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Student Perceptions	of Academic Advis	or Effectiveness
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and Student Success: Factors That Matter

(TITLE)

ΒY

Madeline R. Owens

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2015

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

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Abstract

This study examined students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness as well as perceptions of the importance of academic advising functions, in relation to the contribution these constructs have on student success as measured by GPA and continuous semester enrollment. Participants included students 18 years or older who were enrolled at the institution of interest at the time of data collection. Quantitative causal-comparative and correlational designs were utilized. A 41-item instrument was adapted with permission from Smith and Allen (2006) to measure students' perceptions of advisor effectiveness and importance of the academic advising functions. Findings indicated that a change in students' GPA can be explained by perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness, and academic advisor effectiveness impacted student success. Students perceived advisors to be most effective in performing the functions: Accurate Information, Major Connect, and Share Responsibility, and least effective at performing Know as Individual, Referral Nonacademic, and Out-of Class Connect. Findings also indicate there is a difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' perceived importance of the academic advising functions. The functions with the highest dissonance were Know as Individual, Skills Abilities Interests, Out-of Class Connect, Overall Connect, and Accurate Information. This study found a practical and significant difference between perceptions of effectiveness and importance and highlighted the benefits that come from effective developmental academic advising. Based on the research, student affairs professionals should address areas that students identified as highly important yet had low perceptions of advisor effectiveness.

Dedication

I'd like to dedicate my thesis to my supportive and loving family. Any success I have would not be possible without the encouragement I continue to experience from your beliefs that I can, and will, accomplish any endeavor I embark on. I am truly grateful – I love you, my cherished family (Owens, Hummel, Darling, Miezio, Elliott).

Acknowledgements

My greatest thank-you will always be to the Lord, I aspire to progress through life showing kindness, compassion, and acceptance of all people – principles I've witnessed and learned from my faith that have benefitted me tremendously, including in my work as a student affairs professional. Life is so much easier with an open heart.

To my thesis chair, Dr. Polydore, your expertise, patience, charisma, and vigor have transformed the thesis process for me. I have truly enjoyed working with you; you've gone above and beyond your expected duties to teach and mentor me, and I will not forget what you have demonstrated – students flourish when approached with appropriate challenges and support. Seven months ago I would not have believed you if you'd told me we'd be where we are now. I'm not sure thank-you is sufficient; please know you've made the difference in my education and thoughts on pursuing further educational opportunities.

I must express additional thanks to Dr. Eric Davidson and Dr. Nancy Crone for serving on my thesis committee. Eric, thank you for guiding my experience in assessment and evaluation, and our discussions regarding statistics; you've helped me open doors I hadn't known were waiting to be opened. Dr. Crone, I have valued your insight and expertise in academic advising and it has been a pleasure to discuss advising philosophies and theories with you, thank you for your investment in my education.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the staff from my undergraduate department's academic advising office. Our interactions and the advice from each staff member during my undergraduate study were what sparked my passion for student affairs. Furthermore, I appreciate the additional mentorship and learning opportunities this office provides as I complete an internship; Keri, thank you for so willingly sharing your knowledge, office, and mentorship in academic advising.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The last 40 years have seen a proliferation of research on student success and retention in higher education as institutions compete for an increasingly diverse applicant pool (Bai & Pan, 2009; Cleary, 2001; Crookston, 1972; Wright, 1996; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). Most recently, decreases in college enrollment (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2011) compounded by reduced funding from state and federal agencies (Mortenson, 2012) mean that retaining students once they arrive at the institution is particularly crucial. Many suggest the quality of the interaction between a student and an involved individual on campus is a key contributor to college retention (Demski, 2011; Pascarella, 1980; Robbins, Oh, Le, & Button 2009; Tinto, 1990). Academic advisors have been identified as individuals who can fill this role (Habley, 2004). Though the term "academic advisor" might take on slightly different meanings across institutions, it is generally defined as an individual, often a faculty or staff member, who serves as teacher and guides students in an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness and fulfillment (O'Banion, 1972).

Academic advisors can also help students shape meaningful learning experiences, which in turn influence the achievement of life, educational, and career goals (Hunter & White, 2004). However, much of the past research on academic advising and its influence on student achievement often centers on student satisfaction with the process of advising (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Light, 2001; Propp & Rhodes, 2006). Although student satisfaction is important (Propp & Rhodes, 2006), evaluating the effectiveness and role academic advising plays in students' success, as measured by grade point average (GPA) and continuous semester enrollment, requires significantly more than surveying student satisfaction. For example, consider the hypothetical undergraduate student who is highly satisfied with the instructor because the instructor gives A's to all students if they attend every class. Reasonably, one might call into question the effectiveness of this instructor's teaching and assessment methods. Stated another way, student satisfaction doesn't always give an accurate depiction of the effectiveness of an academic professional (Tobin, 2001).

Steering away from satisfaction measures, Hemwall and Trachte (2003) proposed viewing academic advising as a learning process. Hemwall and Trachte believe this alternate view provides room for the assessment of specific outcomes, which can then be used to evaluate students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and student success. Evaluating academic advising and student success by students' GPA, continuous semester enrollment, and perceptions of advisor effectiveness allows us to analyze these constructs in a more objective manner compared to satisfaction measures. This study built on the existing research by measuring academic advising effectiveness through students' perceptions of the degree to which advisors perform the roles identified by Allen and Smith (2008), roles that are integral to effective advising. I also examined if the students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness correlate with students' success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the causal comparative study was to investigate if students' perceptions of the academic advisors' effectiveness in performing 12 functions of academic advising related to students' success as measured by GPA and continuous

semester enrollment while at a midsized university in the rural Midwest. This was examined by comparing the GPAs and continuous semester enrollment of students to students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness, as measured by an online survey adapted from Smith and Allen's (2006) Inventory of Academic Advising Function Student Version. Another purpose was to determine if demographic factors such as gender, ethnic minority status, and classification impacted students' perceptions of effectiveness. I sought to further explore the gap between perceptions of importance and academic advisor effectiveness, as effective developmental academic advising has been linked with student success (Chiteng Kot, 2014). A final purpose of the study was to determine what functions of an academic advisor's role students regarded as necessary and valuable. Smith and Allen (2006) found student satisfaction with advising was consistently rated lower compared to students' ratings of importance for advising functions.

Findings from this study can aid administrators or other college student personnel in their efforts to design and implement effective advising strategies, which have been linked with increased retention (Chiteng Kot, 2014; Hunter & White, 2004; Light, 2001). This study may also provide a basis for understanding what functions of an academic advisor's role students regard as important. According to Smith and Allen (2006), by seeking out and providing students with essential information, advisors may be creating a foundation that prospers academic and co-curricular integration, individuation, and shared responsibility, all of which help students' success in college.

Research Questions

I sought to understand what role if any academic advisors serve to undergraduate students aside from selecting courses. Does the quality of academic advising lead to measurable impact on student success, as measured by cumulative GPA and continuous semester enrollment, and if so, is that impact the same for all students irrespective of the ethnic minority status, class standing, and gender? These were addressed by answering the following research questions:

- RQ1. Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and grade point average?
- RQ2. Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and continuous semester enrollment?
- RQ3. Is there a difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' perception of the importance of academic functions?
- RQ4. Is there a difference in perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus non-minority), and class standing?

Research Hypotheses

Four research hypotheses were generated based on the prior literature for the purposes of the study. The first research hypothesis tested if there was a relationship between grade point average and undergraduate students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. The second research hypothesis tested if there was a relationship between continuous semester enrollment and undergraduate students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. The third hypothesis tested if there was a difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' perception of the importance of academic advising functions. The fourth hypothesis tested if there was at least one difference in the mean perception of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus non-minority), and class standing.

- H_a1: There is a relationship between students' grade point average and perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness
- H₀1: There is no relationship between students' grade point average and perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness.
- H_a2: There is a relationship between continuous semester enrollment and perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness.
- H₀2: There is no relationship between continuous semester enrollment and perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness.
- H_a3: There is a difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' perception of the importance of academic functions.
- H₀3: There is no difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' perception of the importance of academic functions.
- H_a4: There is at least one difference in the mean perception of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus non minority), and class standing.
- H₀4: There is no difference in the mean perception of academic advisor

effectiveness by gender.

- H₀4: There is no difference in the mean perception of academic advisor effectiveness by ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus non minority).
- H₀4: There is no difference in the mean perception of academic advisor effectiveness by class standing.

Significance of the Study

Declining enrollment on college campuses means an increased urgency to retain students (Demski, 2011; Schneider, 2010). This is illustrated by Demski's (2011) study which calls to attention the \$9.1 billion spent between 2003 and 2008 in appropriations and grants on students who dropped out after their freshman year. Recent research has found that a critical point of influence on student retention is the interactions students have with academic advisors (Chiteng Kot, 2014). According to Nutt (2003), any effort toward student retention must recognize that academic advising is vital to student success. Advisors who understand the level of influence they have on student success will be better able to serve the needs of individual students, which has been shown to result in greater student GPA and retention (Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Robbins, Oh, Le, & Button, C. 2009). Results from this study provide additional empirical evidence for the effect academic advising has on students' GPA and retention at the institution of interest. Furthermore, results identify what students view as important and necessary to receive from meetings with an academic advisor.

Limitations of the Study

Four limitations were identified which could have impacted the validity of the study. The first limitation was the time lapse between when students took the survey and when they last saw an academic advisor. According to Hardt, Nader, and Nadel (2013), actively forgetting memories between the moment they occur and a later point in time is known as decay. To decrease the likelihood decay affected students' responses, the researcher disseminated the survey toward the end of the spring 2015 semester when students were likely to have recently met with their advisor to discuss fall 2015 courses.

The second limitation to this study was the existence of moderator variables among the group of participants that influenced the correlations between indicators of academic success, (e.g. GPA and continuous semester enrollment) and students' perceptions of the degree to which academic advisors fulfilled their expected duties. Moderator variables change the strength of an effect or relationship between two variables and indicate when or under which circumstances a particular effect could be expected (Baron & Kenny, 1986). This could have been harmful to the study because GPA and continuous semester enrollment may have been influenced by other existing variables aside from academic advisor effectiveness such as: age, gender, ethnic minority status, and class status. If moderator variables existed in this study, the examination of the relationship between grade point average, continuous semester enrollment, and academic advisor effectiveness may have been skewed. The researcher tested moderation effects with multiple regression analysis to improve the interpretation of regression coefficients. The third limitation was the potential for non-response bias which is associated with web-based surveys. Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, and Vehovar (2008) illustrate this in their meta-analysis on web-based surveys where they found response rates were 11% lower compared to surveys conducted through the mail, telephone, or fax mediums. These are problematic because non-response bias can influence the findings of the study, specifically, the representativeness of the sample.

For example, according to Porter and Whitcomb (2005), the individuals that take web-based surveys tend to be demographically different from those who do not respond to surveys; Caucasian students are more likely to respond to surveys than other racial groups. Furthermore, the more educated and affluent an individual is the more likely they are to respond to and complete surveys (Porter & Whitcomb, 2005). To minimize this limitation, as Manfreda et al. (2008) suggested, I attempted to obtain a large number of subjects. All undergraduate students enrolled at the institution during the time of data collection were invited to participate in the study (N = 6,866). I also followed Millar and Dillman's (2011) suggestion of sending follow-up email reminders to students three days after the initial invitation to participate was sent. The survey was open for four weeks. Millar and Dillman (2011) found follow-up contact increased the likelihood of students responding to surveys. These efforts resulted in a response rate of 15.6% (n = 1,074), ideally, we would have liked to have had a higher response rate.

The fourth limitation to the study was the lack of representativeness in the sample, which limits the generalizability of the findings. While a cross-sectional survey was an efficient way to evaluate a large sample of students' perceptions of academic

advisor effectiveness, there are limitations associated with this type approach. First, according to Carlson and Morrison (2009), cross sectional surveys do not allow for random sampling; instead the assignment of subjects to groups is observed rather than manipulated through randomization. In addition, it isn't possible to determine if the exposure (academic advising) caused the outcome (GPA) because the variables are simultaneously assessed (Carlson & Morrison, 2009). The lack of ability to randomize subjects could have fostered a situation where only a certain demographic subset of students responded to the survey which also limits generalizability, as research findings may not hold true for other institutions with different demographic breakdowns or representativeness. However, a cross sectional survey was utilized due to the time constraints imposed upon the researcher in completing a master's thesis.

Definitions of Terms

Academic advising. Advising is a process in which advisor and advisee enter a dynamic relationship respectful of the student's concerns. Ideally, the advisor serves as teacher and guide in an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness and fulfillment (O'Banion, 1972).

Academic advising effectiveness. This is measured through the use of a proxy variable, students' perceptions of the academic advising job functions.

Academic advising job function. This is comprised of twelve items that are designed to measure the various functions that an academic advisor typically performs as defined by Allen and Smith (2008), see Table 3.2.

Continuous semester enrollment. Continuous semester enrollment is defined as enrollment from the semester of admission until the completion of all degree

requirements. Summer sessions in which there are no program requirements are not included.

EFFECTIVE. This is defined as perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness that are higher than the top-most limit of the 3rd quartile (75th percentile) perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness of the sample (64 to 72).

Ethnic minority status. In this study ethnic minority status is defined as identifying as White or any of the other non-White classifications.

INEFFECTIVE. This is defined as perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness that are lower than the 1st quartile (25th percentile) perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness of the sample (12 to 45).

Retention. A measure of the proportion of students who remain enrolled at the same institution from year to year (Hagedorn, 2005).

Student success. Student success is measured by grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0 scale and continuous semester enrollment.

Summary

Retaining students once they arrive at an institution is vital to an institution due to the reduced funding from state and federal agencies (Mortenson, 2012) alongside decreases in college enrollment (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2011). Several studies suggest the quality of the interaction between a student and an involved individual on campus is a key contributor to college retention (e.g. Demski, 2011; Pascarella, 1980; Robbins, Oh, Le, & Button, 2009; Tinto, 1990). Habley (2004) identified academic advisors as individuals who can fill this role. One function of academic advisors is their ability to help students shape meaningful learning experiences, which in turn influence the

achievement of life, educational, and career goals (Hunter & White, 2004). To examine the impact of academic advisors, students' perceptions of the effectiveness of their academic advisors' job performance and how these perceptions related to the students' levels of success as measured by GPA and continuous semester enrollment, were measured. This study contributed empirical evidence to the existing literature on academic advising and student success. The limitations inherent with causal-comparative designs and cross sectional surveys were presented, along with steps the researcher took to minimize the effect these limitations had on the outcomes of the study. The information presented in Chapter I provided a foundation for the following chapters in the study. Chapter II discusses the review of literature, containing a history of academic advising. The role of academic advisors, academic advising and student success, and the theoretical framework used to guide this study is also discussed in Chapter II. Chapter III discusses the methodology used, while Chapter IV describes the research findings, and Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

A pervasive goal in the field of higher education is to improve students' success (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Chiteng Kot, 2014; Ensign, 2010; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Lambert, Terenzini, & Lattuca, 2007). Several studies have supported the importance of improving students' success by examining the components that make students successful. For example, Robbins et al. (2004) conducted a study and found that academic selfefficacy and achievement motivation are predictors of grade point average (GPA), which is a measure of student success. Similarly, Gore (2006) found academic self-efficacy beliefs predict college outcomes, but this prediction is dependent upon when the efficacy beliefs are measured, the types of beliefs measured, and the criteria used to measure these beliefs. Gore also found that "students need feedback on their performance (both social and academic) before they can realistically assess their ability to achieve academic goals" (p. 112). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), academic advisors can provide that feedback and directly have an effect on students' persistence and likelihood of graduating. Furthermore, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested academic advisors could have an indirect effect on students' grades, which is an indicator of students' success. This chapter presents a detailed review of the literature on the history of academic advising and role of academic advisors, followed by the previous research on academic advising and student success, including the retention of students and academic implications advising has on student success. Two theoretical frameworks that are used to guide the study are also presented.

History of Academic Advising

The roles and missions of academic advisors and advising systems have made significant gains in the American undergraduate education systems (Frost, 2000). According to Gordan, Habley, and Associates (2000), academic advising has shifted from an informal, isolated, and undefined nature into an extensive system with multiple elements that are an important component in the mission of higher education. The following sections will discuss how developments in college access, recruitment, retention, and education have historically influenced the advancement of academic advising.

Academic advising can be traced back to the 1800s during the formation of American colonial colleges (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). During the 17th and 18th centuries these colleges acted *in loco parentis*, or in place of the parent (Cook, 2001). While there isn't any formal evidence that academic advising existed during this time, Frost (2000) determined that academic advising was performed by faculty, tutors, and professors who acted in the capacity of *loco parentis* regarding students' basic academic and personal concerns. Cook (2001) adds faculty also assisted with decisions regarding curriculum, extracurricular activities, and moral and intellectual training. Faculty and staff were also responsible for students' needs for discipline, exploration of moral development, and character growth (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Although colleges began as male preparation schools for the ministry and civic leadership, they expanded to include curriculums such as social studies and fine arts, science, and vocational training (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). With this progression came the realization an advising system was needed; two historic institutions, Harvard and John

Hopkins University, introduced advising systems in the late 1870s (Frost, 2000). According to Hawkins (1960) the role of faculty advisors at this point was to guarantee personal assistance to students and create friendly relationships while instilling confidence in students.

As college enrollment both increased and diversified, in part due to the passing of the Second Morrill Act of 1890, it became apparent additional academic advising expansions within the institutions were necessary (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Academic advising was an expansion that most colleges and universities implemented by the 1920s, which prompted the need to hire full-time advisors. These positions needed to be filled to compensate for professors who were unwilling or unable to take time for advising students (Lucas, 2006). By the 1940s academic advisors were seen as the authority in assisting students with academic and personal affairs; however it was still viewed as a prescriptive or administrative activity (Frost, 2000). By the late 1950s and 1960s, students expressed an interest in academic advising moving beyond a prescriptive scope; students wanted advisors who took a greater interest in their needs and abilities along with advisors who were able to develop interpersonal relationships with them (Crookston, 1972). With the emergence of student development theories came a critical shift in academic advising, moving from a prescriptive relationship to a developmental one. Crookston (1972) proposed his model of developmental advising, which quickly gained acceptance and use in universities.

Institutions in the late 1970s to late 1990s focused on rectifying the imbalances that existed in the educational progress for groups based on their race, ethnicity, disability, age, gender, and economic status (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The decrease in

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retention during this time period put pressure on academic advising systems; university personnel felt advisors and the advising process could be a remedy to break down the barriers that threatened nontraditional and marginalized students (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Wilder (1981) reports that a retention study conducted by The American College Testing (ACT) Program in 1979 found that academic advising was an important component for retention efforts. The ACT Program continued studies in 1983, 1987, 1993, and 1998, which helped change higher education's perceptions of academic advising, framing it as an integral piece in undergraduate education (Frost, 2000). This led to the establishment of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) in 1979 (Frost, 2000). As research studies began to link academic advising services to student retention and success, institutions developed their advising units to encompass efforts to improve student retention, persistence, graduation rates, and success (Frost, 2000). Today, many scholars (e.g., Allen & Smith, 2008; Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Chiteng Kot, 2014; Dillon & Fisher, 2000; Roberts & Styron, 2010) attribute the growth and success of students to the involvement and mentorship of skilled academic advisors.

Role of Academic Advisors

Academic advisors perform an instrumental role for students (Habley, 2004). Richard Light (2001), a professor and advisor, was spurred into investigating how academic advisors influence students after a comment made during a gathering of academic personnel from over 50 colleges left him feeling both disturbed and unsettled. The comment made during this gathering that led to Light's discomfort was one of the belief that once good students have been recruited and accepted into college, faculty should stay out of the students way because students would learn most from other students. Light was unable to reconcile the idea that universities should recruit good students then proceed to neglect them in order for students to succeed. This comment led Light to interview 400 students within 90 different universities throughout the United States asking what students believed they, along with administrators and faculty members, could do to facilitate the best possible undergraduate experiences. After interviewing students over a 10-year period and analyzing stories shared with him, Light (2001) stated, "good academic advising is the most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience" (p. 81). Good academic advising, however, can be time consuming and challenging (Smith & Allen, 2006). This is problematic, as appointed faculty advisors may not see the value in performing effective academic advising if they are not being adequately compensated for performing the additional role (Dillon & Fisher, 2000; Vowell & Farren, 2003).

Smith and Allen (2006) devised 12 key variables of academic advising by reviewing the existing advising literature from the past 30 years and consulting with professional and faculty academic advisors in order to identify the job functions of academic advising personnel. The 12 variables can be compiled into five functions: integration, referral, information, individuation, and shared responsibility (Smith & Allen, 2006). The integration function contained variables that considered the students' life, career, and academic goals, as well as what courses, major, and extracurricular activities would help students best tie those goals together. The referral and information functions examined the level to which an advisor referred students to campus resources for academic and nonacademic issues, and the degree to which advisors provided students with accurate information and assisted students in understanding how things work at the university, including degree requirements, respectively. The individuation function suggested effective academic advisors should take into account the students' skills and abilities when selecting courses and know the student as a unique person that exists outside of the academic world. Furthermore, Smith and Allen suggested effective academic advising involved allowing students to be responsible for their own education, planning, problem solving, and decision making skills.

Crookston (1972) describes a type of advising (developmental) that integrates several constructs to serve students: allowing students to be responsible for their life, career, and educational goals, practice their decision making and problem solving skills, and connect their curricular and co-curricular activities to their educational experiences. Lowe and Toney (2001) have found that students identify Crookston's concepts of developmental academic advising as a desirable and important framework for advisors to operate under. These qualities of effective academic advisors, as suggested by Smith and Allen (2006), are also supported by several others' ideas. For example, additional researchers have found that ensuring students are taking the necessary courses to graduate, considering students' personal and professional interests while forming a plan of study, and supporting students beyond an academic level, e.g., personal and professional development, all lead to students' success (Corts, Loundsbury, Saudargas, & Tatum, 2000; Crookston, 1972; Thompson, Orr, Thompson, & Grover, 2007).

Academic Advising and Student Success

Much of the previous research on academic advising in higher education has been done on student satisfaction with the advising process (e.g., Allen & Smith, 2008; Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Light, 2001; Propp & Rhodes, 2006). However, a significant amount of research has also been conducted on the influence academic advising practices have had on student retention, as well as student academic success (e.g., Bai & Pan, 2009; Chiteng Kot, 2014; Hester, 2008; Robbins et. al, 2009; Roberts & Styron, 2010). The following sections will describe key studies that have directly examined how the role of academic advising has influenced student retention and academic success.

Retention. Retention can be operationalized as a measure of the proportion of students who remain enrolled at the same institution from year to year (Hagedorn, 2005). According to College Board (2009), academic advising has been identified as a strategy to increase retention. Several additional studies have been conducted concerning the impact academic advising may have on retention (e.g., Bai & Pan, 2009; College Board, 2009; Ensign, 2010; Roberts & Styron, 2010). For example, Ensign (2010) reviewed admission and retention data as well as conducted interviews with various faculty members from 2003-2008 at 150 colleges and found academic advising was frequently credited as a strategy that increased retention. One faculty member, Peter R. Jones, Senior Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies at Temple University, told Ensign in an interview that academic advisors were able to assist in retention efforts because students used advisors as a conduit to explain why they were unable to complete a degree within six years. Thus, academic advisors can share their acquired knowledge with other faculty members regarding the barriers to retention from students' perspectives. This sharing of knowledge is one method in which faculty and staff may learn of students' difficulties at institutions and begin the discussions of how to address these barriers and equip students with resources to succeed.

A study by Bai and Pan (2009) also illustrated the benefits of academic advising as a retention strategy. Bai and Pan assessed the effects of four types of intervention strategies (advising, academic help, first-year experience, and social integration) on retention. The advising intervention was primarily set up based on Tinto's (1975) Integration Model and Astin's (1984) Involvement Model, thus, Bai and Pan's program was designed to increase faculty-to-student interaction, student involvement, academic engagement, and academic assistance. Bai and Pan found that compared to students in general orientation programs during the first year, students who were in advising programs were 24% more likely to come back to campus for their second year of undergraduate study. Specifically, students in selective colleges who went through the advising program were 22% more likely to return to school than other students after the first year at the institution. This study suggests special interventions, such as advising programs, are "…necessary at the beginning of the college life… in order to improve the effectiveness of the programs on student retention" (p. 297).

Conversely, a study by Roberts and Styron (2010) examining students' perceptions of academic advising, social connectedness, involvement and engagement, faculty and staff approachability, business procedures, learning experiences, and student support services found no significant link between perception of academic advising and student retention. However, Roberts and Styron did suggest that to increase student retention, universities should improve efforts to promote student-faculty contact. As Roberts and Styron previously stated, "... academic advising might possibly be, as Hunter and White (2004) suggest, the only organized and structured attempts in which university faculty or staff have sustained interactions with students," (p. 3). The results

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of this study did not support academic advising as a contributor to retention; however, the researchers did indicate academic advising can increase student-faculty contact, which was found to decrease the likelihood of student attrition.

Results similar to Roberts and Styron (2010) were found in a more recent study. Schwebel, Walburn, Klyce, and Jerrolds (2012) used a 4-year randomized trial of 501 students to examine advising outreach and its potential impact on retention by splitting the students into two groups where one half of the cohort received advising outreach every semester of enrollment and the other half received typical university announcements about advising but no additional outreach. Results suggested that although advising outreach increased student contact with professional advisors, advising outreach efforts had a minimal impact on retention. The researchers suggested the advising outreach may not have been intrusive or proactive enough to yield benefits and students may not benefit from advising outreach unless mandated to attend advising appointments.

Smith and Allen (2014) conducted a study to determine if there was a relationship between frequency of advising sessions and eight identified advising outcomes (e.g., knows requirements, understands how things work, knows resources, understands connections, has educational plan, values advisor-advisee relationship, supports mandatory advising, and has significant relationship) and found results indicative of the benefits of student contact with advisors. The researchers surveyed students (n = 22,305) about the frequency of advising sessions and level of agreement with the eight advising outcomes. Frequency of advising sessions was broken up into three groups: not advised, occasionally advised, and frequently advised where not advised students were not receiving advising at the time of the study, occasionally advised students received advising at least once per year, and frequently advised students received advice at least once per term or at least twice per year. Smith and Allen found across all eight advising outcomes, students in the advised frequently and advised occasionally groups scored significantly higher than students in the not advised group. Additionally, students in the advised frequently group scored significantly higher than those in the advised occasionally group. Furthermore, students reported more knowledge and attitudes predictive of academic success and retention when they saw advisors, interacted, and consulted frequently with them.

Academic success. Similar to the existing research conducted on retention and academic advisor involvement, the literature concerning academic success and academic advisor effectiveness is contradictory and inconclusive. Robbins et al. (2009) conducted a large (n = 1,534) study that tracked students' use of the resources and services available on campus. Robbins et al. (2009) found among the various types of resources and services, the use of academic services such as academic advising led to an increase in GPA. Specifically, high-risk students reaped the greatest benefits from academic advising and advising sessions in terms of GPA. Robbins et al. examined multiple factors that determined at-risk students, specifically, race, gender, high school GPA, standardized test score, semesters living on campus, enrollment status, and socioeconomic status.

In a more recent study by Chiteng Kot (2014), where students' use of academic advising services was tracked, it was found that students who used centralized advising had higher GPA (both term and first-year cumulative GPA) compared to their

counterparts who did not use advising. Centralized advising is a model in which an institution relies on an advising center, often staffed by a director and professional academic advisors, to provide all academic advising to students (Chiteng Kot, 2014). Chiteng Kot found the result partially supported the hypothesis that a difference existed in enrollment behavior between the students who used centralized advising during the second term versus the students who did not use advising during the second term.

Corts, Loundsbury, Saudargas, and Tatum (2000) conducted a study on academic advising after finding a gap in the literature on the assessment of advising and mentoring, both of which are likely to make a significant contribution to students' education and personal development. Corts et al. surveyed a group of undergraduate students' satisfaction in five domains: advising, course offerings, career preparation, quality of instruction, and class size. Three of these domains (advising, course offerings, and career preparation) are encompassed in Crookston's (1972) developmental advising perspective and Smith and Allen's (2006) inventory of academic advising functions. The single most common suggestion from students' surveys was a request for career preparation and internship opportunities, or as Smith and Allen (2006) call it, out-of-class connect. Corts et al. (2000) reported the students' greatest concern was difficulty arranging meetings with advisors and advisors' lack of preparation and failure to fully understand graduation requirements; Smith and Allen (2006) refer to this construct as accurate information. Lack of preparation and failure to fully understand graduation requirements could attribute to the finding that in terms of student satisfaction, advising scored the lowest and received the most student complaints. Corts et al. determined institutions should give more emphasis to career preparation and departmental advising as part of the overall

advising system to maintain a high level of preparedness and satisfaction among undergraduate students.

Thompson, Orr, Thompson, and Grover (2007) proposed, "to be more responsive to the needs and desires of freshman, institutions must become familiar with students' perceptions concerning their early experiences on campus" (p. 642). Thompson et al. surveyed freshman undergraduate students and found certain factors affected student success: time management/goal setting (13.06% of the variance), academic advising (11.749% of the variance), stress (11.152% of the variance), and institutional fit/integration (9.823% of the variance). In addition, they found that students who were satisfied with their academic advising experiences were stimulated by their course work and extremely satisfied with their first semester, thus more likely to be retained. Conversely, students who experienced difficulty with academic advising reported a more difficult transition from high school to college. These results may speak to the quality of academic advising the student received. For example, if a student works with an advisor who is sensitive to the interests and skills of the student and selects courses accordingly – what Smith and Allen (2006) refer to as skills abilities interests – the student may be more engaged academically, leading to greater academic success (Thompson et al., 2007). Thompson et al. concluded that colleges and institutions must expand advising services to include mentoring, especially for students who are considered at-risk for leaving.

Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, and Hawthorne (2013) surveyed 611 undergraduate students to investigate how advising influenced student academic performance, specifically GPA. They found higher scores on student study skills and student self-

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efficacy were related to higher GPA. Additionally, meeting with an advisor and advisor accountability contributed to student responsibility, self-efficacy, study skills, and perceived support. The degree to which advisors make themselves available to students, meet with them, and provide them with assistance and support are, "clearly linked to factors demonstrated to predict student success" (p. 15). Furthermore, the students who met at least once per semester with their advisors compared to those meeting less frequently reported higher levels of perceived support, which Shelton (2003) found was directly linked to retention and success.

Powell, Demetriou, and Fisher (2013) provide further insight to the concept of perceived support through their review of the existing literature on micro-aggressions and micro-affirmations among students from under-resourced backgrounds and underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Rowe (2008) defines micro-affirmations as "small acts in the workplace fostering inclusion, comfort, and support for people who may feel unwelcome or invisible in an environment. Micro-affirmations can communicate to students that they are welcome, visible, and capable of performing well in the college environment." Academic advisors are in a prime position to communicate micro-affirmations to students, as students who experience high-quality interactions are more likely to thrive and persist compared to students who experience low-quality interactions (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Witt, 2005). McClellan (2007) stated the highquality interactions advisors have with students hold a greater influence than accurately selected courses, and high-quality interactions can help students develop academic motivation, as well as self-confidence to persist to graduation. Museus and Ravello (2010) delved deeper into this topic by conducting qualitative interviews with 14

academic advisors and 31 racial ethnic minority (9 Asian American, 9 Black, and 13 Latina/o) students from three institutions. Students and advisors were asked for their perceptions of the ways academic advising contributed to racial and ethnic minority student success on campuses. Humanized academic advising, where advisors display a sense of caring and commitment toward their racial/ethnic minority students' success, holistic academic advising which encompasses an advisor's effort to serve the whole students' needs (academic, financial, social, etc.), and proactive academic advising – advisors who proactively assume a responsibility for connecting minority students with the resources they need to succeed, were noted as the three academic advising factors that influenced minority students, is a way to encourage students' utilization of academic advising services (Museus & Ravello, 2010) which in turn has been linked to higher GPA and decreased attrition (Chiteng Kot, 2014; Smith & Allen, 2014).

Conversely, micro-aggressions, which are most frequently directed toward underrepresented students and students from under-resourced backgrounds, communicate individuals are unwelcome, invisible or incapable of performing well in higher education (Franklin, 2004). These micro-aggressions, in comparison to micro-affirmations, communicate a drastically different message to students about their acceptance in the environment and support from the institution. An example of micro-aggressions in higher education may include implying an individual of an underrepresented racial or ethnic group achieved success through special programs for underrepresented students rather than by merit of their talent, intellect, and perseverance. Other examples of microaggressions include minimizing the negative experiences of students who have
experienced bias on campus, as well as ignoring or invalidating students' heritages. These micro-aggressions carry a disturbing power to do harm, have a deleterious effect on students' performance, and have been associated with student attrition (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). When minority students perceive they aren't welcome in an environment, or their advisors are unaware of beneficial resources, the student is significantly less likely to utilize advising services (Museus & Ravello, 2010).

While considering these studies, one should acknowledge these findings do not show causation or provide definitive support for a concept. Rather the research indicates, based on the correlation between the use of academic advising and GPA, it may be beneficial for students to receive academic advising early and throughout their academic career, as academic advising is associated with gains in GPA. However, confounds to this principle exist – Hester's (2008) research, which examined 50 academic advisor evaluations filled out by students over a five-year period and found no significant relationship between frequency of advising sessions and GPA. These mixed results suggest further research is needed to gain a better understanding of the role academic advising may have on college student success.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by two theoretical frameworks: Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory of college student departure.

Student involvement. Astin's (1984) theory has five basic tenets; these tenets can be applied to how students experience academic advising. The first tenet involves the physical and psychological energy in various objects. The energy can be highly

generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a math exam). Astin's second tenet is regardless of the object, involvement will occur along a continuum; students may visit their academic advisor once during their tenure at an institution, or many times while at an institution. The third tenet states different students will show different degrees of involvement for varying objects at differing times. For example, a student may dedicate significantly more energy toward meeting with an academic advisor during class registration periods and less during the remainder of the semester. Fourth, Astin poses involvement can be both quantitative and qualitative; e.g. the number of hours a student spends studying (quantitative), versus the comprehension of the material being studied opposed to simply staring at the textbook (qualitative). The fifth tenet states the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quantity and quality of the students' involvement in that program. According to this tenet, a student who invests high quality levels of effort into an educational program should learn and develop at equally high levels when compared to the effort they invested. The tenet of Astin's theory of student involvement that is perhaps most relevant to this study is, "the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement," (Astin, 1984, p. 519). Thus, I chose to investigate the functions of academic advisors and if the successful performances of academic advising functions correlate with student success.

Astin (1984) also developed three sub-theories: the subject-matter theory, the resource theory, and the individualized theory. The subject-matter theory states that student learning and development is primarily reliant on exposure to the right materials.

Astin stated that students would learn by attending lectures, doing assignments, and working in the library. Although oral presentations and written exams are important, they mostly serve as tools through which students examine the content of educational programs. A serious limitation of this theory is that it paints students as ignorant sponges that absorb the material knowledgeable professors imbue upon them.

The resource theory states that if physical facilities, human resources, and fiscal resources are brought together in one place, student learning and development will occur (Astin, 1984). Astin's (1984) theory also states that the lower the student-faculty ratio, the greater the learning and personal development will occur. A limitation of this theory is it focuses on the accumulation of resources rather than the use and dispersion of resources. Consider, for example, the student who doesn't know which courses will fulfill degree requirements yet registers for courses without the guidance of an academic advisor. Without the proper utilization of academic advising resources, this service suddenly becomes very useless to a student.

Astin's (1984) individualized theory states that no single approach to subject matter, teaching, or resource allocation will be applicable or adequate for all students. This theory attempts to identify curricular content and instruction methods that best meet the individualized needs of students and highlights the importance of advising and counseling. A substantial limitation to this theory is the costs associated with implementation due to each student requiring individualized attention. Academic advising is a form of practicing individualized theory.

College student departure. Tinto's (1993) theory of college student departure provided a framework for understanding how what an institution does can affect students'

academic success and retention. There are three main causes for student departure: academic difficulties, students' inability to resolve educational and occupational goals, and students' failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Tinto's theory also states that to remain in college, students need to integrate into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. Tinto also states that causes of departure exist at the individual and institutional level. The intentions and commitments of students are important at the individual level, along with the occupational and education goals, and motivation of the student. The institutional level, however, encompasses the students' adjustment to the educational system, as well the level of academic difficulty experienced by students, incongruence between the student and the university, and the students' feelings of isolation.

Tinto points out previous research focused largely on psychological models as explanations for student departure, which inadvertently diminishes the role an institution plays in retention. Calling upon Durkhiem's work on egoistic suicide, Tinto draws the parallel between theories of departure and suicide; both involve voluntary withdrawal from local communities. To combat students' withdrawal from college, Tinto suggests six principles: ensure new students have basic academic skills, recognize outside-theclassroom personal contact is paramount, systematically organize retention efforts, start early, make students the first commitment of institutions, and identify education versus retention as the goal. Pascarella (1980) also supports Tinto's principle concerning the importance of faculty-student interactions outside of the classroom. Although, Pascarella noted, it is important to recognize not all faculty-student interactions can provide the host of benefits that can support college student retention. Specifically, "informal contacts that focus on intellectual/literary or artistic interests, value issues, or future career concerns have the greatest impact," (Pascarella, 1980, p. 565). Academic advising can exist in a developmental capacity, where advisors focus on the values and career goals of students. Therefore, I sought to investigate the possible correlation between student success, as measured by GPA and continuous semester enrollment, and academic advisor effectiveness.

Summary

The literature identifies differing ways academic advising can impact student success, specifically GPA and retention. The literature also provides a mixed review concerning what degree academic advising impacts student success, with several studies supporting this tenet and others finding no significant relationship between the two concepts. It is important to examine the effects of academic advising on student success, as academic support services are one of the accessible services students can utilize to speak with a faculty or staff member at an institution. Moreover, in light of studies that suggest there is a link between academic advising and student success, administrators can closer examine the type of advising offered at their institution(s) and develop a plan of action for assessing and improving academic advising practices on campus to ensure students are receiving all the benefits possible from utilizing these services.

Additionally, the theories on student involvement and departure discuss how student academic and social engagement, both inside and outside the classroom, influence student success (see Figure 2.1).

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Figure 2.1. Theoretical Frameworks' Influence on Study. Items that are bolded represent components of theories that were used to guide the study on student success and perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness.

Additional researchers have taken a close look at the relationship between curricular decision, classroom experiences, out-of-class activities, and student academic and social engagement (Lambert, Terenzini, & Lattuca, 2007). Lambert et al. (2007) proposed that because student inputs lead to increased engagement, which transforms into positive academic and persistence outcomes, if institutions tailor their services and resources to those needed by the student the likelihood of student success should increase. Put simply, "...-what institutions do- affects learning" (Lambert et al., 2007, p. 163). Guiding my study under this framework, I sought to learn more about the relationship between the institutional resource of academic advising and student success, specifically if there was a relationship between students' perceptions of advisor effectiveness and students' success as measured by GPA and continuous semester enrollment, as well as what demographic factors exist that may affect students' expectations for advisor duties, which was addressed by the following research questions:

- RQ1. Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and grade point average?
- RQ2. Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and continuous semester enrollment?
- RQ3. Is there a difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' perception of the importance of academic functions?
- RQ4. Is there a difference in perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus non-minority), and class standing?

The next chapter presents the methods that were conducted to answer these questions.

CHAPTER III

Methods

This study used quantitative casual-comparative and correlational designs to answer the research questions. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2011) described causalcomparative research as when, "investigators attempt to determine the cause or consequences of differences that already exist between or among groups of individuals" (p. 366). Because the variables I wanted to examine were already defined (GPA) a causal-comparative study was appropriate. The design I used for the study was the criterion-group design, with students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and important functions of academic advising as the independent variables where Group I contained students with a high perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. The dependent variable was the level of students' success as measured by GPA and continuous semester enrollment (see Figure 3.1).

Design of the Study

Because the research questions that drove this study were quantitative (e.g. Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and grade point average?) causal-comparative and correlational studies were appropriate. The study was conducted utilizing a survey sent via email. All undergraduate students enrolled in degree-seeking programs at a midsized Midwestern four-year state university during the time of data collection were contacted to complete the survey. The survey consisted of demographic questions as well as closed-ended questions about students' perceptions of their academic advisors' effectiveness.



Figure 3.1. Model of design of study showing the hypothesized relationships among student perceptions, academic advisor effectiveness and student success.

Participants

The target population included all undergraduate students enrolled at a mid-sized Midwestern four-year state university at the time of data collection. Participants were 762 undergraduate students (Table 3.1) who voluntarily completed the online survey. The minimum age reported was 18 years, and the maximum was 57 years (M = 22.42, SD = 5.80. The average GPA of the participants was 3.32 (SD = .54) on a 4.00 scale. The sample size was appropriate for a causal-comparative and correlational research study (Patten, 2010).

Table 3.1

First semester at EIU Yes No Gender Male Female Other Race/Ethnicity American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	0 (0) 762 (100) 183 (24.0)
Yes No Gender Male Female Other Race/Ethnicity American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	0 (0) 762 (100) 183 (24.0)
Sender Gender Male Female Other Race/Ethnicity American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	762 (100) 183 (24.0)
Gender Male Female Other Race/Ethnicity American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	183 (24.0)
Male Female Other Race/Ethnicity American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	183 (24.0)
Race/Ethnicity Race/Ethnicity American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	
Race/Ethnicity American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	575 (75.6)
American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	3 (.4)
American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	2(2)
Asian Pacific Islander Black/African American	2 (.3)
Black/African American	11 (1 4)
DIACK/AITICAIT AITICTICAI	11(1.4) 71(0.3)
Hignonic	71(9.3)
White/Caucasian	639(841)
Other	12(16)
Most common Majors	12 (1.0)
Psychology	74 (9.8)
Family and Consumer	53 (7.0)
Sciences	
Kinesiology and Sports	48 (6.3)
Studies	· · · ·
Communication Studies	47 (6.2)
Elementary Education	40 (5.3)
Class status	
Freshman	63 (8.3)
Sophomore	125 (16.4)
Junior	255 (33.5)
Senior	318 (41.8)
Student status	
Full-time	699 (92.0)
Continuously annolled	61 (8.0)
Continuously enrolled Ves	716 (94 0)
No	46 (6 0)
	10 (0.0)
Reason for break in	
enrollment	
Military	2 (4.3)
Personal	25 (54.3)

Demographic and Biographic Information of Sample of Undergraduate Students (N = 762)

Academic	5 (10.9)
Other	14 (30.4)
Transfer student	
Yes	350 (46.1)
No	410 (53.9)
First-generation student	
Yes	245 (32.2)
No	516 (67.8)
Veteran	
Yes	20 (2.7)
No	714 (97.3)
NCAA athlete	· · · ·
Yes	47 (6.3)
No	695 (93.7)
International student	· · · ·
Yes	3 (.4)
No	729 (99.6)
Commuter student	()
Yes	107 (14.5)
No	632 (85.5)
Student with physical	× ,
disability	
Yes	18 (2.5)
No	711 (97.5)

Research Site

The study was conducted at a midsized Midwestern four-year state university located in a rural community of about 21,000 residents. The institution had a first-tosecond-year retention rate of 76% ("Retention & Graduation," 2014), which falls above the national average of 69% ("College Student Retention," 2015). Likewise, the institutional graduation rate was 59% while the national average is 43.7%. The population from which I selected the sample of students, according to fall 2014 data, had a demographic break down of: 69.9% White, 16.8% Black or African American, 5% Hispanic, 3.1% International, 2.1% Unknown/not reported, 1.9% Multiple, .9% Asian, and .2% American Indian or Alaska Native, and .1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific, of which 60.4% were female and 39.6% were male ("Student by Level," 2014).

The institution has an academic advising policy that beginning freshmen, students without a declared major, and students not accepted to professional programs must be assigned a full-time academic advisor from the institution's Academic Advising Center ("Student Support," 2014). Students are required to meet with their academic advisor each semester, and students are expected to be aware of the academic policies of the institution, as well as assume responsibility for their academic progress and awareness of deadlines listed in class schedules. Once students have declared and been accepted into their program of study, students receive academic advising from departmental advisors in their major. The institution states students can expect academic advisors in the Academic Advising Center to: exhibit concern for the welfare of individual students; provide accurate information concerning academic programs, policies, procedures, and requirements; assist in the exploration of educational opportunities; refer students to other support services as needed; and promptly notify students about their reassignment to an academic advisor within the department of their chosen major ("What You Need," 2014).

Instruments

Data was collected through an electronic survey the researcher adapted from Smith and Allen's (2006) Inventory of Academic Advising Function Student Version. Smith and Allen's survey was designed to identify what functions of academic advising are important to students and students' level of satisfaction with those functions. The researcher adapted the satisfaction measure of this survey to measure students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. The survey consisted of demographic, biographic, and importance/effectiveness of academic advisor measures.

Demographic, biographic, and importance/effectiveness of academic advisor questionnaire. The survey for this research study included several demographic and biographic questions (e.g. "Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic background?" and "What is your college status?"). Participants were asked to choose the item that best described their demographic make-up from a list of options. To obtain further information about the characteristics of the participants, additional data was collected, such as: gender; age; academic major; GPA; first-generation student status; if the participants consider themselves to be an international student, veteran, NCAA athlete, commuter student, or student with a physical disability; and whether the student had been continuously enrolled each semester.

Inventory of Academic Advising Function. Permission was obtained from Smith and Allen (2006) to adapt the Inventory of Academic Advising Function Student Version. The original 48-item instrument was designed to measure students' satisfaction and opinions on the level of importance of the 12 functions of academic advising. The change that was made included changing the satisfaction measure in the original survey to an academic advisor effectiveness measure designed to measure students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and omitting demographic-based questions that were specific to the original researchers' institution. The original importance measure from Smith and Allen's Inventory of Academic Advising Functions was used in the adapted version. The importance measure of academic advising functions asks students to rate various functions including, "Advising that helps students connect their academic, career, and life goals" and "Taking into account students' skills, abilities, and interests in helping them choose courses," (Table 3.2). Smith and Allen designed their original questionnaire items after reviewing existing literature from the previous 30 years and consulting with professional and faculty academic advisors to identify the job functions of academic advisors. In this study, participants were asked to rate the importance of the statements and their perceptions of how the academic advisor performed each academic advising function (see Appendix A for survey questions). The ratings were on a six-point Likerttype scale ranging from (1) very ineffective (or not at all important) to (6) very effective (or *extremely important*) (McLeod, 2008). Therefore, the possible range for the total effectiveness and total importance scales were 12 to 72. While various themes of questions were identified in the adaptation of the instrument (i.e. integration, referral, information, individuation, and shared responsibility), the researcher listed the questions in random order on the survey. This decision was made after reviewing prior research which has not shown conclusive evidence that presenting questionnaire items in either random order or groups will impact the internal reliability or validity of the instrument (Burchell & Marsh, 1992).

Table 3.2.

Variable Names Definitions of Academic Advising Functions **Integration Functions** Overall Academic advising that helps undergraduate students Connect connect their academic, career, and life goals Major Connect Academic advising that helps undergraduate students choose among courses in the major that connects their academic, career, and life goals Gen Ed Academic advising that assists undergraduate students Connect with choosing among the various general education options (e.g., choice of capstone, cluster, courses within cluster) that connect their academic, career, and life goals Degree Academic advising that assists undergraduate students Connect with deciding what kind of degree to pursue (Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Music) in order to connect their academic, career, and life goals Out-of Class Academic advising that assists undergraduate students Connect with choosing out-of-class activities (e.g., part-time or summer employment, internships or practicum, participation in clubs or organizations) that connect their academic, career, and life goals **Referral Functions** Referral Advising that refers undergraduate students, when they Academic need it, to campus resources that address academic problems (e.g., math or science tutoring, writing, disability accommodation, testing anxiety) Referral Advising that refers undergraduate students, when they need it, to campus resources that address nonacademic Nonacademic problems (e.g., childcare, financial, physical and mental health) Information Functions How Things Advising that assists undergraduate students with understanding how things work at this university Work (understanding timelines, policies, and procedures with regard to registration, financial aid, grading, graduation, petition and appeals, etc.)

Definitions of and Corresponding Variable Names for Academic Advising Functions

	Accurate Information	Advising that gives undergraduate students accurate information about degree requirements			
Individ	luation Functions				
	Skills Abilities Interests	Advising that takes into account undergraduate students' skills, abilities, and interests in helping them choose courses			
Know as Individual		Advising that includes knowing the student as an individual			
Shared Responsibility Function					
	Shared Responsibility	Advising that encourages undergraduate students to assume responsibility for their education by helping them develop planning, problem-solving, and decision-making skills			
Note T	able adopted from	n Allen & Smith (2008)			

Note. Table adopted from Allen & Smith (2008)

Data Collection

The modified Inventory of Academic Advising Function Student Version was created in Qualtrics[™]. An email with the link to the survey was sent out on a Tuesday to all those on the list of currently enrolled students obtained from the Program Assistant for Information Technology Services at the institution. Research has shown that surveys distributed early in the week have the highest response rate (Fan & Yan, 2010). The survey remained open for four weeks with four reminder emails sent weekly after the initial distribution to encourage participation and increase the sample size; the email for reminder for the first week was sent three days after the initial invitation to participate was sent. Once participants opened the survey email, only those who agreed to the modified informed consent approved by the institution's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B) were allowed to proceed with the study. Participants were also offered the chance to win one of five \$5 gift cards in exchange for their time. To be considered, they provided their email addresses at the end of the survey for a random drawing after the survey closed.

Data Analysis

Pre-analysis preparation. At the end of data collection, data was exported into Microsoft Excel[®] for examination and cleaning (removal of columns created by Qualtrics[™], deletion of non-respondents, etc.). Respondents with incomplete data were deleted and not used in further analysis. Each participant was provided with a unique ID number. Quantitative data was then exported into The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21, a statistical analysis tool, for analyses. The normality assumption was examined, finding the majority (10 of the 12) of items on the functions of academic advisor effectiveness tool had a skewness between -1 to 1; similarly, a majority of the academic advising effectiveness items (11 of the 12) had a kurtosis below 1, therefore, no transformations of the data were conducted (Doane & Seward, 2011).

Descriptive analysis. Descriptive statistics were conducted for all demographic and biographic information collected. Additionally, the percentage of total sample respondents for each survey item was reported as well as the frequencies of answers chosen for each survey question.

Reliability analyses. The internal consistencies of the instrument were run for effectiveness and importance measures using Cronbach's alpha, and were determined to be very good, $\alpha_{\text{effectiveness}} = .96$, $\alpha_{\text{importance}} = .91$.

Correlations. Pearson's bivariate correlations were conducted to answer the research questions: "Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and grade point average?"

Test of difference. An independent samples *t*-test was used to determine if there was a difference in GPA by perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and

continuous semester enrollment. The effect size of the *t*-test was calculated for each question using the eta squared (η^2) coefficient: $\eta^2 = t^2/t^2 + df$. High and low perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness were determined by an examination of the interquartile ranges. The possible range for both importance and effectiveness scales was 12 to 72. The first quartile, 12 to 45, represented low advisor effectiveness and the fourth quartile, 64 to 72, represented high advisor effectiveness. Results were reported in terms of statistical difference at $\alpha = .05$. Multiple paired *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there was a difference in students' perceptions of effectiveness and importance of academic advising functions. To minimize the risk of Type I error which exists when conducting multiple significance tests, the Bonferroni correction was conducted as follows: $PC\alpha = EW\alpha/k$, where $EW\alpha$ was set at $EW\alpha = .05$, and k = 12. As a precautionary measure, internal consistencies of the instrument were great for both, $\alpha_{effectiveness} = .96$ and $\alpha_{importance} = .91$.

Three way-factorial ANCOVA. A three way factorial ANCOVA was conducted to answer the research question: Is there a difference in perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus non-minority), and class standing?

Treatment of Data

Data was collected through the online survey program, Qualtrics[™] and then imported into Microsoft Excel[®]. The data was then imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 software for statistical analysis. Before starting the questionnaire, participants were required to read through an informed consent sheet and indicate if they would like to continue with the survey (see Appendix B). All contact information was deleted from the data collection process and kept in a separate file to ensure no contact information could be paired with participants' survey information. The only time contact information was accessed was for the use of contacting the five winners of the random drawing for \$5 gift cards. All data was collected and kept on a flash drive, and will be kept for three years after completion of the research, per IRB policy, after which the flash drive will be destroyed.

Summary of Methods

The researcher used a causal-comparative design to explore students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and importance of advising functions at a mid-sized institution. All participants' identities remained confidential, and participants were contacted via email to take the survey adapted from Smith and Allen's (2006) study on academic advising. Reminder emails were sent to participants, and five participants who voluntarily provided their email addresses were randomly selected to receive a reward for participating in the survey. Statistical tests, such as tests of difference, correlations, a three-way factorial ANCOVA, and descriptive analyses were performed to analyze data from the students' responses. The findings from this study are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate if students' perceptions of the effectiveness of their academic advisors' job performance related to students' levels of success as measured by GPA and continuous semester enrollment while at a midsized institution in the rural Midwest, and therefore could be used as a predictor of student success. Additionally, the study sought to determine what functions of an academic advisor's role students regarded as necessary and valuable as well as if there was a difference in perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness by demographic variables such as gender, ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus non-minority), and class standing. This chapter presents the results of a survey conducted with undergraduate students enrolled at mid-sized Midwestern four-year state university as of the spring 2015 semester, designed to answer the quantitative questions: Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and grade point average?, Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and continuous semester enrollment?, Is there a difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' perception of the importance of academic functions?, and Is there a difference in perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus nonminority), and class standing? The data for the 12 items on the effectiveness and importance questionnaire were explored in SPSS to ensure the basic assumptions were met prior to conducting the inferential statistics. The exploration revealed that the items on both measures were significantly different from normal as indicated by high significance (p < .001) in the Levene's test for equality.

Research Question 1

To answer the research question, "Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and grade point average?" a Pearson's bivariate correlation was conducted. It was hypothesized that there is a relationship between students' GPA and perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. The null hypothesis was that there was no difference. Results indicated a small, positive correlation between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and GPA, r(762) = .12, p = .01, and according to Warner (2013) this is a small effect. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that change in students' GPA can be explained by change in perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness.

The findings below include descriptive statistics of biographic and demographic variables, as well as the reliability analyses conducted to determine the consistence of the instrument in measuring students' perceived levels of advisor job effectiveness and importance to their academic advisement experiences. The means and standard deviations of effectiveness and importance scores of the twelve functions were also calculated.

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic and biographic variables. In order to gain a better understanding of the demographic breakdown for the population of students surveyed, demographic information from the participants was obtained. The means and standard deviations for the 12 functions of academic advising were calculated using SPSS (Table 4.1). Students

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perceived their academic advisors' to be least effective at performing the following

functions among the 12: Referral Academic, Out-of Class Connect, and Referral

Nonacademic.

Table 4.1

	Effectiveness		Importance	
Function Item	M (SD)	Rank	M (SD)	Rank
Accurate Information	4.93 (1.31)	1	5.58 (.69)	1
Major Connect	4.70 (1.38)	2	5.32 (.80)	2
Share Responsibility	4.61 (1.43)	3	5.12 (.93)	5
Overall Connect	4.58 (1.37)	4	5.23 (.87)	4
Skills Abilities	A = 5A (1 A Q)		5.23 (.86)	
Interests	4.34 (1.48)	5		3
Gen Ed Connect	4.50 (1.44)	6	4.99 (1.00)	8
How Things Work	4.48 (1.44)	7	4.97 (1.10)	9
Degree Connect	4.48 (1.48)	8	5.09 (1.05)	6
Referral Academic	4.38 (1.42)	9	4.70 (1.14)	10
Know as Individual	4.33 (1.63)	10	5.05 (.97)	7
Referral Nonacademic	4.13 (1.50)	11	4.52 (1.30)	11
Out-of Class Connect	3.83 (1.60)	12	4.50 (1.25)	12

Mean and Standard Deviation of the 12 Academic Advising Functions

Note. Ratings were made on a 6-point scale (1 = very ineffective (not at all important) to 6 = very effective (extremely important).

Independent samples *t*-test. To further investigate if there was a difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' GPA, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. It was hypothesized that there was a relationship between student GPA and perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. In order to obtain the largest difference to describe a high perception group (EFFECTIVE) and a low perception group (INEFFECTIVE), interquartile ranges were used to determine groups based on perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. The possible range for both importance and effectiveness scales was 12 to 72. The first quartile (total perceived effectiveness scores from 12 to 45) represented low academic advisor effectiveness and the fourth quartile (total perceived effectiveness scores from 64 to 72) represented high academic advisor effectiveness. The group of 209 students with high perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness was compared to the group of 191 students with low perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. The assumption of homogeneity of variance as assessed by the Levene's test, F = .520, p = .471 indicated no significant violation of the equality of variance assumption. The results of the independent samples *t*-test indicated the mean GPA between the two groups differed significantly, t(398) =2.87, p = .004, two-tailed; with the mean GPA for the EFFECTIVE group (M = 3.38, SD = .50, N = 209) higher than the mean GPA for the INEFFECTIVE group (M = 3.22, SD =.56, N = 191). The effect size, as determined by the eta squared (η^2) coefficient, was .02 which indicates a medium effect (Warner, 2013). The 95% confidence interval for the difference between sample means, $M_1 - M_2$ had a lower bound of .05 and an upper bound of .26. This suggests that there is a difference in GPA by perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness, thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that academic advisor effectiveness, as indirectly measured by students' perceptions, impacted student success, as measured by student GPA.

Research Question 2

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to answer the research question, "Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and continuous semester enrollment?" The results of Levene's test of equality of variance met the assumptions of equality of variances, F = 2.762, p = .097. There was no significant difference in academic advisor effectiveness between students who were continuously enrolled (n = 716, M = 53.50, SD = 14.68) versus those who were not (n = 46, M = 53.37, SD = 17.17), t(760) = .06, p = .96. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and it could not be concluded that academic advisor effectiveness is a contributing factor to students' continuous enrollment. A total of 46 out of the 762 participants (6% of the sample size) reported not being continuously enrolled; the reasons a student could have selected for not being continuously enrolled included: personal (n = 25), other (n = 14) which included an open-text entry option, academic (n =5), or military (n = 2). Among the responses for "other" students reported: went back to work full-time (4), pursued an internship (2), medical withdrawal (2), family reasons (2), financial issues (2), lease ended (1), and decided to later transfer to a community college (1) as reasons for taking a break in their higher education.

Research Question 3

Multiple paired *t*-tests were used to determine if there was a difference in students' perceptions of effectiveness and importance of academic advising functions (Table 4.3). It was hypothesized that there was a difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' perception of the importance of academic functions. The results indicated students perceived all 12 of the academic advising functions to be more important when compared to students' perceptions of the degree to which their advisors effectively performed each advising function. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, and it was concluded that a difference exists among students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness when performing the 12 academic advising functions and students' perceptions of the importance of each of the 12 functions of advising. The advising functions are listed in Table 4.3 in descending order beginning with the function of the highest dissonance.

Table 4.2

			<u>ری</u>	95% C. I. of the Difference		4	df	
		11/1	SD .	Lower	Upper	l	ц	1
Pair 11	Know as Individual	-0.72	1.617	-0.835	-0.605	-12.3	761	0.166+
Pair 10	Skills Abilities Interests	-0.69	1.49	-0.796	-0.584	-12.783	761	0.177+
Pair 5	Out-of Class Connect	-0.669	1.71	-0.791	-0.548	-10.806	761	0.133**
Pair 1	Overall Connect	-0.664	1.383	-0.743	-0.546	-12.865	761	0.178+
Pair 9	Accurate Information	-0.642	1.329	-0.736	-0.547	-13.334	761	0.189+
Pair 2	Major Connect	-0.623	1.399	-0.723	-0.524	-12.302	761	0.166+
Pair 4	Degree Connect	-0.618	1.619	-0.733	-0.503	-10.541	761	0.127**
Pair 12	Share Responsibility	-0.51	1.43	-0.612	-0.409	-9.854	761	0.113**
Pair 8	How Things Work	-0.491	1.567	-0.602	-0.379	-8.651	761	0.090**
Pair 3	Gen Ed Connect	-0.486	1.501	-0.592	-0.379	-8.903	761	0.094**
Pair 7	Referral Nonacademic	-0.385	1.726	-0.507	-0.262	-6.151	761	0.047*
Pair 6	Referral Academic	-0.327	1.55	-0.437	-0.217	-5.821	761	0.043*

Students' Perceptions of Importance and Effectiveness of Academic Advising Functions

Note. All significant at the Bonferreni correction η^2 .004, negative differences indicate mean importance was larger than mean effectiveness. C.I. denotes confidence interval.

* is a medium effect

** is a large effect

+ is a very large effect

Research Question 4

A 3 X 1 factorial ANCOVA with total importance as the covariate was performed

using SPSS to assess the research question, "Is there a difference in perceptions of

academic advisor effectiveness by gender, ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus non-minority), and class standing?" Total importance was used as a covariate, as there was a significant correlation, r = -.087, p = .016, between total importance and students' GPA. It was expected there would be a difference in the mean perception of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, class status, or ethnic minority status. The Levene's test indicated a violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption, therefore equal variances were not assumed. There were no statistically significant main effects on the mean perception of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, effectiveness by gender, class status, or ethnic minority status (Table 4.3), therefore the researcher failed to reject all three null Table 4.3

Results of ANCOVA Showing Gender, Ethnic Minority Status, and Class Standing Effects on Perceptions of Advisor Effectiveness

	Type III Sum of	Type III Sum of Mean			
Source	Squares	df	Square	F	p
gender	5.667	2	2.834	2.156	.117
minority status	4.919	1	4.919	3.742	.053
class standing	3.335	3	1.112	.846	.469
gender * minority status	.475	1	.475	.361	.548
gender * class standing	5.198	4	1.300	.989	.413
minority status * class standing	1.983	3	.661	.503	.680
gender * minority status * class standing	1.855	3	.618	.470	.703
error	974.109	741	1.315		
total	16249.972	760			
Corrected Total	1159.996	759			

Note. R Squared = .160 (Adjusted R Squared = .140)

Total importance was created to measure all student perception scores of academic advising functions. Ethnic Minority Status was defined as non-minority (White) and minority (all other race/ethnicities).

hypotheses and it could not be concluded that demographic variables such as gender,

class standing, or ethnic minority status influenced students' perceptions of academic

advisor effectiveness.

Summary of Findings

This chapter presented the results of the descriptive analyses, Pearson's bivariate correlations, independent samples *t*-tests, and three-way factorial ANCOVA conducted to answer the research questions. Results from these tests were mixed; the next chapter will discuss the results and implications of the findings.

Chapter V

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate if students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness were related to students' level of success as measured by GPA and continuous semester enrollment. Additionally, did demographic factors, such as gender, ethnic minority status, and classification impact students' perceptions of effectiveness? Furthermore, what functions of an academic advisor's role do students regard as necessary and valuable to their success? This study provided an opportunity to better understand the functions of an academic advisor's role as well as what students seek to gain from their experiences with advisors at their institution. These findings will benefit academic advising offices, as well as others, by providing insight into some of the disparities students perceive in terms of effective job performance from their academic advisors. These findings add to the discussion of an academic advisor's role, as well as what advising practices benefit students.

Discussion

The study was designed to collect demographic/biographic information about the target population and to answer quantitative research questions about what students perceive as necessary and valuable functions of academic advising, as well as what impact academic advisor effectiveness has on student success, and if certain demographic variables (gender, ethnic minority status, class standing) influence students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. Student satisfaction with the advising process has been examined in previous studies (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Light, 2001; Propp & Rhodes, 2006); however, I chose to examine perceptions of advisor effectiveness, as

Hemwall and Trachte (2003) proposed academic advising be viewed as a learning process in comparison to a satisfaction process. This perspective allows us to assess specific advising outcomes, which in turn allows for a more concrete analysis and improvement of advising practices compared to conducting satisfaction measures. Effective advising can then be viewed as an assessable teaching and mentorship process, which assists students in developing their personal, professional, and academic selves. To examine advisor effectiveness, I modified Smith and Allen's (2006) Inventory of Academic Advising Functions Student Version by changing the satisfaction measures to effectiveness measures, replacing *satisfied* with *effective* in 12 of the survey questions. The following research questions were posed at the beginning of the study, and the results of the findings are discussed below.

Research Question #1: Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and grade point average? A proxy variable, students' perceptions of advisor effectiveness, was used to analyze actual academic advisor effectiveness (see Figure 3.1). Grade point average was used as a measure of student success for research question #1. Participants (n = 762) in this study responded to a series of 12 questions asking specifically about students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness relating to the 12 academic advising functions. They rated their perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness on a scale of (1) *Very Ineffective* to (6) *Very Effective*. It was hypothesized that there was a relationship between perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and student GPA. The results of Pearson's bivariate correlation and an independent samples *t*-test indicate that academic advisor effectiveness contributes to student GPA. Based on this information, I rejected the null hypothesis and concluded there was a relationship between perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and student GPA.

Students' mean ratings for their academic advisors at the following job functions were only rated as Somewhat Effective: "Accurate Information", "Major Connect", "Overall Connect", "Share Responsibility", "Skills Abilities Interests", "Gen Ed Connect", "How Things Work", "Degree Connect", "Referral Academic", "Know as Individual", and "Referral Nonacademic." However, on average, students' rated their academic advisors' ability to perform "Out-of Class Connect" as Somewhat Ineffective. This mirrors past research on students' satisfaction with the academic advising experience. For example, Corts, Loundsbury, Saudargas, and Tatum (2000) identified a gap in advising performance and services after reviewing the results from their student survey. The single most common request from students' was for career preparation and internship opportunities, which is what Smith and Allen (2006) defined as Out-of-Class Connect. Similarly, the students at the institution of interest rated advisors' ability to perform the Out-of-Class-Connect function as somewhat ineffective, indicating students don't perceive their advisors to be assisting them at their desired levels for career preparation and internships, which are vital to post-graduate employment.

Additionally, Corts, Loundsbury, Saudargas, and Tatum (2000) reported students' greatest concern was the difficulty experienced in setting up an appointment with an advisor, as well as advisors' lack of preparation and ability to fully understand academic requirements. Smith and Allen refer to this as the ability to provide a student with accurate information. This was also a finding in the study; students from the institution of interest reported academic advisors were only "*Somewhat Effective*" at providing

graduation requirement information in students' most recent advising appointments, however, they perceived "Accurate Information" to be the most important function of academic advising.

Previous research identified students learn more from teachers who are well prepared and experienced in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Therefore, the assumption is that similar to the classroom, students will learn more and have more fulfilling experiences with academic advisors who are well trained, experienced, and continue to develop professionally in advising. Conversely, advisors who are underprepared to give accurate information regarding degree requirements can result in an increase in the time a student may take to complete a degree, resulting in additional student tuition, fees, and other expenses. As the percentage of graduates with student debt increases (Williams & Oumlil, 2015), it becomes crucial for students to attend college on the most cost-effective terms possible, e.g., graduating within the target timeframe. Thus, it is vital for advisors to be prepared to advise students on the core duty, providing accurate information.

Research Question #2: Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and continuous semester enrollment? An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to answer this research question. There was no significant difference in academic advisor effectiveness among students who were continuously enrolled versus those were not. Thus, I failed to reject the null hypothesis, and could not conclude academic advisor effectiveness was a contributing factor toward students' continuous enrollment (retention).

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This result is contradictory to previous research on academic advising and student retention. Bai and Pan (2009) found students who were in advising programs were 24% more likely to come back to campus for the second year of undergraduate study. The basis for advising programs fostering an increase in retention relates to Tinto's (1993) theory of college student departure. Tinto proposed the three main causes for student departure were academic difficulties, students' inability to resolve educational and occupational goals, and students' failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Ensign (2010) interviewed faculty and staff members from 2003-2008 at over 150 institutions, and noted academic advising was frequently credited as a strategy that increased retention. Considering students' personal and professional interests while creating a plan of study, as well as supporting students beyond the academic level (e.g., personal development) leads to student success (Corts, Loundsbury, Saudargas, & Tatum, 2000; Thompson, Orr, Thompson, & Grover, 2007), and this consideration of personal and professional interests also supports students in their attempts to resolve educational and occupational goals.

Several demographic factors that influence student retention and success were not accounted for in this study, due to the time constraints of conducting a master's level thesis. Students' socio-economic status has been shown to be a contributing factor toward students' likelihood to persist in college; those with low socio-economic status are less likely to persist in college or attend graduate school (Walpole, 2003). Similarly, high school GPA has been shown to be a predictor for student success in college (Sawyer, 2013) as well as parent's highest level of education (Choy, 2001). Socio-economic status, high school GPA, and parent's highest level of education were all demographic factors that were not collected in this study. Had I collected data on these factors, I could have partially corrected for these effects by using an ANCOVA, which would have resulted in cleaner data to examine whether academic advising influenced continuous semester enrollment.

Research Question #3: Is there a difference between students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and students' perception of the importance of academic functions? Multiple paired *t*-tests were used to determine if there was a difference among students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and importance of the 12 advising functions. The results indicated for all 12 of the advising functions, students perceived the functions to be more important than their advisors' levels of effectiveness performing the 12 functions. I rejected the null hypothesis that there was no difference in perceptions, and it was concluded that differences exist among students' perceptions of advisor effectiveness and students' perceptions of the importance of academic advising functions. The function with the highest dissonance was "Know as Individual" followed by "Skills Abilities Interests," "Out-of-Class Connect," "Overall Connect," and "Accurate Information." These results are quite similar to those found in Smith and Allen's (2006) study which examined students' ratings of importance and satisfaction with the 12 advising functions. Smith and Allen reported that students ranked the importance of each function higher than their satisfaction with their advisor's performance of the functions. Students were also least satisfied with "Out-of-Class Connect," in Smith and Allen's study, which held true for this study. It is unfortunate that students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness are not commensurate with the importance students attach to it. The advising function most important to students

(the ability to give accurate information about degree requirements) was the function they perceived their advisors to be the most effective at performing, albeit at a rating of *"somewhat effective."*

The results from this question provide further support for Smith and Allen's (2006) study showing that the 12 advising functions identified are indeed important to students. These results in turn support Crookston's (1972) concept of developmental academic advising, which is advising that integrates several constructs to serve students, allowing students to be responsible for their life, career, and educational goals, practice their decision making and problem solving skills, and connect their curricular and cocurricular activities to their educational experience. Previous research has shown that developmental academic advising is integral to students' success at college, and students benefit from this type of advising compared to prescriptive or non-intrusive academic advising (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Chiteng Kot, 2014; Crookston, 1972; Frost, 2000; Hemwall & Trachte, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Propp & Rhodes, 2006; Schwebel, Walburn, Klyce, & Jerrolds, 2012). Robbins et al. (2009) determined the use of academic resources and services, such as academic advising, led to an increase in GPA, specifically for high-risk students. Chiteng Kot (2014) also found an increase in GPA for students who used advising services more frequently than their counterparts. Additionally, students want to speak with advisors about career preparation and internship opportunities which suggests students are seeking holistic, developmental interactions from their advisors, as Crookston proposed in his developmental academic advising model (Corts, Loundsbury, Saudargas, &Tatum, 2000).

Research Question #4: Is there a difference in perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, ethnic minority status (ethnic minority versus non**minority**]), and class standing? A 3 X 1 factorial ANCOVA with total importance as the covariate was performed to determine if a difference in perceptions of advisor effectiveness by gender, ethnic minority status, or class standing existed. There were no statistically significant main effects on the mean perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness by gender, class status, or ethnic minority status (ethnic minority, nonminority). Therefore, I failed to reject the null hypotheses and it couldn't be concluded that demographic variables influenced students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. However, qualitative research conducted by Museus and Ravello (2010) did reveal some minority students felt there were noticeable differences among academic advisors treatment of minority and non-minority students. Specifically, referral to relevant resources and knowing students as individuals was especially important for minority students' success. Additionally, Smith and Allen (2006) found that ethnicity was associated with student ratings of advising importance. Specifically in their study, African American, Asian American, and some multi-ethnic students rated many of the functions as more important than did White students, suggesting advisors need to better understand how differences among ethnic groups ratings of importance and effectiveness relate to issues of privilege and social capital. My research did not support this finding; however, a larger sample size of minority students may have given a better data set to examine these constructs in terms of perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness and importance on this campus. A larger sample size would have more reliably reflected the population; however, I still may not have found a difference despite a larger sample size.
In future studies, using survey techniques shown to have greater response rates such as paper mailing surveys (Fan & Yan, 2010) may yield a larger response rate. A stratified random sample, compared to the convenience sampling technique used in this study, would also be appropriate in future studies to gain a more representative sample.

Implications for Research and Practice

Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory of college student departure were used as the framework to help understand the effects academic advising can have on students' success. Astin suggested the "effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement," (Astin, 1984, p. 519). The data from this study partially supported this statement. The survey item addressing this concept, Out-of-Class Connect was ranked 12th out of 12 in terms of perceived importance – yet, even in the 12th ranking students rated this function as, "somewhat important." In terms of advisor effectiveness, students perceived advisors to be least effective at performing this function, rating their advisors as "somewhat ineffective" at performing academic advising that assists undergraduate students with activities such as part-time or summer employment, internships or practicum, or participation in clubs and organizations on campus that connects the student's academic, life, and career goals. This information would seem to point that although students perceive their academic advisors to be on average somewhat ineffective in connecting them to out-of-class activities, e.g. involvement opportunities, they still on average rate this as a somewhat important academic advising function indicating Astin's idea that effectiveness of a program is to

some degree dependent on the capacity to increase student involvement which benefits the student.

Astin (1984) also described resource theory, a sub-theory which stated that if physical facilities, human resources, and fiscal resources were brought together in one place, student learning and development would occur. The data didn't support this concept; on the contrary, among the functions ranked highest in importance were "Accurate Information (M = 5.58, SD = 0.69)," "Major Connect (M = 5.32, SD = 0.80," and "Skills Abilities Interests (M = 5.23, SD = 0.86)" with a score of 5 indicating students view these functions as "Very Important." However, the mean perceptions of effectiveness for "Accurate Information," "Major Connect," and "Skills Abilities Interests" were, M = 4.93 (SD = 1.30), M = 4.70 (SD = 1.38), and M = 4.54 (SD = 1.48), respectively indicating their advisors were only "Somewhat Effective" at performing these functions. The gap between perceptions of importance and advisor effectiveness indicates students look to utilize academic advisors as a source of knowledge regarding degree requirements and advice based on students' life, career, and academic goals. Thus, the existence of academic advising in one central location doesn't guarantee student learning and development; rather, it is the utilization of resources and effective performance of academic advisors that is a more true indication of what will benefit students.

Tinto (1993) suggested the three main causes for student departure were academic difficulties, students' inability to resolve educational or occupational goals and students' failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. The corresponding functions of academic advisor performance are Referral Academic, Overall Connect, and Out-of Class Connect, respectively. Consistently,

students on average perceived their advisors to be less effective at performing these job duties compared to students' perceived level of importance of these functions. In short, students' perceive these functions to be important to their success at the institution, yet, don't perceive their advisors to be *Very Effective*, or even *Effective* at performing these functions.

Tinto (1993) suggested six principles to improve students' success: ensure they have basic academic skills, engage in out-of-classroom personal contact, organize retention efforts, start early, put students as a first commitment of the institution, and identify education rather than retention as the goal. Academic advisors serve a unique role to students – all the aforementioned efforts could be duties of advisors. Light (2001) researched students' experiences with academic advising over a 10 year period, and concluded "good academic advising is the most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience," (p. 81). Currently, many scholars (e.g., Allen & Smith, 2008; Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Chiteng Kot, 2014; Dillon & Fisher, 2000; Roberts & Styron, 2010) attribute the growth and success of students to the involvement and mentorship of skilled academic advisors. However, in the absence of skilled academic advising, students may experience dissonance in their pursuit of academic assistance, resolution of educational and occupational goals, and efforts to incorporate themselves within the institution, which can impact students' success (Chiteng Kot, 2014). The research supported this theory, as it was found students who, on average, had higher perceptions (EFFECTIVE) of their advisor's effectiveness also had higher GPAs, r(762)= .12, p = .01, compared to students with lower perceptions of advisor effectiveness (INNEFFECTIVE). Thus, based on these results, changes in GPA can be explained by

change in perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness. This was further supported by the results from an independent samples *t*-test where the mean GPA between the EFFECTIVE and INEFFECTIVE groups differed significantly, t(398) = 2.87, p = .004, two-tailed with a medium effect ($\eta^2 = .02$). The EFFECTIVE group had higher mean GPAs, M = 3.38, SD = 0.50, compared to INEFFECTIVE group, M = 3.23, SD = 0.56. This suggests that academic advisor effectiveness, as indirectly measured by students' perceptions, impacted student success as measured by student GPA.

Recommendations for Academic Advisors

The following recommendations are intended specifically for academic advisors at the institution of interest. However, data from this research study could be generalized to other institutions of similar size and demographic make-up to improve advising services offered to undergraduate students of all majors.

Students rated all 12 advising functions as important; thus, advisors should provide and effectively perform these advising functions. A developmental advising framework, compared to prescribing a curriculum, should be followed to aid students' ability to make educational, career, and personal decisions. Advisors should also assist students in making information they learn in the classroom meaningful by helping them integrate classroom experiences into academic, career, and life goals through the recommendation of course plans, internship and professional development opportunities, and relevant out-of-class activities or groups that support the academic, career, and life goals of the student. Additionally, creating an atmosphere of shared responsibility while considering students' individuality can build the students' sense of autonomy and assist them in resolving some of the barriers students may experience while trying to accomplish their goals at an institution.

Professional development opportunities and incentives should be provided for academic advisors in order to assist them in incorporating academic advising functions into their practice. Dillon and Fisher (2000) examined faculty advisor perspectives on faculty-student advisor interactions, and found that advisors expressed a concern that the importance and invested time involved performing in effective academic advising is not sufficiently recognized by higher level administration, which discourages faculty members. Incentives and professional development opportunities show an investment from the institution in faculty advising, encouraging advisors to perform good academic advising. The forefront of advising should include the ability to provide accurate information, however, academic advising is also a culture that is meant to be holistic, individualized for the student, incorporate referral to campus resources, and a shared responsibility between the advisor and student. This includes tailoring advising strategies to the individuality of the particular student an advisor is interacting with at any given time. Although it was not a prominent finding in this study, advising offices should also provide specified workshops for student populations who are underrepresented in higher education.

Providing essential information that students want and need, as well as individualizing advising services for specific students shows both investment and involvement from an advising office. This developmental perspective of academic advising fosters integration, individuation, and shared responsibility – all of which are advising functions students need to be successful in higher education.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research is needed to understand how diverse students perceive and value academic advising; therefore, the following recommendations are suggested for future studies. First, to determine if the time of year affects students' perceptions, repeat this survey again the fall of 2015 and spring of 2016; additionally, this resurvey method can assist in determining if survey fatigue was an actual limitation to this study. Also, surveying students immediately after they conclude an advising appointment can decrease the time gap between the time when students are surveyed and when they last met with an advisor, which reduces the probability of decay limiting the validity of the study.

Additionally, conducting a qualitative survey to understand which functions are valued and why, as well as what students feel is positive about and lacking from their experiences with academic advising would provide richer data on students' perceptions of academic advising. Further study is needed to determine if students from other types of institutions (community colleges, private liberal arts, etc.) attach importance to and rate advisor effectiveness similarly for the 12 advising functions, as all respondents from this study were self-selected from one institution.

Obtaining a more representative sample would also strengthen this study. Ethnic minority students were underrepresented in this study; 15.9% of survey participants identified as an ethnic minority, whereas the percentage of individuals who identify as an ethnic minority comprise 30.1% of the institution. Stratified random sampling could be used in future studies to gain a more representative sample.

Limitations

While this study makes a contribution to understanding students' perceptions of academic advising, it has several limitations. For example, the time lapse between when students last interacted with their advisor and when they were surveyed allowed for decay. According to Hardt, Nader, and Nadel (2013), actively forgetting memories between the moment they occur and a later point in time is known as decay. Another limitation to this study was the existence of moderator variables among the group of participants that influenced the correlations between indicators of academic success, (e.g. GPA and continuous semester enrollment) and students' perceptions academic advisor effectiveness. Moderator variables such as socio-economic status, parent's highest level of education, and high school GPA were among the moderators that were not measured in this study. Moderator variables change the strength of an effect or relationship between two variables and indicate when or under which circumstances a particular effect could be expected (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The examination of the relationship between GPA, continuous semester enrollment, and academic advisor effectiveness was skewed due to the unmeasured or unidentified moderator variables that existed.

This study did not have a representative sample, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The causal-comparative design of this study was not as robust as other designs, such as experimental longitudinal studies. Additionally, a cross-sectional survey was efficient for surveying students, however according to Carlson and Morrison (2009), cross sectional surveys do not allow for random sampling; the assignment of subjects to groups is observed rather than manipulated through randomization. Thus, it wasn't completely possible to determine if the exposure to advising caused or contributed to students' success because the variables were simultaneously assessed (Carlson & Morrison, 2009). This lack of ability to randomize subjects created a situation where only certain demographic subsets of students took the survey, which limits generalizability. Generalizability to other institutions is therefore limited, and should be attempted cautiously as this study specifically examined academic advising on the institution of interests' campus.

Perhaps the greatest limitation that impacted this study was the use of a proxy variable (students' perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness) as a measure. This study lacks the ability to determine causality and although significant differences in GPA existed based on students' perceptions of advisor effectiveness, this result cannot determine that across the board high perceptions of academic advisor effectiveness caused high student success, as measured by GPA and continuous semester enrollment. Additionally, while quantitative data, such as the data reported in this study, showed how the students responded, it did not provide information about the reasons for students' responses. Although proxy variables are commonly used in social science research due to the difficulty or impossibility of obtaining measures of the constructs of interest (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004), further research using more direct measures is needed to understand how diverse students perceive and value academic advising.

Conclusions

Students' lack of satisfaction with the advising process is a standing issue (Allen & Smith, 2008). Choosing to examine perceptions of effectiveness, overall, I found students did not perceive their advisors to be performing their job "very effectively" or even "effectively." Rather, it was viewed as "somewhat effective" at best and "somewhat

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ineffective" at worst. This was also a prominent concept in Allen and Smith's (2008) study, where they concluded, "students were less satisfied with the advising they receive than faculty were with the advising they provide" (p. 621). Effectiveness ratings from this study align with those of satisfaction from Allen and Smith's study. The students were lukewarm in their satisfaction with advising services received (between scale point 3 to 4 on a 6-point scale) as they were with their perceptions of advisor effectiveness in this study, which is in contrast to students' perceptions of the importance of each of these functions. Students consistently perceived the 12 functions to be either "somewhat important" or "important" for academic advisors to perform. These results support a purpose of the study, to explore the gap between perceived effectiveness and importance in academic advising functions. Determining which functions students regard as necessary and valuable from their advisors, a secondary purpose, included the following highest rated functions: "Accurate Information," "Major Connect," "Skills Abilities Interests," "Overall Connect," "Share Responsibility," "Degree Connect," and "Know as Individual." Students who perceived their advisor to be effective at performing academic advising job duties were also the students who had higher GPAs; investigating this concept was the was the primary purpose of the study. Demographic factors (gender, ethnic minority status, and classification) did not impact students' perceptions of effectiveness in this sample.

Although it can be argued that students' perceptions do not equate to reality, there are still concerns that even the use of a true measure in assessing advising interactions and performance may not be beneficial if students do not perceive themselves to be getting necessary assistance and continue to report dissatisfaction and a lack of effectiveness in their interactions with advisors. For example, consider a math professor who teaches the required material. The textbook material is taught in a monotone voice, using a chalk board in straight lecture format, while only showing three equations on the board per day. Yes, the duty is being performed; however, students have been shown to learn better through interactive, whole-brain, modern teaching techniques (Bietenbeck, 2014).

The issue at hand exists when advisors work with students from a prescriptive approach, running through a course schedule and sending students on their way. Students benefit far less from this type of advising framework. Advisors should recognize the potential to motivate students and assist them throughout their education exists each time an advisor interacts with a student, and these specialized interactions result in a more successful student (Corts, Loundsbury, Saudargas, & Tatum, 2000; Crookston, 1972; Thompson, Orr, Thompson, & Grover, 2007). In turn, these students go on to become a reflection of the institution, and successful students represent successful institutions.

I assert that to serve students at optimal levels, advisors should continually invest in and develop themselves and others as professionals, mentors, advisors, and academic, collegiate resources. This is both what students deserve from their advisors and respective institutions, as well as what academic advisors are entrusted to do.

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Appendix A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE – STUDENT SUCCESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISOR EFFECTIVENESS

Is this your first so Yes	emester at Eastern Illing	ois University?			
No					
What is your age?)				
What is you gend Male Female Other	er?				
Which best describes your race/ethnicity? American Indian/Alaskan Native Black/African American White/Caucasian		? Asian Paci Hispanic Other	Asian Pacific Islander Hispanic Other		
What is your maj	or?				
What is your clas Freshman	s status? Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate	
What is your curr Full-time Part-time	ent student status?				
What is your curr	ent grade point average	e (GPA)?			
Since you began continuously enro Yes No	college, have you been blled)?	enrolled each F	all and Spring	semester (e.g.,	
What was the rea Military Duty Academic Re	son you took a break in Personal R lated Other (plea	your education leasons ase describe) _	1?		

A transfer student is a student who has completed some credit hours at an institution and then transfers to a different institution. Are you a transfer student?

Yes No

Are you a first-generation student (your parents never enrolled in post-secondary education)?

Yes No

Do you consider yourself to be a:

Veteran Commuter Student NCAA Athlete International Student Student with a physical disability

Which statement best describes where you get most of your information about classes to take to meet requirements from?

Automated Degree Audit Systems (DARS)	University Catalog
Undergraduate Advising Website	Departmental Website
Friend(s)/Other Student(s)	Family Member(s)

On average, how often do you get advice from your primary source of advising, i.e., the advising you consider most central to your academic progress?

I'm not currently getting academic advising from faculty or staff at Eastern Illinois University At least once per semester At least once per year More than once per semester Thinking about your primary academic advisor, rate their effectiveness in performing the following:

Effectiveness:

- 1 Very Ineffective
- 2-Ineffective
- 3 Somewhat Ineffective
- 4 Somewhat Effective
- 5 Effective
- 6 Very Effective
- 1. Advising that helps you connect your academic, career, and life goals
- 2. Advising that helps you choose among courses in your major that connect their academic, career, and life goals.
- 3. Advising that assists you with choosing among the various general education options (e.g., examples unique to each institution) that connect your academic, career, and life goals.
- 4. Advising that assists you with deciding what kind of degree to pursue (e.g., Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Music, etc.) in order to connect your academic, career, and life goals.
- 5. Advising that assists you with choosing out-of-class activities (e.g., part-time or summer employment, internships or practicum, participation in clubs or organizations) that connect your academic, career, and life goals.
- 6. When you need it, referral to campus resources that address academic problems (e.g., math or science tutoring, writing, disability accommodation, test anxiety).
- 7. When you need it, referral to campus resources that address non-academic problems (e.g., child-care, financial, physical and mental health).
- 8. Assisting you with understanding how things work at Eastern Illinois University (understanding timelines, policies, and procedures with regard to registration, financial aid, grading, graduation, petitions and appeals, etc.).
- 9. Ability to give you accurate information about degree requirements.
- 10. Taking into account your skills, abilities, and interests in helping you choose courses.
- 11. Knowing you as an individual.
- 12. Encouraging you to assume responsibility for your education by helping you develop planning, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

Rate the importance of the following to you:

Importance:

- 1 Not at all Important
- 2-Very Unimportant
- 3 Somewhat Unimportant
- 4 Somewhat Important
- 5 Very Important
- 6 Extremely Important
- 13. Advising that helps you connect your academic, career, and life goals
- 14. Advising that helps you choose among courses in your major that connect their academic, career, and life goals.
- 15. Advising that assists you with choosing among the various general education options (e.g., examples unique to each institution) that connect your academic, career, and life goals.
- 16. Advising that assists you with deciding what kind of degree to pursue (e.g., Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Music, etc.) in order to connect your academic, career, and life goals.
- 17. Advising that assists you with choosing out-of-class activities (e.g., part-time or summer employment, internships or practicum, participation in clubs or organizations) that connect your academic, career, and life goals.
- 18. When you need it, referral to campus resources that address academic problems (e.g., math or science tutoring, writing, disability accommodation, test anxiety).
- 19. When you need it, referral to campus resources that address non-academic problems (e.g., child-care, financial, physical and mental health).
- 20. Assisting you with understanding how things work at Eastern Illinois University (understanding timelines, policies, and procedures with regard to registration, financial aid, grading, graduation, petitions and appeals, etc.).
- 21. Ability to give you accurate information about degree requirements.
- 22. Taking into account your skills, abilities, and interests in helping you choose courses.
- 23. Knowing you as an individual.
- 24. Encouraging you to assume responsibility for your education by helping you develop planning, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

Would you like to be entered to win a \$5 gift card to Starbucks?

- Yes
- No

Please provide your email for a chance to be entered to win a \$5 gift card to Starbucks:

If you have any questions about this project, you may contact the course instructor: Catherine L. Polydore, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Educational Psychology Department of Counseling and Student Development Room # 2104, Buzzard Hall Eastern Illinois University 600 Lincoln Avenue Charleston, IL 61920-3099 Office: 217-581-7237 Fax: 217-581-7800

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Madeline Owens, a graduate student in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University. You are being asked to participate because you are a student attending EIU. The purpose of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of their academic This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to advisors' effectiveness. complete. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. Your involvement in this research will be kept confidential; the data will be averaged and reported in the aggregate. Group data from this research project will be shared with administrators on campus to promote improvements in programs and services. Because I appreciate your participation in this study, you will be given the opportunity to win 1 of 5 \$5 gift cards. To enter in the drawing, you will be asked to provide your email at the end of the survey, which is completely optional. Your email address will be accessed in a separate file so as to keep your response to the survey anonymous. If you have any questions about this project, you may contact the course instructor, Dr. Catherine Polydore at 217-581-7237, or at cpolydore@eiu.edu. Please print a copy of this consent form for your records, if you so desire. I have read and understand the above consent form. I certify that I am 18 years old or older and, by clicking the submit button to enter the survey, I indicate my willingness to voluntarily Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from take part in the study. participation will have no effect on your current status or future relations with Eastern Illinois University.

Do you wish to continue?

Yes No