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# **The Impact of Engagement Model Academic Advising on Involvement, Academic Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Cohesion of Online Adult Learners**

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**Abstract:** In this paper, the researchers present an ongoing study to better understand the faculty advisor role in guiding adult learners in online programs to degree completion. The researchers present a brief review of relevant literature, a research design, initial data analysis, and additional research questions that emerged from the data.

## **Introduction**

With a growing number of adult learners entering online degree programs, the face of education needs to evolve as students, technology, and the way we communicate and educate change. Online degree programs can mitigate various obstacles and meet the accessibility needs of adult learners. Yet the importance of having an adequate support system for adult learners after they enter an online program cannot be understated. The overarching role of an undergraduate faculty advisor within these programs is to provide institutional support to students while they are enrolled. The purpose of this roundtable is to facilitate a discussion on the importance of the faculty advisor role in guiding adult students in online programs to successful degree completion.

In this paper the researchers present ongoing research into the use of a proactive, engagement model (Yarbrough, 2002) of faculty advising for online adult learners. The researchers explore the effects of using an engagement advising model on student attitudes, as well as examine the practical application of engagement advising from a college student personnel perspective. The theoretical and practical impact of engagement advising on adult learner involvement (Kasworm, 1995), academic self-efficacy (Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997), perceived cohesion (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990), and transitioning of the online adult learner to the higher education environment (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) is explored.

## **Literature Review**

Three main advising approaches are identified in the literature: prescriptive, developmental, and integrated (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). The prescriptive advising relationship is based on authority in that the faculty advisor directs the advisee through an academic plan (Crookston, 1972). Developmental advising is based on a close advisor-advisee relationship (Winston & Associates, 1984), with the advisor assisting the advisee in achieving a full range of goals beyond academic coursework. In an integrated approach, such as engagement advising, the primary role of the advisor is that of a mentor or coach, assisting advisees in articulating their personal and academic goals (Yarbrough, 2002). According to Yarbrough, the advisor guides the advisee through a process of passage, going from initiation to the institution to induction of the student into the status of degree completer.

As the engagement model of academic advising relies heavily on advisee past experience (Yarbrough, 2002), it is inherently suited for application with adult learners. The closer relationships developed through this advising model have the potential to influence the adult learners sense of involvement and belonging to the institution, as well as their sense of confidence in attaining their academic goals. Adults generally spend less time on campus and are thus less involved in extra-curricular (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kuh, 1993; National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], 2008), and this is particularly true for adult students enrolled in an online program. The central path for social engagement and for negotiating meaning for learning is the classroom (Philibert, Elleven, & Allen, 2008). The use of an engagement model of advising

can create another avenue whereby adult learners experience involvement. Academic self-efficacy has been empirically linked to both academic performance and persistence (Bong, 2001; Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007; Soldberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel, & Davis, 1993). The importance of perceived cohesion and fit was predominant in the literature on adjustment (Astin, 1984; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975,1993).

### **Research Design**

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach. Initial data are collected through questionnaires. Follow up interviews are conducted using a semi-structured format. The sample includes new admits to an accelerated degree program. Participants complete the questionnaire and participate in interviews during their first week in the program and during the final week of their first semester.

### **Initial Data Analysis**

Data were collected to assess the reliability and validity of the testing instrument. Scale measures were used to determine sense of involvement, self-efficacy, and perceived cohesion. A 6-point Likert-type response scale was used. Cronbach alpha scores for the subscales used in the testing instrument were as follows: 18 item involvement scale ( $\alpha = .78$ ), 12 item self-efficacy scale ( $\alpha = .93$ ), and the 6 item perceived cohesion scale ( $\alpha = .94$ ). All scale measures exhibited adequate internal consistency reliability.

Factor analysis was conducted on scores from the testing instrument. For the involvement scale, the alpha reliability coefficient was .75. The results of the PCA revealed five factors explaining 61.4% of the total variance in the data. The PCA revealed three factors explaining 80.09% of variance in the self-efficacy scale. The alpha reliability coefficient was .92.

### **Research Questions**

The initial intent of this research was to examine the transition process of adult learners into an online degree program. The research focus then shifted to the role of the faculty advisor in this transition process, specifically how the use of an engagement model of advising influences the transition process. The initial data showed a relationship between level of classroom involvement and both academic self-efficacy and perceived cohesion to the institution. After reviewing the initial data, it was determined that an examination of advising type in relation to involvement, self-efficacy, and perceived cohesion was insufficient. Departmental faculty teaching styles also needed to be examined. The following research questions emerged:

1. What are the adult online learner expectations for engagement advising and teaching experiences that they anticipate receiving during their first two semesters of enrollment?
2. To what extent do engagement advising and teaching practices change the involvement, academic self-efficacy, and perceived cohesion perceptions of adult online learners during their first two semesters of enrollment?
3. What experiences do adult online learners perceive to make an impact on their sense of involvement, academic self-efficacy beliefs, and perceived cohesion to the university during their first two semesters of enrollment?

References furnished upon request.