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Ronda M. Bond
Virginia Commonwealth University

Stephen C. Byrd
Virginia Commonwealth University

Sandra J. Mazzoli
Virginia Commonwealth University

Reginald L. Stroble
Virginia Commonwealth University

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John Tyler Community College:
Developing A Sustainable Model for Impactful Academic Advising

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By:

Ronda Smith Bond
Associate of Applied Science, Southwest Technical Community College
Bachelor of Liberal Studies, University of Memphis
Master of Science in Education, Capella University

Stephen Byrd
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Master of Art, Western Kentucky University

Sandra Mazzoli
Bachelor of Arts, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Master of Education, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Reginald Stroble
Bachelor of Science, Virginia State University
Master of Arts, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Chair: Dr. Kimberly Bridges, Assistant Professor and
Ed.D. Co-Coordinator, Educational Leadership

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, VA
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Ronda Smith Bond

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Abstract

JOHN TYLER COMMUNITY COLLEGE: DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR IMPACTFUL ACADEMIC ADVISING

By: Ronda Smith Bond, Stephen Byrd, Sandra Mazzoli, and Reginald Stroble

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Capstone Chair: Kimberly M. Bridges, Ed.L.D., Department of Educational Leadership

The primary focus of this research is advising delivery models for community colleges. This capstone focused on the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), namely John Tyler Community College (JTCC). The research focused on delivering the most consistently supportive advising framework for faculty, staff, and students. A mixed-methods study was used by way of an online survey and in-person focus groups. Secondary data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) was used to compare JTCC to other colleges in the VCCS. This study also focused on best practices regarding academic advising and advisor development, evaluated the needs of current advising personnel, and provided academic advising strategies specifically for the JTCC student population. Using that information, this paper offers strategies for the successful implementation of new advising processes for institutions experiencing structural change.

Keywords: Advising, Advising Models, Advisors, Barriers, Community Colleges, Faculty Advisors, Retention, Shared Structure

Developing A Sustainable Model for Impactful Academic Advising

Community colleges nationwide are providing high-quality education at more affordable rates than most four-year institutions (Turk, 2019). Currently, many community colleges are dealing with declines in enrollment and funding while trying to meet government demands to improve graduation rates (Crisis in Enrollment, 2019). Since we know college enrollment nationwide is forecasted to decline until 2025 (Smith, 2018), it is imperative that institutions focus on strategies to not only broaden their recruiting practices but also focus on retaining the students who do enroll.

Smith (2018) states that community colleges are accustomed to fluctuating enrollments. While community colleges are no strangers to state budget cuts when enrollment declines, implementing or making changes to advising systems can come at a significant financial cost. Institutions have to consider the cost of upgrading or replacing operating systems, networking needs, and the cost of necessary personnel to sustain these systems and processes. For the many institutions that are facing budget reductions, any initiative that will incur costs is often placed on hold until proper funding can be secured. As a result, many institutions must operate under financial constraints.

However, despite such constraints, John Tyler Community College (JTCC) has been making improvements to their advising system because they recognize the correlation between advising, student retention and long-term success. As a public two-year institution of higher education in Virginia, JTCC offers "high quality, easily accessible, and affordable education. The mission of JTCC is to provide quality educational opportunities that inspire student success and community vitality" (JTCC, n.d). This objective also makes it understandable that JTCC would want to assess and restructure their advising policies and practices periodically.

The onset of new regulations has dramatically changed the workflow of the John Tyler Community College (JTCC) advising center. The advising center has been the first stop for most new students and student onboarding. Previously, the advising center provided initial intake and subsequent advising until students were required to declare a major. Beginning in October 2018, the students declare a major during the onboarding process and work with both the advising center and their faculty advisor. Additionally, a changing student population has, at times, put a strain on the new workflow. Based on the problem statement articulated by JTCC in its Request for Assistance, the increase in enrollment of underrepresented students, coupled with the new workflow, has created inconsistency in advising.

In the Fall of 2019, John Tyler Community College (JTCC) advising center incorporated the appreciative advising model with their professional & faculty advisors in an attempt to increase retention. They made this change based on research that showed success in building rapport and the resilience of college students through appreciative advising. The graphic below represents the six phases of appreciative advising (See Figure 1). In addition, we have listed a brief explanation of the components of the appreciative advising model that JTCC's advising center now uses (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008):

Figure 1*Appreciative Advising Phases*

- Disarm: Make a positive first impression with the student, build rapport, and create a safe, welcoming space.
- Discover: Ask positive open-ended questions that help advisers learn about students' strengths, skills, and abilities.
- Dream: Inquire about students' hopes and dreams for their futures.
- Design: Co-create a plan for making their dreams a reality.
- Deliver: Deliver on the plan created during the Design phase.
- Don't Settle: Advisers and students need to set their internal bars of expectations high.

The appreciative advising model is becoming increasingly popular with many institutions because of its proven effectiveness with emphasizing student's strengths and helping them to build on their assets (He & Hutson, 2016). According to Truschel (2008), "appreciative

advising is supportive, positive, dynamic, and holistic" (p. 7). As more advising centers are beginning to incorporate this model, JTCC is integrating the phases of this approach to focus on the best practices of appreciative inquiry (Bloom & Martin, 2002) and how building this mindset will aid in the active development of students by emphasizing holistic growth (He & Hutson, 2016).

As JTCC embarks upon restructuring its advising model, one of their first tasks will be to review best practices of the advising field. With advising models evolving to accommodate student learning trends, institutions need to remain current with the changes happening within their student population as well as with the broader advising field. As with many higher education professionals, it is also essential for advisors to know the current trends and practices of their field.

Another task will be to ensure continued professional development on advising and its connections to student and organizational success. According to Woods (2014) advisor learning is connected to student learning; therefore, it is imperative that institutions help their advisors to see and understand how their professional competency is directly connected to the success of the students they serve. Advisors' awareness of student needs will determine how they approach counseling and advising. A robust advising process will have a positive impact on student success, thereby strengthening the retention rate of the institution.

Purpose of the Study

The primary focus of this capstone was to assist John Tyler Community College (JTCC) in delivering the most consistently supportive advising framework for faculty, staff, and students. For this capstone project, we researched best practices regarding academic advising and advisor development, evaluated the needs of current advising personnel, and assessed academic advising

strategies for the JTCC student population. Using this information, we offered strategies for the successful implementation of their new advising process.

Assumptions and limitations

Through a review of the project proposal, client discussions, and the JTCC website, the capstone team came to a few conclusions. First, it was apparent that the institution was embarking upon significant changes. The JTCC Capstone proposal stated that the institution was implementing a new software system, known as Navigate, to help track and record advising sessions. Navigate is the primary advising software the center is using for all advising processes at the college. Although this represents a significant change, it was not within the scope of this project.

In addition to the system change, the institution is embarking upon a few advising policy changes that involve the implementation of the appreciative advising model. Our capstone team presumed that these changes produced some level of anxiety for advisors; therefore, our team needed to address any potential anxiety levels by way of a *needs assessment* (He & Hutson, 2017) to inform our recommendations for implementation. The needs assessment allowed our team to explore successful elements of other advising models that complemented decisions already made and efforts underway by JTCC.

Thirdly, based on the information gathered from initial client meetings, communication challenges existed between the advising center staff and faculty advisors. This challenge prompted our capstone team to consider the need for assistance with decoding expectations. It became clear to the team that there was the use of professional language familiar to the professional advisors but not necessarily to faculty advisors. Lastly, the capstone team wanted to address the lack of confidence faculty advisors felt with their advising duties when relating with

students; Finch (2013) shares that faculty advisors play a significant role in the personal development of their students. The capstone team felt it important to make the connection between the level of faculty confidence and the execution of advising duties. Although we recognize that students are essential to this process, the capstone team determined that the priority for this project was the collection of qualitative data from faculty and professional advisors.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was the JTCC advising process and the training and development of advising personnel from the perspective of faculty, advisors, and leaders. Included in the study was a data comparison between John Tyler Community College and other Virginia Community College System (VCCS) schools, for the purpose of informing improvements at JTCC.

Definitions

Admission - the process through which students enter tertiary education at universities and colleges (Dictionary.com, Sept. 2019).

Advising - the intentional interactions between students and higher education representatives (including both faculty and staff members) that support students' growth and success (He & Hutson, 2016). Academic advising takes place in "situations in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter. The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach" (Definitions of academic advising. 2014,).

Advising Center - offices located on both the Chester and Midlothian campuses of John Tyler Community College that lead and handle all advising activities.

Advising Caseload--refers to the number of students an advisor has assigned.

Advising model - the standard by which advising services are executed.

Advising Structure - also referred to as *organizational structure*. The framework for delivering advising services to students (Pardee, 2004).

Appreciative Advising - is the intentional collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008).

Appreciative Inquiry - is a strengths-based, positive approach to leadership development and organizational change.

At-risk - is often used to describe students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school (Partnership, G. S., 2013).

Assessment - refers to the wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students (Partnership, G. S., n.d.).

Capstone Project - refers to a comprehensive project for JTCC that is currently in progress.

Capstone Team - refers to team members Sandra Mazzoli, Stephen Byrd, Reginald Stroble, and Ronda Bond. The Capstone Project chair is Dr. Kimberly Bridges. The Capstone committee members are Dr. Jeff Wilson and Dr. Christopher Brooks.

Coach - synonym for advisor.

Coded/Coding - process of determining themes within the qualitative data.

Conceptional Content - addresses the general framework in understanding the relationship between advising and institution mission, the expectations for academic advising by various stakeholders, and models and theories regarding college student cognitive, affective and moral development (Hutson, 2013).

Developmental Advising - is a model in which the student and advisor work together to determine a plan for the student and depends on mutual communication between the two parties.

Early Alert - alerts advisors when students are at risk of not being retained because of different academic, social, and emotional issues.

Faculty Advisor - member of JTCC faculty who has an advising caseload.

Informational Content - the institution-specific information regarding general education and major degree requirements; institutional policies; student support services; co-curricular activities, appropriate use of advising tools such as class schedules, catalogs, degree plans, placement-test results, and interest and ability inventories; and career selection information (Hutson, 2013).

Navigate - the database system used by John Tyler Community College and all community colleges in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) to track advising activities.

Needs Assessment - A needs assessment is the process of collecting information about an expressed or implied organizational need that could be met by conducting training.

Operational - refers to on-campus resources such as student accounting, financial aid, registration, health services, etc.

Prescriptive Advising - is linear communication from the advisor to the advisee and places most of the responsibility not on the student, but the advisor.

Professional Development - training that is given to managers and people working in professions to increase their knowledge and skills. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019).

Programmatic - focuses mainly on courses/program requirements

Relational - primary focus on making connections and building relationships with students.

Relational Content - addresses specifically how advisors manage the advising process and focuses on effective inter-communication skills (Hutson, 2013).

Retention - continued enrollment within the same institution for the fall semesters of a student's first and second year (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015).

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

Underrepresented students - students that make up only a small fraction of the college's total population (Definition, N.D.).

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to help the capstone team better understand academic advising overall, appreciative advising, current trends and best practices. The literature review helped the team to develop a strategy to create a sustainable model for JTCC.

Advising is considered the most effective process used by institutions to help students set and achieve academic goals (Crocker, Kahla, & Allen, 2014). Academic advising is one of the critical components of student retention in higher education (He & Huston, 2016), and it is an essential part of any institution's retention plan. According to Hutson (2013), a student's ability to feel connected to their institution goes well beyond their experience in the classroom. The building of relationships between students and advisors is a critical facet of that connectedness (Winfield, 2018; Putnam & Rathburn, 2018; Hutson, B, 2013; Duberstein, 2009). Academic advisors play a crucial role in assisting students with their collegiate experience, and according to Yarbrough (2002), "The brief exchanges between advisor and advisee may have the greatest impact on the student's sense of self-efficacy in completing his or her degree requirements" (p.63).

Advising Models

Academic Advising has a direct impact on institutional retention rates (Orozco, Alvarez, & Gutkin 2010; Crocker, Kahla, & Allen, 2014). Research shows that advising is most crucial for first-year and high-risk students because it aids in a student's ability to adjust to their new academic environment (Woods, Richard, Park, Tandberg, Hu; & Jones, 2016; Winfield, 2018; Duberstein, 2009). Advising is most effective when advising staff are consistently and adequately trained to coach and guide students (Hutson, 2013; Winfield, 2018).

There are many advising models for institutions to reference when developing strategies for serving their student body. The two most prevalently used in higher education are Developmental and Prescriptive. Developmental advising is a model in which the student and advisor work together to determine a plan for the student; it depends on mutual communication between the two parties (Missouri State University, n.d.). Prescriptive advising is a model in which the advisor tells the student what to do, and the student does it (Missouri State University, n.d.) For example, prescriptive advising includes issues such as telling the student how to register for courses or simply referring the student to financial aid. These approaches are not exclusive to one another, and it is not unusual to use two or more approaches at the same time. For example, the advisor may discuss which courses to take but only after a discussion with the student to determine if the needed courses will fit into the student's overall schedule (i.e., work, family obligations, etc.). While advisors are currently practicing different techniques, our research has identified some advising best practices that JTCC can possibly utilize.

Advising Best Practices

Appreciative advising allows advisors the opportunity to help students define their own unique way to success rather than follow a cookie-cutter model for success. In our professional practice, we [capstone team] have personally utilized the appreciative advising model. We have experienced the positive effects of taking the time to build relationships with our students. The appreciative model places an emphasis on the holistic growth of a student (He and Hutson, 2016) which has allowed us to connect with students, thereby building trust. When our students see that we are committed to their success, they open up about their dreams and goals, allowing us to give guidance for their journey.

For their specific population, JTCC has selected the Appreciative Advising Model. This model offers intentional collaboration between advisors and advisees with the use of open-ended questions that allow students to dream, establish goals, and realize their full academic potential. As with other advising models, Appreciative Advising emphasizes building relationships as a best practice. According to Truschel (2008), "Appreciative Advising is positive and action-oriented. The advisor and the student should form a working alliance. This alliance will allow the advisor to interview the students in order to learn what is important in their lives" (p. 9).

The first two phases of the Appreciative Model are to Disarm and Discover; these phases cannot be accomplished without first establishing trust, which helps to build a strong advisor/advisee relationship. Establishing trust is another best practice of advising that goes hand in hand with building relationships. Sapp and Williams (2015) encourage advisors to take responsibility for defining what this relationship will look like by being intentional in discovering the needs of their advisee population. The Appreciative advising model encourages this in its phase three known as the Discover phase. The Discover phase allows advisors to ask questions that will allow them to learn more about their student. As Roscoe (2015) states, we need to discourage stereotyping students. All students are unique, and although we acknowledge similarities, we must also acknowledge the differences if we desire to maximize student success.

What appreciative advising does is allow advisors to create a positive environment regardless of where the student is on the prescriptive-developmental spectrum. Although JTCC has adopted the Appreciative approach, other forms of developing advising fit within the institutional vision. According to King (2005) "Developmental academic advising recognizes the importance of interactions between the student and the campus environment, it focuses on the whole person, and it works with the student at that person's life stage of development."

However, Hatch and Garcia (2017) state "developmental advising may not be desired for all students" (p. 379). Based on a student's motive for entering an institution, the idea of immersing oneself fully into the life of the college may seem overwhelming and unconnected to their life goal. Additionally, Hatch and Garcia (2017) suggest that other external factors determine the goals of students, which in turn determines how they want to be advised. For example, non-traditional students who have a specific goal in mind may only need assistance with registration and other questions that are more prescriptive. Students who do not have a specific goal and need help with exploring their options will need a more developmental/relational approach.

Another best practice of advising is the ability to be flexible with students, not just during the actual advising appointment, but in advising processes. Hatch and Garcia (2017) remind us that many students, especially in the community college system, are so frustrated by our intake processes, that we often lose students before they can even begin. We must be mindful of our administrative processes so that we do not create unnecessary obstacles for our students. This practice correlates with phase four of appreciative advising – Design. From a student perspective, the Design phase "helps students devise concrete, incremental, and achievable goals" (Bloom, 2008). Often, this phase can leave an advisor feeling caged because many have no direct influence over the overall institutional policies and processes – e.g., Financial Aid, Registrar. However, frequent communication among advisors and these offices can help build understanding, thereby eliminating unnecessary barriers. From this perspective (the administrative side), the Design phase can help institutions build processes that are also student-focused and friendly. As stated before, advisor learning directly impacts student learning. Creating the opportunity to consistently collaborate and assess institutional services can lead to smoother institutional processes.

Advising at the Community College Level

Community colleges offer degree and non-degree options, whereas four-year institutions only focus on degree programs. According to Woods, Richard, Park, Tandberg, Hu, and Jones (2016), "For community college students, in particular, advising may be crucial during the enrollment process so that students are aware of the differences between remedial and college credit-bearing classes." Understanding the difference is most crucial for community college students who plan to transfer to four-year institutions. "Given the unique stressors faced by community college students, the need to investigate the relationship between advising and retention for community college students is clear" (Orozco, Alvarez, & Gutkin, 2010).

Although colleges are seeing an overall decline in enrollment, according to Winfield (2018), institutions are experiencing "enrollment peaks of students from various backgrounds with diverse needs...this increase in students warrants the necessity for more support" (para. 1). Therefore, there is a growing number of underrepresented students who are enrolling in college. With this type of increase, institutions are adopting early intervention programs to assist students who are struggling academically (Winfield, 2018). Some of the indicators that universities are using for their alert system are decreases in class attendance, lack of classroom participation, and poor grades (Winfield, 2018). With early intervention programs, faculty and staff are critical components of student retention. Additionally, Winfield (2018) discusses the use of technologies such as the early alert system and states its positive contribution to inform academically at-risk students. However, he reiterates that faculty are critical to the improvement of the overall system of identifying at-risk students and, therefore, must know how to discuss issues, such as early warning alerts or concerns based on classroom observation, with their students.

Sense of Belonging - On and Off Campus

The relationships that students build with their peers, faculty, staff, and administrators of the institution help to create a sense of belonging that cultivates student success. Duberstein (2009) states, "when students feel connected to the campus community, they are more often retained and excel academically, creating a winning situation for everyone" (p.2). These relationships have a profound impact on the student's commitment to learning and ability and willingness to overcome obstacles that could otherwise impede their ability to persist.

"Regardless of the measurable impact of advising on retention or student success, conventional wisdom suggests that appropriate advising will enhance the retention process and positively contribute to student academic success" (Crocker, Kahla, & Allen, 2014).

Good relationships between advisors and students begin with conversations, and with online learners, advisors can use multiple avenues. Skype, Zoom, and Blackboard are just a few examples of alternate ways that advisors can communicate with students. One of the challenges with online connections and academic advising is a sense of developing community on a virtual campus (Duberstein,2009). The relationship between advisor and student is more critical for students who choose online courses than any other student population because advisors may be the only point of contact for the institution. In efforts to increase the retention rates of students who choose online coursework, some institutions have begun to extend the appreciative advising model to those students.

Black male students in higher education

JTCC has begun to develop initiatives to recruit, support, and retain Black male students. The inability to foster a sense of belongingness on campus for Black males is one of the most significant challenges that many institutions face. This lack of connectedness often results in

significantly lower retention of African American males in comparison to other student demographic groups. Wood and Palmer (2013) state, "Black males have the lowest persistence and attainment rates among their male peers. For example, of black males who enter community college, only 42.2% will have persisted or attained a degree within three years" (p.223).

According to Wood and Palmer (2013), "similar to 4-year institutions, community colleges are struggling to find ways to increase the success rates of racial and ethnic minority students in general and black males specifically" (p.222). Davis (1994) suggests, "African American students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI's) of higher education report that their relationships with faculty members and peers are negative and that avoid interaction with them outside of the classroom" (p.621).

Faculty Training and Development

JTCC utilizes a shared advising model. With this model, "there is a central administrative unit with professional staff to support the department advisors (usually faculty) by providing resources and training" (Pardee, 2004). Therefore, with a shared model, faculty advisors ideally focus only on academic issues (curriculum and career) while professional advisors ideally focus on operational issues (registration systems and academic standing concerns).

Crocker, Kahla, and Allen (2014) note effective training as the first item of a successful advising system. Advisors must be proficient not only in the knowledge of degree requirements, but they must also have sound knowledge of the institutions advising and registration processes. For institutions that utilize faculty advisors, it may not always be reasonable or even realistic to require them to have proficient knowledge of disciplines outside of their department. As noted by The Higher Education Resource Institute, faculty interaction is one of the top three factors

that contribute to student success (Winfield, 2018). However, faculty are not always the best prepared to help students navigate their college experience (Savini, 2016; Wiseman. & Messitt, 2010). This lack of training, along with obligations towards research and teaching makes advising a lower priority for faculty advisors. (Vespia, Freis, & Arrowood, 2018).

Since many advisors also teach in the classroom, institutions must also develop a training that helps advisors identify students who are struggling academically. Faculty awareness is crucial to active engagement and timely intervention with the students. The knowledge gained in the classroom can inform future interactions with advisees, which leads to improved student retention (Winfield, 2018).

What is the best way to bridge the gap between the need for strong faculty-student relationships and the lack of advisor preparedness as institutions move toward more student-centered models? According to Putman and Rathburn (2018), the challenge for institutions is twofold: 1) guide faculty to engage with students and 2) give them the tools and the training to help connect those students with high impact experiences that interest them.

Components of Faculty Training

An important component of faculty training and development is the ability to focus on the skills students lack in order to obtain their educational goals. Bloom, Cuevas, Hall, and Evans (2007) discuss the use of the scaffolding or 'gradual release' model. This model calls for three stages of learning. In the first stage, the advisor has most of the responsibility for completing and explaining the task to the students. The second stage calls for the advisor and student to share that responsibility with the advisor providing feedback to the student. By the final stage, the student is ready for most tasks independently of the advisor. The challenge for advisors is to

make this model flexible enough to support the student yet allow the individual growth of the student.

Hutsen (2013) and Winfield (2018) discuss three essential components for faculty advisor training: 1) conceptual content, 2) informational content, and 3) relational content. Winfield suggests that institutions use this element for helping advisors understand both the mission of the institution along with student expectations of advising. Hutson (2013) further explains, "The conceptual element addresses the general framework in understanding the relationship between advising and institution mission, the expectations for academic advising by various stakeholders, and models and theories regarding college student cognitive, affective and moral development" (p.7). Once the connection occurs, there is buy-in, and advisors will embrace and support the efforts of the advising center. For colleges seeking faculty buy-in, training on conceptual content will be critical.

The informational element is the second area of content that is key to a successful advisor training session. For many institutions, this area may not require much effort depending on the years of service for the advisors involved. "This an area where faculty may have some advantage since they typically are familiar with specific course and degree requirements within their major, have a comprehensive understanding of career selection information within their academic discipline and are able to facilitate students in reflecting on their interest and passion for the professional fields"(Hutson, p 7). Winfield (2018) refers to this element as understanding the organization of the institution.

The final critical component of successful advisor training is the relational element. This element addresses specifically how advisors manage the advising process and focuses on effective inter-communication skills. Winfield (2018) suggested that faculty learn to identify

student needs through conversation and engagement which aligns with this final element. Models such as appreciative advising in which building the advisor-student relationship is central are an excellent example of this element (Hutson, 2013). During training, facilitators can theorize the process of disarming, discovering, dreaming, designing, delivering, and not settling; however, once the advisor is in the appointment with the student, they will put their training into practice. For example, a constructive training session could include a mock advising session to allow faculty the opportunity to practice this element.

Academic advising is more than making class schedules and sharing graduation requirements (Cannon, 2013). When institutions adopt new advising models, the administration must develop a well thought out training for all who will participate in the advising process. This training should include the three critical components of a successful advisor training that Hutson (2013) highlights: conceptual content, intellectual content, and relational content.

Needs Assessment

When institutions adopt new advising models or make changes to their current advising procedures, Hutson (2013) states that it is best to start this process with a needs assessment. The first step in any change process requires assessment of the problem. Before designing any training, the institution must first learn the needs of their students, the advisors who will serve the students, and the resources that will be at their disposal. Finch (2013) states that many institutions fail to offer the appropriate (if any) professional development training to their advising staff – especially in the case of faculty advisors. The needs assessment allows advising offices to understand what their advisor already knows and what information they are lacking. Once an office is aware of what is lacking, training can be tailored to specific needs and not overwhelm advisors.

According to a study done by Finch (2013), many faculty advisors reported inadequate training and skill development for their advising duties. Many of the advisors felt unprepared to adequately serve students, which leaves one to wonder: if advisors feel ill-prepared, what message does that send to the student? Finch (2013) further shares that faculty advisors play a significant role in the personal development of their students; with this knowledge, institutions must invest in consistent and relevant advisor training.

A comprehensive needs assessment should assist institutions in determining how much training focus each of these components should receive. Moreover, as previously stated, a needs assessment is necessary to determine the content and the best strategies for executing the training. Consistent and relevant training can potentially lead to more productive faculty engagement with students.

Faculty Engagement

Faculty engagement is key to advancing student success and professional development. Authors Kennemer and Hurt (2013), propose that faculty advisors are more impactful than general advisors because they cannot only address academic requirements but also provide guidance as discipline experts who serve as career planning mentors as well. Multiple advising models echo the need for faculty engagement in the advising process and a broad conception of engagement that extends beyond technical advice into trust- and relationship-building. Ideally, Developmental advising involves building a high level of trust between advisors and students. It also provides students with attentive faculty review of transcript decisions, as well as mentorship from faculty for other facets of their life (Allen, Crocker, & Kahla, 2014). Faculty members may be able to combine knowledge about the student's persona and their academic performance to help guide students in making decisions that best prepare them for future career success. An

advisor may even place the onus of career exploration on the student, suggesting that students connect with faculty members to find out how they became invested in their particular area of expertise (Duberstein, 2009).

The appropriate level of student-advisor engagement is so vital that some scholars suggest that the primary role of an advisor is to foster student-faculty interaction (Duberstein, 2009). Considering the high impact of such engagement, colleges and universities should prioritize fostering opportunities for co-curricular interaction between faculty and students. Institutions may find that designing entire systems to foster such interactions may be necessary to truly cultivate an appreciated atmosphere of inclusion, in which faculty and students feel collectively comfortable among one another (Duranczyk et al., 2015).

Aside from official transcript advising and extracurricular engagement, some scholars recommend that institutions offer faculty mentors who can provide students with guidance specifically about their career paths (Montag et al., 2012). Their research notes that several respondents in their study selected or changed their major because of the influential attention they received from a faculty mentor. They also cite previous scholarly work that shows students are often unhappy with the unavailability of faculty to offer both academic and career guidance (Atkinson, 2004).

Creating Engagement Opportunities: What Institutions Can Do

One strategy for increasing student-faculty interaction is to create high-impact engagement opportunities. High-impact opportunities promote deep learning and facilitate student engagement, such as writing courses or service-learning. The authors suggest that high-impact interaction will improve student success through intentional engagement. Putnam and Rathburn (2018) offer a series of reflective questions for advisors who are interested in engaging

with students through high impact opportunities. For example, the advisor can reflect on such questions as "How do you actively advise students to engage in high-impact practices? Do you plan to integrate high-impact practice advising into your interactions with students?" (para 8).

Another way to foster student-faculty interaction is to incentivize this aspect of work for faculty. Most faculty positions place much more emphasis on other job responsibilities, as opposed to student advising. One study showed that of 636 job postings for professorial positions, only 7.5% mention student advising (Wiseman & Messitt, 2010). To foster more consistent engagement, institutions should begin incorporating student advising into the most integral job functions of faculty. If incorporated into *scholarship*, *service*, and *teaching*, then student advising can become embedded within the evaluatory tenets most often ascribed to faculty for tenure and promotion (Sprague, 2008). Institutions willing to support such a system can incentivize a host of opportunities for faculty to engage in the various aspects of student advising. Supporting research opportunities, making course load allowances for engagement interactions with students, or designing curriculum around advising, are all ways to emphasize this area of faculty performance (Sprague, 2008). Additionally, institutions can incentivize faculty activities that support general advising personnel, particularly during critical periods where there are high volumes of student advising needs. This type of engagement serves as another student-faculty touchpoint and reinforces the image of advising to students as something of importance, valued by the institution and faculty (Williamson, Goosen, & Gonzalez, 2014).

Assessment systems for advising effectiveness that solicit input from faculty may also encourage their engagement (He & Hutson, 2017). Assessments often incorporate student satisfaction, but without faculty input, the feedback may slant more towards perceptions of effectiveness, as opposed to the actual evaluation of processes and systems that involved faculty

could provide (He & Hutson, 2017). Additionally, institutions should measure how enjoyable the advising process is for faculty. One tool for collecting such feedback is the PERMA Profiler (He & Hutson, 2017). This tool evaluates the advising experience from the faculty perspective, based on the following five elements; positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. Other scholars have since adjusted the tool to incorporate items to measure the general well-being of advising faculty (He & Hutson, 2017). This type of balanced assessment from the faculty perspective helps institutions move past the view of advisors being judged primarily for their knowledge of courses and their availability (Harrison, 2009).

Faculty Ownership

Faculty engagement is the process in which advisors are actively using processes that currently exist. Faculty ownership is the process that allows faculty advisors to be involved with the creation of new approaches. Another critical way to increase faculty engagement is to create opportunities for them to help determine how they might interact with students. Wiseman and Messitt (2010) promote the importance of faculty understanding their roles as advisors, as part of the process of cultivating their engagement. The University of Minnesota's Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (PsTL). Duranczyk, Frank, Osifuye, Barton, and Higbee (2015) studied the Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (PsTL) at the University of Minnesota as they piloted a new advising approach that was intentionally student-centered for a new Master of Arts program. (See Appendix A) Many scholars recommend that schools involve faculty in developing advising models and the associated subsequent training (Hutson 2013; He & Hutson 2017; Wiseman & Messitt 2010; Harrison, 2009).

Kotter (2012) discusses his eight-step model for sustainable change in his book *Leading Change*. The eight steps are: 1) establishing a sense of urgency, 2) Creating a guiding coalition,

3) Developing a vision and strategy, 4) Communicating the change vision, 5) Empowering broad-based action, 6) Generating short-term wins, 7) Consolidating gains and producing more change, 8) Anchoring new approaches in the culture (p. 23). Of these eight steps, steps 2-3 lend themselves to foster stakeholder participation and the idea of faculty ownership or "buy-in."

Specifically, step 2-- creating a guiding coalition, allows for institutions to include key faculty members as part of the overall decision-making team. This is the point in which faculty can lend their expertise, credibility within the institution, and leadership skills to the process (p. 59). If faculty can see that their input is part of creating an effective team with common goals, they may continue to promote and practice whatever changes the group decides.

Those changes that begin to form in step 3, developing a vision and strategy, will also benefit from stakeholder's expertise, credibility, and leadership skills. By offering their points of view to create a vision that includes not only what the team envisions for the future but also its feasibility, stakeholders remain invested in the process. Additionally, it will allow the team to ensure any vision and its implementation is adequately communicated to all affected by the proposed changes.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review performed by the capstone team made it clear that advising approaches are needed to provide consistent interaction and accurate information. Additionally, the team learned that faculty training, engagement, and ownership build strong student/advisor relationships and an overall sense of belonging or community for students. It is for these reasons that institutions of higher learning must be intentional in how they evaluate, enhance, and execute their advising processes.

Methodology

Research Design

Quantitative methods focus on the use of objective measurements and numerical data collected through questionnaires and surveys. The second form of quantitative research utilizes a series of computational techniques on secondary or pre-existing information; this type of research is also called secondary data research and analysis (Muijs, 2010). This type of research also focuses on one or two independent variables and whether or how these variables relate to the dependent variables (Creswell, 2018). Secondary data often determines commonalities between studies or various populations. Additionally, quantitative research gathers data that can be used across populations or to explain a specific phenomenon (Babbie, 2010).

Qualitative methods focus on collecting non-numerical data, such as interviews or focus groups, in order to find a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Since the data collected is descriptive (use of words, phrases, or images), qualitative research studies multiple perceptions gathered from the participants. This approach requires the interviewer or researcher to be the primary instrument of data collection as opposed to an inanimate instrument such as a survey (Creswell, 2018). In general, qualitative researchers attempt to describe and interpret human behavior based primarily on the words of selected individuals [a.k.a., "informants" or "respondents"] and through the interpretation of their material culture or occupied space (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

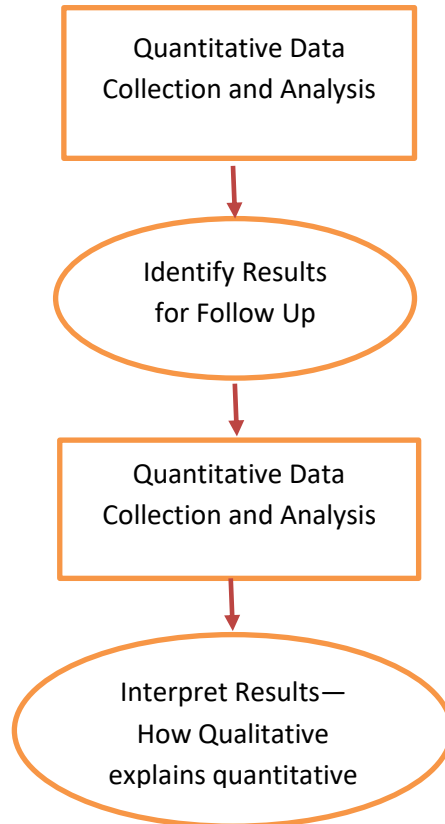
The capstone team selected the mixed-methods approach to collect data that explored the needs of JTCC's advising center and its personnel. The mixed methods research (MMR) approach is used when neither qualitative nor quantitative approaches can fully answer the research questions. The mixed methods research approach uses both qualitative and quantitative

research, which allows for the synthesis of the two forms in the creation of more robust analysis.

Our mixed methods research approach is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the best practices for helping advising personnel understand their role in the process?
 - a) For both general and faculty advising
- 2) What are the needs of advising personnel to be effective in the process?
 - a) Training and development
 - b) Barriers for faculty engagement
- 3) What academic advising strategies would most effectively serve the JTCC population?
 - a) Information on target student populations
 - b) Shared structure and technology

With the research questions as our guide, the team used Explanatory Sequential Design (Two-Phase Design) in which the quantitative (survey) data was collected and analyzed to identify follow up questions for qualitative (focus groups, interviews) data collection. The steps for the Explanatory Sequential Design (Two-Phase Design) are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2*Explanatory Sequential Design (Two-Phase Design)*

There are two variants of the explanatory sequential design--the follow-up explanations model and the participant selection model. Researchers use the follow-up explanations model when qualitative data is needed to explain quantitative results. This study will use the follow-up explanations model of the explanatory design approach since the top priority of the study is the qualitative section. The qualitative section will collect the critical faculty input needed to develop a sustainable advising model. This MMR design has both its strengths and challenges. Some of the strengths of the design are: 1) the two-phase design has straightforward implementation as the research team gathers one form of data at a time, 2) the report utilizes the

same straightforward manner and 3) the design appeals to quantitative researchers because of the strong quantitative phase (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Some of the challenges of the MMR design are: 1) It can require a good deal of time to implement both phases. Researchers should recognize that the qualitative portion will take longer than the quantitative portion. 2) Internal review board (IRB) approval may be difficult to secure since the researcher cannot specify participant selection until after phase 1 is complete, and 3) Researchers need to determine which quantitative results need to be further explained (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Setting and Participants

JTCC is a public 2-year institution in the VCCS system with 2 campuses, one in Chester and one in Midlothian. They offer 75 career and technical programs and serve over 14,000 students. They also serve over 7,000 students through their Workforce Development partnerships with Reynolds Community College. In the Spring of 2018, the end of term total enrollment was 9,435 students. Of this population, 56% identify as female while 44% identify as male. Students who identify as transgender, non-binary or other were not listed in the JTCC Factbook. Twenty-three percent of their student population identify as Black, 59% identify as white, and 19% as Other (JTCC, 2018).

Participants: The team surveyed professional and faculty advising staff for John Tyler Community College for the quantitative section of the study. For the qualitative section of the study, the participant pool included a total of 130 advisors and 8 Administrators. JTCC uses department faculty as well as full-time and part-time professional staff for the advising needs of both campuses. Of the administrative staff, seven were Deans and one was the Director of Advising Services. Lastly, we interviewed the Director of Student Success and senior administrators at JTCC.

Settings: The surveys were administered via Survey Monkey. Focus groups were conducted in face to face settings on both campuses (Chester and Midlothian). Individual interviews were conducted face to face.

Instrumentation

Our capstone team provided the Survey for Advising Model Assessment to the JTCC advising personnel on November 1, 2019. Participants could submit survey responses through November 29, 2019. We used SurveyMonkey to create the survey tool, which consisted of 28 questions developed by the capstone team to gauge the perceptions of the advising personnel at JTCC (See Appendix B). Of the 28 questions, the first was the consent form, 6 were demographic, and the remaining 21 addressed aspects of our 3 research questions. The latter questions focused on types of advising, levels of student engagement, and advisors' perceptions of the levels of service provided to various internal student populations. On average, the survey took eleven minutes to complete. There was a 100% completion rate of all required questions from those participants who began the survey.

The first section of questions on the survey gauged how well advising personnel understand their specific role within the academic advising framework at the institution. Using the results of the survey, the capstone team then provided recommendations from the research literature that address potential gaps between what advising personnel believe and what the institutional administration expects. The second section of questions focused on gathering the opinions of advising personnel on training that they have received and on what areas they felt that more training would be helpful. Based on the information gathered from this portion of survey responses, the capstone team recommended strategies from researched literature that adequately addressed the training and development needs of the JTCC advising personnel. The

final section of questions focused on the opinions of advising personnel concerning how well they felt JTCC serves various specific student populations. The capstone team used this information, along with demographic data and performance indicator statistics retention, to then identify strategies from the research literature that may improve the academic advising service of JTCC to target student populations. As is the case with the other research questions, the goal was for JTCC to be able to leverage recommendations in a manner that results in increased student retention.

The survey questions predominantly included closed-ended questions, such as the Likert scale, multiple-choice, and yes-no questions, so that the obtained data can be readily quantified. However, there were open-ended questions as well to allow for feedback on any potentially unforeseen sub-topic area. The questions on advisors' understanding of their role covered sub-topics such as level of advisor responsibility, areas of focus in which advisors feel are most important (operational, programmatic, career, etc.), willingness to engage in co-curricular programming, and other topics germane to their contribution to student success. The survey questions about training and development covered proficiency with advising models, relevant software, ability to initiate difficult conversations, barriers to high advisor performance, and other aspects of training and development. The last set of questions asked advising personnel about their observations and perspectives regarding how effectively JTCC's advising center serves the various student populations.

Focus group and interview questions were based on the data collected from the survey responses. During the focus group meetings, the capstone team attempted to gain additional clarity about the perspectives uncovered through the surveys. The questions were mostly open-

ended, with the transcripts subsequently coded to capture patterns and noteworthy comparisons among the responses.

Secondary Data

Using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) system, we conducted secondary data analysis to compare JTCC's level of student success with similar institutions. This portion of the study compared the completion rates for African American males against those of other students at the institution. The data specific to JTCC will be compared to that of the other community colleges in Virginia, providing the client with a sense of how their institution ranks among peer institutions across the state.

Procedure

The email soliciting engagement in the survey (See Appendix C) was sent to advising personnel by the client. The initial email was sent on November 1st, and advising personnel was later sent reminder emails on November 15, 20, and 29, 2019. A total of 56 advisors completed the survey, which represented a 43% response rate from the 130 advising personnel at JTCC. Over 70% of the respondents were full-time faculty advisors. The remainder of the respondents were full-time or part-time staff, non-teaching advisors.

Additional data was gathered through four focus groups, as well as an interview with the Director of the Advising Center. Focus group sessions were held at both JTCC campus locations and included advising personnel as well as the academic deans. Three of the focus groups lasted one hour each. The final focus group was conducted with the academic deans in December of 2019, and it also lasted one hour. There was a total of 20 participants between all sessions. The Capstone team recorded all focus group sessions and utilized Transcription Puppy to transcribe the content. We took notes during the interview with the Director of the Advising Center so that

we could compare her responses to information obtained during the focus groups. The interview not only provided the additional opportunities to follow up on information obtained from the survey but also allowed capstone members to obtain the isolated perspective of a supervising personnel member within the institution's advising process. In order to capture themes from the qualitative data, the Capstone team coded each transcript. This process identified major findings concerning the JTCC Advising process. These themes became the points of focus and comparison with the survey data. The results of that analysis, and corresponding comparisons, are discussed in Chapter Five.

During this same period, the capstone team began conducting a secondary data analysis targeting the academic performance of specific student populations. The team used data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The goal was to compare how various student groups performed at JTCC in comparison to other similar institutions. The information obtained was analyzed in conjunction with the survey responses from advising personnel to develop a comparison between the performance of the specific student groups and the delivery of advising service to those same groups.

Aside from the research data associated with the JTCC population, the capstone team will provide recommendations regarding strategies for advising services to current and prospective student populations, as well as potentially useful ways to incorporate technology to assist with effectively managing the advising needs at the institution. These recommendations will not be focused on ways to use the Navigate software system, but will instead highlight potential opportunities to complement those efforts.

Data Processing and Analysis

The secondary data analysis was conducted based on the student demographic categories reported to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). At the request of JTCC, the specific student population of focus was the recruitment and retention of African American male students. This method determined how effectively the JTCC advising system was serving target student populations. The administration at the institution is planning to implement an academic alert intervention system to improve the retention of African-American males. In order to address the request of JTCC and determine their success in retaining this student population, quantitative data was needed for objective analysis beyond the feedback obtained through the surveys and focus groups. To provide this information, we conducted two secondary data analyses.

We gathered quantitative information for each secondary data analysis from the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS). From this database, we retrieved Fall enrollment and two-year completion rates for African-American males from the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). For comparison purposes within JTCC, the same institutional data was also gathered for all male students and the overall JTCC student population. This approach allowed us to make comparisons regarding the effectiveness of our client to provide service to African-American males, in comparison to that to other male students, and other JTCC students in general.

The second analysis was a comparison between the success rates of African-American males at JTCC, and that of other African American male students within the VCCS. The same data for enrollment of, and completion rates for, African-American males were pulled from IPEDS for each of the VCCS schools. This data allowed for a comparison of the completion

rates for African-American males between those at John Tyler Community College, and those attending other VCCS institutions.

The specific data collected to represent enrollment was from Fall entry numbers. The range of years for which data was collected is from 2014 through 2018, with 2018 providing the most recent data available on the IPEDS website. The three fall cohorts of 2014, 2015, and 2016) were analyzed in comparison to completions for 2016, 2017, and 2018. The results are reviewed in detail in Chapter 5.

Ethical Considerations

Formally, the capstone team completed the participant information and consent forms and applicable IRB paperwork. Participants completed surveys anonymously. Any information that could personally identify a participant during focus groups and interviews was not incorporated into the final report. Through all interactions with JTCC constituents, the capstone team strived to provide recommendations that not only sufficiently meet the goals of their academic requirements, but that also improve the effectiveness of the JTCC academic advising program.

Summary

Using Explanatory Sequential Design (Two-Phase Design), the capstone team will conduct a mixed-method study to determine how to create a sustainable advising model for JTCC. The survey used in Phase I will provide data for two of the three research questions as well as guide the design of the focus groups questions in Phase II. Secondary data analysis will address the final research questions. The collection of both quantitative and qualitative data will give a more detailed description of perceptions held by faculty and professional advising personnel.

Findings and Outcomes

We reported the findings based on our survey questions and addressed the results by research questions in the recommendations section. Our data collection efforts provided several outcomes for approaching the JTCC advising reorganization process. In survey question 11, we asked the JTCC advising team about organizations and resources, including training, to which they refer for best practices in advising. As seen below in Figure 3, 26% of participants stated that they reference the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) which is a well-known organization that supports academic advising in higher education. In smaller percentages, which totaled around 14%, participants selected organizations that focused on matters of handling student records, registration, student affairs, or mental health issues. Of the remaining 60%, 26 respondents said they received no training around this information. The remaining eight respondents stated that they rely on the information provided by JTCC and other colleagues. The goal of this question was to gather insight on how effectively advisors stay current with best practices. The wide variety of responses led our capstone team to believe that it is most imperative that JTCC provides internal professional development to help their advisors maintain professional competencies.

Figure 3*Sources of professional training*

Understanding the expectations of advising personnel

Research question one focused on best practices for helping advising personnel understand what is expected in their role as advisors. Most of the research supports the need for building strong advisor-advisee relationships to improve student success (Drake 2011; Hatch & Garcia, 2017; and Yonker, et al, 2019), and this aligned with the data collected from the JTCC advising team. There was an overall theme across all focus groups concerning strength of advisor-student relationships. For example, one focus group participant stated, "I think an important aspect is definitely being able to establish a relationship so the student would trust, build a sense of trust. Because, that way, the student is more apt to listen . . . take your advice seriously." Another focus group participant replied, "I think, establishing that sense of trust in building relationships. Even though they only see that person one time, at least they will feel

comfortable enough to be able to come back, and if they have questions, they will come back and speak.” The previous statements support the idea that the JTCC advising team has a strong sense of how building relationships positively impact student success. It also helps the administration to understand better the knowledge for which their advisors are approaching meetings with students.

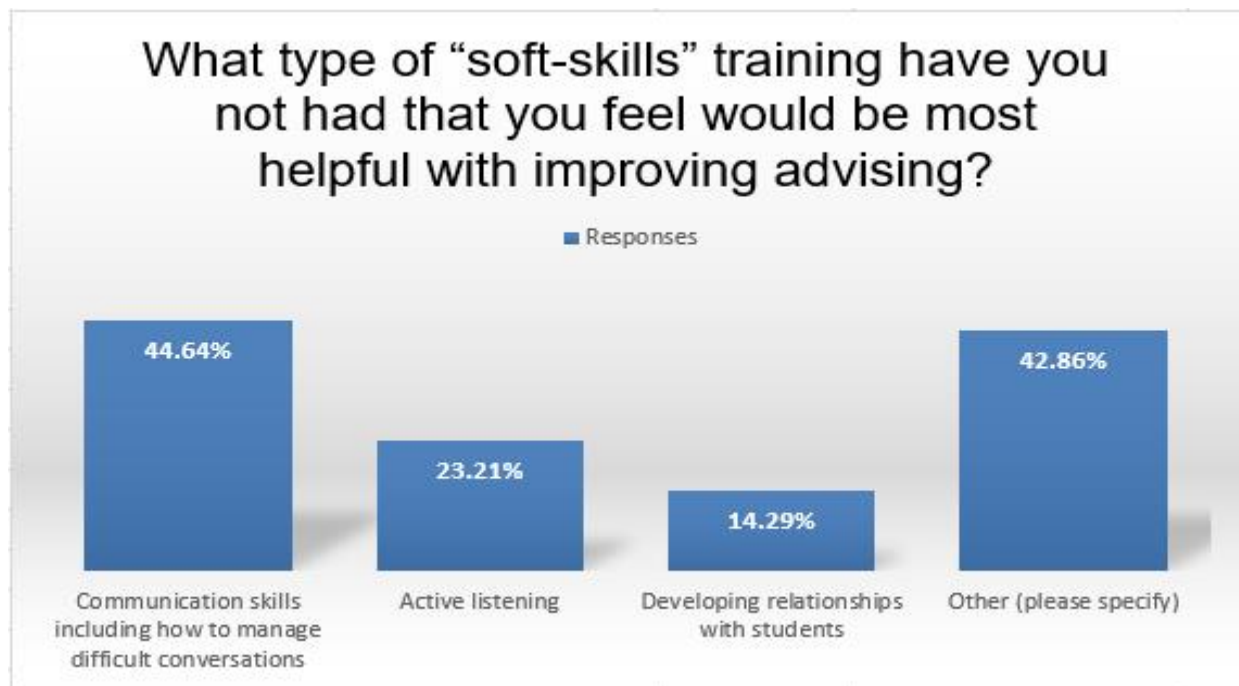
Since building relationships requires a sense of one's soft-skills, survey question 17 asked participants what type of “soft-skills” training would most help them to improve their advising skills (see Figure 4). The purpose of this question was to gather a more detailed answer as to what specific type of training advisors were seeking to improve upon their relationship-building skills with students. Participants were allowed to select all answers that applied. Three of the answer responses were predetermined by the Capstone team - who are all professional advisors. The final answer response was listed as “other” to allow survey respondents to list any other skills they felt were needed.

Of the predetermined answers, the greatest response, at 44.64%, was the desire for training in communication skills - specifically how to handle difficult conversations. This response correlates with the advising best practice of creating strong relationships. What is most interesting about this response is that when asked about improving relationship building skills, only 14% of respondents listed this as a need. This led the capstone team to believe that perhaps respondents felt there was a disconnect in the use of these two skills and how they relate with the appreciative advising model. The main focus of the appreciative advising model is collaboration which requires that parties work together to create or build something. In order to collaborate, one must communicate and when this happens in a consistent pattern the student experience is optimized.

When asked about active listening skills, only 23% of respondents stated this as a need for improving. Twenty-four of the 56 respondents chose "other," and of those 24, 18 indicated that they had received some form of the training listed and felt comfortable with their skills. Of the remaining responses, the participants expressed concern over students who self-harm and those enrolled in developmental coursework. Furthermore, there was concern about handling conversations around cultural competencies (LGBTQIA+, and International customs).

Figure 4

Soft-skills Training



To better understand how advising personnel approach advising, survey question eight asked: What types of information do you routinely share with your advisees during a session? Please rank approaches from most used to least used. The question used four types of information: programmatic, operational, relational, and techniques to inspire career goals. The first three types of information are defined in the glossary. The fourth approach is the use of techniques to inspire career goals, including finding internships and offering a comprehensive

insight into the work world. The survey revealed that 85% of the respondents considered the programmatic approach to be extremely important, and 12.5% stated it was very important (Table 1).

Table 1										
<i>Information Shared with Students</i>										
	Extremely Important		Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not so Important		Not at all Important	
Programmatic (focus mainly on courses/program requirements)	85.71%	48	12.50%	7	1.79%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Operational (student accounting, financial aid, registration, health services, etc.)	8.93%	5	26.79%	15	41.07%	23	21.43%	12	1.79%	1
Relational (personal connections, sharing, etc.)	17.86%	10	35.71%	20	26.79%	15	16.07%	9	3.57%	2
Techniques to inspire career goals (suggest interns, apprenticeships, offer comprehensive insight)	10.71%	6	41.07%	23	30.36%	17	16.07%	9	1.79%	1

However, our focus groups revealed that most, if not all, the participants stated that building relationships with the student is the most important aspect when working with advisees. This response suggests that developmental advising, in which healthy relationships are needed for successful sharing of responsibility, is the approach used by most advisors. This contradicted the survey findings the programmatic approach is the most critical aspect; although it aligned with the second-ranked survey response in Table 1 as, overall, 53% of survey respondents also stated that the relational approach to advising was either "extremely important" or "very important." The focus groups reinforced these survey statements by indicating that building relationships or trust is one of the most critical aspects of successful advising. One participant stated that the advisor-student relationship "becomes key to the success in other ways, and

ultimately, obviously, we want them to reach that academic success." Another participant said that "you want to build that rapport. So, when they have an issue, they're not afraid to come back to you."

At 85%, the majority of respondents said that programmatic was the most important element of advising practices; however, the survey made clear that although they saw it as important, they did not feel they should be the ones responsible for executing these tasks. Since most of the respondents were faculty advisors, this poses a potential problem for operations. At JTCC, faculty advisors outnumber professional advisors. With this imbalance of human resources, the workload cannot be evenly or fairly distributed; therefore, causing problems with efficiently serving students. Finding the proper way to assign advisees could help eliminate this imbalance.

Comparing Survey Responses to Best Practices

When discussing best practices, two recurring themes with the focus group participants were helping students and streamlining the various advising processes that advisors use with the students. Of the many who shared this view, one participant stated: "one of our primary roles has to also be helping the students navigate the bureaucratic obstacles we put in place in front of them...they're first-generation students. They have no idea how this works. We need to help guide them through that process." Additionally, multiple participants stated that receiving inaccurate information [via the website or internet resources] is a stumbling block to helping the student. Truschel (2008) states that at-risk students (which often include first-generation) can greatly benefit from the appreciative advising model. "First-generation students are less confident in their academic ability, and readiness for college-level work and are more likely to avoid asking questions or seeking help from faculty" (Sorai and Strebleton, 2012). Advisors

who understand the barriers faced by at-risk students can then construct their advising sessions to help students understand institutional expectations, conquer academic fears, and overcome the emotional challenges of engaging in their new educational environment.

Appreciative advising takes a positive holistic approach with students, and a significant portion of his model focuses on planning. One of the primary purposes of advising is to help students figure out a plan for getting from one step to the next until they reach their ultimate goal. In that planning, institutions must also consider the infrastructure for which the administration must operate to meet student needs. According to Crocker, Kahla, and Allen (2014), there are some basics of advising systems that must be in place for success. Two of these “system basics” are an in-house expert support person who is available for consultation should advisors encounter problems. The second is a user-friendly computing system so that advisors can access and input student data.

Advising Personnel Needs

As part of the needs assessment, the capstone team surveyed advising personnel about the effectiveness of past training to determine areas in which they would like additional development. In our survey, we asked: How familiar were you with the Appreciative Advising Model before attending the September 27th training with Dr. Bloom? Close to 60% of the respondents were not familiar with the Appreciative advising approach (Table 2). This confirms the need for continued professional development surrounding advising.

Table 2		
<i>Familiarity with Appreciative Advising</i>		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Extremely familiar	7.14%	4
Very familiar	14.29%	8
Somewhat familiar	17.86%	10
Not so familiar	26.79%	15
Not at all familiar	33.93%	19
	Answered	56
	Skipped	0

Survey question 16 (Table 3) asked “What types of training have you had concerning academic advising?”

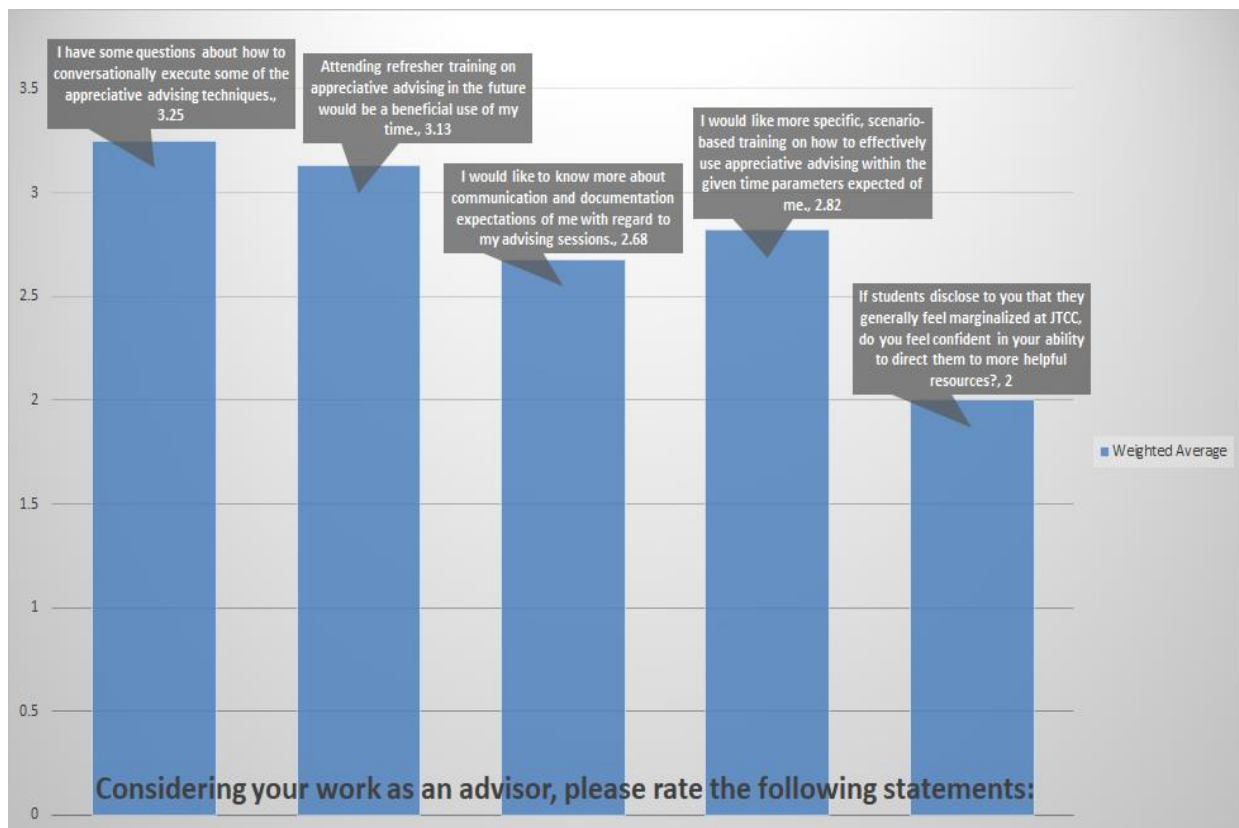
Table 3		
<i>Training Surrounding Academic Advising</i>		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Professional training from advising center	42.86%	24
Professional development conference that focused on advising practices	42.86%	24
Mentorship	35.71%	20
Read a few articles	30.36%	17
Just jumped in and started working with students the best way I knew how	80.36%	45
	Answered	56
	Skipped	0

An overwhelming 80% of the respondents indicated they received no training prior to becoming an advisor. This is reflected in the focus groups conducted with advising personnel. One participant indicated that “there was no formal [training], here's how you do this and then this and then this and then sit down and ask questions. It was very much a watch and learn from your colleagues, ask questions if you have them, read all this information on the P drive.” In a follow-up question, 71% of the survey respondents replied that semi-annual or annual training would be beneficial. This result shows the need for initial training for new advising personnel.

There is also a need for a reliable means of assessing advisor skills and the advising processes in order to build viable training sessions. Within the survey (Question 24), we asked respondents to consider their work as an advisor and rate their confidence levels within five specific areas (See Figure 5 below). As student needs evolve, so should the student service offerings of the institution. Proper and consistent assessment of student services will help institutions be proactive in these processes. Survey question 24 was an evaluative question, it allowed participants to rate where they felt the greatest need for training. The capstone team further expanded on these needs during the focus groups, which surprisingly led to a discussion on more of the processes of advising at JTCC rather than the act itself. Respondents spoke of a desire to be included in the conversation of change *before* it was forced upon them.

Figure 5

Advising Personnel Confidence Levels



Barriers to Student Success

Survey question 27 asked participants about potential barriers that affect student success as well as any additional barriers specific student populations may encounter while at JTCC. The survey asked: What are some barriers that you feel often impede students of specific student populations from successfully matriculating at JTCC? (please mention the specific populations that you are referring to, in your response). The question is open-ended with the intent of allowing the participants to give us specific information about the culture at JTCC. All 56 participants responded, and of those 56, 16 listed "no barriers" or "n/a." Of the remaining 40 respondents, the responses fall into two main themes: 1) barriers for student success created by current operations and 2) barriers created by a lack of academic student preparedness.

Barriers for Student Success--Operational/Available non-academic resources

Several different survey responses were categorized under the theme *barriers for student success*. Responses to the survey question 27 revealed four populations whose success is likely impeded: First-generation students, African American males, Non-traditional students, and International or English Language Learners (ELL). The main theme respondents attributed to first-generation students focused on social capital or not having the networks/relationships that provide support while pursuing a degree. (see Table 4)

Table 4	
<i>Barriers for Student Success--Operational/Available Non-Academic Resources</i>	
Student Group	Responses
First-Generation Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Knowing how to absorb or use the information “ ● “Not understanding how financial aid works, including applying for scholarships and so do not have the opportunity to compete.” ● “First-generation students lack social capital, making them unable to navigate the overall college atmosphere.”
African American Male Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Black or African American students may need better support services (i.e., tutoring, mentoring, pathway program) that address the many disparities in this population.” ● “I also find that many Black and Brown students face barriers in communication with professors. I believe that a lot of this stems from mutual assumptions made about the other person. More training on diversity and more opportunities to form connections with students beyond the classroom are needed.” ● “African American males are not feeling a part of the school.”
Non-Traditional Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Nontraditional students who work full-time and/or are raising children often struggle to balance their personal, work, and school responsibilities.” ● “Resources for non-traditional students, like childcare, social services, etc.”
International/ELL Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Undocumented and English learner students. Undocumented students face out-of-state costs. The students who are English learners and undocumented are ineligible for financial aid and have to pay out-of-state fees for developmental/fundamental courses.” ● “Language barriers.” ● “Students who have English as a second language have few resources available to them on campus to help them improve their language skills.”

Barriers for Student Success--Student's Academic Preparedness.

Several responses to this question focused on a student's academic preparedness.

Academic preparedness includes but is not limited to the ability to write, critical thinking, and critical problem-solving. Table 5 below represents direct quotes from the survey respondents:

Table 5	
<i>Barriers for Student Success--Student's Academic Preparedness</i>	
Student Groups	Survey Responses
First-Generation Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “First-generation and underperforming students don't always see their advisors. They need more mentoring in correct study habits. Many work too many hours and see college as little more than high school.”
Non-traditional Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Older students are not confident about their ability to take college classes.”
International/ELL Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Spanish speaking students: the language barrier to express themselves and ask questions in class or to their instructors, sometimes they do not feel comfortable asking.” ● “Little support for language challenges.”
All JTCC Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Poor High School Education. (Specifically writing)” ● “Barrier for successful completion in STEM majors = poor math skills” ● “Lack of academic skills/preparedness, no expectation of time commitment required for schoolwork” ● “Developmental students not well suited to a transfer degree should be advised toward career services and marketable credentials. I think this is not done enough.”

Overcoming Barriers

Lastly, we asked the participants to supply suggestions for removing said barriers. The objective of this question was to provide data, influenced by the JTCC advising team, that could inform the final recommendations of the needs assessment. All 56 participants responded, and of those 56, 33 respondents provided suggestions ranging from working with high schools to creating a one-stop shop for advising, financial aid, and other student services. The majority of suggestions focused on the operational and available non-academic resources at JTCC.

Suggestions for Removing Barriers to Student Success--Operational and Available non-academic resources

Participants cited that students tend to first go to the advising center since the expectation is that advisors are experts on all fronts from registration to financial aid to career planning. In reality, this is not true; however, the advising center staff is trained to search for information students need. Although students are able to immediately engage with the advising center staff, the barrier comes when access to the requested information is not as accessible. Oftentimes, advisors are at the mercy of those who have the information they need. Survey and Focus Group participants were detailed in their suggestions for eliminating or minimizing the communication barriers students face. Other participants chose to focus not on explicit expectations but instead talked about logistics and other operational factors such as the website, which some saw as a barrier to when engaging with their students. For example, one participant indicated that website organization should be more user-friendly, and another response noted that the current intake procedures created unnecessary barriers by being overly cumbersome.

Others expressed an interest in helping obtain grants to assist undocumented English language learners. At the same time, advisors recognized a need for investing the appropriate

technology to help student learners who need alternative modes of engagement (i.e. developing self-advising portals for students who cannot physically get to campus and an online suggestion box). Since several of the advisors are aware of JTCC's initiative to increase the recruitment and retention of African American male students, they expressed concerns about providing the appropriate academic and social support for this group. And the final overarching theme that advisors expressed was concerns around student access - more specifically, access between campuses. There were several suggestions for a shuttle service between the Chester and Midlothian campuses. There were also suggestions for a new student orientation session for specific groups (i.e. First-Generation students and Non-traditional students).

Barriers to Advising Personnel's Engagement with Students

During focus groups, we discussed expectations and how those expectations aligned with the core duties of their position at JTCC. Several participants indicated that before all else, advising expectations need to be identified and defined to include a balance between the additional duties (such as committees or teaching) and advising. "I think you have to identify what are the current advising expectations", said one focus group participant.

Focus group participants indicated that the college needs to realize that training and institutional support impacts not only the advisors but also student success. Several participants sought more support from administration for advising personnel, and wanted decisions made with the advising personnel's input or consideration of their current workload. The comments of one attendee illustrated these concerns:

Yeah, I mean I'm just (inaudible gasp) it's just the decisions that administration makes that directly affects faculty and what we do on a day to day basis. We're the ones that eventually are the advisers, the faculty have to provide those students with

instructions. And so, we have to be well versed on what that is. Before you just roll it out. It's like, 'Let's go, without any real instructions.'

The mandatory use of Navigate requires that advisors schedule and report on all appointments through the system. Administration requires that this be done in real time. The current set-up of Navigate gives all appointments a 30-minute time limit, which can be adjusted. Should an advisor go over this limit in the current set-up it will disrupt the entire schedule. Some appointments easily fall within a 30-minute session, but some require more than the 30-minute allotment. Several participants felt as if the administration did not trust them with adjusting the timing of each session, which can be done within Navigate. Allowing advisors to adjust their personal appointment time lengths based on student needs, better serves students within the appreciative advising model. One participant expressed such frustration below:

Part of the appreciative advising is kind of a holistic approach to taking care of the student's needs but when we get busy, and it is back to back to back [sighs] I'm not saying we're just shooting the shit with students but for us to be told that we only got (sic) 30 minutes with them, then they're gonna have to come back to me and having a student come in five times is crazy and less efficient and it take more time than just spending 45 minutes with them to take care of everything.

There is also some perception that JTCC is not looking out for the student's best interests by not holding advisors accountable when they fail to execute their advising duties; rather the interest is perceived to be in self-preservation. One participant summed it up by stating:

I also think we have an issue here of people. Nobody wants to take responsibility for things. We have, from what I've seen anyway and I've been here a very short amount of

time, passing the buck a lot. We're not looking necessarily for the student's best interest so much as covering our own butts just in case.

Additionally, there was concern about the deficit between workflow and balance. One respondent stated, "We're the third largest now in the system but we haven't come to grips about what that means in terms of logistics." The perception is that as the JTCC student population grew, the staff and faculty population did not, which led to some advisors feeling a lack of administrative support.

Supporting the JTCC Recruitment and Retention Initiative

To gauge the ability of John Tyler Community College to advise black male students effectively, we performed two quantitative analyses. The first analysis compared the success rate of black males at JTCC to other students at the institution. The second analysis compared the success rate of black male students at JTCC with that of black male students at other schools within the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). For each analysis, the published data within this study is based on the three-year averages for each metric discussed.

The findings from each of the secondary analyses confirmed the need for John Tyler Community College to make improvements. As illustrated in Table 6, when compared to the overall student population, the completion rate for black males is roughly six to nine percentage points lower each year. Even though more women attend JTCC than men, the discrepancy between the complete rates of black males and other students is not attributable to gender. This finding was verified by comparing black males at JTCC to males from all other racial categories. The results verify that the gap in the completion rate is specific to black males, as the rate for all other males closely aligns with that of the overall student population.

Table 6			
<i>JTCC 2-year Completion Rates</i>			
JTCC Entry Cohort Year	Black Males	Males of Other Ethnicities	Overall Student Population
2014	20.2%	28%	28.7%
2015	22.3%	31.9%	31%
2016	25.1%	32.8%	32.7%

Results of a comparison of the completion rates of black males across the Virginia Community College System, displayed in Table 7, showed that the completion rate at John Tyler Community College is the lowest in the system. The result is true whether the completion rate is calculated by using the total population of black male students, or by calculating the average rate of the various entry cohorts of black males (Appendix D). That current ranking within the VCCS system validates the focus of the JTCC administration on strategies to serve black males more effectively. Through further analysis of the data and the associated literature, our capstone team offers various suggestions for that effort within the recommendations section.

Table 7	
<i>Completion Rates of Black Males</i>	
VCCS Institution	Rate
Southside Virginia Community College	72.5%
Virginia Highlands Community College	56.9%
Patrick Henry Community College	52.9%
Wytheville Community College	51.2%
Paul D Camp Community College	49.6%
Blue Ridge Community College	48.3%
Danville Community College	47.5%
Dabney S Lancaster Community College	44%
Southwest Virginia Community College	40.7%
Tidewater Community College	40.5%
Eastern Shore Community College	39.6%
Lord Fairfax Community College	38.3%
Mountain Empire Community College	36.8%
Central Virginia Community College	36.4%
Rappahannock Community College	36.1%
New River Community College	34.3%
Germanna Community College	33.4%
Virginia Western Community College	32.9%
Piedmont Virginia Community College	31.2%
Northern Virginia Community College	30.5%
J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College	29.8%

Thomas Nelson Community College	27.9%
John Tyler Community College	22.5%

Other Findings

When approaching the data analysis section, the capstone team anticipated several themes based on their initial client meeting: advisor training, restructuring, and advising best practices. Although all of these themes were captured, there was a discovery of additional advising concerns. For example, when discussing restructuring, the team found a high level of anxiety based on a lack of communication in the restructuring process. This lack of communication led to distrust among advising personnel. Both the survey and focus group data revealed additional findings that are outside of the research question parameters but informative to the organization. From both focus groups and survey data, we discovered that JTCC advising personnel have significant concerns regarding incoming students' lack of preparation for academic success and navigating the college system. Through our survey, participants indicated that current overall operations cause barriers, however unintentional. For example, one respondent stated "The admission process is long and complicated as well as transferring in credits" while others indicated "the 'runaround,' even when unintentional" and "lack of training for students on how college works, how it differs from high school, expectations, etc." including computerized onboarding process. One participant mentioned that

International [students] often have no context or knowledge of the American college system and how it 'works.' This probably applies to first-generation college students as well who are lost in the college process. They are utterly lost and often become frustrated and unmotivated by how to seek direction and guidance.

When discussing these, the conversations turned to creating some type of one-stop shop for students. One specific participant discussed the idea of a triage center in which students arrive and work with one of the receptionists who then determine where the student needs to go to meet their immediate needs. The participant stated that "There's so many things that can be answered in a triage situation that would not mean that they're jumping around everywhere or waiting long periods of time." With a triage center in place, advisors believe that services would be more impactful.

Recommendations

When considering which strategies would be most beneficial to the client, we based our suggestions on collected data and available scholarly research. The resulting recommendations are sorted by the associated research question with additional recommendations based on the unanticipated findings from our analysis of collected data. Together, these 12 recommendations represent the priority initiatives that can best provide our client with an updated advising model explicitly tailored to the needs of their institutional community.

Research Question 1 (RQ1) - What are the best practices for helping advising personnel understand their role in the process?

- **Build Stronger Student/Advisor Relationships** - Building this relationship can be carried out through conversation and by making notes on a student's record to help advisors remember details (personal & academic) about the student. When time allows, advisors can research areas where students have questions beyond their professional knowledge and share the discovery with the student at the follow-up appointment. These efforts towards building relationships with students emphasizes what JTCC advising personnel identified during focus groups as the most critical aspect of their engagement.

We recommend that advisors make a follow-up appointment before students leave the session. Also, advisors should be available virtually for students who do not have access to in-person advising services. These strategies provide intentional, tangible steps that advisors can take to ensure their relationships with advisees are ongoing.

- **Create an Institutional Definition for Advising Practices** - The institution needs a definition of advising that suits its student population and campus culture. This definition will be used as a guideline for decision making by both administrators and advising personnel. Once

JTCC has a more concrete definition for its advising practices, there can be more uniformity between the programmatic advising priorities highlighted in survey results, and the relationship-building priorities articulated during focus groups.

At JTCC, the defined advising practices could officially be maintained by the Advising Center so that they can develop and implement the appropriate training needed. The Advising Center would also be able to determine and confirm changes to advising practices. If done effectively, then the institution can best maintain uniform delivery of advising services.

While we recommend that the JTCC Advising Center provide official oversight of advising practices, we also suggest that all levels of advising personnel, including faculty, have continual creative input. This strategy aligns with the previous research highlighted which recommends collaboration that effectively cultivates faculty ownership and engagement with the desired institutional advising practices.

• **Create Clearly Defined Advisor Job Descriptions (define advising roles and responsibilities)** - These descriptions should be based on the advisor title (Faculty, Professional, and Part-Time advisors) and aligned with a shared advising model. This change would address the concerns expressed by advising personnel about each advisor needing to be thoroughly familiar with the entire range of both programmatic and operational areas of advising. The more clearly defined roles would allow for a degree of specialization, resulting in more knowledgeable advising and improved services to students.

Such a change, if appropriately structured, could also help alleviate the imperfect balance for faculty advisors between teaching duties and the more operational functions of advising. Throughout the focus groups, there were no advising personnel, academic deans, or administrators who confidently expressed how to effectively hold faculty advisors accountable

for such operational functions. Additionally, many of the professional and faculty advisors expressed uncertainty with operational functions being part of faculty advising duties.

At John Tyler Community College, the delineation of advisor job duties within a true shared model might look like the following:

1. The Advising Center will provide and update all advising resources, provide training for all advisors, and handle communication flow and updates (e.g., emails, webpage)
2. Professional Advisors will provide course evaluations & degree audits, handle all undeclared and non-degree students and provide all registration functions (no restrictions)
3. Faculty Advisors will handle all students who have declared a major, provide career & curriculum counseling, and provide essential registration functions (add/drop only)

• **Incorporate Library Staff as Part of the Advising Personnel.** This would increase the number of advisors available, particularly during the summer months when there are typically fewer faculty advisors on campus. This change would be one step towards directly addressing caseload concerns at JTCC that were revealed by responses to our survey and reiterated during focus groups.

This strategy could prove particularly useful at JTCC if the institution chooses to move to an authentic shared advising model. The addition of librarians may allow the institution to more formally separate career planning duties from the more programmatic duties, with librarians joining the Advising Center staff to focus on the latter. The additional availability of advising personnel during the summer would also align well with updates made to new student orientations (recommended below).

Research Question 2 (RQ2) What are the needs of advising personnel to be effective in the process?

- **Build a Network System for Academic Support** - Develop a small task-force of persons connected to key offices and resources that benefit students academically and personally. This task force would serve as a key stakeholder in creating professional development opportunities for faculty & staff. Advisors should collaborate in a way that builds an extensive network system of support for student needs. A cross-department task force would create a system that works for all involved in the process to ensure consistent dissemination and accuracy of information.

- **Centralize Information** - There is no one central place at the college to access advising information and associated resources; there are several portals, but no connection. This lack of connection leaves advisors feeling unsure about the accuracy of information. Since JTCC is utilizing a shared advising model, there must be an established office that is responsible for updating such information. This same office must also communicate externally to ensure the information is easily accessible by advising personnel.

Establishing this central point of communication would alleviate the concerns expressed by advising personnel that it is too difficult to identify the most up-to-date advising information available. Such difficulties typically then result in poor service to students, who are often receiving conflicting information from various offices. In this revamped model, information that impacts advising could be easily shared across various campus resource areas.

Research Question 3 (RQ3) What academic advising strategies would most effectively serve the JTCC population?

- **Create Instructional Videos and FAQs for All Advising Personnel** - This material would be housed on the intranet and available to all personnel. The videos and FAQs should be short and concise, allowing new personnel to gain the necessary skills for executing advising duties. As with Recommendation 3, this information will be in a centralized location for easy access. This strategy can address the concerns of advising personnel about not being adequately trained when joining the JTCC team. If adopted as a strategy, the Advising Center might produce such videos. An example of such video can be found here – [Navigate Tutorial](#).

- **Create a Virtual Suggestion Box** - This allows the personnel to provide both operational and strategic feedback. Allowing for open input from advising personnel increases their sense of involvement in the development of advising practices. A transparent welcoming of such engagement would reduce feelings of mistrust by advising personnel. While rebuilding that trust, we recommended that our client implement the virtual suggestion box to allow advising personnel to offer their feedback anonymously. The handling of this process would be at the discretion of the administrative team.

- **Effectively Use Technology to Prepare for Advising Appointments** - The information collected from JTCC administrators and personnel suggests that the institution is having a difficult time delivering the intentional engagement that appreciative advising prescribes while also getting all of the students registered for classes within appropriate time frames, specifically during periods of high demand. Incorporating available technology (e.g., Navigate) that allows advising personnel to obtain specific information about the needs of their scheduled advisees ahead of time will allow for more time-effective advising sessions.

- **Consult with Peer Institutions** - To address the desire of our client to better retain black male students, we recommend that JTCC consult peer institutions who are experiencing success in this area. JTCC can benefit from strategies already being incorporated by institutions that have a higher completion rate for black males. The VCCS school with the sixth-largest black male student population is Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC), which consistently leads the entire system in completion rates by black males. Each of these two institutional peers within the VCCS could provide John Tyler Community College with insights on the programs and strategies that have proven to be effective.

There are only a handful of institutional-wide initiatives at college campuses aimed at increasing retention rates for black male students. One of Southside Virginia Community College's successful initiatives is its MAN UP program. MAN UP is a minority male mentoring and leadership development program designed to promote the personal and social development and academic improvement of students. The program was developed to increase retention, graduation rates, and the academic performance of minority males while providing them with the skills and motivation to reach these goals. Participants receive academic skill-building, monthly success coaching, career exploration, and service-learning opportunities.

Another successful initiative that SVCC utilizes is collaborating with Longwood University's Call Me Mister program, which is a national initiative. The mission of Call Me Mister (Men Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) is to increase the pool of available teachers from broader, more diverse backgrounds, particularly among the state's lowest-performing elementary schools. While this program has an emphasis on preparing black males to become educators, it also offers mentorship for black males who are in search of guidance. This program also develops a pipeline for black males to attend a four-year university.

Additional Recommendations

- **Create Single-Stop Service Model** - JTCC advising personnel conveyed concern regarding students' ability to navigate the various on-campus location points for information needed to maintain enrollment at the institution. They expressed the desire for a centralized informational hub where students can bring their needs and expect to receive service or applicable information. This model can help reduce the misinformation and confusion that may result when multiple campus offices attempt to relay information between each other, while updates and changes may be coinciding. For JTCC, this could involve the use of a common space in which respective offices temporarily set up during peak advising times.

- **Consider New Student Orientation Process** (Hollins, 2009)- This continues the theme of assisting students during the onboarding process so that more of them experience success at the institution. We recommend that JTCC review the upfront information that orientation provides and determine if there may be ways to prepare students better for navigating essential campus resources.

- **Establish Sensitivity/Diversity Training** - To address the needs of greater inclusion, the capstone team is recommending that the faculty and staff of JTCC participate in sensitivity/diversity training, informed by a campus climate survey. A climate survey would help inform specific training needs related to interactions within growing diverse populations (J. Wilson, personal communication, April 24, 2020).

Conclusion

Academic advising is an essential component of an institution's ability to drive student success (Thomas, 2017). Colleges should continuously evaluate their advising structures, corresponding training, and resources available for advisors to successfully work within those

structures. Even then, institutions should not rely solely on their ability to prescribe a sound advising system that should yield success. They must also consistently assess the metrics that evaluate the effectiveness of their advisors and the academic outcomes of their students. If done comprehensively with a commitment to grow and evolve as students' needs change, then colleges can effectively provide academic advising in a manner that contributes to both student retention and institutional success.

As demonstrated in the case of John Tyler Community College, establishing a priority focus on academic advising is the first step to achieving a structure that both supports advising personnel and delivers impactful service to students. JTCC has the opportunity to re-imagine advising personnel roles, and establish clear expectations for the particular structure that works best for their institution. They can develop training that best aligns with the needs of their advisors and materials that assist them in connecting students to essential campus resources. Once this foundation is in place, John Tyler Community College can better leverage their tools, technology, and talents to more effectively engage not only target student populations but their general student population as a whole. As a result, JTCC could be well-positioned to increase student retention and bolster their enrollment in a manner that consistently thrives in an increasingly competitive higher education market.

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Appendix A

Example of Successful Faculty Buy-in

The University of Minnesota's Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (PsTL). Duranczyk, Frank, Osifuye, Barton, and Higbee (2015) studied the Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning (PsTL) at the University of Minnesota as they piloted a new advising approach that was intentionally student-centered for a new Master of Arts program. The faculty was involved in the development of the approach from the beginning, including needs assessments and the creation of the mission and value statements. The published mission statement says, in part, that the department is to "provide student-centered, multicultural, multidisciplinary learning opportunities for a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff" (p.148). That statement informs their advising approach and policies, which include required meetings with advisees, and then having those students join them to complete an annual review of the student's progress. Additionally, the faculty advisors are responsible for assisting students in navigating institutional resources. Faculty relay information about various professional opportunities and facilitate student progress toward degree completion (p.150).

At the end of every spring semester, the PsTL department administers a survey to students to determine if the services are provided effectively. For example, during the 2012-2013 academic year, the mean score for the number of appointments students had with their advisors was 3.4 for the spring semester (Duranczyk, et al, 2015). The authors (Duranczyk, et al, 2015) concluded that the department's use of an intentional approach could create a successful advising program.

Such an approach would include the following:

1. advising priorities student survey
2. annual review of student progress

3. advising evaluation student survey
4. student exit interview

They also suggest that other programs can use this approach to improve advisor-student relationships, promote degree programs, and prepare students for life after college.

Appendix B

Survey Questions

General questions

- 1) What is your current employment status (Faculty, Full-time staff, Part-time staff)?
- 2) Do you identify with any gender identity (optional and open-ended)?
- 3) Do you identify with any Race/Ethnicity (optional and open and ended)?
- 4) How many years of service do you have at John Tyler Community College?
- 5) How many years of experience advising students?
- 6) Years of service in Higher-Ed

Research question 1 What is the best practice for helping advising personnel understand their role in the process?

Distribute surveys and conduct focus groups to acquire personnel perspectives.

1. What types of information do you routinely share with your advisees during a session, please give a percentage to each content area, totaling 100?
 - a. Do you utilize a programmatic (focus mainly on courses/program requirements) approach with your advisees?
 - b. Do you utilize an operational (student accounting, financial aid, registration, health services, etc.) approach with your advisees?
 - c. Do you utilize a relational (personal connections, sharing, etc.) approach?
 - d. Do you utilize techniques to inspire career goals (suggest interns, apprenticeships, offer comprehensive insight)?
2. What percentage of your job duties is spent working with your advising caseload? Please choose the closest percentage rate.
 - a. Less than 10%
 - b. 10% to 25%
 - c. 26% to 50%
 - d. 51% to 75%
 - e. 76% to 100%
3. How familiar were you with the Appreciative Advising Model before attending the training with Dr. Bloom? (Likert scale)
 - a. Very Familiar
 - b. Familiar
 - c. Somewhat Familiar
 - d. Slightly Familiar
 - e. Not at all Familiar
4. What professional development organizations do you most refer to for best advising practices?

- a. American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (AACRAO)
 - b. National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)
 - c. American College Personnel Association (ACPA)
 - d. National Association of Student Personnel Association (NASPA)
 - e. American Counseling Association
 - f. Additional
5. How likely are you to use communication platforms such as Zoom, Facetime or Skype to advise students who desire a face-to-face meeting, but are unable to get to campus physically?
 - a. Likert scale
 6. Is co-curricular engagement with students (outside of the classroom or advising sessions) part of your regular activities as an advisor?
 - a. (yes/no response)
 7. If you answered no to the previous question, then what do you see as the barriers to such engagement that prevent you from doing so?
 - a. (open response)

Thinking about your job as an advisor at JTCC, please rate the statements 8 through 11 based on the following scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

8. My primary role as an advisor is to make sure students take the correct courses to fulfill their degree or transfer requirements.
9. One aspect of my job is to engage students outside of advising sessions formally.
10. It is vital for me to engage advisees about their career goals and professional development plans.
11. I believe that it is important that I ask students about personal aspects of their lives that may influence their academic success.

Research Question 2: What are the needs of advising personnel to be effective in the process? Understanding the beliefs or perceptions of the advisors (what do they think they need)?

Distribute surveys and conduct focus groups to gauge how personnel feels about the effectiveness of past training, and to determine the areas in which they would like additional development.

1. What types of training have you had concerning academic advising? (check all that apply)
 - a. professional training from advising center
 - b. professional development conference that focused on advising practices
 - c. mentorship
 - d. read a few articles
 - e. Just jumped in and started working with students the best way I knew how

2. What type of “soft-skills” training have you not had that you would be most helpful with improving advising?
 - a. Communication skills including how to manage difficult conversations
 - b. Active listening
 - c. Developing relationships with students
 - d. Other (Please list)
3. Please rate your level of proficiency with using Navigate. (yes or no response)
 - a. Very Proficient
 - b. Proficient
 - c. Somewhat Proficient
 - d. Slightly Proficient
 - e. Not at all Proficient
4. Since the training with Dr. Bloom on 9/27/19, have you had the opportunity to use the appreciative advising method?
 - a. Yes/No/Was unable to attend the session
5. If you have answered yes to question 4, please rate your experience with the method?
 - a. Level of satisfaction (Likert scale)
6. How motivated are you to when it comes to your advising duties (Likert scale)?
7. Do you feel there is a benefit from having annual/biannual advising workshop sessions?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. What types of resources/materials (Do we want to know about the types or the actual resources?) How do I outsource students . . . (select all that apply).
 - a. website links
 - b. Paper files
 - c. Mental health services
 - d. Tutoring
 - e. Transfer Center
 - f. Social Services
 - g. Student Services
 - h. Childcare services
 - i. Financial literacy

For questions 9 through 14, considering your work as an advisor, please rate the following statements based on the following scale: (Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

9. I have some questions about how to conversationally execute some of the appreciative advising techniques.
10. Attending refresher training on appreciative advising in the future would be a beneficial use of my time.
11. I would like to know more about communication and documentation expectations of me with regard to my advising sessions.

12. I would like more specific, scenario-based training on how to effectively use appreciative advising within the given time parameters expected of me.
13. If students disclose to you that they generally feel marginalized at JTCC, do you feel confident in your ability to direct them to more helpful resources?

Research Question 3 What academic advising strategies would most effectively serve the JTCC population? What strategies do advisors believe most effectively serve the JTCC population? (Byrd) (Survey goal: to obtain perspectives from advising personnel about how various students or student groups are being served at JTCC).

1. Are there students from specific populations whom you feel JTCC could be served better? If so, then to which populations do these students belong (list as many as needed)?
 - a. Asian
 - b. Black (African/African American)
 - c. Latinx
 - d. International Students
 - e. English Language Learners
 - f. Students with Disabilities
 - g. Undocumented Students
 - h. Non-Traditional Students (Students over the age of 25)
 - i. First-generation Students
 - j. Military
 - k. Please add any applicable populations that are not listed here
2. Are there students from specific populations who often express to you that they often feel marginalized or treated as "less than" at JTCC?
 - a. Asian
 - b. Black (African/African American)
 - c. Latinx
 - d. International Students
 - e. English Language Learners
 - f. Students with Disabilities
 - g. Undocumented Students
 - h. Non-Traditional Students (Students over the age of 25)
 - i. First-generation Students
 - j. Military
 - k. Please add any applicable populations that are not listed here
3. Do you feel that specific student populations are being treated negatively by some advising personnel (can be professional or faculty)?
 - a. Asian
 - b. Black (African/African American)
 - c. Latinx

- d. International Students
 - e. English Language Learners
 - f. Students with Disabilities
 - g. Undocumented Students
 - h. Non-Traditional Students (Students over the age of 25)
 - i. First-Generation Students
 - j. Military
 - k. Please add any applicable populations that are not listed here
4. What are some barriers that you feel often impede students of specific student populations from successfully matriculating at JTCC? (please mention the specific populations that you are referring to, in your response)

Appendix C

Example of Email Sent for Survey

Greetings!

First, let us begin by thanking you for helping us with this portion of our research. As doctoral students who finally see the light at the end of the tunnel, we are truly grateful for your investment in this stage of our journey. Your willingness to complete this survey and participate in this capstone process allows us the intentional time to explore, research, and experiment in ways that our professional lives will not always allow. We are extremely appreciative and will do our best to make sure this investment is as equally beneficial to the work that you do at JTCC.

Below this message, we have included a link and QR code for accessing the survey, please use whichever is more convenient for you. The survey will remain open until 11:59 pm on Friday, November 22. In addition to the survey, we will hold 4 focus group meetings. These sessions are voluntary, but we hope you will consider attending one to help us further analyze the survey data. Below are the dates and designated campus for which we were planning to conduct the sessions. Again, you only need to attend one session. Information for session sign-up will follow shortly.

- Nov. 12th at 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 (Midlothian Campus)
- Nov. 13th from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (Chester Campus)
- Nov. 19th at 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 (Chester Campus)
- Nov. 20th at 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (Midlothian Campus)

Again, we are grateful for your willingness to participate and we look forward to working with everyone!

weblink - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WMJRFQR>

Sincerely,
Reggie, Sandra, Stephen, and Ronda - VCU Cohort 2020

Appendix D

Raw Data for Secondary Analysis

				Avg. by Total Pop.	Avg. by Cohort
Southside Virginia Community College	400/589 = 67.9%	375/495 = 75.8%	322/430 = 74.9%	72.5%	72.9%
Virginia Highlands Community College	14/31 = 45.2%	13/12 = 108.3%	10/22 = 45.5%	56.9%	66.3%
Patrick Henry Community College	105/256 = 41%	99/185 = 53.5%	117/166 = 70.5%	52.9%	55%
Wytheville Community College	35/80 = 43.8%	31/51 = 60.8%	22/41 = 53.7%	51.2%	52.8%
Paul D Camp Community College	59/116 = 50.9%	63/112 = 56.3%	52/123 = 42.3%	49.6%	49.8%
Blue Ridge Community College	50/128 = 39.1%	58/110 = 52.7%	48/85 = 56.5%	48.3%	49.4%
Danville Community College	200/463 = 43.2%	185/405 = 45.7%	206/377 = 54.6%	47.5%	47.8%
Dabney S Lancaster Community College	12/23 = 52.2%	14/35 = 40%	14/33 = 42.4%	44%	44.9%
Southwest Virginia Community College	11/19 = 57.9%	7/23 = 30.4%	6/17 = 35.3%	40.7%	41.2%
Tidewater Community College	1,321/3503 = 37.7%	1307/3280 = 39.8%	1287/2876 = 44.7%	40.5%	40.7%
Eastern Shore Community College	26/90 = 28.9%	28/73 = 38.2%	35/62 = 56.5%	39.6%	41.2%
Lord Fairfax Community College	45/122 = 36.9%	48/127 = 37.8%	41/101 = 40.6%	38.3%	38.4%
Mountain Empire Community College	14/21 = 66.7%	9/25 = 36%	5/30 = 16.7%	36.8%	39.8%
Central Virginia Community College	94/307 = 30.6%	119/313 = 30%	112/274 = 40.9%	36.4%	33.8%
Rappahannock Community College	72/201 = 35.8%	68/186 = 36.6%	72/201 = 35.8%	36.1%	36.1%
New River Community College	43/132 = 32.6%	36/97 = 37.1%	33/98 = 33.7%	34.3%	34.5%
Germanna Community College	108/379 = 28.5%	119/378 = 31.5%	148/365 = 40.5%	33.4%	33.5%
Virginia Western Community College	110/421 = 26.1%	119/341 = 34.9%	120/298 = 40.3%	32.9%	33.8%
Piedmont Virginia Community College	63/285 = 22.1%	83/226 = 36.7%	95/261 = 36/4%	31.2%	31.7%
Northern Virginia Community College	1,214/4109 = 29.5%	1,208/3949 = 30.6%	1,136/3625 = 31.3%	30.5%	30.5%
J Sargeant Reynolds Community College	351/1323 = 26.5%	361/1163 = 31%	350/1082 = 32.3%	29.8%	29.9%
Thomas Nelson Community College	330/1330 = 24.8%	348/1178 = 29.5%	312/1039 = 30%	27.9%	28.1%
John Tyler Community College	178/880 = 20.2%	195/876 = 22.3%	217/866 = 25.1%	22.5%	22.5%