most frequently discussed theme, especially in the focus groups. Participants clearly wanted to connect with their advisors on a personal level and be recognized as a unique individual. Depending on the situation, the transition either strengthened or weakened this perception of connectedness. They expected advisors to ask about their individual characteristics and desires, and to make suggestions based on those personal details. Furthermore, they enjoyed the opportunity to interact with faculty and staff members in multiple settings (i.e. having the same faculty member as both an instructor and an advisor). The advising transition was either a threat or a catalyst in the context of participants' perceptions of connectedness, depending on the level of personalization with each of the advisors involved. The participants that were pleased with the personalization they received from their professional advisor were apprehensive about severing that connection during the transition, and then were dissatisfied if the same level was not reached with a faculty advisor. Conversely, if no personal connection previously existed, then the new faculty advisor represented an opportunity to create one.

This study has established that personalized advising relationships were important to participants. The logical extension of this theme was that any modification to an advising relationship would affect perceptions of connectedness. This possibility was central to the purpose and significance of this study. Participants, in their descriptions of their transitional experiences, have clearly articulated the ways in which students' perceptions of connectedness are affected by advising transitions. Participants who enjoyed a meaningful personal connection with their professional advisor were seeking a similar connection with the new faculty advisor. If this did not occur, then the post-transition environment was significantly different than the pre-transition environment, resulting in an overall negative impact. One participant spoke in detail of her relationship with her professional advisor, whom she found "open" and "caring," only to transition to a faculty advisor who was a "completely different person." Her dissatisfaction was visible as she explained that she was never able to achieve a level of personal connection with the faculty advisor. Participants who did not find a personal connection with their professional advisor were also seeking one from their new faculty advisor, and if this occurred the impact was equally strong but positive in nature. A participant described a frustrating professional advising experience in which no one took the time to help her choose a major that suited her. This was followed by a faculty advisor that spent up to an hour each advising session getting to know her and helping her plan her future. There were also instances of participants who enjoyed a personal connection with both the professional advisor and the faculty advisor, and those that lacked a connection with either of them (an example of which was the participant described earlier who was disappointed in the institution as a whole).

In all four of these scenarios, the influence of the advising transition on participants' sense of connectedness was clear. In two of the possible scenarios it had a positive impact: 1) by

maintaining an existing sense of personal connection, albeit with a new advisor, or 2) by creating an opportunity to foster a connection when one has not previously existed. The remaining two scenarios had a clearly negative impact: 1) by severing an existing personal connection, or 2) by failing to create a connection when one did not exist, prolonging the participant's sense of isolation.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study were congruent with relevant existing literature. Participant descriptions of the advising transition can be easily understood within the context of Schlossberg's (1995) explanation of how adults experience transition, which provided the theoretical framework for this study. In fact, Schlossberg's (1995) dimensions of transitional experiences are somewhat similar to the cognitive structures used in phenomenological descriptions. Both are sets of factors that shape how individuals perceive a given experience. Schlossberg (1995) identified three dimensions related to the transition (type, context, and impact) and four dimensions related to individuals' ability to adjust to that transition (situation, self, support, and strategies). *Type* refers to whether the transition was anticipated, unanticipated or a nonevent. *Context* is a summation of factors related to the transition itself, and *impact* is the net difference between the pre- and post-transition environments. Because the transitional experience examined by this study involved modifications to relationships with faculty and staff members, I fortified Schlossberg's impact dimension with descriptions of connectedness offered by Tinto's (1993) Theory of Individual Departure. The meaning of final four dimensions of Schlossberg's model, which were referred to as the 4 *S*'s, are fairly intuitive based on their names. *Self* describes the personal context of transitioning individuals and *situation* describes how the transition relates to that personal context. *Support* includes the network of people who

can help the individual adjust after the transition, while *strategies* include individuals' own personal coping behaviors.

The type of transition differed among participants in this study because for some it was anticipated but for others it was entirely unanticipated. A major theme among participants was a feeling of apprehensiveness towards unknown aspects of the transition. The more participants knew about the transition and the new setting, the more comfortable they were. Those who expected the transition were much less apprehensive than those that did not. Ostensibly, the context dimension of the transition should have been the same for all participants, given that they met such narrow parameters to participate in the study, but one fundamental difference existed. The academic advisors involved in each participant's experience were quite different. Aspects such as advising styles, personal characteristics, interpersonal skills, etc. significantly influenced the perceptions of participants. Some found their professional advisor to be the most personable, while others preferred their faculty advisor. Some already knew their faculty advisor as an instructor, while others did not. These advisor-related differences were central to participants' overall experience.

The impact dimension of the transition was the most complicated. There were many different ways in which the post-transition environment could differ from the pre-transition environment. Participants' apprehensiveness towards the unknown was essentially an assessment of the impact of the transition – an assessment of the ways in which the faculty advising setting differed from the professional advising setting. For some participants, the new advising setting was already part of their established routine because they already knew the faculty member or they frequented the building that housed the new advisor. For others, the difference was more

significant. Some had never met the new advisor or encountered a much different method of advisement than they had previously encountered.

As discussed in the previous section, the theme of personalization highlighted the most significant way in which the new advising environment may have differed from the previous one. Student connectedness is a well-researched and frequently discussed concept within higher education literature. For this reason, I used the concept of connectedness, as defined by Tinto (1993) and other higher education scholars (Astin, 1975; Chickering, 1969; Kuh et al., 2008; Tinto, 1993), to more fully describe Schlossberg's impact dimension. According to Tinto's (1993) Theory of Individual Departure, student satisfaction and well-being were largely a result of the degree to which students perceived that they were part of the academic and social systems at an institution. Indeed, participants in this study described a desire to be known as a unique individual by their advisor. They expected advisors to show genuine concern for their own well-being. The satisfaction described by those who received this type of attention was identical to the personal integration described by Tinto (1993). Furthermore, the dissatisfaction (extreme in some cases) resulting from a lack of personalization resembled Tinto's (1993) concept of isolation. Several participants recounted experiences in which the advisor asked about personal details and then used that information to help them achieve their goals. Many of these participants were adamant about the positive effect this had on their overall experience at the institution. One participant joined several clubs, explored two different languages, and added a minor all based on the personal connection she had with her advisor. Another credited her advisor with helping her through a very difficult freshman year by connecting on a personal level. A less fortunate participant spoke at length about the feelings of despair and isolation he harbored because neither of his advisors seemed to show concern for him. These feelings

contributed to an overall perception that no one representing the institution “cared about him.” In these ways participants’ perceptions of connectedness aligned with both Tinto (1993) and Schlossberg (1995).

As I previously mentioned, Schlossberg’s (1995) model also included four dimensions related to the individual experiencing the transition, rather than the transition itself. All four of these dimensions were evident in this study. The situation dimension included factors that defined the transition in terms of the personal context of the participants. For several of them, the timing of the transition was important. Several participants explained that the transition occurred at the same time they were changing their major. Another participant was in the middle of planning for a study abroad trip. Factors such as these had a clear impact on how the participants experienced the transition. Characteristics related to the self dimension differed considerably among participants, as was expected. One participant was an honors student, two had been transfer students, one had worked alongside professional advisors during summer orientation, and one was a nontraditional student with a family. Students also differed in terms of standard demographics, including age, gender, socioeconomic background, etc. Schlossberg’s (1995) support dimension and strategies dimension both relate to the coping strategies that were part of the trustworthiness theme. Participants who mistrusted their new advisor indeed turned to their support network, which often included a previous trusted advisor. Another course of action was for participants to rely more on themselves to navigate academic policies and make decisions about coursework - clearly a personal coping strategy.

The findings of this study should also be discussed in the context of existing research. For example, the theme of avoiding the unknown involved, among other factors, participant interactions with faculty and staff members outside of the classroom. Pascarella and Terenzini

(1976, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1995) explored the importance of these types of interactions for several decades. They found that an increase in the frequency of non-classroom interactions was related to more positive perceptions of the college experience. Several of the participants in this study described their positive experiences when advising sessions allowed them to interact with their instructors in a different setting. This allowed participants to build a relationship with a faculty member beyond the formalities and defined roles found in a classroom setting. One participant even had this experience with the professional advisor, as they were enrolled in a freshman orientation course taught by that advisor. In relation to participants' apprehensiveness towards unknown aspects of the transition, several of them mentioned that they were eager about the advising transition because they already knew their advisor as an instructor, which presented them with an opportunity to expand that relationship. Conversely, several other participants explicitly mentioned that they were apprehensive about meeting with their new faculty advisor because they had not had him or her in class before. Thus, these students were unsure about non-classroom interactions with faculty members unless they had previous classroom experiences with them.

Another finding was that participants developed their own personal expectations for advising during their professional advising experience, and then used those expectations to assess their new advising setting after the transition. While participants varied in the expectations they described, the language they used to do so was very similar to much of the research that has been conducted on academic advising styles. In the broadest sense, participants were clearly able to describe the difference between the developmental and prescriptive styles defined by Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972). Several participants encountered advising situations they described as rushed, in which advisors of both varieties simply listed a few

courses for them to take. Most of those same participants desired advisors who spent more time discussing personal goals, aptitudes, etc. Though ostensibly unaware of the two terms, these participants illustrated the difference between prescriptive and developmental advising.

Collectively, participants in this study mentioned all of the 12 advising functions identified by Smith and Allen (2006): *overall connect* – helping students connect to academic, career, and life goals, *major connect* – helping students choose and connect with a major, *gen[eral] ed[ucation] connect* – helping students value and understand general education, *degree connect* – helping students select the type of degree to pursue, *out-of-class connect* – helping students with non-classroom activities, *referral academic* – helping students utilize campus resources that will help them academically, *referral nonacademic* – helping students address nonacademic issues, *how things work* – helping students understand the policies and procedures of the institution, *accurate information* – helping students by providing accurate information about degree requirements, *skills abilities interests* – helping students choose courses based on their own skills and abilities, *know as individual* – getting to know students on an individual, personal level, and *shared responsibility* – helping students by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own education. Each of these functions was explicitly described by one or more of the participants in this study. The same was true for Alexander et al.'s (2003) preferred advisor traits (*advising sessions that lasted at least 30 minutes, advising sessions that were one-on-one advisors that have been well-trained, advisors that build personal relationships, and advisors that enjoy their job and helping students*) and Bitz's (2010) three areas of overall advising satisfaction (*level of advisor concern, frequency of contact, and quality of advising relationship*). Participants' preference for personalization, a primary theme of this study, was also a central theme of the Mottarella et al.'s (2004) study. Suffice it to say that the

ways in which participants in this study described their personal advising expectations corresponded with the findings of existing research on advising expectations.

The findings of this study also related, in an intriguing way, to the existing research involving types of academic advisors. Specifically, the evaluation of trustworthiness that occurs during the advising transition has very much to do with the differences between these two types of advisors. Participants were able to accurately identify these differences based simply on their own intuition. The positive and negative aspects of each type of advisor discussed by King (1993) and Habley (2004) are the same aspects that were discussed by participants when explaining whether they trusted their advisor. Some participants trusted faculty advisors while others trusted professional advisors, depending on the type of information they were seeking. They recognized the faculty members as experts in their field. They also recognized the competing roles of instructor and advisor for faculty members. In other words, many of the participants in this study observed for themselves the “sharpened focus” of faculty activity on teaching and research that has pushed advising and other duties “more and more to the periphery” just as Schuster and Finkelstein had observed (2006, p. 123). They also assumed that professional advisors possessed a broad base of general advising knowledge. Essentially, participants were able to reach on their own the same conclusions that researchers have reached.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have many practical implications for institutions of higher education, especially in the area of academic advising administration. There are implications associated with each of the four themes. The theme of avoiding the unknown has perhaps the clearest implications. Participants in this study exhibited a distinct apprehensiveness towards any unknown aspects of the advising transition. Any measures that may reduce the number of

unknown aspects should help students feel more comfortable with the transition. This particularly affects the advisor on the front end of an advising transition. If this advisor thoroughly explains the upcoming transition and the new advising setting, this will familiarize the student with the transition before it happens. Even just mentioning that the transition is about to happen should have an impact on some students as several participants said they were taken completely by surprise. The initial advisor should introduce the new advisor in as much detail as possible. Details such as the new advisor's contact information, office location, teaching emphasis, and advising process should be discussed during the final advising session before the transition.

The fact that participants demonstrated an obvious preference for personalization also has clear implications. Above all, advisors of any kind should simply be aware of this preference. Participants expected a personal connection with each of their academic advisors, regardless of the type of advisor or the number of credit hours they had earned. Furthermore, this was a passive desire; participants did not take steps on their own to create such a personal connection. They considered personalization to be a task of the advisor. Thus, in an effort to increase student satisfaction and connectedness, advisors should take steps to foster advising relationships that are personal in nature. They should discuss personal details and desires of the advisee and then make customized suggestions based on those factors. Several participants explicitly recommended, without being prompted, that advisors ask about personal details and make an attempt to remember some of them over time. The advice of one participant seems especially relevant: "You should sit down and talk to the kid for a second, just about life because I think that a lot of people are struggling with other stuff..."

Fostering a personal connection is important during the first advising session after an advising transition. Presumably, that session will set the tone for future advising sessions and as such figures to be critical in fostering a connection. Based on participants' descriptions, forming a connection after the transition can have a positive effect on their overall perception of the institution and their connectedness to the institution. If the connection is not made, however, feelings of isolation may result. Advisor training should incorporate general steps toward fostering a personal connection within the confines of a standard advising session.

The advising transition also triggered an internal evaluation of trustworthiness for participants, one that was based primarily on the job duties of the advisor. They assessed how the advisors' role(s) on campus impacted their ability to possess and articulate accurate information. This finding indicates a need for awareness and communication on both sides of the transition in the same way as the theme of personalization. Both the initial and the subsequent advisors should understand that students are keenly aware of an advisor's job responsibilities. For example, they understand that a professional advisor is primarily responsible for advising while faculty advisors have teaching and research duties, and they assume that these factors relate to their ability to advise. This is an issue that advisors can address directly with students by explaining their role on campus and their commitment to accurate advising. Presumably, this would be especially important for the initial advisor to do in the final session before the advising transition, and then for the subsequent advisor to do during the first session after the transition. This would allow each advisor to make explicit any trust issues the student may have and then take steps to alleviate those issues. In this way, the advising transition is more likely to be from one trusted advisor to another.

The coping mechanisms associated with the evaluation of advisor trustworthiness also have practical implications. Participants who did not trust their new faculty advisors made attempts to return to their professional advisors, either in person or via phone/email. Those participants that did not have access to their previous advisors began to rely more on themselves to navigate academic policies. If students were able to maintain contact with their previous advisor, even if only by email, this might reduce feelings of isolation and therefore increase overall student satisfaction. Several participants explicitly requested continued access to the professional advising center as a whole. For these participants, this access to a trusted resource would have provided valuable peace of mind.

The fact that participants entered the advising transition with personal advising expectations that they had developed during their time in the professional advising setting has its own set of practical implications. Within advising models that involve an advisor transition, the new advisor should negotiate expectations and objectives with the student. The first advising session after an advising transition is one that involves a student and an advisor, both with clear expectations about what the advising process should involve, however those two sets of expectations may very well be dissimilar. Advisors should describe what they intend to accomplish during the initial advising session as well as all future sessions that are planned. They should also ask students about their own expectations and then negotiate until both are satisfied. Furthermore, open communication between advisors on either end of the transition will increase the new advisor's awareness of the previous advising process and vice versa. This may help to align the two settings, or at the very least help advisors better prepare students for the transition.

To summarize, the findings of this study seem to suggest three general practices that might improve student experiences within models that involve advising transitions: 1) closure and preparation during the final advising session before the transition, 2) negotiation and introduction during the first advising session after the transition, 3) strategic awareness during all advising sessions from orientation to graduation, and 4) structural policies approaching a dual advising model. The first three recommendations are simply a matter of advisor awareness and training. The final advising session before the transition should be one that brings closure to the current advising situation and prepares students for the new advising setting. Advisors should review what has been accomplished to that point and discuss students' desires and concerns about their remaining years at the institution. They should then preview, to the greatest extent possible, the new advising setting. The preview should include information about the new advisor (including his or her name, title, role on campus, etc.), the location, the method of scheduling an appointment, and potential advising objectives. To continue this process of transition, the new advisor should spend ample time getting acquainted with students and then negotiate advising objectives with students during the first advising session after the advising transition. Advisors should discuss their own background and role on campus (including their commitment to advising), and then ask students about their background, academic progress to that point, goals, concerns, etc. They should then make their own advising objectives explicit, ask students to do the same, and then align the two sets of expectations as much as possible. Through the combined efforts of advisors on either side of the transition, student experiences should be much more satisfactory and productive. Administrators may even consider instituting a co-meeting involving the student, initial advisor, and subsequent advisor. Should resources

and advisor availability permit such an endeavor, it would undoubtedly improve the transitional experience for students.

In addition to these specific activities during the advising sessions on either side of the transition, advisors (both professional and faculty) should transmit strategic awareness during all advising sessions. This requires advisors to exhibit a thorough understanding of the advising model in use, and to frequently convey the structure and purpose of this model to the student. This increased awareness should decrease uncertainty and further align advisor and advisee expectations. In addition to the sessions already mentioned, another critical session in which this strategic awareness should be present is the initial advising session preceding the student's first semester at the institution. This is the student's first exposure to advising at the institution and, as such, has the potential to substantially affect the student's advising awareness and expectations. Again, each of these first three recommendations involve advisor training. This is particularly important for faculty advisors because, as has previously been discussed, the majority of their time and attention is required for activities related to research and teaching. Objective-based advisor training will help advisors make the most of their time with students.

Finally, structural policies within shared models of advisement should approach those found within a dual model of advising when possible. A dual model is a shared advising model in which students are simultaneously assigned both a professional advisor and a faculty advisor. Clearly, the implementation of a dual model at every institution is neither possible nor practical. Because each institution has its own mix of resources and needs, it is not the most effective model for every institution. Rather, the suggestion here is to implement policies that increase student access to both types of advisors, professional and faculty, when possible. This study highlighted the possible benefits of both types of advisors. It also revealed that participants

tended to return to professional advisors, and then were frustrated if they no longer had access to the professional advising center. Because they assumed professional advisors possessed a broad knowledge base related to general advising issues, they preferred to have access to professional advisors for simple advising questions. Many participants also valued the expertise and mentorship of faculty advisors. Thus, to the greatest practical extent, students should have access to both types of advisors within shared advising models.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study provided a foundation for future research related to transition with shared advising models, both qualitative and quantitative. Possible scholarly efforts that would build on the findings of this study are listed below.

- A qualitative study that would build on a limitation of the current one would be a multi-year study in which students are interviewed once during each of their freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years. Multiple interviews would address the fact that the current study was based on the recollections of seniors, which created the potential for recall bias and also meant that participants possessed knowledge and maturity that they may not have had while they actually made the transition.
- A qualitative study that examines the perceptions of professional and faculty advisors within a shared advising model would also be valuable. This type of study would provide a more complete understanding of the advising relationships that are affected by the transition.
- A qualitative study that more intentionally includes a broad representation of majors and academic departments should also be considered. This would address a limitation of the

current study, in which I did not select participants with any regard to major or academic department.

- A quantitative study should be conducted to compare students' perceptions and satisfaction on either side of an advising transition. Such a study would either simultaneously survey two separate cohorts within the same setting, or survey the same cohort at two separate points in time.
- A quantitative study that specifically measures students' connectedness before and after an advising transition is another possibility. The theoretical perspectives, augmented by the findings of this study, provide the impetus for developing a quantitative instrument aimed at measuring connectedness as it relates to academic advising.
- A study that further explores the idea that students develop personal advising expectations during their initial advising experiences and then use those expectations to form their own perceptions during an advising transition will also be helpful. Such a study should measure advising expectations of students in the process of transitioning advisors.

Chapter Summary

Transition and connectedness were at the core of this study, and both of which are familiar themes among college students. During their first year of college, students transition to a new setting, new friends, new culture, and new set of academic and social expectations. They remain connected through online networks, smartphones, and social interaction. The hope among higher education scholars and practitioners is that they stay connected to campus by forming positive relationships with classmates, faculty members, staff members, academic departments, student organizations, etc. The participants of this study experienced an additional

transition after their sophomore year, one that involved their relationships with faculty and staff members. After connecting with professional advisors during the freshman and sophomore years, they went through the process of reconnecting with a new faculty advisor in their junior year. In light of their recurrent one-on-one interactions with students, many scholars have recognized the potential of academic advisors to facilitate a positive connection between the student and the campus community (Kuh et al., 2005; Light, 2001; Tinto, 1993). Yet, the effect of severing this advising connection when students are reassigned to new advisors had never been examined in research prior to this current study.

This phenomenological study provided a thorough understanding of how students experienced the process of advising transition. Through combining literal descriptions of participants' subjective experiences with the underlying cognitive themes common among all participants, I produced a complete explanation of the true essence of the advising transition experience. By understanding this experience from the perspective of students, advisors, both professional and faculty, will be able to improve their advising methods and maintain meaningful advising relationships with their students throughout their undergraduate experience.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol

Group #:

Date:

Facilitator:

Participant Demographics						
Participant #:						
Age:						
Classification:						
Academic Department:						
First Semester at Institution:						
Advising History:						

Description of the Study:

The focus group facilitator will inform the participants about the purpose of the study, its expected duration, and procedures. The facilitator will also explain how the findings of the study will be used and disseminated. The participants will also be informed that they will be contacted in the future to check the accuracy of the findings.

Questions:

1. Describe what it was like switching from the Advising Center to a faculty advisor.
2. Describe your relationships with each of the advisors you have had.
3. Describe your overall experiences with academic advising in this college.
4. Describe how those experiences made you feel.
5. Describe how your advising experiences have affected how connected to your institution you feel.
6. Do any of you have anything else you would like to share about when you switched advisors or about your advising experience in general?

Appendix B: Personal Interview Protocol

Group #:

Participant #:

Date:

Facilitator:

Description of the Study:

The interviewer will inform the interviewee about the purpose of the study, its expected duration, and the procedures. The interviewer will also explain how the findings of the study will be used and disseminated. The interviewee will be also informed that he or she will be contacted in the future to check the accuracy of the findings.

Questions:

1. Describe the advising system in your college [interviewer may need to prompt student to provide details about how advising is handled for each classification of students].
2. Describe your experience transitioning from one advisor to another.
3. Describe any adjustments you had to make as a result of this transition.
4. Describe the first time you met with your faculty advisor in as much detail as possible.
5. Describe your relationship with your previous advisor.
6. Describe your relationship with your current advisor.
7. Describe how you feel about your overall experience with academic advising, taking into account the entire time you have been at this institution.
8. Describe what you would imagine to be an ideal advising session.
9. Describe what you would imagine to be an ideal system of advising.
10. Describe how you think your advising experience has affected any aspect of how connected to your institution you feel.
11. [At this point, the interviewer has the option of mentioning specific statements or themes that were discussed in the focus group and asking the interviewee to elaborate on them].

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

Title: Getting Connected...Again: A Phenomenological Study of Student Experiences of Transition Within a Shared Model of Academic Advising

Researchers:

Shane Barker, M.S., Graduate Student, Staff Member
 Ketevan Mamiseishvili, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor
 University of Arkansas
 College of Education and Health Professions
 Department of Rehabilitation, Human Resources,
 and Communication Disorders
 106 Graduate Education Building
 Fayetteville AR 72701
 479-575-4758

Compliance Contact Person:

IRB Coordinator
 Research Compliance
 University of Arkansas
 120 Ozark Hall
 Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
 479-575-2208
irb@uark.edu

Description: You are being asked to participate in a study designed to explore the perceptions of students who have transitioned from centralized, professional advising to decentralized, faculty advising. The researcher will be conducting small focus group discussions and one-on-one personal interviews to gain insight into the experience of switching advisors and to identify themes associated with that experience. You are invited to take part in a focus group involving up to five other students, and then a possible face-to-face, one-on-one interview. Each will last approximately sixty minutes. I will generate audio recordings of each focus group and interview, including yours, using a digital recorder. You have been invited to participate in this project because you fit the following characteristics 1) full-time student within the college of arts and sciences at a research university in the Mid-South, 2) have been advised continuously in a centralized advising office for at least one year, 3) transitioned to decentralized advising, 4) have been advised under decentralized model for at least one year, and 5) have reached the rank of senior

Risks and Benefits: Benefits include the fact that you are contributing new knowledge to the existing research. For your participation, you will receive \$10-\$25 in the form of a gift card that can be used on campus. Also, you will have a chance to examine and reflect on your own feelings about your academic success and how productive you think your mentor relationships with your assigned advisors are (and perhaps how they can be improved.) There are no anticipated risks.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to not answer any question, or to withdraw your participation at any point during the focus group or the interview.

Confidentiality: All information will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will know your name, but will not divulge it or identify your answers to anyone. Recordings of the focus groups and interviews will be identified by number, not by name. Only the researcher will know your number. All recordings will be destroyed after transcription. All information will be reported as aggregate data. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

Informed Consent: I, _____, have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Each of these items has been explained to me by the investigator. The investigator has answered all of my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. My signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this study and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the investigator.

Signature

Date

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

October 18, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: Shane Barker
Ketevan Mamisetskhvili

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: PROJECT MODIFICATION

IRB Protocol #: 11-03-497

Protocol Title: *Getting Connected...Again: A Phenomenological Study of Student Experiences of Transition Within a Shared Model of Academic Advising*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 10/18/2011 Expiration Date: 03/10/2012

Your request to modify the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. This protocol is currently approved for 24 total participants. If you wish to make any further modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

Please note that this approval does not extend the Approved Project Period. Should you wish to extend your project beyond the current expiration date, you must submit a request for continuation using the UAF IRB form "Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects." The request should be sent to the IRB Coordinator, 210 Administration.

For protocols requiring FULL IRB review, please submit your request at least one month prior to the current expiration date. (High-risk protocols may require even more time for approval.) For protocols requiring an EXPEDITED or EXEMPT review, submit your request at least two weeks prior to the current expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation on or prior to the currently approved expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

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