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Exploring a Quality Assurance Tool on Remote Academic Advising for Higher Education Traditionally Underrepresented Students in Distance Education

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EXPLORING A QUALITY ASSURANCE TOOL ON REMOTE ACADEMIC ADVISING
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION TRADITIONALLY UNDERREPRESENTED
STUDENTS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

A Dissertation

by

KATRIEVA S. JONES MUNROE

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December 2020

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ABSTRACT

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Over the past years, traditionally underrepresented student enrollments in distance education at community colleges have increased, yet the retention and persistence rates of online students compared to on-campus students have decreased (Breit & Schreyer, 2018). The gap between ideal and reality serves as a powerful blind spot toward the lack of access to remote student support services in higher education. Remote access to technology and student support services (e.g. academic advising) negatively influence student persistence, retention and graduation from distance education programs (Britto & Rush, 2013; Lapadula, 2003). When unchecked, gaps of access to remote technology and academic advising, perpetuates the marginalization of traditionally underrepresented students in distance education. The purpose of this research is to provide insight into stakeholders' perceptions (e.g., college administrators and college staff) about remote access to academic advising through the implementation of a quality assurance tool. Using a quality assurance tool will serve as a solution to shrink the gap of persistence and retention rates between traditionally underrepresented students and their white counterparts. This qualitative research will utilize virtual interviews, participant observations and archival documents to examine organizational stakeholders (e.g. administrators) perceptions of an institution's access to remote academic advising and how remote academic advising is utilized.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Parents, Freddie and Shirley Jones, who always reminds me of the importance of being true to one's self and who has been a steadfast supporter of everything I do. Thank you to my husband Presley for your patience throughout the years. To my son Chase, thank you for always reminding me to have fun and for being my one and only mejo; to my wonderful and my loving grandparents Nathaniel Norman, Edna Fields and Willie and Peggy Jones, thank you for your endless encouragement and showing me, by example, how to bring positive change to my community to my family. Without the love and support from all of you; I never would have been able to accomplish the completion of my doctorate degree. A doctorate degree is not just about completing work; it's about showing yourself through your works. You are the wings beneath my wings.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Distance Education can potentially expand access to higher education for students who are presented with social, economic or geographical barriers (Saldaña, 1999; Sitzmann, Kraiger, Stewart, & Wisner, 2006) . Over the past four years, undergraduate online enrollment at community colleges have increased at a faster rate than four-year public universities ("The National Center for Education Statistics." 2016). Nearly 5.2 million students, including 44% at community colleges and 37% at universities, participated in distance education ("National Center of Education Statistics", 2019). Students enrolled in exclusively online programs increased by 8.4% at community colleges and 7.3% at universities from fall 2012-fall 2016 ("National Center of Education Statistics", 2019). The American Association of Community Colleges (2013) and Mullin (2017) noted that community colleges are the most common pathway into higher education by providing education for underserved, underprepared, and nontraditional student populations (Mullin, 2017). Underserved, students of color, nontraditional students, and women over the age of 30+, are the main constituents in distance education programs with women outnumbering men 45.5% to 39% ("National Center of Education Statistics", 2019). One urgent challenge facing community colleges nationwide that impacts underserved and underprepared non-traditional populations is students' lack of academic preparation, which negatively impacts their success (Ashburn, 2006).

Traditional measures of student success in higher education are persistence, retention, and graduation rates (Nitecki, 2011). McFarland et al. (2018) states traditionally underrepresented populations are the largest constituent group enrolled in online programs, Black students are represented in distance education at 42.5%, Hispanic, 37.9%, Asian 38.9%, American Indian 47.5, and Pacific Islander 42.4%; while White students are represented at 45.5% (Figure 1.1).

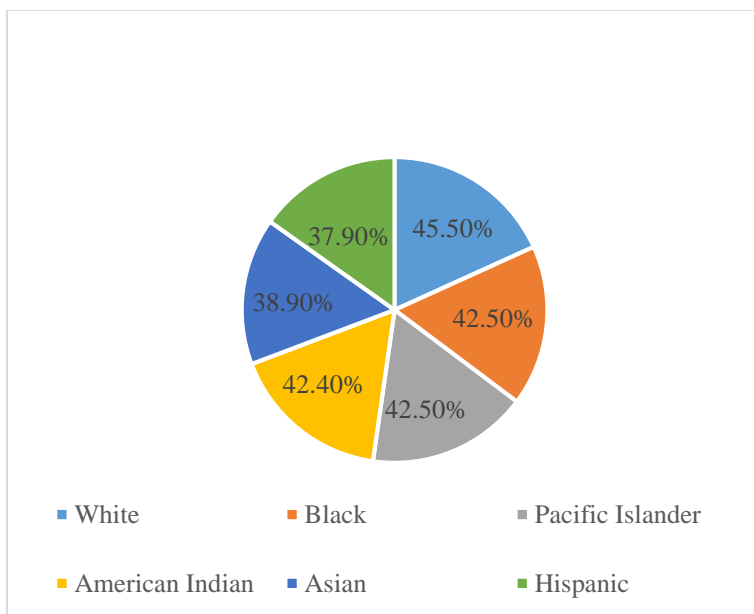


Figure 1.1. Race and Ethnicity in Distance Education, Reprinted from Percentage of Undergraduate Students Enrolled in Distance Education, 2018., Retrieved July 12, 2020, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_311.22.asp

Kramarae (2001) states women choose distance education programs because it allows them to juggle not only work and family, but also to achieve educational goals. Although both women and men struggle in distance education programs, the struggles women face are not usually experienced by men or at least not to the same degree (Kramarae, 2001). Many women

struggle to balance work and heavy family responsibilities against their academics and lack of access to college resources (Furst-Bowe, 2002; Kramarae, 2001). The result of these obstacles facing women are reflected in retention and persistence rates (Bocchi, Eastman & Swift, 2004; Moore, Bartkovich, Fetzner & Ison, 2003; Nitecki, 2011; Packham, Jones, Miller & Thomas, 2004; Zirkle, 2004).

Bailey (2005) discovered if community colleges are to improve persistence, those institutions must focus on the factors inhibiting or contributing to students' persistence. The National Center of Education Statistics (2018) reported that White community college students had a higher first-year persistence rate, 67.1%, than Hispanic students 62.1%. Black students had the lowest persistence rate with 42% returning to their starting institution and 13.3% transferring to another institution their second year (Clearinghouse, 2019).

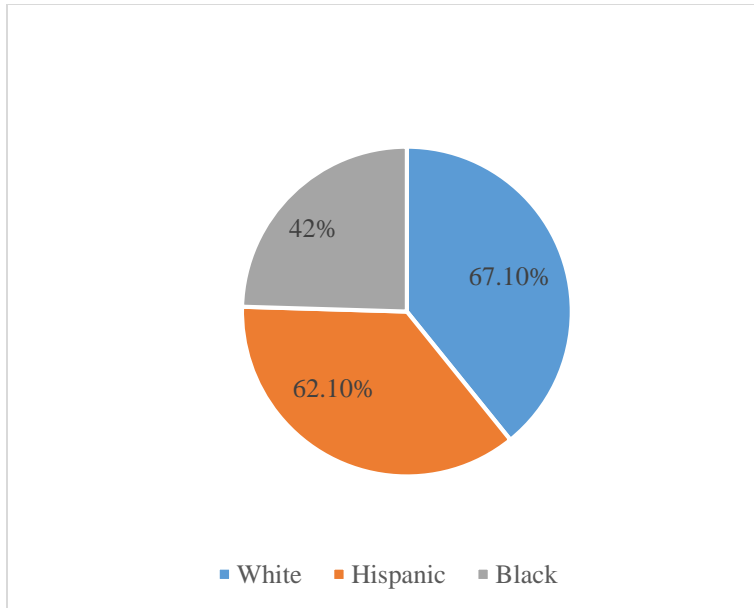


Figure 1.2. Persistence Rates in Distance Education by Race From Overall Persistence and Retention Rates Snapshot Report, 2018., National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SnapshotReport35.pdf>

The statistics show White students persisting at a greater rate than both Hispanic and Black students enrolled at community colleges. This federal report refers to persistence as percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year (Clearinghouse, 2019). It is apparent that persistence is a concern, but it is merely a symptom of a greater issue. Researchers have identified lack of access to technology and student support services as factors that negatively influence student retention and persistence (Britto & Rush, 2013; Lapadula, 2003). Most research on computer-mediated learning and persistence strategies do not disaggregate data by gender although some studies have identified women’s struggles in distance education to include support services (Burge, 1998; Burke, 2001; Dittmann, 2001; Furst-

Bowe, 2002). It is not only important to disaggregate data by gender, but also by ethnicity to ensure strategy engagements are directed at the right population.

LaPadula (2003), said students who engage in student support services tend to be more successful in persisting in and graduating from college than those who do not. Although the curricular aims in higher education are to provide equity and access for all students, colleges and universities continue to struggle with access to positive and impactful academic advising for distance education students, while providing multiple access points to these services for face-to-face students (Gravel, 2012). The ("Blackboard Institute Student Services Survey" 2010, p. 63) revealed that student support services and exemplary academic content work together to support student achievement.

Typically, student support services are implemented to enhance student success (Chen, 2018). Many of these student support services include but are not limited to library services, academic tutoring, financial aid, counseling services, orientation, technology support, library services, bookstore, registration and enrollment disability services, student support center and academic advising (Bettinger, Boatman, & Long, 2013; Dolan, Donohue, Holstrom, Pernell, & Sachdev, 2009; LaPadula, 2003; Richburg-Hayes, 2015). However, many questions remain about access to academic advising for distance education students (Cain & Lockee, 2002; S. J. Jones & Hansen, 2014). One critical support service shown to influence retention and graduation among students is academic advising (Gravel, 2012; Smith & Allen, 2014). The end goal of higher education must be the retention, persistence, and graduation of students; as such, academic advising is the key to engagement in students' educational careers (Drake, 2011). Specifically, intrusive

advising (Ryan, 2013) provides a mechanism to nurture students, assist them with academic plans by virtual communications with an advisor (White & Schulenberg, 2012); build relationships through bilateral communication with advisors and early alerts systems within learning management systems (Smith, 2007); and create connections with the institution and their faculty--all of which positively impact persistence rates of students (Orozco, Alvarez, & Gutkin, 2010). The word “intrusive” is used in advising literature (Appleton, 1983; Glennen, 1975; Tinto, 1975; Vowell & Karst, 1987) to define intervention strategies to motivate a student to seek help and has been shown to enhance students’ ability to retain and persist in education (Earl, 1988; Orozco, Alvarez, & Gutkin, 2010). Ideally, advisors should reflect their student population (e.g., race, gender, and sexual orientation); however, there may potentially be obstacles in obtaining such a sample of advisors. While this is not a part of this research study, a student learning style based on their cultural upbringing could impact retention, persistence, and graduation rates with the style of online education delivered to the student. This concern would be better addressed in a different research project.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, enrollment among students of color in distance education at community colleges have increased, yet the retention rate of online students compared to on-campus students have decreased (Breit & Schreyer, 2018). Institutions are left asking the following question: what are the factors contributing to these low persistence rates? Researchers identified lack of access to technology, lack of access to student support services, and lack of a quality assurance tool to

evaluate the quality of services as factors negatively influencing student retention and persistence (Britto & Rush, 2013; LaPadula, 2003); Nsamba and Makoe (2017). Perraton (2012) and Simpson (2018) have observed that low persistence and pass rates in distance education programs are caused mainly by inadequate student support facilities. According to LaPadula (2003), students who engage in student support services tend to be more successful persisting in and graduating from college than those who do not. Although the curricular aims in higher education are to provide equity and access for all students, colleges and universities continue to struggle with access to academic advising for distance education students, while providing multiple access points to these services for face-to-face students (Gravel, 2012). If higher education is to educate the world, higher education must start by first educating themselves. Traditionally, institutions have viewed the quality of student support services from the perspective of the institution and not the student. Viewing quality from the perspective of the institution limits quality determination to management and therefore does not provide a true picture of the student experience (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). To improve persistence in distance education, institutions must explore equitable frameworks that invite access to support services and an evaluation of those access points. With the implementation of a quality assurance tool, institutions may understand distance education students' experience using remote academic advising, identify any gaps in access to technology for remote academic advising, and discover solutions to continuously improve remote academic advising.

Need for the Study

Low student persistence (as referenced in Appendix A) remains a major challenge in online courses and programs despite rapid growth in online delivery (Chiyaka, Sithole, Manyanga, McCarthy, & Bucklein, 2016). Community colleges share concerns with identifying factors that inhibit persistence and finding solutions that can improve persistence. Some characteristics that impact community college students' academic success for on-campus programs are similar to characteristics that impact students in distance learning (S. J. Jones & Hansen, 2014). The lack of access to technology and access to student support services are factors that negatively influence retention and persistence in distance learning (Britto & Rush, 2013; LaPadula, 2003). In this research, student support services consist of the following units: orientation to online study, technical support, academic advising, proctoring and student authentication, tutoring, grade appeals, remote library access, accessibility services, records and registration, financial aid services, billing, institutional and student policies. One critical support service shown to appreciably influence persistence and graduation rates among students is academic advising (Gravel, 2012; Smith & Allen, 2014). It is possible that the core issue of access to technology for traditionally underrepresented students is not just centered on access to digital devices (e.g., laptops, desktops, cell phones or connectivity to the internet), but rather, the volume of similar technology found in greater abundance in white communities than in communities of color (where underrepresented students reside). In distance education, access to academic advising must be provided virtually (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Big Blue Button, Skype, etc.). Virtual advising provide students who would never physically appear on campus

with access to a full menu of advising features to mirror services on-campus students receive. Access to technical software, provided for free by an institution, along with the intrusive advising (as referenced in Appendix A), are required for remote academic advising.

The American Graduation Initiative invested \$12 billion in community colleges over 10 years with the goal of increasing the number of certificates and degree completers from 1.5 million to 1.75 million each year by 2020 (Obama, 2009). Could it be the institution's responsibility to provide remote academic advising and to implement a quality assurance tool to evaluate of the delivery of its services? If the answer is no, how do institutions measure equity of remote advising services support to on-campus advising services as the pipeline of students in distance education programs increase? Perraton (2012) and Simpson (2018) observed that low persistence rates and low pass rates in distance education programs are mainly caused by inadequate student support. Evaluating the quality of students' support services in distance education institutions is vital because distance education is a high-involvement service industry, with multiple student support service encounters (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). An appropriate approach to evaluate the quality of services, according to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), is to measure service users' expectations and their perceptions of the experienced service. This can be realized through the use of quality assurance tool (e.g., Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria) that enables an institution to evaluate their access to remote student support services (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). A quality assurance tool will serve as a solution to positively influence persistence rates in distance education and reduce the persistence gap

between higher education students of color enrolled in distance education programs to their white counterparts.

Purpose of the Research

This qualitative study utilizes virtual interviews, archival data, and document analysis to address the research problem and gather organizational stakeholders' perceptions of remote academic advising. The qualitative data collection examines college administrators' perceptions of students' access to remote academic advising at their institution, through virtual interviews, document analysis, and archival documents. The purpose of this research is to provide sight into stakeholders' perceptions (e.g., college administrators and college staff) about remote access to academic advising through the implementation of a quality assurance tool.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions using a qualitative methods approach. The following will be the research questions posed:

- 1) What are the perceptions organizational stakeholders' have of access to remote academic advising?
- 2) How does the use of a quality assurance tool improve access to remote academic advising?
- 3) What is the relationship among race, persistence and quality assurance tools in distance education?

Significance of the Study

Research towards scholarly conversations on equity and access in distance education is revealed through the “complicated contradiction” (Nyachae, 2016, p. 12). This term references the rhetoric of access and its lived reality, which is essentially drift (discussed in detail in Chapter 3). The gap between ideal and reality serves as a powerful blind spot of limited student support that can perpetuate the marginalization of distance education students and bring privilege to on-campus students. The ideal (equitable access to remote academic advising for all students), becomes disconnected from the reality (limited or no access to remote academic advising for distance education students), which result in missed opportunities for institutions and students enrolled in distance education at these institutions. In distance education, higher education institutions are doubly implicated in the hard truth that even well intentioned institutions often (dis)serve the very population they vow to “serve” by providing inequitable access to key student services, which hinders the success of distance education students. Knowing this, higher education institutions should consider ways to unearth tensions of inequities of access to remote academic advising. To this point, institutions would implement quality assurance tools that evaluate the delivery of access to remote academic advising, implement recommendations (based on these evaluations) to improve the delivery of services, thereby strengthening access to remote academic advising.

Summary

Britto and Rush (2013) and LaPadula (2003) declare the lack of access to technology and student support services as factors that negatively influenced retention and persistence. One critical support service shown to appreciably influence the retention and graduation among students is academic advising (Gravel, 2012; Smith & Allen, 2014). Given the extensive nature of support services offered to students, the purposes of this study are to explore organizational stakeholders' perceptions of access to remote academic advising, determine the impact of a quality assurance tool in distance education programs to improve access to remote academic advising and understand the relationship of race, persistence and quality assurance tools in distance education programs.

This chapter introduced the research topic and explained in detail: (1) the background, (2) the need for the study, (3) the statement of the problem being addressed by the study, (4) the purpose of the study, (5) research questions, and (6) the significance of the study.

Overview of the Chapters

This research unearths major findings in the research that follows the evolution of distance education, critical literatures on improved remote access to academic advising using a quality assurance tool, and organizational decision making that contribute to race disparities and persistence in distance education programs for traditionally underrepresented populations are unpacked in Chapter 2. Regarding methodology, grounded theory develops organizational stakeholders' perceptions of remote access to academic advising, which is discussed in Chapter 3. Regarding data collection, data analysis, and triangulation, three research methodology (archival data, virtual interviews, and document analysis) illuminates the data themes and patterns within the research and across the research mapped to major findings from Chapter 2; this takes place in Chapter 4. Finally, in Chapter 5, major findings are aligned to research questions which promotes implications for practice to improve student access to remote academic advising and lead to the implementation of organizational mechanisms to refine robust process in distance education.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Background literature related to distance education and organizational decision making of higher education's priority to improve remote access to academic advising using a quality assurance tool is examined to provide grounding related to the research questions of this study. This review of literature is divided into four sections. The first section defines distance education and examines its evolution from correspondence education, television, and radio to online courses. The second section examines models of academic advising that influence retention and graduation and persistence in academic programs related to traditionally underrepresented students in distance education. The third section examines the multi-approach of evaluating remote academic services, identifying gaps of access to remote services, and finding solutions to fill service gaps. The fourth section examines the theoretical basis of decision making in higher education which influence organizational priorities that possibly contribute to race disparities and persistence in distance education programs for traditionally underrepresented populations.

Distance Education

To embrace a discussion of where higher education should be regarding distance education, it is important to understand how distance education started and how distance education evolved to meet the growing needs and demands of students. Distance education has a dynamic history that dates back to the early 1700's where regular mail service was used to send

and receive shorthand lessons from students (Börje Holmberg, 1995). Many of the important transitions since the 1700's were impacted by the development and use of new innovative technologies (Simonson, Smaldino, & Albright, 2012, p. 37). The definition of distance education is as dynamic as its offering; meaning it covers various forms of study at all levels of education. According to Harting and Erthal (2005), distance education takes place when a teacher and student(s) are separated by physical distance. Borje Holmberg (1977) says distance education are studies which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance, and tuition of a tutorial organization. Moore (1993) further explains distance education as a family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviors are executed apart from the learning behaviors. Simonson et al. (2012) defines distance education as "formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors" (Simonson et al., 2012, p. 32), which will be used in the current study. The popularity of distance education programs dates to the early 1700's to the present date, see Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Distance Education Timeline

1700's – Mid 1900's	1800's - 1970	1970's - Today
Correspondence Education:	Radio and Television:	Online Courses:
Augmented learning opportunities through regular mail service, media, TV and Radio, video tapes and computer software	The Federal Communications Commission granted educational licenses to 200 plus colleges and universities between 1918 and 1946. UT Dallas was birthed through TAGER, a research and television network and satellite that expanded initiatives to grow graduate programs, retain science and technology graduates through radio and TV course delivery.	1970 and 1980's experienced with software boring software for course developing. But the 1990's included personal computers, two-way texting, video conferencing and the internet as a medium for delivering distance education, now referred to as online education. The Hanover Research reports declares over 80 percent of higher education institutions offer online programs at the undergraduate level, while only 56 percent offer online programs at the graduate level ("The state of online postsecondary education," 2014).

Note: This is a snapshot of the evolution of distance education.

This section will review the distance education timeline divided into three phases: (1) correspondence education; (2) radio and television; and (3) current online courses.

Correspondence Education

Regular mail service was the key to augment learning opportunities for students during the early 1700's. Examples of correspondence education included an advertisement by Caleb Phillips in the Boston Gazette on March 1728, offering weekly short-hand lessons to students (Börje Holmberg, 1995). Anna Eliot Ticknor organized a correspondence school, greatly

populated by housewives, which offered 24 subjects within six departments: history, science, art, literature, French and German; in which students would receive a syllabus and assignments by mail from instructors (MacKenzie & Christensen, 1971). Additionally, Ticknor's correspondence school served over 10,000 students in a 24 year period (Casey, 2008, p. 46; Simonson et al., 2012, p. 37) and provided women with one of the first meaningful experiences in correspondence study in the United States (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006, p. 573). Other pioneer of early correspondence education was Isaac Pitman's shorthand course offered through mail, Foulkes Lynch Correspondence Tuition Service offered in accountancy, Keegan (2013), Thomas Foster who distributed course content by mail to teach mine safety, which later became the International Correspondence Schools (ICS), which at its peak enrolled over 2.5 million students by the early 1920's.

During the mid-1800s, Great Britain and the United States offered university extension programs. In the 1870's, Illinois Wesleyan University offered home-study programs that granted bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees and in 1883 a "Correspondence University" was established at Ithaca, New York (Harting & Erthal, 2005). William Harper, considered by many to be the father of modern correspondence education, established the first university extension program at the University of Chicago where he became the first president in 1891 (MacKenzie & Christensen, 1971). Through the University of Chicago extension program, one third of students coursework was transferred towards a bachelor's degree (Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006, p. 574).

United Kingdoms' "Open University", was the world's first university to teach only at a distance in 1971 and admitted more than 24,000 students (Harting & Erthal, 2005). The Open University pioneered open admissions and degrees built on credit obtain by taking a number of modular courses. Students accessed curriculum and completed assessments using media, textbooks, TV and radio program, audio, video tapes, computer software, and home experiment kits (Perry, 1977). Over 30% of students obtaining degrees since 1973 held less than the minimum entry requirements for a traditional university and almost 80% of students are enrolled in courses at Open Universities (University, 2019). With the success of Open Universities in Britain, Open Universities Worldwide was established in the United States as an alternative means for students working toward a bachelor's degree (University, 2019).

Radio and Television

New technologies such as radio and television had a great impact on distance education. Radio stations provided institutions with fast delivery of courses and course content could be heard on the radio (Casey, 2008; *The college blue book: distance learning programs*, 2018). The Federal Communications Commission granted educational licenses to 200 plus colleges and universities between 1918 and 1946; unfortunately, most instructional radio programs did not grant credit towards a degree (Casey, 2008, p. 46). In 1932, the University of Iowa began experimenting with instructional television courses and by the late 1950's, 17 program used television as an instrument of transmitting instruction (Harting & Erthal, 2005). Educational television station grew exponentially by 1960's and by 1972, there were 233 educational stations

(Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public, 1979). One of the areas in Texas greatly influenced by course delivery through television was the University of Texas at Dallas.

In the late 1800's to late 1950's, Texas Christian University (funded in 1875) and Southern Methodist University (founded in 1915), were private universities in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The educational committees of both Dallas and Fort Worth Chambers of Commerce conducted a Manpower survey of the which reported that the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan area would require 2000 Ph.D.'s between 1963 and 1970 (Mitchell, 2014). With Dallas institutions having awarded less than a dozen nonmedical scientific Ph.D, the need to retain science and technology graduates within the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan area became critical. To retain science and technology graduates, business and community leaders in Dallas-Fort Worth created the Southwest Center for Advanced Studies (SCAS) in 1950's, see Figure 2.1.



Figure 2.1. TAGER Tower and Southwest Center for Advanced Studies (Bottoni, 2020)

The mission of SCAS was to conduct fundamental research in natural sciences, to serve as a regional postdoctoral training institution and to aid southwest universities initiate or expand their graduate programs, particularly at the doctoral level (Mitchell, 2014). In 1969, Governors of the Southwest Center for Advanced Studies, agreed to donate land and transfer facilities, faculty, staff and research programs to establish the University of Texas at Dallas. University of Texas at Dallas started in one building with on-campus and instructional television programs made possible through its membership with The Association for Graduate Education and Research (TAGER), a television network. The tower was originally built to broadcast network, a closed-circuit television education system delivering courses via telecast operated by TAGER

(Bottoni, 2020), see Figure 2.2. Cecil Green, the University of Texas at Dallas co-founder explains the benefit of TAGER (Green, 1994):

We'd tie together, by means of this closed-circuit television system, all the existing colleges and universities, and even the medical schools. And then put classrooms, also, in technical industrial plants. In order to make a successful industrial enterprise here, we had to get it completely involved in education. Which has paid off, of course.

Green's effort to offer courses by television was influenced by the deficiencies in science and engineering training at the graduate level in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan area (Mitchell, 2014). From a narrow perspective, Green opened the door to a strategic measurement to retain white students in the field of science and engineering within the state of Texas. This research is a complement to Green's blue print from an international level of retaining and persisting, not only white students in online programs but students of color, as they are the primary constituents of online education.



Figure 2.2. 2016 TAGER Tower and The University of Texas at Dallas (Bottoni, 2020)

Fifty years later, the TAGER tower structure remains a familiar landmark on-campus at University of Texas at Dallas, functioning as a transmission tower for several companies, see Figure 2.2. Although radio and television was a medium that made formal learning opportunities available to adults, the mediocre quality of instructional programming resulted in a shrinking interest in funding (Reiser, 1987).

Online Courses

Although the use of computers as a tool for delivering education was implemented and experimented with in the late 1970's and 1980's, boring and unimaginative software limited the emergence software as educational (Harting & Erthal, 2005). The 1990's, included personal

computers, two-way texting, video conferencing and the internet as a medium for delivering distance education, now commonly known as online education (*The college blue book: distance learning programs*, 2018). Distance education has become increasingly common at the postsecondary level and provide students with flexible learning opportunities (Musu-Gillette, 2015). Many institutions in higher education offer at least some online courses, while other institutions offer exclusively online programs and courses taught exclusively online (Musu-Gillette, 2015). The Hanover Research reports declares over 80 percent of higher education institutions offer online programs at the undergraduate level, while only 56 percent offer online programs at the graduate level ("The state of online postsecondary education," 2014).

Academic Advising

One of the most critical support services shown to influence the retention and graduation among students is academic advising (Gravel, 2012; Smith & Allen, 2014). Effective academic advising brings advisor-student interaction through collaboration and communication to specific learning, developmental, life goals and in how to access various resources and services available to them in distance education (Creamer & Creamer, 1994; Noaman & Ahmed, 2015). According to the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2019), goals for advisor-student interactions are integral part of helping students plan and manage successful educational experiences. There are various advising models used in higher education such as: developmental advising, prescriptive advising, or intrusive advising, see Figure 2.2 for an intrusive advising timeline.

Table 2.2

Intrusive Advising Timeline

Academic Advising	Intrusive Advising	Remote Intrusive Advising
<p>Three models are advisor-student interactions and the provision of anytime, anywhere access to advisers;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Developmental</i>-Helps students explore and define academic, career, life goals, academic pathways, development problem solving, decision making skills through collaborative and process orientated advising. 2. <i>Prescriptive</i>-Provides students with information directly related to their major. 3. <i>Intrusive</i>- guides the student through their academic experiences, from inquiry about an academic program, apply to institution, receiving admission status, registering for the first day of class, retention management to graduation. 	<p>Intrusive advising (Ryan, 2013), provides a mechanism to nurture students, assist them with academic plans (White & Schulenberg, 2012); build relationships (Smith, 2007); and create connections with the institution--all of which positively impact persistence rates of students (Orozco, Alvarez, & Gutkin, 2010) is a intention model to motivate students to persist in school. The word “intrusive” is used in advising literature (Appleton, 1983; Glennen, 1975; Tinto, 1975; Vowell & Karst, 1987) to define intervention strategies to motivate a student to seek help and has been shown to enhance students’ ability to retain and persist in education (Earl, 1988; Orozco et al., 2010). The theoretical basis of intrusive advising is a model of retention that is based on three advising principles (Earl, 1988): Academic and Social Integration for Persistence.</p>	<p>Remote access should include direct and indirect access as well as student experience using remote academic advising such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reliable Internet Connection. 2. Synchronous Technology. Software that supports real-time communication, offers whiteboard learning, allows desktop sharing, virtual discussion rooms, virtual office hours, web video, web chat, and phone capabilities as well as student engagement features. Examples of synchronous tools include, Skype, GoTo Meeting, Zoom, Big Blue Button.

Note: This is a snapshot of intrusive and remote intrusive advising.

While the common theme of all three models are advisor-student interactions and the provision of anytime, anywhere access to advisers, there are also differences that promote the use of one model over the other (Noaman & Ahmed, 2015): *Developmental advising*- This model helps students explore and define academic, career, life goals, academic pathways, development problem solving, decision making skills through collaborative and process orientated advising. Developmental advising builds an advisor-student relationship while requiring an extensive commitment of time and resources compared to other advising models (Mottarella, Fritzsche, & Cerabino, 2004). *Prescriptive advising*- This model is often referred to as the traditional advising model as it provides students with information directly related to their academic program and progress, such as academic policies, major/program requirements and course selection (Mottarella et al., 2004). Typically, prescriptive advising is initiated by the student for the purpose of addressing concerns about their academic progress. The operation of this model is similar to the doctor-patient relationship model (White, 2006). *Intrusive advising* – According to Mottarella et al. (2004), this model is initiated by the advisor rather than the student and guides the student through their academic experiences, from inquiry about an academic program, apply to institution, receiving admission status, registering for the first day of class, retention management to graduation. Cohorts of students may be targeted such as academically at-risk students (e.g., students on probation), or high-achieving students using this model. Scholars of academic advising state that intrusive advising is of great impact toward student retention and degree attainment rates. Schwebel, Walburn, Jacobsen, Jerrolds, and Klyce (2008) agree that students prefer this approach to advising over prescriptive advising Mottarella et al. (2004).

Breit and Schreyer (2018) states “good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience” (p. 81). Levitz (2006) labeled advising as a retention tool and connected academic advising with student success and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated “research consistently indicates that academic advising can play a role in students' decisions to persist and in their chances of graduating” (p. 404). Current studies have confirmed the critical role of effective academic advising is improving student retention (Kolenovic, Linderman, & Karp, 2013; Kot, 2014; Woodson, 2017).

Through intrusive advising, advisors encourage student involvement in the advising process, which is effective in facilitating persistence rates. Helm, Coronella, and Rooney (2018) concluded students receiving intrusive advising earned higher grades and persisted at a higher rate than students expose to other academic advising models. This research will discuss intrusive advising as a foundational advising model in distance education due to its ability to positively impact of student persistence.

Intrusive Advising

Intrusive advising is of great impact toward student retention and degree attainment rates Schwebel et al. (2008) and other researchers indicate that students prefer this approach to advising over prescriptive advising, which takes less time to implement unlike development advising (Mottarella et al., 2004). Intrusive advising (Ryan, 2013) is a model used to motivate students to persist in school by nurturing and assist them with academic plans (White & Schulenberg, 2012); building relationships (Smith, 2007); and creating connections with the

institution--all of which positively impact persistence rates of students (Orozco, Alvarez, & Gutkin, 2010). The word “intrusive” is used in advising literature (Appleton, 1983; Glennen, 1975; Tinto, 1975; Vowell & Karst, 1987) to define intervention strategies to motivate a student to seek help and has been shown to enhance students’ ability to retain and persist in education (Earl, 1988; Orozco et al., 2010). The theoretical basis of intrusive advising is a model of retention that is based on three advising principles (Earl, 1988): Academic and Social Integration for Persistence. The inclusion of personal variables, the evaluation of personal values, informal interaction among student and faculty members outside of the classroom.

- Orientation Skills through Intrusive Advising. A student’s perception of personal “fit” to an institution is one variable of academic persistence (Astin, 1971; Berdie, 1967; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969).
- Motivation. Intrusive orientation operates on the premise that student response is based on motivation to succeed. Students should be intrusively identified and placed in curriculum that capitalizes on motivation to succeed through self-evaluation of an institution (Orozco, Alvarez, & Gutkin, 2010).

These advising principles led the effort for higher education institutions to develop action-oriented responses to identify a problem in order to motivate a student to seek help. Research shows that students receiving intrusive advising earned higher grades and persisted at a higher rate than students exposed to other academic advising models (Helm et al., 2018). The impact of intrusive advising in higher education provides evidence that inclusion of this model is beneficial for all students, whether on-campus or at a distance. Effective academic advising

brings advisor-student interaction with direct or indirect access resources and services available to them at a distance (Creamer & Creamer, 1994; Noaman & Ahmed, 2015).

Remote Intrusive Academic Advising.

In distance education, access to academic advising must be provided to students who never physically appear on campus; this type of advising is referred to as remote advising (advising that can be accessed off-campus). Remote intrusive advising is the same as intrusive advising with one exception, that is, digital technologies are required for students to gain anytime, anywhere access to advisors and tools to help them succeed (Noaman & Ahmed, 2015). Although the curricular aims in higher education is to provide access to student support services for all students, colleges and universities continue to struggle with access to academic advising for distance education students (Gravel, 2012). Hargittai (2018) defines access as a user's actual use of a medium, beyond the access to the medium. Based on this definition, having direct and indirect access to information on an institutions' website telling students how to connect with advisors by LIVE web chats, web conferences, or email is not enough. Rather access should include direct and indirect access as well as student feedback using remote student support services (Quality Matters, 2019). To promote virtual intrusive advising, the following technical infrastructure is required:

1. Reliable Internet Connection.
2. Synchronous Technology. Software that supports real-time communication, offers whiteboard learning, allows desktop sharing, virtual discussion rooms, virtual office

hours, web video, web chat, and phone capabilities as well as student engagement features. Examples of synchronous tools include, Skype, GoTo Meeting, Zoom, Big Blue Button.

Technology Model for Remote Services

A core concept of the internet is to provide and receive information. Although the Internet has the potential to provide individual users with information content on an almost any topic, the act of searching or seeking out information makes using the internet too labor-intensive thus searching for wanted information becomes less effective (Mathai & Margon, 2005). The act of accessing information from the Internet is known as pull technology, since the user must pull the information from the Internet onto his local computer (Mathai & Margon, 2005). Thus, it is desirable to allow users to receive desired information over the Internet without time-consuming searching. To alleviate the burdens associated with pull technology, the Internet communications industry has developed push technology which somewhat resembles broadcasting (Mathai & Margon, 2005). Using a push model of by delivering information directly to the user's computer so that the user is not required to engage in a search for the information which is desirable and less time-consuming than searching (Mathai & Margon, 2005).

Quality Assurance Tools for Online Programs

According to the amount of studies and research performed on the subject, it is apparent that persistence is a concern in higher education, but persistence is merely a symptom of a

greater issue. According to LaPadula (2003), students who engage in student support services tend to be more successful in persisting in and graduating from college than those who do not. Bailey (2005) found that if institutions are to improve persistence, they must focus on barriers that contribute to low persistence rates in distance education. Researchers have identified the lack of access to technology and student support services as factors that negatively influence student retention and persistence (Britto & Rush, 2013; Lapadula, 2003). There is not a single solution for improving persistence in distance education programs; only a multi-approach that includes students' perceptions of their experiences using remote services and identifying events throughout the campus that influence their perceptions and shape their motivation to persist in colleges and universities (Tinto, 2016). It may be an institution's responsibility to implement tools that influence students' that shape students motivation to persist in distance education programs; such as implementing a quality assurance tool to evaluate the quality of services and after implementation, provide feedback that can potentially transform an organizations delivery of services and produce recommendations (e.g. action research).

Perraton (2012) and Simpson (2018) observed that low persistence rates and pass rates in distance education programs are caused mainly by inadequate student support. Evaluating the quality of students' support services in distance education institutions is vital because by nature distance education is a high-involvement service industry, with multiple student support service encounters (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). An appropriate approach to evaluate the quality of services, according to Parasuraman et al. (1988), is to measure service users' expectations and their perceptions of the experienced service. This can be realized through the use of a quality

assurance tool enabling an institution to evaluate their remote student support services (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). Remote student support services (orientation to online study, technical support, academic advising, proctoring and student authentication, tutoring, grade appeals, remote library access, accessibility services, records and registration, financial aid services, billing, institutional and student policies) are the same as on-campus student services with one exception; remote services require access to digital technology.

This research will discuss a quality assurance tool packed within one of Quality Matters Program Reviews called the Online Learner Support Certification (Quality Matters, 2019). The Online Learner Support Certification is a data-driven process that uses a quality assurance tool (e.g., Annotated Program Criteria) to evaluate access to essential academic resources and support services. Traditionally, institutions have viewed the quality of remote student support services from the perspective of the institution and not the student. Viewing quality from the perspective of the institution limits quality determination to management and therefore does not provide a true picture of the student experience (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). The Online Learner Support Certification serves as a solution that may possibly influence persistence rates positively in distance education for traditionally underserved students enrolled in distance education programs.

Quality Matters is one of the most popular quality assurance frameworks in the United States (Lowenthal & Hodges, 2015). Quality Matters began with a small group of colleagues in the MarylandOnline, Inc. Consortium, then expanded with funding for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant. Quality Matters is now an international organization

focused on improving the quality of online courses/online programs in K-12, Higher Education, and Professional Education. Quality Matters is divided into two areas: quality assurance of course design and quality assurance of online programs. Quality assurance of course design (referred to as Course Reviews) is what Quality Matters is traditionally known for; however, in 2015 they introduced Program Reviews, which is what this section will focus on.

Program Reviews

The Quality Matters Program Reviews evaluate higher education online programs. Vlăsceanu, Grünberg, and Pârlea (2007) states quality assurance in higher education requires a dynamic process involving internal approaches to the institution and external agencies. It is a never ending process for “maintaining and improving quality rather than simply a system of evaluation and checking for errors” (Warren, McManus, & Nnazor, 1994). Program Reviews goes beyond an initial focus on course design by creating a series of Program Review Certifications related to online teaching and online learning. These certifications draw upon the knowledge gained from reviewing several thousand courses from hundreds of institutions over more than a decade (Matters, 2020). The Quality Matters Program Reviews process consist of four individual certifications that online higher education programs may seek (Matters, 2020):

1. Online Program Design- Recognizes programs that are designed around measurable learning objectives or competencies.
2. Online Teaching Support- Recognizes programs that require all online faculty to undergo training in best practices for online course delivery, provide faculty with ongoing pedagogical support, encourage faculty professional development to increase their

knowledge and skill in online teaching, emphasize instructor availability and feedback to learners, and collect and use feedback from learners to improve online teaching.

3. Online Learner Support- Recognizes programs that provide all the critical student and academic services needed for learner success and use learner feedback to continuously improve those services.
4. Online Learner Success- Recognizes programs that are able to articulate a mission-driven definition of success for their learners that also meets the expectations of their external stakeholders and to demonstrate that their learners are achieving success at a high rate, based on external comparisons and benchmarks.

Of the four certifications, Online Learner Support is the only process that is centered on a deliberate and laser-focused evaluation of policies, processes, resources and need assessment to develop eco-system of support and access for student support services (Quality Matters, 2019).

As such, this research will discuss artifacts linked to the Online Learner Support Certification: a) psychometric of a quality assurance tool; and (b) Online Learner Support Candidacy.

Psychometrics of a Quality Assurance Tool

Alfred Binet developed psychometric test to distinguish student who would excel in education from those who would not through complex intellectual tasks involving students' judgment, comprehension, and reasoning (Smelser & Baltes, 2001). Based on these pragmatic tasks, Binet defined intelligence as the capacity to adopt and sustain a direction, make adaptations for the purpose of attaining a desired end, and monitor performance self-correctively.

With little elaboration, this definition still directs the psychometric paradigm (Smelser & Baltes, 2001). In alignment with Binets' psychometric test, the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification folds in a quality assurance tool (e.g., Annotated Program Criteria, see table 2.6 and 2.7) that measures an organization's capability to evaluate gaps in access to remote support services, technology required for remote access, and monitoring the implementation of recommendations within an organization to shrink any gaps of access. An organization may earn The Online Learner Support Certification by successfully meeting criteria outlined in the Annotated Program Criteria.

Desired outcomes for the Online Learner Support Certification are to: (a) demonstrate a commitment to quality online learning; (b) improve online programs through the process of qualifying for Quality Matters Certification; and (c) use Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria to identify opportunities for improvement to collect evidence on the quality of educational practices intended to sustain learning and teaching in academic and student support services for regional or professional accreditation (Quality Matters, 2019). The certification itself pulls from the evaluation and student services guidelines documented by The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC). C-RAC is a collective of seven regional organizations (e.g., Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), Higher Learning Commission (HLC), Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), WASC Senior College and University Commission

(WSCUC), etc.) responsible for the accreditation of roughly 3,000 of the nation’s colleges and universities ("Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions," 2020). Accreditation is a process of external review used by the higher education community to assure quality and spur ongoing improvement ("Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions," 2020). C-RAC ensures ("Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions," 2020):

- Interregional guidelines for the evaluation of distance education
- Streamlines the accreditation process by providing a framework for the collection and analysis of evidence related to an institution’s online programs—the same evidence that can be used to support accreditation.

The Annotated Program Criteria, draws from C-RAC guidelines 5 and 7 (see Table 2.3 and Table 2.4) ("Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions," 2020):

C-RAC | Guideline 5: Evaluation- “The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its online learning offerings, including the extent to which online learning goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.”

C-RAC | Guideline 7: Student Services- “The institution provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in online learning offerings.”

Table 2.3

Annotated Program Criteria, Criteria 1 | Aligned with C-RAC Guideline 7

Criteria	Evidence to Submit	Annotations
1. Direct and indirect support for online learners should include	Provide 1) A list of links to the	An effective response to #2 includes a brief statement from <i>each</i> support service regarding its goals and services for the online learner and

Criteria	Evidence to Submit	Annotations
remote access to the following services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation to online study • Technical support • Academic advising • Proctoring and student authentication • Tutoring • Grade appeals • Remote library access • Accessibility services • Records and registration • Financial Aid services • Billing 	listed services (and others that may be relevant), 2) An explanation of how each service supports the online learner and promotes learner success, and 3) A plan to address any identified gaps in service.	how it meets them.

From “Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria”, by Quality Matters, 2019
<https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/program-review-docs-pdfs/Annotated-Program-Criteria.pdf>

Table 2.4

Annotated Program Criteria Criteria 2 Aligned with C-RAC Guideline 5

Criteria	Evidence to Submit	Annotations
2. A robust process exists to collect, distribute, and use learner feedback to inform and improve learner support efforts.	Provide 1) A description of data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts; 2) Representative survey data documenting learner satisfaction with online campus services over the past three years; and 3) Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback.	It should not be assumed that raw data speak for themselves. Analysis is necessary to interpret the significance of the data in determining the effectiveness of support services and pinpoint areas for improvement. A <i>Data Analysis Cover Sheet</i> is provided for this purpose.

From "Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria", by Quality Matters, 2019
(<https://www.qualitymatters.org/sites/default/files/program-review-docs-pdfs/Annotated-Program-Criteria.pdf>)

Online Learner Support Candidacy

The Online Learner Support Candidacy is a subset of the Online Learner Support Certification

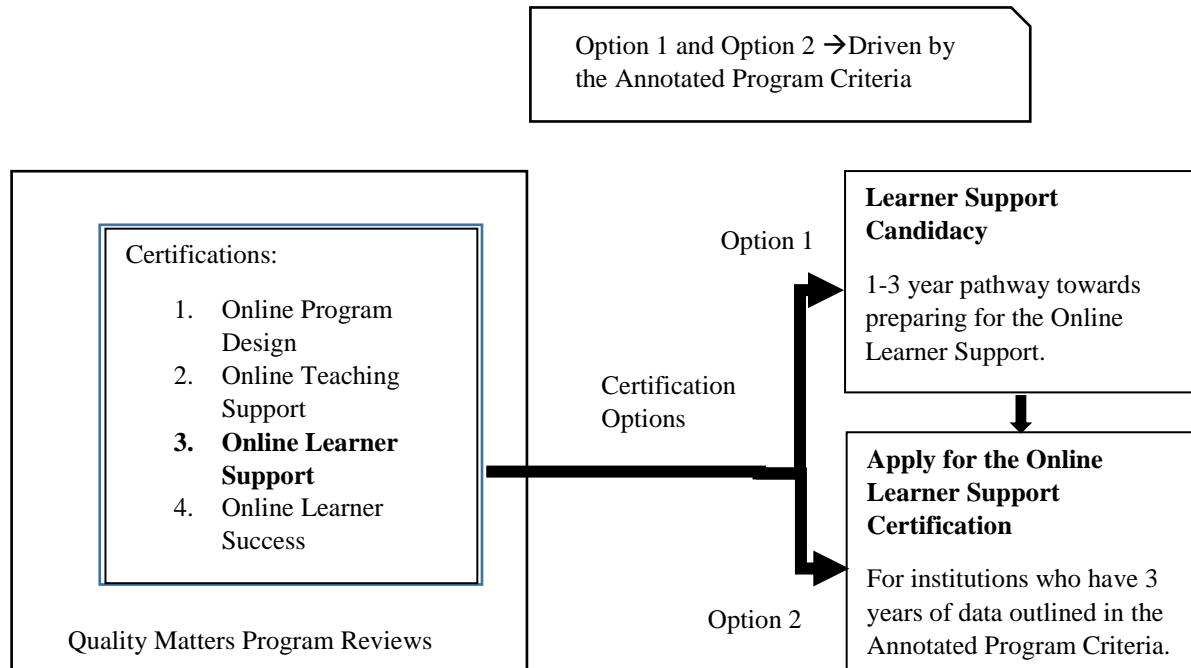


Figure 2.3. Quality Matters Program Review Layout.

The candidacy is a one to three-year pathway that prepares an institution to successfully meet the Annotated Program Criteria, outlined in the Online Learner Support Certification. The Online Learner Support Candidacy is organized into three phases (or years) with targeted activities for each phases that may be completed at any point in the process with the goal of establishing, improving, and documenting that critical learner support services are provided and continuously improved (Quality Matters, 2019). Institutions may potentially appoint expert group (e.g., faculty, advisors, staff, upper administrators) to evaluate each criterion within the quality assurance tool to determine effectiveness. Further evaluation of the quality assurance tool may potentially be gleaned from student of color in distance education program via focus groups.

Institutions may apply separately to QM to become a candidate for the Online Learner Support.

Table 2.5 shows Quality Matters Online Learner Support Candidacy by phase chart.

Table 2.5

Online Learner Support Candidacy Chart by Phase

Criterion/Criterion Component	Target Activity (TA)	Documentation
Phase 1/Year 1	Concurrent Target Activities	
Criterion 1 – remote access to services	<p>TA 1 – Collect and review statements of commitment to serving online learners and any supporting policies and documents explaining how online learners are supported by each of the following units or functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation to online study • Technical support • Academic advising • Proctoring and student authentication • Tutoring • Grade appeals • Remote library access • Accessibility services • Records and registration • Financial aid services • Billing • Institutional and student policies <p>TA 2 – Review statements for thoroughness and consistency and recommend any needed changes.</p> <p>TA 3 – Develop or describe any existing planning process to address any gaps or deficiencies in learner support services.</p>	Learner Support Improvement Plan
Criterion 2 – use of learner feedback	<p>TA 1 – Document the learner feedback data that is collected on the support of online learners for each of the following units or functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation to online study • Technical support • Academic advising • Proctoring and student authentication • Tutoring 	

- Grade appeals
- Remote library access
- Accessibility services
- Records and registration
- Financial aid services
- Billing
- Institutional and student policies

TA 2 – Document how feedback informs changes in organization, policy, and practices for the support of learners.

Learner feedback data, analysis and emerging recommendations for change

Phase 2/Year 2

Criterion 1 – remote access to services

Concurrent Target Activities

TA 1 – Update unit statements of commitment to serving online learners and any supporting policies and documents with any modifications of online learner support services for each unit or function previously identified.

Unit statements describing services and goals for supporting the online learner

TA 2 – Report activity in addressing any gaps in service and closing them.

Progress report on addressing gaps or deficiencies in learner support

Criterion 2 – use of learner feedback

TA 1 – Continue collecting and, if needed, refining the data that are collected on the support of online learners for each unit or function previously identified.

Updated learner feedback data, analysis, and recommendations for change in the organization, policy, and practices of learner support services

TA 2 – Record changes in organization, policy, and practices for the support of learners that are informed by learner feedback.

Phase 3/Year 3

Criterion 1 – remote access to services

Concurrent Target Activities

TA 1 – Update, refine, and finalize with any modifications of statements of commitment to serving online learners and any supporting policies and documents about online learner support services for each unit or function previously identified.

Final unit statements of learner support

TA 2 – Summarize changes in the planning process in place to address gaps in service and close them, and note any organizational changes that have resulted.

Review-ready 3-year report on improvements to learner support

Criterion 2 – use of learner feedback

TA 1 – Assemble and review the past three years of learner feedback data, and identify trends in learner satisfaction with the support they receive from each unit or function previously identified.

Review-ready 3-year learner feedback data, analysis, and recommendations

TA 2 – Prepare an updated report of all changes in organization, policy, and practices for the support of

learners over the past three years that were informed by learner feedback.

Review-ready 3-year changes to online learner support organization, policy, and practices, based on learner feedback

From “Quality Matters Program Review”, by Quality Matters, 2019 (<https://www.qualitymatters.org/qm-reviews-certifications/program-reviews>)

Through this three-year process of the Online Learner Support Candidacy, institutions will identify gaps in the delivery of services, policies, processes, and the collection of student feedback to determine support and access improvement are needed. Institutions who have not assembled three years of feedback from distance education students will choose the candidacy route as it takes you through a three-year process of collecting learner feedback results and refining processes in each of the eleven units that identify gaps in services and continuously improve process to fill those gaps (Quality Matters, 2019).

The Online Learner Support Certification process is the same whether an institution enters into the Online Learner Support Candidacy (the one to three-year pathway for collecting data) or skips the candidacy to apply directly for the Online Learner Support Certification. An institution knowing which route to take (e.g., direct certification or candidacy) depends on one factor:

- Institutions with three years of survey data addressing criteria 1 and criteria 2 of the Annotated Program Criteria; should apply directly for the Online Learner Support Certification.

- Institutions without three years of survey data addressing criteria 1 and criteria 2 of the Annotated Program Criteria; should pursue the Online Learner Support Candidacy first.

When an institution applies for the Online Learner Support Certification, the institution is required to have three years of evidence that corresponds to the Annotated Program Criteria. In other words, applying for the Online Learner Support Certification signals that an institution already has three-years of evidence and is ready for the Program Review. Through the Program Review, institutions would align their three years of data to criteria outlined in the Annotated Program Criteria. If an institution's data submitted aligns with Annotated Program Criteria, then the institution receives Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification. After applying for the Online Learner Support Certification, an institution has up to one calendar year to successfully meet the Annotated Program Criteria (Quality Matters, 2019).

Quality assurance has become a strategic issue for higher education in response to accreditation and accountability, competition, and economic reasons (Darajat, 2018). The goal in any distance education program should be to provide learner support services when and where the students need and provide access to these services, realized through quality assurances processes. To meet this goal, institutions can follow a process that encourages regular self-assessment of equitable support services, stakeholders' (distance education students) feedback of support services provided, stakeholders' need assessment of support services, and stakeholders' access to support services. This research will explore the impact of implementing a quality

assurance tool to shrink inequities of access to remote academic advising at two community colleges. Furthermore, this research will discuss the important role organizations (i.e., higher education institutions at state and local government levels) play in expanding inequity gaps of access through organizational decisions.

Organizational Theory Framework

The purpose of this research is to explore organizational stakeholders' perception of access to remote academic advising. Organizational theory is used to frame and explain the decision-making process in distance education. Agency Theory, Life Cycle Theory, Logic of Confidence, Drift and Organizational Culture are additional theories discussed in this research that explains how state and local initiatives influence organizational priorities that possibly contribute to race disparities and persistence in distance education programs for traditionally underrepresented populations. A summary of research on the effectiveness of access to remote academic advising and quality assurance tools in distance education, will analyze the relationship among race, persistence and quality assurance tools in higher education.

Organizational Theory in Higher Education

Organizational theory pertaining to higher education is understanding how decisions are made, identifying issues, resolving those issues as well as maximizing efficiency and productivity (Birnbaum & Edelson, 1989). Research centers (and higher education institutions) have two loci of control: investigator-controlled research center, where all research activity decisions are made by the individual researcher (e.g., faculty member), and organization-

controlled research, which allows the institution to control research activities (Valcik, 2016). In particular, research activities are controlled (as well as instructional activities), are deployed and led through researcher and organizational controls (Valcik, 2016). One hypothesis is that research centers and higher education institutions have multiple points of individuality as well as centralized organizational control as the life cycle of the organization progresses. More specifically, as the research governance process matures, the research center or higher education institution will move to greater organizational controls as pressure from funding agencies and funding sources increase (Tierney, 1998; Valcik, 2016). For example, the 60x30TX strategic plan for higher education is an incentive-based program in the state of Texas that allocates funding to community colleges, universities and medical schools, for providing 60% of workers with a certificate or degree by 2030. Since 2003, state appropriations for public universities have declined by 23% and community colleges have seen a 13% decline since 2005 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019).

State agencies such as the Texas Education Coordinating Board ([THECB](#)), implemented structure funding to achieve the goals of 60x30TX. The goal of incentivizing community colleges and universities for high graduation rates may be viewed as influencing organizational control through funding (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019). Through this influence, organizations research interest and strategic goals shift to align with funding sources.

Through structure funding THECB award Community College Student Success Points based on students' achievement of certain milestones, including completion of a developmental

education course, completion of 15 or 30 semester credit hours, obtaining a certificate or degree or transferring to a university (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019). Community College Student Success Points increase funding from \$171.56 to \$215 per point. Since being implemented in 2014, degrees and certificates awarded at community colleges have increased 17% despite relatively flat or declining enrollments (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019).

Similar to community colleges, public universities are offered structure funding for the Graduation Supplement Initiative. The Graduation Supplement Initiative may be viewed as influencing organizational control through funding as it focuses on investing in academic and student support services to help students complete their degrees. The Graduation Supplement measures universities' performance on two metrics: (a) the average number of "at-risk" and (b) not "at-risk" students completing undergraduate degrees during the previous three years. Universities receive \$500 for each "not at-risk" graduate, and \$1,000 for each "at-risk" graduate (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019).

Low persistence and retention rates in distance education are crucial conversations towards increasing graduation rates. Community College Student Success Points and Graduation Supplement are two metrics that most directly impact the 60x30TX goal of producing more graduates (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019). Graduating from an academic program requires students to be persistent in higher education and be retained in their academic program. Financial incentives tied to graduation rates allows funding sources, like the THECB,

to dictate research activities centered on producing higher graduation rates driving investments (e.g., local initiatives and local programs), which shapes decisions made within an organization over a span of time.

Life Cycle Theory

Changes occur to the organizational structure over a span of time as the organization, process, or product goes through various stages of growth or decline are referred to as the life cycle of an organization (Valcik, 2016). The organization has its own development of attributes and methods. External pressures, internal dynamics and organizational characteristics evolve over time; either staying in internal or external alignment, or failing to do so. It is during this time an organization may expand, contract or cease to exist (Gross, 1968). A Chronicle analysis of federal data shows in the last five years, about half a million students, most are 25 years or older, have been displaced by more than 1,200 campuses college closures (Vasquez & Bauman, 2019). A higher education institution will grow after initial creation and success, and contract as resources dissipate (Gross, 1968; Valcik, 2016).

At a time of contraction, an institution will have to “renew” itself by finding more resources, new research areas and perhaps redefine its purpose. Community colleges and universities will also expand under the life cycle theory model if new directives are imposed upon the organization from an external force (Valcik, 2016). Institutions should be prepared to adapt its resources to serve an increase or decrease of an online student population. Failure to

adapt to the growing population of online students limits access to resources aiding in students persisting in, and ultimately graduating from online programs. The life cycle perspective on organizations argue there are predictable patterns as organizations are born, mature, and end (Daft, 1995). Institutional characteristics must change as their life cycle progresses. These changes will dictate who the actors are and what role the actors will play in the organization (Valcik, 2016). The life cycle perspective argues that as organizations grow, change and contract, so do the needs and actors change and grow in power as well as loci of control. Capacity of institutional programs and student enrollment are signals to administrators that adjustment of students support resources are necessary to meet equity standards (Daft, 1995).

Decoupling and Drift

Taking into account that the Life Cycle of an organization produces changes, the bi-product of organizational change, brings actors who implement new projects, provides feedback on policy and procedures to fill the new gaps represented with change. Meyer and Rowan (1977) explains the gap between actions and formal structure as loose coupling.

Decoupling. Ideally, organizations built around efficiency attempt to maintain close alignments between structures and activities. Conformity is enforced through inspection, output quality is continually monitored, the efficiency of various units is evaluated, and the various goals are unified and coordinated. But a policy of close alignment in institutionalized organizations merely makes public record of inefficiency and inconsistency. (p. 356)

Decoupling has a close relationship to organizational drift since both decoupling and organizational drift highlight problems of the organization. Decoupling and drift occur when the

organizations' actors are working on actions that are no longer relevant solutions to address gaps from organizational changes. Perrow (2011) expressed flexibility to incorporate change (e.g., interventions that promote access to student support services) that can be implemented within an organization without destabilization with organizations operating in loosely coupled systems. Unfortunately, loosely coupled systems react slowly with required change, leaving the organization possibly at risk. Tightly coupled systems, on the other hand, react quickly to change, but could cause an organization to overreact with dire consequences (Perrow, 2011). Institutions' tight coupling may vary depending on the state and regulatory agencies changing guidelines (Valcik, 2016). Some institutions' response rate to organizational changes are greatly impacted by the actors and may have a fast or slow reaction.

Agency Theory and Logic of Confidence

Federal and state regulatory agencies (as well as upper higher education administrators), assume faculty, researchers and institutions are conforming to guidelines. Meyer and Rowan (1977) state the logic of confidence as good faith in an organization and their professionals.

Despite the lack of coordination and control, decoupled organizations are not anarchies. Day-to-day activities proceed in an orderly fashion. What legitimates institutionalized organizations, enabling them to appear useful in spite of the lack of technical validation, is the confidence and good faith of their internal participants and their external constituents. (p. 357)

Institutions are committed to meeting state agency policies and guidelines to provide access to support services for all students (face-to-face or online); it is usually assumed by state agencies

that institutions ensure online students have access to the same support services as do face-to-face students. Coordinating board and accreditation agencies are evaluating the organization under a set of assumptions (e.g., optimum and ideal), which may or may not be accurate. It is assumed there is equity in the provision of resources provided to online students and that those students are able to access these provisions. However, the reality is there can be “drift” at various points of the student experience as students are unable to access these resources remotely (off-campus).

An agency theorist could debate institutions have a research mission and commitment to serve students as well as community partners. The research mission and commitment is implemented from the institutions by creating new and substantial knowledge benefiting their constituents. This knowledge includes, but is not limited to, conducting an evaluation of remote support services to identify opportunities of improving students access to resources at various points of the student experience. The perspective of agency theory leads agents to consider research and instruction maximizing new resources for their agenda and minimizing transaction costs of doing so, thus positing faculty to establish policies and procedures that become practices for the organization (Valcik, 2016). To this extent, faculty and institutional administrators may have a responsibility to evaluate access to remote resources and to identify interventions shrink gaps in equity to remote resources in distance education.

Organizational Culture and Bounded Rationality

According to Lacatus (2013); Tierney (1988), organizational culture is the understanding and analyzing triggers consist of an educational organization such a university or a school to get structured, develop, and perform. It also allows identify possible ways for universities and community colleges and schools to improve management, build enhancement and reform strategies. Classifying institutional functions & frameworks centered on persistence and retention rates could be viewed through the lens of equity in the provision of resources provided to online students and that those students are able to access support services. If one is framing the aspect of having limited resources, bounded rationality would have to a part of the organizational decision-making framework since there are only so many viable choices that can be made in the selection process (Deming, 1993). One also has to take into account in an organization the different stakeholders who have different agendas driving the decision process (e.g. Agency Theory) (Downs, 1967). How critical online education is for the organization will be telling on the decision-making process on whether or not the decision-making process is tightly or loosely coupled (Perrow, 2011). The social morale's of the organization will also influence where resources are invested since organizational culture still has to be navigated during the decision-making process. Faculty and staff making curricula decisions, make these decisions based on their own understanding, which can work against students of color (Patton, McEwen, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). Higher education institutions, determine access to services and quality of services in distance education based on their perspective and not the perspective of the student. Viewing quality from the perspective of the institution limits quality determination to

management and therefore does provide a true picture of the student experience (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017).

According to the ("The National Center for Education Statistics," 2016), jobs held by community college traditionally underrepresented faculty (delivery of course content) and traditionally underrepresented staff (delivery of academic advising) pale in comparison to White employees. The exclusion of experiences from traditionally underrepresented faculty and staff coupled with the majoritarian force of power at the community college being White; informs us that Whiteness is the race of greater value, the beneficiaries of academic persistence and access to services. An appropriate approach to evaluate the quality of services, according to Parasuraman et al. (1988), is to measure service students' perceptions of services and access to those services. This can be realized through the use of quality assurance tool that enables an institution to evaluate their remote student support services (Nsamba & Makoe, 2017). Perraton (2012) and Simpson (2018) have observed that low persistence rates and low pass rates in distance education programs are caused mainly by inadequate student services. In this case, access to services in distance education are motivated by the experiences of Whiteness without the consideration or experiences of traditionally underrepresented students.

Key Points from Literature

The literature provides historical evidence, dating back to the 1960's, of strategic efforts to retain and persist traditionally underrepresented students in distance education. The primary contingent group in distance education is traditionally underrepresented students and they are retaining and persisting in online programs at a lower rate than their white counterparts. The lack of technology and student support services are factors that negatively influence student retention and persistence (Britto & Rush, 2013; LaPadula, 2003). Academic Advising is a critical student's support service shown to influence the retention and graduation among students (Gravel, 2012). Students receiving intrusive advising, a specific type of advising model, earn higher grades and persist at a higher rate than students exposed to other academic advising models by focusing on advisor-student interactions, the provision of anytime, anywhere access to advisors and communications software used for remote access to advising (Helm et al., 2018). As a result, it is vital for distance education students to have access to remote advising as well as the technology required for remote advising. Ensuring remote access to support services and technology requires funding to implement a quality assurance tool to evaluate the quality of services. Currently, state and local funding agencies have incentivized community colleges and universities to produce high graduation rates across academic programs for "at-risk" students. Institutions typically make financial decisions based on funding sources; therefore, making a financial commitment to implement a quality assurance tool would improve access to remote advising and align with state and local funding agency incentivized program goals.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The focus of this research is to gather data on organizations' actions to explore organizational stakeholders' perception of remote academic advising. This is a qualitative research design. Qualitative methods address organizational stakeholders' perceptions of remote access to advising and a quality assurance tool capability to improve access to remote advising for distance education students. Face-to-face interviews with college executive stakeholders and unit leads is helpful for collecting information not found in archival records. Due to the unforeseen challenges of employee's reluctance to physically meet for face-to-face interviews, three research methods are used in the data collection: virtual interviews, archival records, and document analysis. All three data sources are collected and analyzed using triangulation to strengthen research conclusions. This chapter outlines the methodology used in this research and is separated into the following subsections: (1) grounded theory develops organizational stakeholders perceptions of remote access to academic advising; (2) triangulation address the intersection of three research methodologies and data sources for accurate analysis; (3) archival data explores national, state and local data pertaining to race, ethnicity and persistence rates of student enrolled in distance education programs; (4) limitations of archival data describes how the intent of the original data is not realized using this type of data source alone; (5) document analysis discuss the relevance of documents towards gaining understanding and developing

knowledge; (6) Virtual Interviews explains the relevancy of perspectives of organizational stakeholders and the structure of interview questions; (7) interviews versus questionnaires outline the fixed format of questionnaires that limit topics and produce low response rates; (8) Data Collection explores data captured from interview, archival records and document analysis connected to the research questions (9) participant recruitment explains participant selection criteria; (10) trustworthiness establishing a relationship with organizational stakeholders that promotes a willingness to volunteer and be vulnerable; (11) data analysis focusing on analyzing the data across data sources to common themes and patterns within the data; (12) settings; and (13) limitations of the study.

This research unearths major findings in the research that follows the evolution of distance education, critical literatures on improved remote access to academic advising using a quality assurance tool, and organizational decision making that contribute to race disparities and persistence in distance education programs for traditionally underrepresented populations are unpacked in Chapter 2. Regarding methodology, grounded theory develops organizational stakeholders perceptions of remote access to academic advising, which is discussed in Chapter 3. Regarding data collection, data analysis and triangulation, three research methodology (archival data, virtual interviews and document analysis) illuminates the data themes and patterns within the research and across the research mapped to major findings from Chapter 2; this take place in Chapter 4. Finally, in Chapter 5, major finding are aligned to research questions which promotes implications for practice that improve student access to remote academic advising and leads to the implementation of organizational mechanisms to refine robust process in distance education.

Grounded Theory

The research used ground theory qualitative approach, because it created a space to inductively construct a theory while maintaining participants' perspectives (Charmaz, 2014). The use of this method gives participants data and voices center stage while engulfing the researcher in theory creation (Hays & Singh, 2011). Virtual interviews, archival documents, and document analysis will determine emerging patterns from past and current organizational operations. As stated by Saldaña (1999):

The categories and themes that emerge directly during the process of the coding process may eventually become scenes in the play. Once you have your analyzed data, there are structural design features to consider: characters, dialogue/monologues, plotting, structures, scenography, and costuming. The number of research participants whose stories stand out during a review of the data become the number of characters in the script. (p. 66)

Through archival documents, the research will encompass what the current situation is in distance education and how organizational decisions at Community College #1 & Community College #2 were impacted by past actions. The use of a grounded theory, qualitative approach organizes administrators' experiences and perceptions of access to remote academic advising in distance education and ultimately creates remote student support best practices for current operations (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, this method allows the researcher to maintain a close relationship with the data and with participants' voices while engaging insightful conversations (Hays & Singh, 2011). This may consist of comparisons within and across participants, points in time, incidents, and categories (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

Additionally, this research will use a constructivist paradigm because it requires researchers to approach data with the assumption that knowledge itself is constructed and affected by people's experiences and that their experiences are meaningful, valid, and subjective (Hays & Singh, 2011). Moreover, constructivism is strongly recommended in grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014). Coupled with the constructivist paradigm, the Annotated Program Criteria Matters (2020) is used to guide the coding process. This process identifies organizational stakeholders' perceptions of access to direct and indirect remote academic advising and processes to collect student feedback and use student feedback to inform and improve access to remote services.

Triangulation

This research will use three methods to address the hypothesis by using qualitative methods (virtual interviews, archival documentation, and document analysis) to summarize findings. Data triangulation refers to using multiple sources of data to examine an assertion (Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011). As described by E. J. Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1999):

The most persuasive evidence comes through a triangulation of measurement process. If a proposition can survive the onslaught of a series of imperfect measures, with all their irrelevant error, confidence should be placed in it. Of course, confidence is increased by minimizing error in each instrument and by a reasonable belief in the different and divergent effects of the sources of error. (pp. 3-4):

Triangulation in methods, where differing processes are implemented, maximizes the validity of the research: Convergence of results from different measurements enhances validity and verification ("Encyclopedia of Research Design," 2010). As seen in Figure 3.1, this research will interpret data from virtual interviews, archival records, and document analysis) methods.

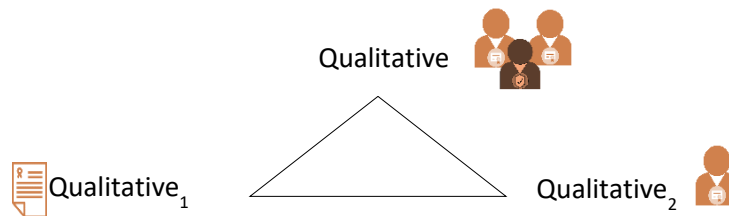


Figure 3.1 Triangulation of Methods

Archival Documentation

Existing data pertaining to race and persistence rates of distance education students may be collected at national, state, and local levels of education to form relationships between people and problems in distance education. Archival documentation address research question three. McNabb (2002) expresses, “To achieve qualitative study objectives, researchers analyze the interaction of people with problems or issues (p. 89). These interactions are studied in their context and then subjectively explained by the researcher.” As the research progressed, obtaining this documentation began with an investigation to determine if any documentation existed and determining where such documentation resided. As stated by E. Webb and Weick (1979), archival data is purposeful.

Besides the low cost of acquiring a massive amount of pertinent data, one common advantage of archival material is its nonreactivity meaning the producer of the data does not mask or shield themselves because he/she knows they are being studied by some social scientist. Through archives it is unusual to find masking or sensitivity and this makes the use of achieves attractive supplement for the university interview and the questionnaire. (p. 53)

Through the investigation, it was revealed that many of the actors with history of the online programs at the Community College #1 and Community College #2 were separated from the institution or unavailable; therefore, national, state and local race, ethnicity and persistence archival documentation was gathered to determine any connections among race, persistence, and access to quality assurance tools at both colleges and how each colleges data converged or diverged from national and state data.

Document for Analysis

Prior to virtual interviews, Community College #1 and Community College #2 condensed the Quality Online Learner Support Application and each college reviewed the Quality Online Learner Support Application to determine the impact of implementing a quality assurance tool, see Appendix K Document analysis was used to evaluate the implementation of the quality assurance tool and its ability to reduce gaps of access to remote academic advising at Community College #1 and Community College #2. Document analysis is used to address research question two and grounded theory, the process of using organizational stakeholders' perceptions of remote access to academic advising was used to answer research question two.. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating both printed and

electronic (computer–based and internet transmitted) material (Bowen, 2009). This qualitative method requires that data is examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007). Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003) refer to documents as ‘social facts’, which are produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways (p.47). Documents such as advertisements, agendas, attendance registers, minutes of meetings, manuals, background papers, books, brochures, diaries, maps, charts, letters and journals may be used for systematic evaluation as part of a study (Bowen, 2009).

As a research method, document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies—intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization, or program (Stake, 1995; Yin & Liu, 2009). Document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation ‘the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon’ (Denzin, 1970, p.291). The researcher will draw upon multiple sources of evidence (e.g., virtual interviews, document analysis, and archival data) to seek convergence or corroboration through evidence gathered and methods. By triangulating data, the researcher attempts to provide a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility’ (Eisner, 1991, p.110).

Cooperating with Community College #1, Community College #2, and the Systems Office allowed for the collection of data from system units, such as academic advising and the Online Learner Support Application. The Online Learner Support Application included reflection for

academic advising unit leads and a summary of the current state of remote access to academic advising before and after completing the Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria. In this research, it is possible for change to occur when the results of the virtual interviews, document analysis, and archival documents are given to the quality assurance team and the community college request recommendations to improve the observed situations. Discussions from the virtual interviews, archival documents, and document analysis will be discussed as well as action research discovered by Community College #1 and Community College #2 through the process of completing the Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria. Discussions will be held among organizational stakeholders towards making recommendations to refine operational procedures and steps taken to implement recommendations at each community college.

Analysis Across Data Sources

The analysis across data sources started with open coding of each of the three transcripts (Charmaz, 2014) using a three-step approach. In step one, I checked for accuracy between the MS Teams voice recording and the transcript (each transcript was automatically generated by MS Teams by way of the saved voice recording). In step two, the I coded transcripts line by line (each transcript was coded a day after the interview) to identify specific data, such as domains, phrases, or key words (Hays & Singh, 2011), to “summarize and account” for all data (Charmaz, 2014). Upon evaluating the coded transcripts, the initial coding yielded 20 unique codes. Step three consisted of focused coding (Charmaz, 2014). During the focused coding processes, the data was arranged within the theoretical framework by concentrating on organization

stakeholder's perspectives of students access to remote academic services and direct and indirect access to these services drawn from the Annotated Program Criteria (Table 2.3 and Table 2.4). The Annotated Program Criteria was used as a conceptual framework for the development of common themes from the data via the grounded theory process (Charmaz, 2014), specifically in the axial coding process. The focus coding process yielded six categories from the original 20 themes. I then used an axial coding process to refine my categories into themes (Charmaz, 2014); at this point of the coding process, I used components of the Annotated Program Criteria (e.g., Evidence to Submit) to bring theoretical structure to my codes. I continued to refine my data using the axial coding process, which produced 15 themes. The fourth step and final step of my analysis across data sources highlight theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). To bring life to this effort, I organized my coding into six categories, fifteen themes and four recommendations into a Pre-theoretical model representing their relationship (Figure 3.2).

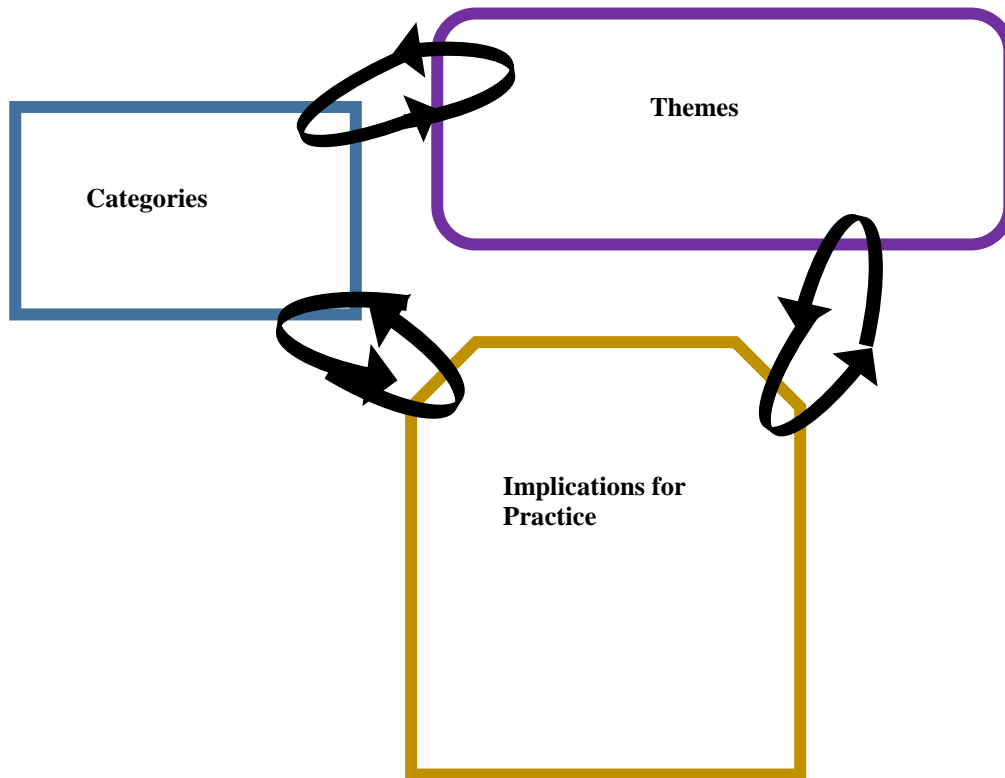


Figure 3.2 Pre-Theoretical Model Relationship.

Virtual Interviews

Qualitative data will be collected through virtual interviews with participants at Community College #1 and Community College #2. There are three reasons for conducting virtual interviews: (1) to supplement documentation gathered; (2) to learn where documentation lived; and (3) to understand how decisions were made and how policy became practice. These three reasons will be used to address research question one. In most cases, documentation did not exist and interviewing was the only method available to understand the stakeholders' perception of access to remote academic advising and processes used to continuously improve students' access to remote academic advising. Using open-ended questions when interviewing

participants provided respondents with opportunities to answer using their language. Semi structured questions were intentionally used to bring ease and flexibility as Maxwell (2012), explained:

Some qualitative researchers believe that, because qualitative research is necessary inductive and “grounded”, constructs leads to lack of flexibility to respond to emergent insights, and can create methodological “tunnel vision” in making sense of data. (p. 80)

Participants were asked the same question for a given topic, see Appendix B and Appendix C. The importance of maintaining the integrity of the interview instrument (i.e. questions) is described by Drew and Hardman (1985):

Instrumentation is defined as “changes” in the calibration of a measuring instrument or changes in the observers that may influence the scores or measures obtained. When something occurs midway through the experiment that changed the calibration of the instrument, such as adjustment by a well-meaning service representative, all the data collected from that point on would be systematically different from those data collected before the change. (pp. 134-135).

In person interviews with the Quality Assurance Team from Community College #1 and Community College #2, consisted of semi-structured guiding questions with different pending questions depending on each interview. Interview questions for Quality Assurance Teams at each community college will be the same. According to Lofland (1995, p. 18) “Unstructured interviewing is a guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis.” Feedback from interviews will be documented as field notes and will be entered into a computer for later retrieval.

Questionnaires versus Interviews

The use of virtual interviews instead of an online questionnaire was decided due to the sensitive nature of the questions. Online questionnaires tend to limit topics and respondents are reluctant to open emails with hyperlinks and or attachments for fear of downloading a computer virus. Wright (2005) states invitations to take questionnaires may be unwanted or considered spam in which it may be deleted. Researchers also have concerns about response time of respondents, stating that response take a long time to complete a questionnaire or forget about it all together. The fixed format of a questionnaire does not permit the respondent to provide additional information that is sometimes spontaneously volunteered in a face-to-face interview (Valcik, 2016). (Drew & Hardman, 1985) discussed:

There are many intricacies to questionnaire studies that are not apparent on the surface, and some of them relate directly to the instrument....It must, in large part, stand on its own because a researcher is not usually present to prompt a response or clarify areas in which the subject may be confused (p. 98).

During the scope of the Online Learner Support Candidacy, three different interview schedules were created to investigate past and present concerns of access to academic advising. Prior to conducting the virtual interviews, a Pledge of Confidentiality from all respondents was signed and collected from participants. According to Goddard and Villanova (2006)

Confidentiality is the more frequent level of protection given to survey respondents, whether they are responding to a questionnaire or interview. In the case confidentiality, the specific individual's responses are identifiable to the researcher, but are not disclosed to other parties. Frequently, researchers provide respondents with a pledge of confidentiality, and this is usually honored by securing all survey responses and reporting only aggregate (i.e. grouped) data that prohibits identification of individual responses to questions. (p. 115)

The eight interview questions were not shared with the Online and College executives beforehand nor was the two interview questions shared with the Administrator of Academic Advising, so there is confidence that bias in the interview questions will not be a concern. It is perceived that sharing the same employer does improve access to participants. As the principal investigator, all virtual interviews are administered off-campus after business hours using Microsoft Teams, a web-conferencing tool. Feedback from virtual interviews will be documented as field notes and transcribed into Microsoft Word containing each respondent's interview question(s) and feedback. All transcripts from virtual interviews are emailed to participants of the study for feedback. In addition, during the research period, participants provided the researcher with corrections to the interpretation and challenge what they perceived to be 'wrong' interpretations via email and approve or reject feedback. Finally, the findings are presented to the participants in a separate meeting to confirm the theory. Interview questions are crafted to capture information on how online learning evolved and to determine why the Community College #1 and Community College #2 are pursuing the Online Learning Support Candidacy.

The first interview, Appendix B, consisted of the evolution of online learning at the Community College #1 and Community College #2. There were eight questions provided to the College Executive of Academic Affairs and the Online Executive at each of the community colleges.

The second interview, Appendix C, posed questions for Administrator of Academic Advising Community College #1 and Community College #2. There are two questions on the value of a statement of commitment, which is declaration of how the remote academic advising unit supports and promotes student success.

Data Collection

This research examined organizational stakeholders' perceptions about the satisfaction of remote academic advising and if access to remote academic advising is improved by undergoing the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Program Review, which is a quality assurance tool. Online organizational stakeholders' perception of data are collected for one full academic year where two organizations, will pursue the Online Learner Support Candidacy, a pathway that prepares an institution to successfully meet the criteria of the Online Learner Support Program Review. Although the Online Learning Support Program Review allowed Community College #1 and Community College #2 to self-evaluate all twelve support service units (orientation to online study, technical support, academic advising, proctoring and student authentication, tutoring, grade appeals, remote library access, accessibility services, records and registration, financial aid services, billing, institutional and student policies), the primary investigator will only feature data from the remote academic advising unit at the organization.

The organizations in this research will be referred to as "Community College #1" and "Community College #2" whereas the college leads (e.g., faculty, staff and upper administration) representing each of the twelve support service units, will be referred to as the "Quality

Assurance Team”, while the administrator for academic advising will be referred to as “Administrator of Academic Advising.” Additionally, the coach, guiding Community College #1 and Community College #2 through the Program Review, referred to as the “Certification Coach” and the executives at Community College #1 and Community College #2, consisting of presidents and vice presidents, referred to as “College Executive.” Lastly, Community College #1 and Community College #2 College Executive report to a systems office. In this community college system there are five individually accredited colleges; two of the colleges in the community college system are featured in this study. The systems office referred to as, “Systems Office”, the head of distance education at the Systems Office referred the “Online Executive”, and the chief of support services at the Systems Office referred to as “Support Service Executive”. The names of the interviewed respondents were withheld for confidentiality reasons. This research required various data collection techniques that relied on qualitative methods, including interviews, archival records, and document analysis. Maxwell (2012) emphasized the following:

Collecting information using a variety of sources and methods is one aspect of what is called triangulation (Fielding, 2012). This strategy reduces the risk that your conclusion will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating. (pp. 93-94)

Interviews were conducted with Quality Assurance Team members, Executive Council and the Support Service Executor at Systems Office, who at the community colleges? Community College #1 and Community College #2 familiar with the history of the student support unit at

each Community College and Systems Office operations. This research relies on documentation provided by state accrediting agencies, other community college organization structures and historical records describing the evolution of each community college. To establish a timeline of events, historical records will be gathered from Executive Council, Quality Assurance Team and the Academic Coach at Community College #1 and Community College # 2.

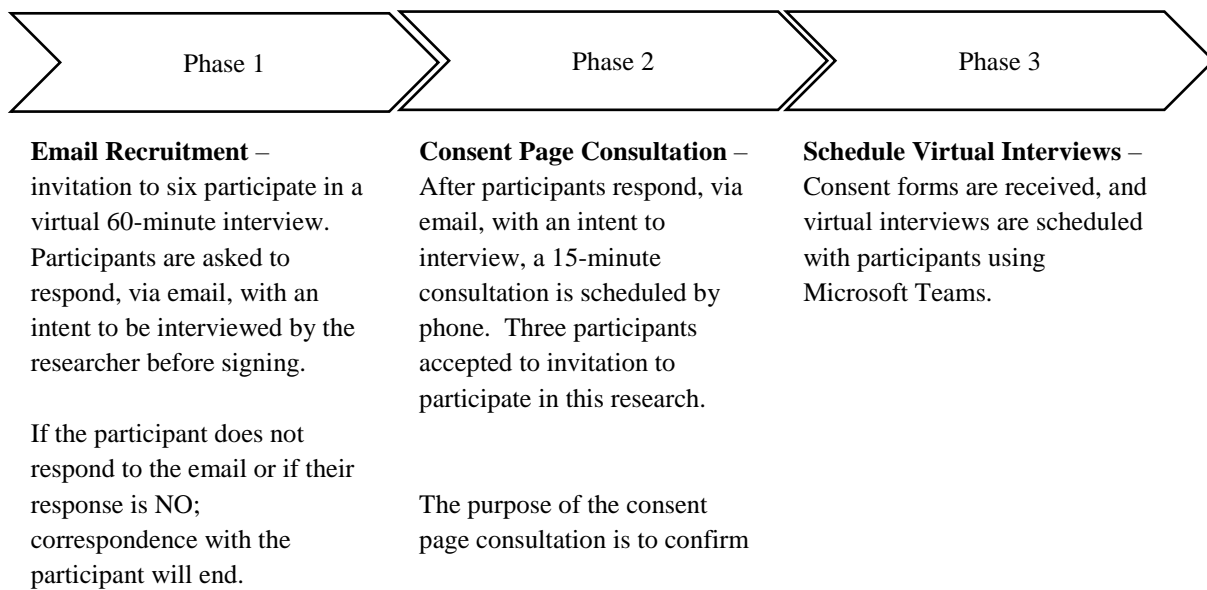


Figure 3.3 Three-Phase Participant Recruitment Approach

For phase one, the researcher sent an electronic email to six participants requesting their participation in a virtual interview for the purposes of research. During this phase, each participant reads the purpose of the research and how and why the data provided will be protected and treated as confidential. After reviewing the email, participants are asked to respond to the email with an answer of “Yes, I intend to participate in a virtual interview,” or “No, I do not intend to participate in a virtual interview.” All correspondence with participants

will end should they respond with an answer of “No.” Three participants said they would not participate in the study and three participants agreed to participate in the study. Participants who respond with an answer of “Yes” will move to phase two of the recruitment phase. Phase two consists of a consent page consultation. After participants respond, via email, with an intent to interview, a 15-minute consultation is scheduled by phone. The purpose of the consent page consultation is to confirm each participant understands to what he or she are consenting before signing the consent form and sending it to the researcher. Upon receiving participants’ consent forms, participants enter into phase three to schedule virtual interviews.

Trustworthiness

Researchers conducting qualitative studies use an interpretive paradigm think in terms of trustworthiness as opposed to the conventional, positivistic criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Denzin, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1999; Padgett, 2004). Validity and trustworthiness speaks to the quality of the project, the rigor of the methodology, and whether readers of the research findings think the researcher established trustworthiness (Aguinaldo, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1999). Guba and S. Lincoln (1985) states:

The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: how can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? What arguments can be mounted, what criteria invoked, what questions asked, what would be persuasive on this issue? (p. 398)

Trustworthiness of interviews are approached in two ways: (a) trustworthiness of the researcher and (b) trustworthiness of the field notes from interviews. The trustworthiness of

virtual interviews will be established through member checking. Feedback from virtual interviews will be documented as field notes, transcribed into Microsoft Word containing each respondents interview question(s) and feedback. All transcripts from virtual interviews are emailed to participants of the study for feedback. In addition, during the research period, participants provided the researcher with corrections to the interpretation and challenge what they perceived to be ‘wrong’ interpretations via email and approve or reject feedback. Finally, the findings are presented to the participants in a separate meeting to confirm the theory.

The researcher established confirmability by reviewing recorded virtual interviews a day after the initial interviews, eliminating the researchers’ opinions to influence respondents’ feedback. Confirmability concerns the aspect of neutrality as explained by (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1999):

The interpretation should not be based on the researcher’s preferences and viewpoints but needs to be grounded in the data. Here, the focus is on the interpretation process embedded in the process of analysis. The strategy needed to ensure dependability and confirmability is known as an audit trail. You are responsible for providing a complete set of notes on decisions made during the research process, research team meetings, reflective thoughts, sampling, research materials adopted, emergence of the findings and information about the data management. This enables the auditor to study the transparency of the research path. (p. 122)

Setting

Community College #1 is located in south-central Texas and currently has the largest online community, in this area, educating over 3,500 fully online students per semester by offering ten fully online degrees and eleven fully online certificate programs. Community

College #1 is part of a community college system which is one of five affiliated colleges geographically distributed in the south-central Texas area. The open-enrollment admissions policy and affordable tuition have opened doors to economic opportunity for low-income individuals since 1925. The college educates a large number of low-income, minority, first-generation-in-college (first-generation) students who need intensive support to succeed in higher education. Sixty-point-seven percent (60.7%) of all students enrolled in online programs at Community College #1 are Hispanic (Community College #1 Certified Fall Student Profile, 2017). Students aged twenty-five and older represented approximately one-third of all students in fall 2017, and 81.4% of all students attended part-time (Community College #1 Certified Fall Student Profile, 2017). Community College #1 Fall 2018 online learner student profile analysis, revealed that there is a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students taking online classes (43.9% vs 37.2%). Traditionally, distance education students on average take 4.99 credit hours a semester vs the face-to-face population (9.35 credit hours).

Community College #2 is located in south-central Texas and educates over 2,100 fully online students per semester by offering five fully online certificate programs. Community College #2 is part of a community college system which is one of five affiliated colleges geographically distributed in the south-central Texas area. The college educates a large number of low-income, minority, first-generation-in-college (first-generation) students who need intensive support to succeed in higher education. Currently, fifty-six percent (56%) of all students enrolled in online programs are Hispanic. Students aged twenty-five and older

represented approximately one-third of all students in fall 2017, and 88% of all students attended part-time (Community College #2 Certified Fall Student Profile, 2017).

The criteria for selecting the site were: (a) public community college; (b) a traditional campus; (c) diverse population of online students (race/ethnicity); and (d) offering fully online degree programs and fully online classes at the undergraduate level.

Participant Recruitment. Before sampling, the researcher secured institutional review board approval. Upon approval, the researcher began a purposive sample of participants who meet the inclusion criteria (Hays & Singh, 2011). Since the researcher is a Certification Coach with both community colleges in the study, participant selection relies on the judgment of the researcher as to who would add value to understanding perceptions of students' access to remote academic support services. To meet the inclusion criteria, participants had to be identified as an academic advisor administrator, an executive administrator overseeing student support services, and an executive administrator overseeing distance education. There were no exceptions based on participants' age, gender, racial, or ethnic identity. This sampling strategy and inclusion criteria were selected because participants have oversight of academic advising, institutional academic/campus support services or distance education programs, all of which are institutional roles that add value to understanding students' perceptions of access to remote academic support services. In addition, all participants are employed at higher educational institution involved in this research and would provide valuable data to outline best practices for remote access to academic advising. The recruitment process was a three-phase approach (Figure 3.2).

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this research is to fill the gap in the literature which examines organizational stakeholders' perceptions' of remote academic advising by: (a) Determining the relationship among race, gender, and persistence for community college students in distance education; and (b) Determine the impact of quality assurance tools as a strategy for promoting access to remote academic advising. The elimination of a longitudinal perspective is a limitation in this research. The process of sharing organizational experiences throughout this process and the ways these experiences brought change to the institutional operations, processes and procedures will be bolstered by using multiple qualitative research methodology to triangulate the data.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this research is explore organizational stakeholders' perceptions (e.g., college administrators and college staff) of access to remote academic advising by implementing the Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria, a quality assurance tool. This chapter articulates findings discovered after undergoing a detailed data collection and data analyzation across virtual interviews, archival data, and document analysis before and after the implementation of the Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria.

During the span of one year, Community College #1 and Community College #2 completed the Quality Matters (QM) Online Learner Support Candidacy, which led to a QM Online Learning Certification. The candidacy uses a quality assurance tool (Annotated Program Criteria) to evaluate an organization's delivery of services in the area of remote student support. To understand how certain situations evolved, this research will assemble data on current policies and procedures for remote access to academic advising. Through the collection of three research methods, including archival data, document analysis, and virtual interviews from organizational stakeholders (e.g., Online Executive (OE), College Executive of Academic Affairs (CE) and Administrator of Academic Advising (AAA)), information for recommendations are formulated. This chapter will review the evolution of distance education at the featured community colleges, discuss current policies and procedures for remote access to academic advising, and explain documentation collected for archival data, document analysis and virtual interviews. Data collected will be analyzed to identify any gaps in providing distance education students with remote access to academic advising, and then the three research

methodologies will be intersected to allow accurate analysis to be conducted thus yielding major findings.

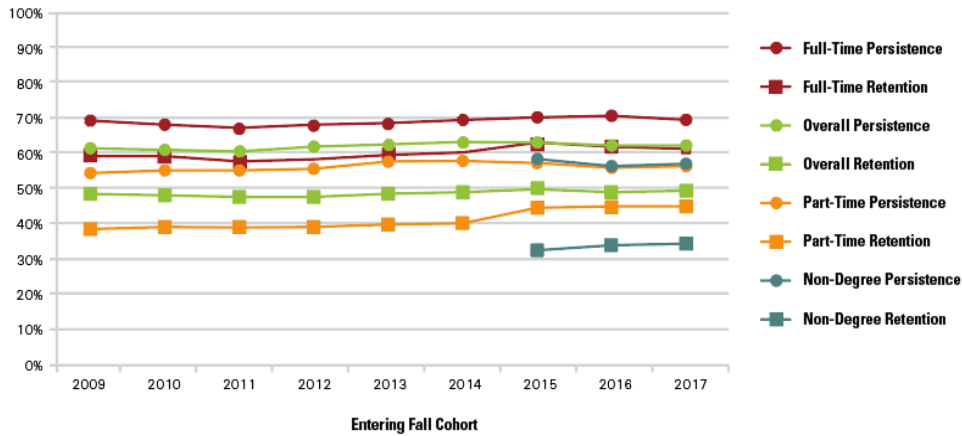
Data Collection & Policies and Procedures

The existing policies and procedures are obtained from Community College#1 and Community College #2 digital student catalog, student support services website and the distance-learning website. I, the researcher, served as the Certification Coach for the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Candidacy for Community College #1 and Community College #2. As the Certification Coach, I assisted each college by providing them with clarification on the Annotated Program Criteria, collaborated with organizational stakeholders to collect and analyze evidence (to align with Annotated Program Criteria, Table 2.6 and Table 2.7), host round table discussions, deliver deadline reminders, celebrate victories and share learned experiences. To gather established policies and procedures to satisfy Annotated Program Criteria, the Academic Advising Administrators from Community College #1 and Community College #2 realized they did not have remote academic advising support for distance education students documented digitally or in print. Rather, academic advising support documented in digital form (e.g., student catalog, student support services webpage, or academic advising webpage) referenced types of support available for on-campus students. Each college asked students seeking additional support for academic advising to physically report to campus to speak with an academic advising expert. I found existing policies and procedures from the academic advising website, which provided students with contact information to advisors, but did not provide an explanation of how to

access remote advising services or the type of remote advising services available. In short, the Academic Advising Administrators for Community College #1 and Community College #2 concluded that current policies and procedures did not provide direct and indirect support to remote academic advising for distance education students.

Archival Data

Since many of the actors with full history of the online programs at the Community College #1 and Community College #2 were separated from the institution or unavailable, it was important to collect archival data to explain why Community College #1 and Community College #2 chose to pursue the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification. According to the ("Graduation and Retention Rates Report," 2018), students are attending two-year institutions with an average persistence at a rate of 62.3% and are retained at an average of 50% between Fall 2017, Fall 2016, and Fall 2017 (see Figure 4.1).



		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Full-Time	Persistence	69.0%	67.7%	66.7%	67.8%	68.5%	68.2%	70.2%	70.6%	69.7%
	Retention	59.3%	58.5%	57.4%	58.1%	59.1%	60.0%	61.6%	61.0%	60.1%
Overall	Persistence	61.0%	60.7%	60.2%	61.3%	62.2%	62.7%	62.7%	62.2%	62.3%
	Retention	48.0%	47.9%	47.2%	47.4%	48.1%	48.5%	49.1%	48.9%	48.9%
Part-Time	Persistence	53.9%	54.7%	54.8%	56.1%	57.2%	57.7%	56.9%	55.6%	56.3%
	Retention	38.1%	38.6%	38.6%	38.8%	39.4%	39.8%	44.2%	44.5%	44.9%
Non-Degree	Persistence							58.4%	56.5%	57.2%
	Retention							32.0%	33.4%	34.1%

Figure 4.1 First-Year Persistence & Retention for Two-Year Colleges, Snapshot Report, 2018., National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/snapshotreport35-first-year-persistence-and-retention/>

Community College #1 and Community College #2 reported an average persistence rate of 39.2% for students enrolled in a fully online program (never step foot on-campus) and 52.4% for students who take at least one course online, which is 10% lower than the national persistence rate average of 62.3% (see Figure 4.2).

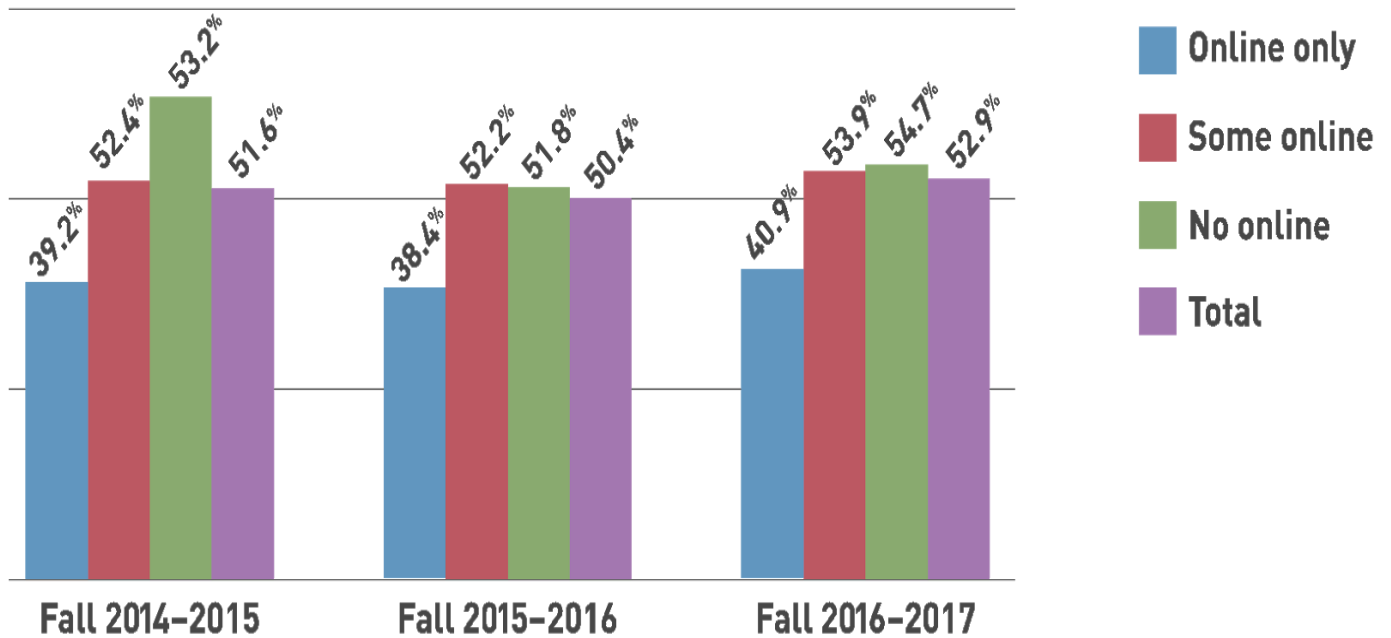


Figure 4.2 Combined College Report of Fall 2018 Exclusive Online Institutional Research Profile, 2018, Community College #1 & Community College #2

Equally important as identifying gaps in persistence at national and local levels in higher education is understanding the student profile at an institution to determine the audience largely impacted by these gaps.

According to McFarland et al. (2018), Black students are represented in distance education at 42.5%, Hispanic at 37.9%, Asian at 38.9%, American Indian at 47.5, and Pacific Islander at 42.4%; while White students are represented at 45.5% (Figure 1.1). Community College #1 and Community College #2 are individually accredited institutions who are part of a System (an aggregate of institutions under the administration of a chancellor who represents and is responsible to Board of Directors for that local area). The college systems' distance education race and ethnicity profile consist of 56% Hispanic, 30.4% White, 10% African American, 2.9%

Asian, 0.5% other. The other category in each figure represents students who claimed other races (e.g., American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, two or more races and Unknowns or Not Reported) see Figure 4.3.

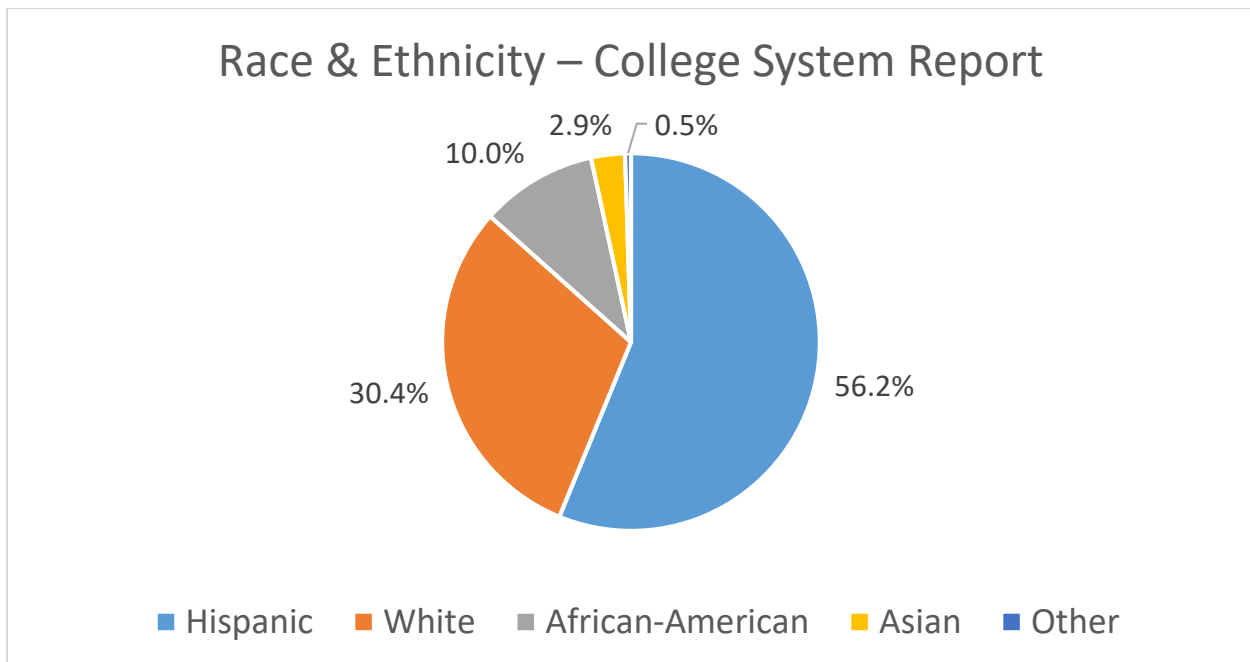


Figure 4.3 Fall 2018 College System Race and Ethnicity Profile, 2018, Community College #1 & Community College #2

Specifically, Community College #1 race and ethnicity profile is 56.5% Hispanic, 30.2% White, 9.8% African American, 2.7% Asian and 0.7% other (see Figure 5.4).

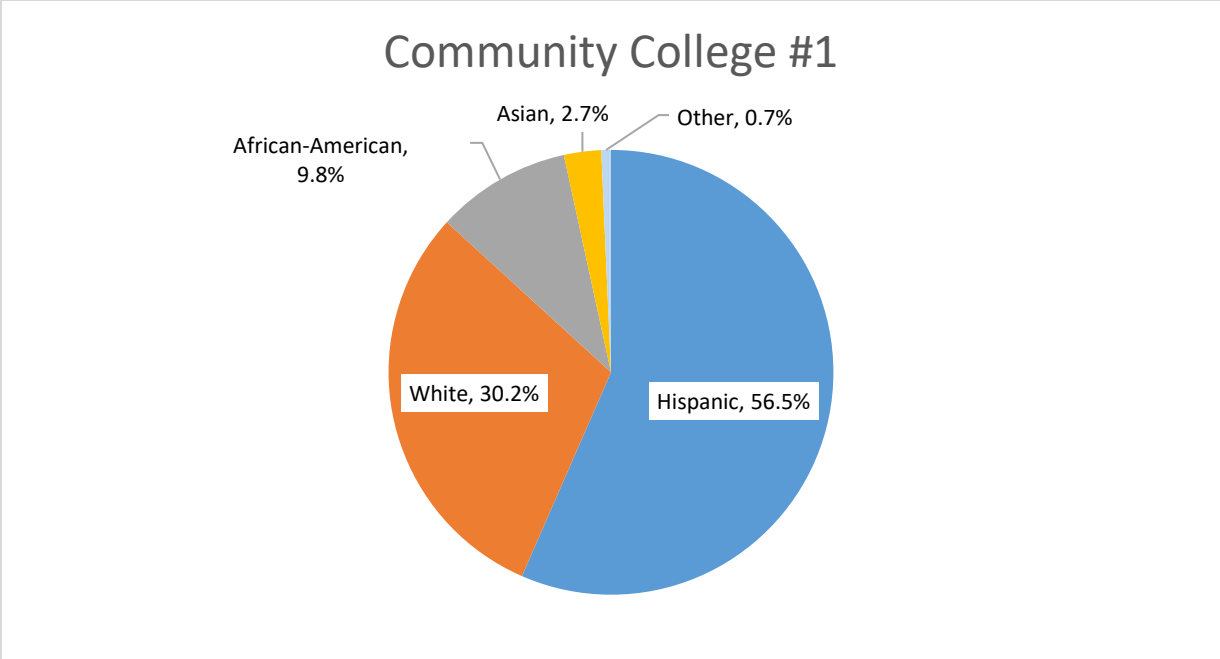


Figure 4.4 Fall 2018 Race and Ethnicity Profile, 2018, Community College #1.

Community College #2 race and ethnicity profile is 48.2% Hispanic, 31.4% White, 13.9 African American, 3.0% Asian, 3.6% other (see Figure 4.5).

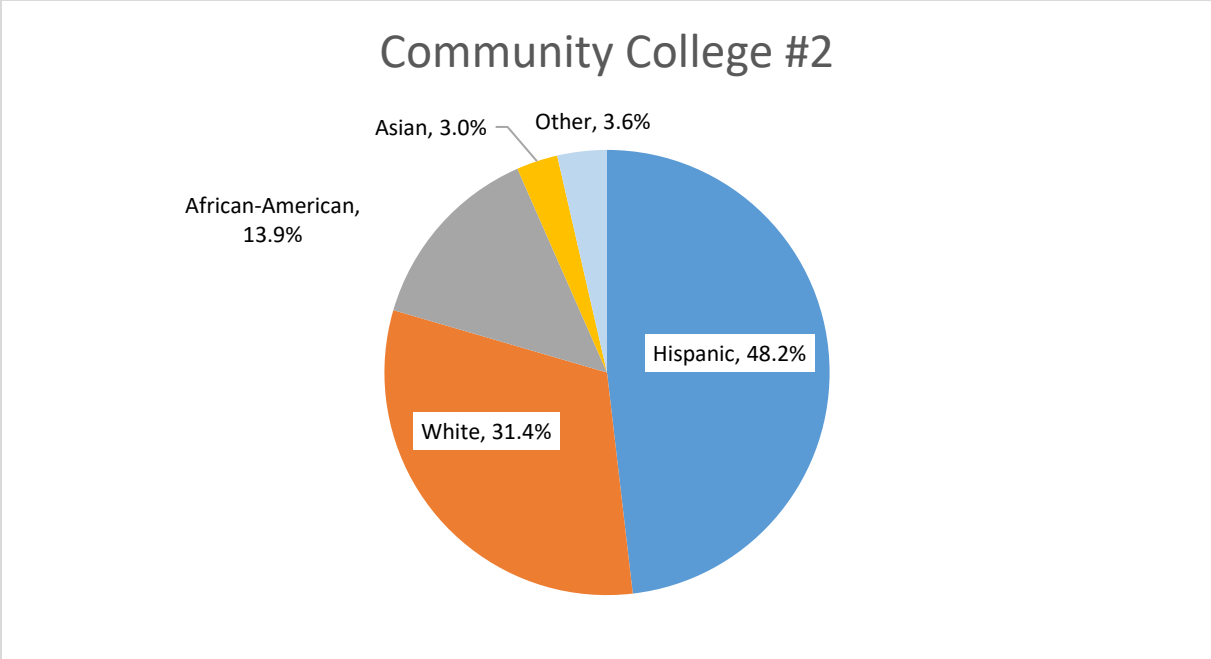


Figure 4.5 Fall 2018 Race and Ethnicity Profile, 2018, Community College #2.

The archival data shows that traditionally underrepresented students are a large constituent group in distance education at Community College #1 and Community College #2, which is consistent to the national race/ethnicity profile in distance education. Knowing this, it is clear to see that race and persistence is a factor in distance education that needs attention. Kuhn (2008) and LaPadula (2003) say students who engage in student support services tend to be more successful in persisting in and graduating from college than those who do not. Bailey (2005) found that if institutions are to improve persistence, they must focus on the factors that distance education student’s face. Britto and Rush (2013) and Moore, Bartkovich, Fetzner, and Ison (2003) identified six factors that negatively influenced student retention and persistence. These factors include a large course load, a lack of experience in higher education, a lack of experience

with online courses, busy lives outside of coursework, a young age, and a lack of access to technology and computers. It is possible to find a connection between race, low persistence, and the lack of access to student support services in distance education. This connection alone may be an entry point into the Online Learner Support Program Review for some higher education institutions as it may provide an avenue towards shrinking persistence gaps. Consequently, shrinking persistence gaps in distance education was the reason behind Community College #1 and Community College #2, pursuit of the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Candidacy (to close any gaps in remote access to academic advising). The mission of the online programs for these institutions is best described in the Request for Participation for Community College #1 and Community College #2 as noted in the statement below: (Appendix F)

The goal of this year-long collaboration is to identify gaps of equity and access to online learner support services, and collaborate on solutions to close those gaps. Quality Matters Online Learner Support Program Review help ensure that students have access to essential academic resources and support services to ensure their success in an online learning environment. These reviews also provide further evidence to current students, board members, and accreditors that colleges are committed to continuous quality improvement for online learners.

The program review process will also assist the college in identifying strengths, challenges, and opportunities in serving online learners. Shared solutions as well as those unique to each College's context and culture can be defined and implemented. Additionally, the Online Learner Support Certification would add value to the Distance Learning area of the fifth year accreditation reports and show the college commitment to online learners. (p.93)

The Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification is an evaluation of critical student and academic services needed for learner success and uses learner feedback to improve academic services.

Document Analysis

Prior to the virtual interviews, the researcher reviewed Community College #1 and Community College #2 condensed Online Learner Support Application (Appendix G and Appendix H) to gain an understanding of the types of remote access to academic advising currently available to distance education students before undergoing the candidacy and after completing the candidacy. The condensed version of the Online Learner Support Application for both community colleges focuses on one-unit (i.e., academic advising) since this unit is the center point of this research.

Community College #1 condensed Online Learner Support Application (Appendix G), refers to Annotated Program Criteria 1 and Criteria 2. First, I will discuss the data collection of Annotated Program Criteria 1, which addresses evidence that provides students with direct and indirect support to academic advising. The evidence to submit to meet Criteria 1 includes: 1) A list of links to the listed services; 2) An explanation of how each service supports the online learner and promotes learner success (e.g., statement of commitment); and 3) A plan to address any identified gaps in service. I, the researcher took on the role of Certification Coach for Community College #1, collaborated with Program Liaison (College Executive) and the Academic Advising Administrator to evaluate if the academic advising unit met Criteria 1. My role as the Certification Coach was to guide the Quality Assurance Team (e.g., Academic Advising Administrator, Certification Coach, Program Liaison and Online Executive) through the program review. When reviewing Community College #1 academic advising and distance

learning webpage, the Quality Assurance Team found no evidence of any statement of commitment for remote academic advising for distance education students and no links to remote advising services (Appendix G). Since there was no statement of commitment found on the webpage, the Academic Advising Administrator created one that would be reviewed and approved by the College Executive. Community College #1 plans to address gaps in service (e.g., no statement of commitment or links to remote services) and will result in the creation of a web-hub. The web-hub (a one-stop shop for all remote student support services at the college) will feature access to remote advising. Remote advising services will include online advising through Zoom, a web-conferencing tool. Zoom is provided to all registered students free of charge. With Zoom, distance education students at Community College #1 will meet virtually with academic advisors. Meeting virtually will provide students an opportunity to see their academic advisor and use features that allow them to share documents, discuss degree plans, registration steps and other topics. The web-hub will reside on the distance learning and academic advising webpages.

Annotated Program Criteria 2 moved beyond access to services and focused on robust process to collect, distribute, and use student feedback to improve remote academic advising services. Again, I refer to Community College #1 condensed Online Learner Support Application (Appendix G, page). I, the Program Liaison and the Academic Advising Administrator collected evidence to submit to meet Criteria 2. This evidence included: 1) A description of data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts; 2) Representative survey data documenting learner satisfaction with online campus services over

the past three years; and 3) Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback. Community College #2 Quality Assurance Team (e.g., Academic Advising Administrator, Certification Coach, Program Liaison and Online Executive) reviewed the 2016-2018 Advising Satisfaction Survey. During 2016-2018, an Academic Advising Survey was distributed to all students (e.g., on-campus or online) who received advising on a monthly basis. This survey was distributed via email, or on-campus or online to all students (based upon their preference). The survey comprised of nine questions. Five of these questions measured student satisfaction according to these criteria: student advising experience; advisor courteousness; student career goal; academic policies; and students meeting with their advisors in a timely manner. In Fall 2016, 696 students completed the Advising Satisfaction Survey (Appendix G) of these 12 were distance education students. Eighty-three percent (83%) of distance education students either agreed or strongly agreed that their overall advising experience met their academic and career needs. Ninety-Two percent (92%) felt they were able to meet with their advisor in a timely manner. In Fall 2017, 1240 students completed the survey; of these 400 were distance education students. Eighty-five percent (85%) of distance education students either agreed or strongly agreed that their overall advising experience met their academic and career needs. Eighty-three percent (83%) of students felt they were able to meet with their advisor in a timely manner. In Fall 2018, 801 students completed the Advising Satisfaction Survey; of these 225 were distance education students. Eighty-six percent (86%) of distance education students either agreed or strongly agreed that their overall advising experience met their academic and career needs. Eighty-three percent (83%) of students felt they were able

to meet with their advisor in a timely manner. During the span of 2016-2018, the survey results show that distance education students (19.5%) were not provided adequate information about academic policies (e.g., academic policy, academic advising, technical training, etc.) and their overall satisfaction with academic advising decreased.

Through the candidacy, the Quality Assurance Team identified gaps in their process for collecting and analyzing survey data. First, it was discovered that it was difficult to distinguish survey feedback from on-campus students vs. online students, since there was no self-identifying question to capture student identity (e.g., online student or on-campus student). Second, there was no consistency in how students received surveys (e.g., student email or hard copy of survey on-campus). Third, there were no race/ethnicity questions on the survey. Fourth, students were not asked about their experiences accessing remote advising services and finally, there was no consistent process in place to use student feedback to improve delivery of services (policies, organization, or resource changes because of survey feedback). As a plan to address the gaps, the Quality Assurance Team recommended developing a Combined Learner Feedback Survey with questions from each student support unit (e.g., remote library access, orientation to online study, technical support, academic advising, proctoring and student authentication, tutoring, grade appeals, accessibility services, records and registration, financial aid services and billing). The survey consists of two questions from each unit about students' access to remote unit services, a race/ethnicity question, a self-identifying question, and a student load question (full-time or part-time). The survey will be distributed each semester, via college email, to students taking one or more online courses. Survey results will be analyzed yearly and recommendations

to improve the delivery of services will be provided to College Executives.

Community College #2 condensed Online Learner Support Application (Appendix L), refers to the Annotated Program Criteria 1 and Criteria 2. First, I will discuss the data collection of Annotated Program Criteria 1, which addresses evidence that provides students with direct and indirect support to academic advising. The evidence to submit to meet Criteria 1 includes: 1) A list of links to the listed services, 2) An explanation of how each service supports the online learner and promotes learner success (e.g., statement of commitment), and 3) A plan to address any identified gaps in service. I, the researcher as well as the Certification Coach for Community College #1, collaborated with Program Liaison and the Academic Advising Administrator to evaluate if the academic advising unit met Criteria 1. When reviewing Community College #2 academic advising and distance learning webpage, the Quality Assurance Team found no evidence of any statement of commitment for remote academic advising for distance education students and no links to remote advising services (Appendix H). The lack of a statement of commitment and links to access remote academic services was documented as an identified service gap. Since there was no statement of commitment found on the webpage, the Academic Advising Administrator created one that would be reviewed and approved by the College Executive.

To address the gaps in service (e.g., no statement of commitment or links to remote services) Community College #2 will participate in the creation of a web-hub. The web-hub (a one-stop shop for all remote student support services at the college) will feature access to remote advising. Remote advising services will include online advising through Zoom, a web-

conferencing tool. Zoom is provided to all registered students free of charge. With Zoom, distance education students at Community College #1 will meet virtually with academic advisors. Meeting virtually will provide students an opportunity to see their academic advisor and use features that allow them to share documents, discuss degree plans, registration steps and other topics. The web-hub will reside on the distance learning and academic advising webpages.

Community College #2 addressed Annotated Program Criteria 2, which focused on the evaluation of robust processes to collect, distribute, and use student feedback to inform and improve remote academic advising. Again, I refer to Community College #1 condensed Online Learner Support Application (Appendix G). I, the Program Liaison and the Academic Advising Administrator collected evidence to submit to meet Criteria 2. This evidence included: 1) A description of data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts; 2) Representative survey data documenting learner satisfaction with online campus services over the past three years; and 3) Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback. Community College #2 Quality Assurance Team (e.g., Academic Advising Administrator, Certification Coach, Program Liaison and Executive Council) reviewed the 2016-2018 Academic Advising Survey. Community College #2 Academic Advising Survey was distributed to any student (e.g., on-campus or online) who received advising. Nine questions comprised the survey. Five of these questions measured student satisfaction according to these criteria: student advising experience; advisor courteousness; student career goal; academic policies; and students meeting with their advisors in a timely manner. The survey results for all students show a 90-97% satisfaction with academic

advising from 2016-2018. These results of the survey help maintain a high level of quality service for all students; however, the survey does not delineate the separation between online and on-campus student populations.

Through the candidacy, the Quality Assurance Team identified gaps in their process for collecting and analyzing survey data. First, it was discovered that it was difficult to distinguish survey feedback from on-campus students vs. online students, since there was no self-identifying question to capture student identity (e.g., online student or on-campus student). Second, there was no consistency in how students received surveys (e.g., student email or hard copy of survey on-campus). Third, there were no race/ethnicity questions on the survey. Fourth, students were not asked about their experiences accessing remote advising services and finally, there was no consistent process in place to use student feedback to improve delivery of services (policies, organization or resources changes as a result of survey feedback). As a plan to address the gaps, the Quality Assurance Team recommended developing a Combined Learner Feedback Survey with questions from each student support unit (e.g., remote library access, orientation to online study, technical support, academic advising, proctoring and student authentication, tutoring, grade appeals, accessibility services, records and registration, financial aid services and billing). The survey consists of two questions from each unit about students' access to remote unit services, a race/ethnicity question, a self-identifying question, and a student load question (full-time or part-time). The survey will be distributed each semester via college email to students taking one or more online courses. Survey results will be analyzed yearly and recommendations to improve the delivery of services will be provided to College Executives.

Attributes of Public Higher Education Online Programs

This research examines the experiences of two community colleges in their pursuit of the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification to improve student access to remote academic advising. The purpose of this section is to show typical attributes all public higher education institutions share, which supports that the Annotated Program Criteria can be used at scale to improve remote access to foster services at any public community college or university offering online programs. The focus of this research are two public community colleges (e.g., Community College #1 and Community College #2). Each college’s data was collected and compared to national enrollment metrics of public higher education to show alignments of how both community colleges in this study have similar attributes as comparable institutions. It is very typical that all public higher education will share common attributes such as general education requirements, online courses/online programs, concerns with persistence and retention, no finite budget for distance education (there are no unlimited funds), and a large enrollment of traditionally underrepresented students (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Typical Public Higher Education Attributes for Online Programs

Public Institutions	Enrollment		Distance Education Status			Retention		Persistence		Race/Ethnicity in Distance Education				Accreditation Agency	Undergrad Gender	
	Full-time	Part-time	Enrolled only online	Enrolled in some online	Not enrolled in any online courses	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Southern Association of Colleges and Schools-Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)	Male	Female
Community College #1	20%	80%	22%	15%	64%	58%	37%			3%	7%	62%	24%	(SACSCOC)	40%	60%
Community College #2	13%	87%	27%	18%	55%	56%	40%			2%	9%	59%	24%	(SACSCOC)	44%	56%

Public Institutions	Enrollment		Distance Education Status			Retention		Persistence		Race/Ethnicity in Distance Education				Accreditation Agency	Undergrad Gender	
Lone Star College System	27%	73%	16%	24%	61%	54%	41%			7%	14%	38%	31%	(SACSCOC)	40%	60%
Houston Community College System	29%	71%	15%	23%	62%	66%	47%			10%	28%	35%	12%	(SACSCOC)	41%	59%
University of Texas San Antonio	81%	19%	2%	31%	67%	73%	55%			6%	9%	57%	23%	(SACSCOC)	50	50
Texas A&M University College Station	88%	12%	0%	7%	92%	92%	91%			8%	3%	24	60%	(SACSCOC)	47%	53%
University of Houston-Downtown	49%	51%	20%	32%	47%	71%	60%			9%	19%	49%	15%	(SACSCOC)	40%	60%

From “National Center for Education Statistics” by IES, Fall 2017.

<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?s=TX&zc=78264&zd=200&l=91+92&ct=1&ic=2&of=3&pg=1>

The Typical Public Higher Education Attributes for Online Programs Table reveals similarities that exist between public two-year and four-year institutions offering online programs. The shared enrollment characteristics allows researchers to replicate the framework used in the Annotated Program Criteria to determine organizational stakeholders’ perceptions of students’ access to remote academic advising and examine the implementation of a quality assurance tool (e.g., Annotated Program Criteria) to improve access to remote academic advising within other institutions at scale.

Virtual Interviews Off-Campus

The researcher recruited three participants for virtual interviews: an Online Executive (OE), a College Executive of Academic Affairs (CE) and an Administrator of Academic Advising (AAA). Community College #1 and Community College #2 are colleges that manage

up to a college system, who has oversight of institution funding allocations and state and federal reporting. Each participant interviewed for this study, was employed at the system office with oversight of operations at Community College #1 and Community College #2; therefore, the feedback received from participants represented both colleges. To protect the identity of participants, codes will be used to represent their names (e.g., OE, CE, AAA). All interviews took place after completing phase three of the three-phase participant recruitment approach (Figure 3.2). Phase three of this approach was scheduling each virtual interview. On August 10, 2020, all participants were emailed a link to join a Microsoft Teams virtual interview two days before their scheduled interview times. Additionally, participants were provided the following instructions:

- Your webcams will be disabled to maintain confidentiality and you should not turn your webcams on.
- You should not use your name or the names of your employer during the interview.
- Your interview will be recorded.
- Any information provided that may disclose your name or your employer will be redacted in the interview transcript.

All interviews were held off-campus after office business hours. To understand how certain situations evolved, virtual interviews with OE, CE and AAA are necessary to document current practices and new practices created from the Quality Matters Online Learner Support

Certification process. Additionally, interview data provided direction into each colleges approach towards earning the certification, which produced recommendations to strengthen students access to remote academic advising. Furthermore, the interviews were to focus the purpose behind the pursuit of the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification, the community colleges' and lessons learned through their pursuit of the certification.

Data Collection of Virtual Interviews. The virtual interviews were conducted in the following order, the Online Executive was interviewed first and was given a code of (OE), the College Executive of Academic Affairs was interviewed second and was given a code of (CE) and the Academic Advising Administrator was interviewed last and was given a code of (AAA).

The first interview with the OE, took place Sunday, August 12, 2020. Sunday at 6:00 pm was selected, as it was the best day to interview the OE. The Online Executive interview questions (Appendix B) explain the reasons behind the pursuit and approach towards the Online Learner Support Certification as it was discovered that the OE office was responsible for leading the certification process. The OE explained in the interview that Community College #1 and Community College #2 chose to complete Online Learner Support Certification to “build the capacity to deliver premier, quality digital learning experiences for online students. This capacity was strengthen by ensuring access to essential remote academic resources and support services”. When asked how OE approached the undertaking of completing the certification, it was stated that “joint effort between Academic Success and Student Success prompted the academic advising unit to: (1) conduct self-evaluations of online resources and support services;

(2) identify any gaps of service in each unit; (3) find solutions to close the gaps”. The OE later expressed during the interview, that the candidacy undertaking was completed using an approach that “places each college (Community College #1 and Community College #2) at the center of the process by supporting college leadership in assembling a Quality Assurance Team. The Quality Assurance Team at Community College #1 and Community College #2, includes internal experts to assess potential inequities of access to direct and indirect support services for online students”. When I asked what lessons have you learned from the process so far, the OE responded, “You must have leaders at each college, a team of academic and campus resources experts, A Quality Assurance Team is a prerequisite for success in identifying gaps in remote academic services. The Quality Assurance Team must be chaired by someone serving in the role of Certification Coach, who will support each college in their own assessment, self-discovery, and solution seeking. Additionally, I learned it is necessary to follow a process of continuous improvement to understand, recognize and transform how we serve online students. As stated by the OE, “Through the Online Learner Support pathway, we understood the levels of access needed in distance education, recognized opportunities for (Community College #1 and Community College #2) to expand access to student services, and transformed our efforts to serve distance education by creating web hubs (a one-stop-shop of remote Academic Services, Student Support Services, and College Services) as well as digitizing required student forms.” As a follow-up to the learned process question, I asked the OE to discuss any tools or processes developed to facilitate the completion of the certification and how do these tools or processes help? To answer this question the OE stated, “A staff member was identified to serve as a QM

Certification Coach, and who developed certification pathway tools for use by each College's Quality Assurance Teams, which consisted of Appendix E:

1. *Online Learner Support Swimlane Diagram.*
2. *Learner Feedback Rubric.*
3. *Remote Access to Services Rubric.*
4. *Online Learner Support Pathway Kick-off Orientation.*
5. *College Quality Assurance Team Milestone Chart.*
6. *Remote Access to Services & Learner Feedback Evaluation Form.*
7. *Mock-Review Team Kick-Off Orientation.*
8. *Online Learner Support Candidacy Progress Report.*
9. *Online Learner Support Candidacy In-Flight Status (Per Phase).*
10. *Unit Learner Feedback Survey Target Dates.*

For my final question, I asked the OE how will having the QM Online Learner Support Certification support the mission and/or strategic goals of Community College #1 and Community College #2? The response was, “ The QM Program Certification provides further evidence to current and potential online students, district-wide stakeholders, and accreditors that each College is committed to delivering premier, quality digital learning experiences to its online students. Through this commitment, we support the mission of empowering our diverse communities for success.”

The second interview was with the CE. This interview took place on Sunday August 16, 2020 at 6:00pm. Again, Sunday was selected, as it was the best day to interview the CE. I first asked the CE to explain the reason for pursuing the QM Program Certification. The CE responded that “shrinking the gap in students who completed their academic goals in online learning was tied to securing access to remote support services and the certification would strengthen the institutions ability to ensure access to essential academic resources and support services.” In further discussion with the CE, I learned that there were four certifications under QM Program Certification and the institution decided to obtain the Online Learner Support Certification because it addresses students having remote access to online student support services. Both institutions’ approach towards obtaining the certification was three-fold: 1) Conduct self-evaluation of online resources and support services; 2) Identify gaps in students’ ability to access remote online support services and 3) Find solutions to the gaps. When asked the question what have you learned from the process so far? The CE responded, “Bring tacos for food to inspire employees to work! As a follow-up question, I asked the CE if the institution made any recommendations as result of undergoing the certification and the answer was yes, we did. The CE expanded that answer by saying, “ We transformed our efforts to serve distance education remotely by creating web hubs (a one-stop-shop of remote Academic Services, Student Support Services, and College Services) as well as creating fill-in digital required student forms, forms that were only pdf without any fill-in options ” Towards the end of the interview, I asked the CE to describe, if any, tools or processes developed to facilitate the

completion of the certification and how do they help? The response was, I did not develop any tools or processes, but our QM Certification Coach did. The tools she created was:

1. *Online Learner Support Swimlane Diagram*. A visual representation distinguishing each stakeholder's responsibilities of processes and sub-processes.
2. *Learner Feedback Rubric*. Determines the level of progress units made in collecting, analyzing, and describing ways learning feedback is used to improve processes, policies, or delivery of services each year.
3. *Remote Access to Services Rubric*. Determines the level of progress student support units made to develop and promote statements of commitment to online students that address how remote services are provided and how services are accessed at a distance.
4. *Online Learner Support Pathway Kick-off Orientation*. A meeting to 1) discuss the Candidacy + Program Review pathway to Program Certification; 2) review the benefits of the pathway to students and the college; 3) develop action steps to meet the pathway timeline.
5. *College Quality Assurance Team Milestone Chart*. Provides a snapshot of deliverables tied to each milestone along with a checkmark to recognize the completion of the milestones.
6. *Remote Access to Services & Learner Feedback Evaluation Form*. Guides units towards the identification of gaps in access and support of remote student services through salient question prompts that align to unit goals to support online students.
7. *Mock-Review Team Kick-Off Orientation*. A meeting to 1) discuss the Internal Mock-Review Process; 2) review the benefits of mock-review to the college; 3) develop action steps to meet the mock-review timeline.
8. *Online Learner Support Candidacy Progress Report*. A quantitative summary of artifacts produced and works completed at the halfway point of the pathway in the form of an infographic.
9. *Online Learner Support Candidacy In-Flight Status (Per Phase)*. A pictorial that captures the percentage of completion in each of the three phases in addition to the final steps in the certification pathway process.

10. *Unit Learner Feedback Survey Target Dates.* A semester development timeline for student experience surveys.

The final interview question asked how the QM Program Certification supported the mission and/or strategic goals of the college. The CE expressed that, “Certification provides further evidence to current and potential online students, district-wide stakeholders, and accreditors that each College is committed to delivering premier, quality digital learning experiences to its online students. Through this commitment, we support the mission of empowering our diverse communities for success.

The third and final virtual interview with the AAA, took place Sunday, August 23, 2020 at 7:30 pm. Sunday at 7:30 pm was selected, as it was the best day to interview the AAA. At the beginning of the interview, the AAA discussed an online learner support team survey (Appendix C), which was a self-evaluation of the current state of remote access to advising before entering the Online Learner Support Certification. The AAA thought it would help me understand Community College #1 and Community College #2 before obtaining a snapshot of remote access to academic advising in order to appreciate the progress made after completing the QM Online Learner Support Certification. The AAA expressed that “there is no explanation of advising services provided for students posted on any of the colleges (Community College #1 and Community College #2) webpages nor was there a centralize location for remote support services that distance education students could access. Additionally, it was discovered that Community College #2 had no academic advising survey in place to capture students’ feedback of services rendered. Although Community College #1 had an academic advising student survey

in place, Community College #1 nor Community College #2 had a survey feedback data collection and distribution process in place that allowed for student feedback to improve remote advising services.

Shortly after the AAA summary of the online learner support team survey, I began asking remote access to services interview questions (Appendix D). My first questions asked the AAA for a description of the data collection, distribution and feedback mechanisms each college uses to continuously improve remote access to academic advising. The AAA responded by acknowledging that “Community College #1 and Community College #2 have shared deficiencies such as no consistent data collection processes in place to evaluate or analyze survey feedback. Although Community College #1 and Community College #2 deploy academic advising surveys to students receiving their services, the following should be noted: none of the surveys have self-identifying questions to separate on-campus student feedback from online student feedback”. Admittedly, the AAA states that “survey feedback is rarely evaluated towards improving academic advising delivery of services; we simply collect survey data (year after year) within the department without evaluating ways to improve our services.” Lastly, I asked the AAA to explain the type of impact the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification process had in the changing of policies, organization or resources. The AAA responded, “Community College #1 and Community College #2 share a common plan towards addressing deficiencies discovered by developing a student support survey with questions about remote access to advising services, implementing a process framework to regularly evaluate advising services (e.g., PDCA) and gather student feedback that will continuously improve the colleges’

delivery of services. Additionally, there will be common questions on the survey that do not relate to any specific support service area (e.g., race, ethnicity, status: full-time or part-time). The student support services survey will be deployed each semester to student enrolled in one or more online courses. Data collected from survey will lead to recommended changes as it pertains to processes, procedures or policies.”

Data Analysis

The data analysis started with open coding of each of the three transcripts (Charmaz, 2014) using a three-step approach. In step one, I checked for accuracy between the MS Teams voice recording and the transcript (each transcript was automatically generated by MS Teams by way of the saved voice recording). In step two, the I coded transcripts line by line (each transcript was coded a day after the interview) to identify specific data, such as domains, phrases, or key words (Hays & Singh, 2011), to “summarize and account” for all data (Charmaz, 2014). Upon evaluating the coded transcripts, the initial coding yielded 20 unique codes. Step three consisted of focused coding (Charmaz, 2014). During the focused coding processes, the data was arranged within the theoretical framework by concentrating on organization stakeholders perspectives of students access to remote academic services and direct and indirect access to these services drawn from the Annotated Program Criteria (Table 2.3 and Table 2.4). The Annotated Program Criteria was used as a conceptual framework for the development of common themes from the data via the grounded theory process (Charmaz, 2014), specifically in the axial coding process. The focus coding process yielded six categories from the original 20

themes. I then used an axial coding process to refine my categories into themes (Charmaz, 2014); at this point of the coding process, I used components of the Annotated Program Criteria (e.g., Evidence to Submit) to bring theoretical structure to my codes. I continued to refine my data using the axial coding process, which produced 15 themes. The fourth step and final step of my data analysis process was to highlight theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). To bring life to this effort, I organized my coding into six categories, fifteen themes and four recommendations into a Pre-theoretical model representing their relationship (Figure 4.6).

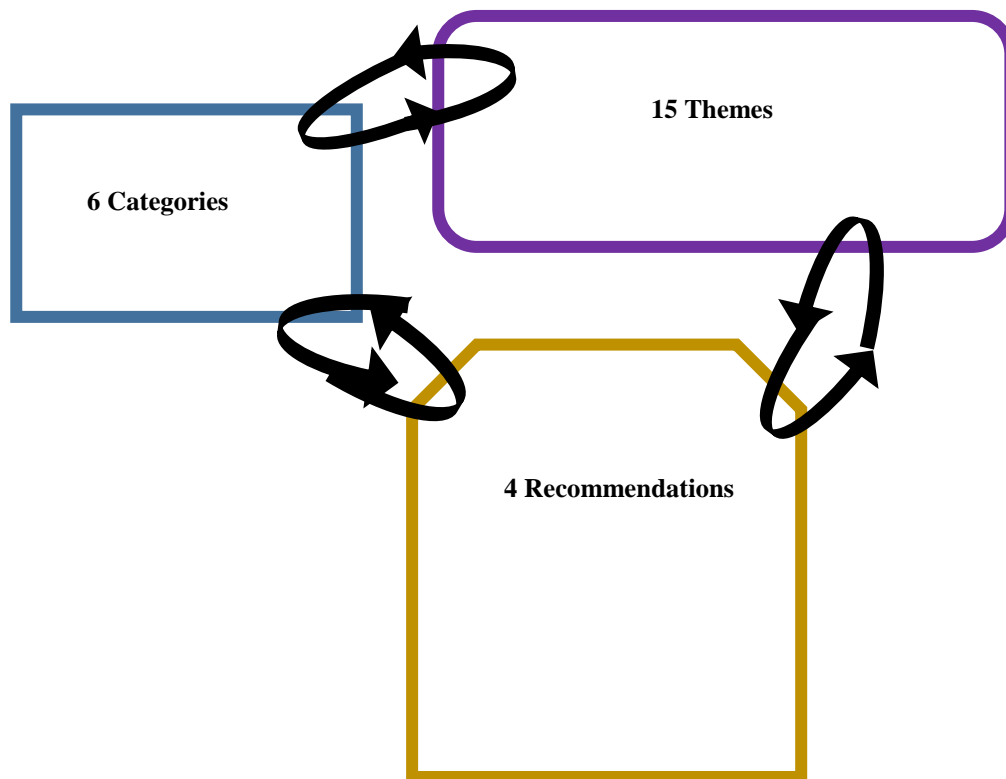


Figure 4.6 Pre-Theoretical Model Relationship.

Triangulation

Three research methods used to address the hypothesis (e.g., virtual interviews, archival documentation and document analysis) and intersection of the three research methodologies list the three allow for accurate analysis to be conducted. The most persuasive evidence comes through a triangulation of measurement process (E. J. Webb et al., 1999). Based upon the Intersection of Research Methodologies (Table 4.2 and 4.3), deficiencies shared by both colleges include: no evidence of an explanation of how academic advising supports their success (e.g., statement of commitment) and deficiencies in having links on the colleges webpage to remote advising services for academic advising. Both colleges share a common plan towards addressing these deficiencies by creating a statement of commitment and developing a web-hub with links to remote support services for online students (that will include access to remote advising services). This web-hub will reside on the online programs landing page at each college.

Table 4.2

Intersection of Research Methodologies, From Annotated Program Criteria 1

College	Category #1	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #1	1) A list of links to the listed services (and others that may be relevant).	<p>From: Virtual Interviews (with CE , OE and AAA) There is no centralize location for online support services. There are no links to remote academic services posted on the colleges website).</p> <p>From: Virtual Interviews (with AAA) An academic advising student survey is emailed to students, but survey results are only collected, not analyzed to improve remote advising services.</p>	<p>No links to remote advising services</p> <p>Add links to remote services on the academic advising website and the distance learning website.</p>

College	Category #1	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
		From: Document Analysis- On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix G) the college found no evidence of links, on the college website, to remote academic advising services.	

College	Category #2	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #1	2) An explanation of how each service supports the online learner and promotes learner success.	From: Document Analysis- On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix G) the academic advising and distance learning webpage, had no evidence of any statement of commitment for remote academic advising for distance education students and no links to remote advising services. From: Virtual Interviews There is no centralize location for online support services.	No evidence of any statement of commitment. Create new statement of commitment for academic advising explaining to students remote services available and how they can access these services. Convert paper-forms required to initiate remote services to digital forms.

College	Category #3	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #1	3) A plan to address any identified gaps in service.	From: Document Analysis- On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix G) the academic advising and distance learning webpage, had no evidence of any statement of commitment for remote academic advising for distance education students and no links to remote advising services.	Create new statement of commitment for academic advising explaining to students remote services available and how they can access these services. Develop a centralize hub for all academic and campus support services ensure student access to college services.

College	Category #1	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #2	1) A list of links to the listed services (and others that may be relevant).	<p>From: Virtual Interviews (with CE and OE) There is no centralize location for online support services. There are no links to remote academic remote services posted on the colleges website)</p> <p>From: Document Analysis- On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix G) the college found no evidence of links, on the college website, to remote academic advising services.</p> <p>No best practices tools to ensure students have access to remote academic advising services via the website through links to services.</p>	<p>No links to remote advising services</p> <p>Add links to remote services on the academic advising website and the distance learning website.</p> <p>Develop best practice tools to guide organizations through identifying gaps of access to remote support services for students</p>

College	Category #2	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #2	2) An explanation of how each service supports the online learner and promotes learner success.	<p>From: Document Analysis- On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix G) the academic advising and distance learning webpage, had no evidence of any statement of commitment for remote academic advising for distance education students and no links to remote advising services.</p> <p>From: Virtual Interviews (with CE, OE and AAA) There is no centralize location for online support services.</p>	<p>No evidence of any statement of commitment.</p> <p>Create new statement of commitment for academic advising explaining to students remote services available and how they can access these services. Convert paper-forms required to initiate remote services to digital forms.</p>

College	Category #3	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #2	3) A plan to address any identified gaps in service.	From: Document Analysis- On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix G) the academic advising and distance learning webpage, had no evidence of any statement of commitment for remote academic advising for distance education students and no links to remote advising services.	<p>Create new statement of commitment for academic advising explaining to students remote services available and how they can access these services.</p> <p>Develop a centralize hub for all academic and campus support services ensure student access to college services.</p> <p>Create Fill-in Digital Student Forms using DocuSign to replace Hard-Copy Forms</p>

The results of the data collected for Criteria 2 (Table 4.3), deficiencies shared by both colleges include: no processes to evaluate or analyze survey feedback, no self-identifying questions to separate on-campus feedback from online feedback, no race/ethnicity questions, no questions about students' experience accessing remote advising services, no student load questions and low survey participation rates concerns. Both colleges share a common plan towards addressing these deficiencies by developing a student support survey with questions about remote access to advising services, implementing a process framework to regularly evaluate advising services and gather student feedback that will continuously improve the colleges' delivery of services. Additionally, there will be common questions on the survey that do not relate to any specific support service area (e.g., race, ethnicity, status: full-time or part-time). The student support services survey will be deployed each semester to student enrolled in one or more online courses.

Table 4.3

Intersection of Research Methodologies, From Annotated Program Criteria 2

College	Category #4	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #1	4)A description of data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts.	<p>From: Virtual Interviews (with AAA) Although there is an academic advising student experience survey distributed, survey results are only collected; they are not analyze to improve remote advising services.</p>	<p>A framework is needed evaluate students access and perceptions of access to remote academic advising services by using survey feedback to continuously improve their delivery of services.</p>
		<p>From: Document Analysis On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix G) The data collected looked at satisfaction with customer service, service provided, information provided and timeliness of service. The survey is distributed face-to-face and via students college email. Monthly data is provided to the Academic advising team. Data is analyze, but not used to improve services. We need to create a survey with questions about students access to remote academic advising services and how those services and satisfaction of those services.</p>	<p>No roust data collection or distribution process is in place to use student feedback to improve remote advising services.</p>

College	Category #5	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #1	5) Representative survey data addressing learner satisfaction with online campus services over the past three years.	<p>From: Document Analysis On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix G) The student survey did not include questions about access to remote services, ethnicity, race or gender.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey has low completion rates. • Survey is mostly distributed in email. • Survey data is not typically analyzed on a regular schedule. <p>Survey satisfaction was high, but the audience poll was small.</p> <p>Recommendation of implemented a quality assurance framework to evaluate remote access to services and use survey data to continuously improve the delivery of remote services to academic advising.</p> <p>From: Archival Data- From Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2; Traditionally underrepresented students are heavily enrolled in online programs and their persistence is lower than on-campus programs.</p>	<p>Surveys do not include questions about access to remote services.</p> <p>Survey has high completion rates, but the polled audience was small.</p> <p>Survey does not include race/ethnicity markers.</p> <p>Survey data was not used to improve services.</p> <p>Survey is not self-identifying.</p> <p>Create a student support services survey (for online students only) with questions about remote Need to add self-identifying questions to the survey (e.g., ethnicity, race, gender)</p> <p>Implement a process framework that will evaluate academic advising services regularly and use feedback from surveys to continuously improve their delivery of services.</p> <p>Develop a Combined Learner Feedback Survey</p>

College	Category #6	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #1	6) Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback.	<p>From: Document Analysis On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix G) Future Surveys will include questions to measure the quality of advising services specifically for online learners.</p> <p>The college used Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) as process improvement framework. “We will keep the current committee structure to make sure we will support each other and share best practices, as well as to discuss data and collectively ensure the success of our online learners. We will use different assessment and strategic planning related events to also discuss strategies for more effective practices for online learners.”</p> <p>From: Virtual Interview (with AAA); Academic Advising use developed while pursuing the Online Learner Support Certification, as well as to discuss data and collectively and use this data to ensure the success of our online learners.</p>	<p>Implement a process framework that will evaluate academic advising services regularly and use feedback from surveys to continuously improve their delivery of services.</p> <p>Academic Advising use developed while pursuing the Online Learner Support Certification, as well as to discuss data and collectively and use this data to ensure the success of our online learners.</p>

College	Category #4	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #2	4)A description of data collection, distribution, and	From: Virtual Interviews	Implement a process framework that will

College	Category #4	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
	feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts.	<p>(with AAA) No process are in place to ensure students have access to remote academic advising services to collect student experience gaining access (via a student survey) to remote advising or students experience using remote advising services.</p> <p>From: Document Analysis On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix H) The data collected looked at satisfaction with customer service, service provided, information provided and timeliness of service. The survey is distributed face-to-face and via students college email. Monthly data is provided to the Academic advising team. Data is analyze, but not used to improve services. We need to create a survey with questions about students access to remote academic advising services and how those services and satisfaction of those services.</p>	<p>evaluate academic advising services regularly and use feedback from surveys to continuously improve their delivery of services.</p> <p>No roust data collection or distribution process is in place to use student feedback to improve remote advising services.</p>

College	Category #5	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #2	5) Representative survey data addressing learner satisfaction with online campus services over the past three years.	<p>From: Document Analysis On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix H) The student survey did not include questions about access to remote services, ethnicity, race or gender.</p>	<p>Surveys do not include questions about access to remote services.</p> <p>Survey has high completion rates, but the polled audience was small.</p>

College	Category #5	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey has low completion rates. • Survey is mostly distributed in email. • Survey data is not typically analyzed on a regular schedule. <p>Survey satisfaction was high, but the audience poll was small.</p> <p>Recommendation of implemented a quality assurance framework to evaluate remote access to services and use survey data to continuously improve the delivery of remote services to academic advising.</p> <p>From: Archival Data- From Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2; Traditionally underrepresented students are heavily enrolled in online programs and their persistence is lower than on-campus programs.</p>	<p>Survey does not include race/ethnicity markers.</p> <p>Survey data was not used to improve services.</p> <p>Survey is not self-identifying.</p> <p>Create a student support services survey (for online students only) with questions about remote</p> <p>Need to add self-identifying questions to the survey (e.g., ethnicity, race, gender)</p> <p>Implement a process framework that will evaluate academic advising services regularly and use feedback from surveys to continuously improve their delivery of services.</p> <p>Develop a Combined Learner Feedback Survey</p>

College	Category #6	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
Community College #2	6) Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback.	<p>From: Document Analysis On the Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification (Appendix H) Future Surveys will include questions to measure the quality of advising services specifically for online learners.</p> <p>The college used Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) as process improvement</p>	<p>Implement a process framework that will evaluate academic advising services regularly and use feedback from surveys to continuously improve their delivery of services.</p> <p>Academic Advising use developed while pursuing the Online Learner</p>

College	Category #6	Data Collected	Common Themes of both Colleges
		<p>framework. “We will keep the current committee structure to make sure we will support each other and share best practices, as well as to discuss data and collectively ensure the success of our online learners. We will use different assessment and strategic planning related events to also discuss strategies for more effective practices for online learners.”</p> <p>From: Virtual Interview (with AAA); Academic Advising use developed while pursuing the Online Learner Support Certification, as well as to discuss data and collectively and use this data to ensure the success of our online learners.</p>	<p>Support Certification, as well as to discuss data and collectively and use this data to ensure the success of our online learners.</p>

Major Findings

This research identified findings discovered during a detailed data collection and data analysis of two community colleges year-long journey through the Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria. These findings revealed each community colleges need for: (1) a centralized website location to explain remote advising services offered and ways to access these services; (2) a student support services survey to capture metrics of students perceptions of all remote support services, including advising, student’s experience using advising services and students’ race, ethnicity and gender; (3) a robust survey data collection and distribution process to analyze

survey data and use the feedback from survey data to improve the delivery of remote academic advising services or drive institutional recommendations for change in distance education; and (4) a framework to guide institutions at scale towards the pursuit of the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND INSTITUTIONS RESPONSIBILITY TO DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS

Introduction

The purpose of the research was to examine the impact of a quality assurance tool on remote academic advising for traditionally underrepresented students in distance education. The following research questions were addressed:

- 1) What are the perceptions organizational stakeholders' have of access to remote academic advising?
- 2) How does the use of a quality assurance tool improve access to remote academic advising?
- 3) What is the relationship between race, persistence, and quality assurance tools in distance education?

To bring literature to bear on major findings tied to research questions for Community College #1 and Community College #2, I mapped each major findings from chapter four to literature in chapter two that aligned to research questions in chapter one which formed a Research Mapping Diagram (Figure, 5.1).



Figure 5.1 Research Mapping Diagram

Implications for Practice of Research Question One

To answer the first research question, virtual interviews were held to understand organizational stakeholders’ perceptions (e.g., document analysis—Condensed Quality Matters application & virtual interviews) of students’ access to remote academic advising. The major findings revealed a centralized website location was needed to explain remote advising services offered at the college and ways students may access remote advising services. I brought literature to bear on this the need for having a centralized location for students to access remote advising services instead of searching for these services on the internet (Figure 5.2).

Major Finding(s)	Major Findings Mapped to Literature Review	Major Findings Mapped to Research Question	Implications for Practice
1. A centralized website location to explain remote advising services offered and ways to access remote advising services	Researchers have identified the lack of access to technology and student support services as factors that negatively influence student retention and persistence (Britto & Rush, 2013; Lapadula, 2003).	1. What are the perceptions organizational stakeholders’ have of access to remote services.	The Creation of Web-Hubs for remote access to Academic Support and Student Support Services
	Although the Internet has the potential to provide individual users with information content on an		

	<p>almost any topic, the act of searching or seeking out information makes using the internet too labor-intensive thus searching for wanted information becomes less effective (Mathai & Margon, 2005).</p> <p>Using a push model by delivering information directly to the user's computer so that the user is not required to engage in a search for the information which is desirable by users and less time-consuming than searching (Mathai & Margon, 2005).</p>		
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Figure 5.2 Major Findings 1: Research Mapping Diagram

The act of searching or seeking out information makes using the internet too labor-intensive thus searching for wanted information becomes less effective (Mathai & Margon, 2005). Using a push model by delivering information directly to the user's computer so that the user is not required to engage in a search for the information which is desirable by users and less time-consuming than searching (Mathai & Margon, 2005). Furthermore, research literature identified the lack of access to technology and student support services as factors that negatively influence student retention and persistence (Britto & Rush, 2013; Lapadula, 2003). Thus, the need for a centralized location on the website to access remote academic advising and how it is one of many factors used to improve persistence of distance education students. To address this need, Community College#1 and Community College #2 recommended an institutional change resulting in the creation of Web-Hubs as a container for accessing remote academic and campus

services. The Web-hub serves as a one-stop shop for all remote student support services at each college, includes links for each student support units each student support unit (e.g., remote library access, orientation to online study, technical support, academic advising, proctoring and student authentication, tutoring, grade appeals, accessibility services, records and registration, financial aid services and billing). Through the remote academic advising link, remote advising services (e.g., virtual advising, digital forms, virtual degree plan mapping) are offered to students through Zoom, a web-conferencing tool. Zoom is provided to all registered students free of charge. With Zoom, distance education students at Community College #1 will meet virtually with academic advisors. Meeting virtually will provide students an opportunity to see their academic advisor and use features that allow them to share documents, discuss degree plans, registration steps and other topics. The web-hub will reside on the distance learning homepage on the college webpage. See an example of Community College #1 Web-Hub to Remote Academic and Students Support Services implemented as a result of this research (Figure 5.3). Note that the Web-Hub Design page for both colleges look the same but link to support services.



Figure 5.3 Community College #1 & Community College #2 Web-Hub Design

This research carried out over one year has clear implications for practice. My research shows the continuing emphasis on using a quality assurance tool to conduct a self-evaluation of remote access to academic support (e.g., academic affairs) and student support (e.g., student affairs) services as an important means of informing an institution ability to identify a central location of services and see remote advising services available and explain how remote services

promote student success (Figure 5.4). Note that the academic advising webpage for both colleges look the same but link to support services on their respective college website.

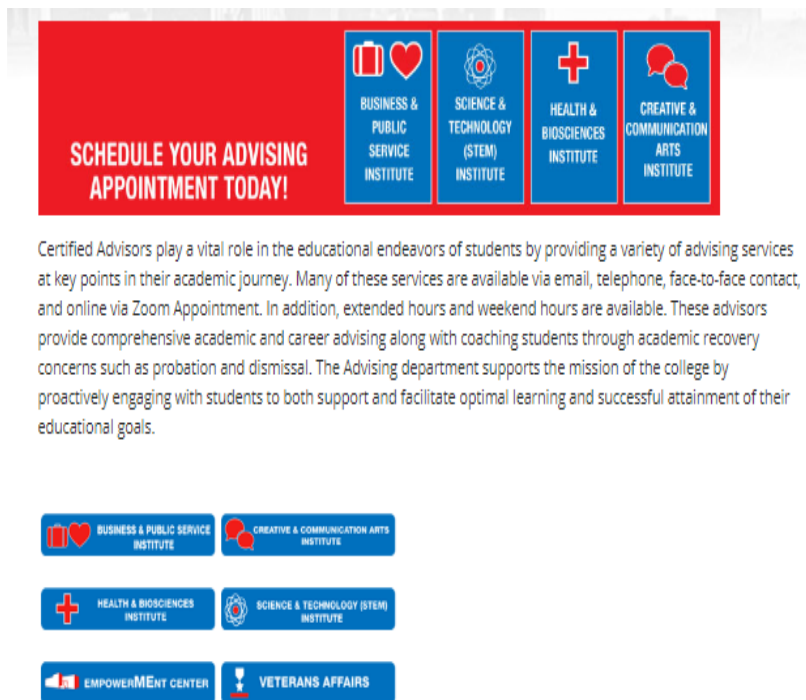


Figure 5.4 Community College #1 & Community College#2 Academic Advising Services Webpage Design

Although various efforts were used to collect feedback from organizational stakeholders at Community College #1 and Community College #2, suggestions for further research should be invested in obtaining student perceptions of remote access to advising services and their experiences using these services to determine the quality or remote access to meet student expectations of quality services.

Implications for Practice of Research Question Two

To answer the second research question, “How does the use of a quality assurance tool improve access to remote academic advising?” The major findings from Community College #1 and Community College #2 revealed a combined learner feedback survey was needed to capture metrics of students’ perceptions of all remote support services, including advising, student’s experience using remote advising services, students persistence and students’ race, ethnicity and gender to draw relationships between race, ethnicity and persistence. Additionally, it was discovered that implementing a robust data process used to collect, distribute, and analyze survey data provides an opportunity to leverage survey feedback, to improve the delivery of remote academic advising services, or drive institutional recommendations for change (Figure 5.5).

Major Finding(s)	Major Findings Mapped to Literature Review	Major Findings Mapped to Research Question	Implications for Practice
2. A student support services survey to capture metrics of students perceptions of all remote support services, including advising, student’s experience using remote advising services, persistence and students’ race, ethnicity and gender	Traditionally, institutions have viewed the quality of remote student support services from the perspective of the institution and not the student. Viewing quality from the perspective of the institution limits quality determination to management and therefore does provide a true picture of the student experience	2. How does the use of a quality assurance tool improve access to remote academic advising?	Implement a robust data process used to collection and distribution process used to evaluate remote support services and collect, distribute and analyze survey data that drives institutional recommendations for change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-Product of Implications for Practice: The Creation of

	(Nsamba & Makoe, 2017).		<p>Combined Learner Feedback Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-Product of Implications for Practice: The creation of eForms for student advising with electronic signature using DocuSign to replace pdf files which must be printed, completed manually, scanned and emailed. <p>*Community College#1 will implement PDCA as a robust data process used to collection and distribution process.</p> <p>*Community College#2 will implement QM Annotated Program Criteria as a robust data process used to collection and distribution process.</p>
	<p>Perraton (2012) and Simpson (2018) have observed that low persistence rates and pass rates in distance education programs are caused mainly by inadequate student support. Evaluating the quality of students' support services in distance education institutions is vital because by nature distance education is a high-involvement service industry, with multiple student support service encounters</p>		

	(Nsamba & Makoe, 2017)		
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Figure 5.5 Major Findings 2: Research Mapping Diagram

The bi-product of implementing a robust data process for Community College#1 and Community College #2 was the creation of eForm for student advising with an electronic signature feature using DocuSign. These eForms replaced pdf files which required students to: (1) physically report to campus to complete or (2) use home resources such as a printer to print advising forms, manually sign advising forms, scan advising form, and email advising forms to the institution. By converting hard-copy student advising forms to eForm, students may avoid using home resources to print advising forms or reporting to campus. Another bi-product of implementing a robust data process was the creation of a Combined Learner Feedback Survey. The purpose of the survey is to capture metrics of students' perceptions of all remote support services, including advising, students' experience using remote advising services, persistence, and students' race, ethnicity and gender. This newly created survey consist of questions from each student support unit (e.g., remote library access, orientation to online study, technical support, academic advising, proctoring and student authentication, tutoring, grade appeals, accessibility services, records and registration, financial aid services and billing) at Community College #1 and Community #2. Featured on the survey are 25 questions in total. Two questions from each unit about students' experience accessing services, one race/ethnicity question, one self-identifying question, and one student load question (full-time or part-time). The survey will be distributed each semester via college email to students taking one or more online courses.

Upon submitting the QM Online Learner Support Certification, Community College #1 recommended the implementation of the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) process improvement framework as a their robust data process. The purpose of this recommendation was to have a consistency in how the Combined Learner Feedback Survey is distributed, feedback is collected, analyzed and used to continuously improve the delivery of services. Community College #2 chose to implement the Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria as the robust data process. Both data process can be used to evaluate and continuously improve the delivery of remote access to advising services.

This research carried out over one year has implications for practice. My research shows the continuing emphasis on using a robust data process as an important means of refining the most effective and meaning mechanism (e.g., student surveys, virtual interviews, and an institution's self-evaluation of academic and student support) to collect, distribute, and analyze user feedback and leveraging user feedback to improve the delivery of services in academic advising. As a result of leveraging user feedback to improve the delivery of remote academic advising services, Community College #1 and Community College #2 produced eForm for student advising with an electronic signature feature using DocuSign. These eForms replaced pdf files which required students to: (1) physically report to campus to complete or (2) user home resources such as a printer to print advising forms, manually sign advising forms, scan advising form and email advising forms to the institution. By converting hard-copy student advising forms to eForm, students may avoid using home resources to print advising forms or reporting to campus. Another result of leveraging user feedback to improve the delivery of remote academic advising services was the

creation of the Combined Learner Feedback Survey, which was a mechanism used for each community college to self-profile metrics (such as race, ethnicity, persistence) along with student experience questions on satisfaction of remote access to twelve institutional units (e.g., library access, orientation to online study, technical support, academic advising, proctoring and student authentication, tutoring, grade appeals, accessibility services, records and registration, financial aid services and billing). Suggestions for further research should be invested in obtaining student satisfaction survey feedback using eForms and collecting results from the Combined Learner Feedback Survey to determine how effective eForms are towards improving students ability to complete advising forms and how meaningful eForms and how meaningful the Combined Learner Feedback Survey is towards drawing relationships between students access to remote advising and their persistence in distance education. Although leveraging user feedback to improve the delivery of services of remote academic advising at Community College #1 and Community College #2, suggestions for further research should be invested in deploying surveys, collection and analyzing survey feedback each term (because student profiles change from term to term) compared against survey feedback among both community colleges to draw meaning recommendations for change about relationship between race, ethnicity and persistence within the college in this study.

Implications for Practice of Research Question Three

To answer the third research question, “What is the relationship between race, persistence and quality assurance tools in distance education? National and local race, persistence rates and deficiencies in access to remote advising (discovered at the conclusion of the candidacy) was

used. This research did not have a methodology to gather enough data through virtual interviews or student surveys at each college to draw implication of practice among race and persistence and how they related to quality assurance tools. This research may be extended by exploring the results of the Combined Learner Feedback Survey, conducting student focus groups (each semester) on experiences and perceptions of remote support services then linking student semester grades to the focus group (to evaluate their persistence in online programs paired with the experience access remote services).

This research carried out over one year has implications for practice. My research shows the continuing emphasis on organizational theory as a theoretical framework that shows how the social morale's of the organization influences where resources are invested and who receives the benefits of those investments (Valcik, 2016). This research shows how classifying institutional functions and frameworks (and resources tied to the functions) are centered on persistence and retention rates seen through the lens of equity of resources provided to traditionally underrepresented students and that those students are able to access support services (e.g., remote academic advising services). Although this research supports that underrepresented students are the main constituent group in distance education at Community College #1 and #2 and low persistence at Community College #1 and #2 is a factor, the research is unable to draw a clear relationship among race, ethnicity, and persistence from one measuring tool that included metrics for race, ethnicity, and persistence. Suggestions for further research should be invested in analyzing the Combined Learner Feedback Survey at each community college for each term (because student profiles change from term to term) compared against survey feedback among both community colleges to

draw meaning recommendations for change about relationship between race, ethnicity and persistence within the college in this study. Additionally, to extend this research, I would suggest partnering with one community college of a similar size from another state to distribute the Combined Learner Feedback Survey at their institution and comparing their results against the results from Community Colleges #1 and #2. Taking this additional step would strengthen the meaning of the relationship among race, ethnicity, and persistence outside of the state of Texas and examine the relevance of the research to other institutions.

Best Practices in Remote Access to Support Services

There are many best practices and frameworks to evaluate in distance education. It is a possibility that use of best practices show consistency in indicators of quality for distance education programs that serve online students. In an effort to guide two large community colleges on their pursuit of the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification, it was possible to create a coaching tool used to assist organizational stakeholders collecting data for the Annotated Program Criteria. As a lead of the candidacy for each college (aka. Certification Coached) and researcher of this study (aka. Certification Coached), I developed Program Review Pathway Tools to guide institutions, at scale, through the successful completion of the Online Learner Support Certification (Appendix I). These tools were beneficial as they provided both community colleges in study with a roadmap towards completing and earning the Online Learner Support Certification in 2020, making them the first community college in Texas to earn the certification.

At the end of my research, I re-organized coding into six categories, fifteen themes, four recommendations and three recommendations implemented at Community College#1 and Community College#2 as seen in the Post-theoretical model representing their relationship (Figure 5.6).

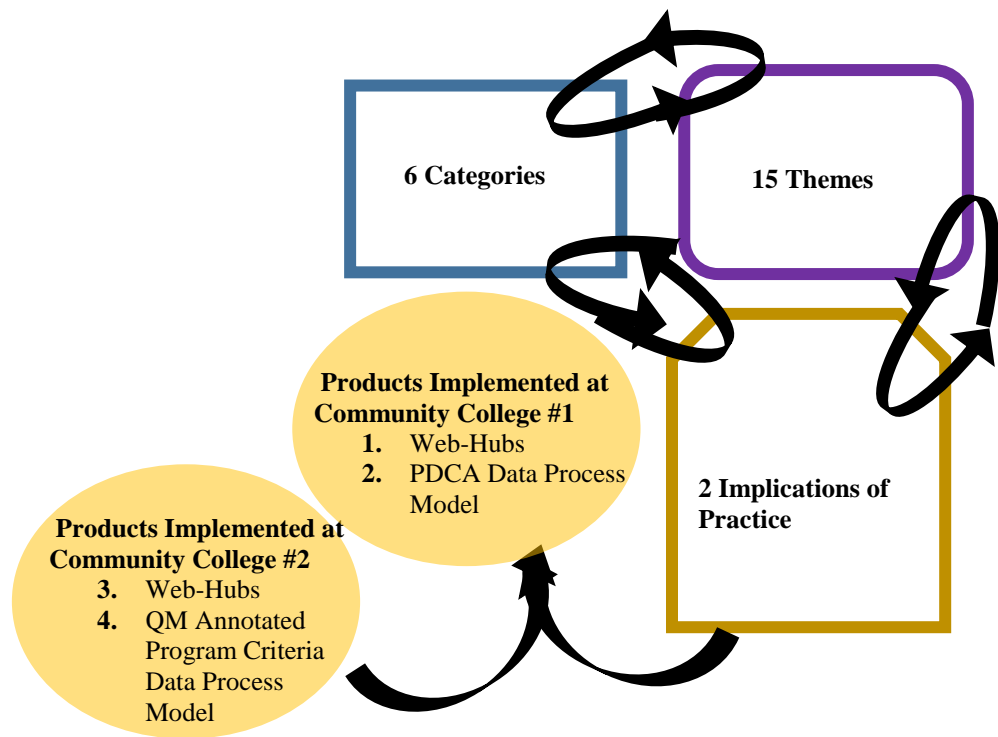


Figure 5.6 Post-Theoretical Model Relationship.

Institutions' Responsibility to Distance Education Students

Chapter 1 of this research asked the question: Could it be the institution's responsibility to provide remote academic advising and to implement a quality assurance tool to evaluate its delivery services? The answer to this question is, yes, it is an institution's responsibility to conduct an annual self-evaluation of remote access to academic advising services because the lack of technology and student support services are factors that increase persistence gaps between traditionally underrepresented students and their white counterparts in distance education programs. The implementation of a quality assurance tool provides a formal process that brings transparency into an institution's expectations of remote access to academic advising versus the reality of remote access to academic advising that exist for distance education students. A prime example of assume expectations of remote access versus the reality of remote access; is the expectations of remote access institutions believed existed before COVID-19 versus the reality of remote access to services institution actually had. Before COVID-19 many institutions took assumed and expected that students had remote access to services if they needed them and some institutions did not consider remote access to services as a priority that should be invested in. However, after COVID-19, institutions found a new reality that students did not have access to technology (e.g., digital devices, reliable internet connections) let alone remote student services and in some cases, students were unable to access curriculum. Major findings from Chapter 2 of this research identified two recommendations (development web-hubs,

implementation of a robust data process) and ten Program Pathway tools (Appendix E) used to facilitate the completion of the Program Review (i.e., Online Learner Support Candidacy—referred to as candidacy). It was evident from the data that the two recommendations and the ten pathway tools interact to strengthen access to remote academic advising. The grounded theory model used in this research laid the foundation to visualize the organizational stakeholder's perceptions of access to remote academic advising and shined a light on the gaps of access to remote services at Community College #1 and Community College #2.

The post-theoretical model relationship documents the products produce through the synthesis of two implications of practice. It should be noted that the Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria (a quality assurance tool), used by both community colleges, gave birth to a Program Pathway Tool that consist of 10 best practices in remote access to student support services. These pathway tools may be applied at scale with small or large institutions interested in additional guidance to align evidence to promote remote access to academic advising, outlined in Quality Matters Annotated Program Criteria, to meet the expectations of the criteria. Future research, should examine the results of the Combined Learner Feedback Survey disaggregated by gender and measure students' expectations/perceptions of their experienced services to draw conclusions about the relationship among race, persistence, and access to remote academic advising at Community College #1 and Community College #2.

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Appendix A

APPENDIX A: Definitions of Terms

Online Student

A student taking one or more fully online courses at a higher education institution.

Persistence

Persistence is the percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year (The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019).

Retention

Retention is the percentage of students who return to the same institution (The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019).

Intrusive Advising

Intrusive advising is a deliberate structured student intervention at the first indication of academic difficulty in order to motivate a student to seek help (Earl, 1988).

Student Attrition

The number of individuals who leave a program of study before it has finished (Attrition, 2019)

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is a systematic review of educational programs and processes to maintain and improve their quality, equity and efficiency (Comission, 2015).

National Academic Advising Association

An organization that endorses the standards and guidelines for academic advising (NACADA, 2019).

Curriculum

The interaction of teaching and learning, which includes a students' educational experiences (Dewy, 1958).

Quality Matters

A non-profit organization that specializes in quality assurance of course design and online programs (Matters, 2020).

Distance Education

A “formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors” (Simonson et al., 2012, p. 32).

At-Risk Student

An “at-risk” student is a Pell grant eligible or below national averages on the SAT or ACT (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2019).

Fully Online Course

An online course, which may have mandatory face-to-face sessions totaling no more than 15 percent of the instructional time (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017).

<https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/miscellaneous/distance-education-portal-guidelines/>

100% Fully Online Course

A course which may have mandatory face-to-face sessions totaling no more than 15 percent of the instructional time (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2017)

Appendix B

APPENDIX B: Online Executive (OE) and College Executive (CE) Interview Questions

1. Your institution is currently in the process of completing the Candidacy + Program Review pathway to Program Certification. Why was this pathway chosen?
2. What certification(s) are you working to obtain?
3. What program(s) are you working to certify?
4. I understand that your institution is doing something unique and attempting to obtain certification for all colleges in the system at once. How many colleges are involved?
5. How did you approach this undertaking?
6. What have you learned from the process so far?
7. What tools or processes did you develop to facilitate completion and how do they help?
8. How will having QM Program Certification(s) support the mission and/or strategic goals of your institution?

Appendix C

APPENDIX C: Online Learner Support Team Survey: Statement of Commitments

1. What student service unit do you serve?
2. In an average week, how many distance education students do you communicate with?
3. Do you know where to find your statement of commitment for Academic Advising on your institution website?
4. Does Academic Advising have a statement of commitment on their website for students to view?
5. Based on your knowledge answer yes or no to the following questions:
 - a. The information in the statement of commitment is correct and is continuously updated?
 - b. The statement of commitment supports explains how distance education students may access/use online student advising?

Appendix D

Appendix D

APPENDIX D: Administrator of Academic Advising (AAA) Interview Questions

Unit Data Collection Questions

1. Describe your unit's data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve student support efforts.
2. What impact has this data had in changes of policies, organization, or resources?

Appendix E

APPENDIX E: Best Practice Tools

1. **Online Learner Support Swimlane Diagram** — A visual representation distinguishing each stakeholder's responsibilities of processes and sub-processes.
2. **Learner Feedback Rubric** — Determines the level of progress units made in collecting, analyzing, and describing ways learning feedback is used to improve processes, policies, or delivery of services each year.
3. **Remote Access to Services Rubric** — Determines the level of progress student support units made to develop and promote statements of commitment to online students that address how remote services are provided and how services are accessed at a distance.
4. **Online Learner Support Pathway Kick-off Orientation** — A meeting to 1) discuss the Candidacy + Program Review pathway to Program Certification; 2) review the benefits of the pathway to students and the college; and 3) develop action steps to meet the pathway timeline.
5. **College Quality Assurance Team Milestone Chart** — Provides a snapshot of deliverables tied to each milestone along with a checkmark to recognize the completion of the milestones.
6. **Remote Access to Services & Learner Feedback Evaluation Form** — Guides units towards the identification of gaps in access and support of remote student services through salient questions prompt that align to unit goals to support online students.
7. **Mock-Review Team Kick-Off Orientation** — A meeting to 1) discuss the Internal Mock-Review Process; 2) review the benefits of mock-review to the college; and 3) develop action steps to meet the mock-review timeline.
8. **Online Learner Support Candidacy Progress Report** — A quantitative summary of artifacts produced and works completed at the halfway point of the pathway in the form of an infographic.
9. **Online Learner Support Candidacy In-Flight Status (Per Phase)** — A pictorial that captures the percentage of completion in each of the three phases in addition to the final steps in the certification pathway process.
10. **Unit Learner Feedback Survey Target Dates** — A semester development timeline for student experience surveys.

Appendix F

APPENDIX F: College #2 Request for Participation

A. Request Summary

The Online Learning Department invites all Colleges to submit a request to participate as a partner in the Quality Matters (QM) Online Learner Support Candidacy+ Certification. Interested Colleges would commit to the following deliverables:

1. Identify a Program Liaison—a dean to represent the College on all activities centering on the QM Online Learner Support Candidacy+ Certification.
2. Assemble a Quality Assurance Team or group of internal experts- faculty and/or staff, from Academic Success and Student Success who would serve as evaluators of online academic and support services such as:
 - a. Orientation to online study- (member with expertise in online orientations).
 - b. Technical support- (member with access to data used to measure IT resources).
 - c. Academic advising- (director of academic advising).
 - d. Proctoring and student authentication- (member with expertise in and access to data of proctoring tools used at the college).
 - e. Tutoring- (member with expertise in tutoring tools).
 - f. Grade appeals- (member with expertise with the process of grade appeals).
 - g. Remote library access- (member with expertise in library resources).
 - h. Accessibility services- (member with expertise in ADA and disability services).
 - i. Records and registration- (records & registration expert).
 - j. Financial aid services- (records & registration expert).
 - k. Billing- (billing expert).
 - l. Institutional and student policies- (Institutional and student policies expert).
3. Identify a technical writer--An employee with experience in technical writing as we will be asked to draft data reports and narratives to align QM criterion to evidence that support and explain each college unit's findings.
4. Identify a measurement instrument expert--a dean of data analytics to assist the QA team in the design of measurement instruments (survey, questionnaire, focus group, etc.), salient questions, instrument deployment, and the recruitment of respondents.

5. Select three reviewers- individuals who are certified as QM Peer Reviewers, to conduct an internal mock-review to identify areas for strengthening the aims, evidence, methods, and packaging the final application for review.
6. Commit to a year toward preparing a final application to obtain the QM Online Learner Support Certification.
7. Agree to share experiences and celebrate success during and after the completion of the QM Online Learner Support Candidacy+ Certification.

Questions about the QM Online Learner Support Candidacy+ Certification should be directed to the Director of Online Learning, via email or by phone.

B. How to Submit

To participate in the QM Online Learner Support Candidacy+ Certification, a university Dean may send a signed letter on university letterhead to the Office of Online Learning acknowledging interest and commitment to participate. The letter should include a commitment to the stated deliverables of the Candidacy+ Certification listed in section A. Please submit your response no later than <insert date> at <insert time>.

C. Project Overview

Going beyond an initial focus on course design, Quality Matters (QM) has created a series of Program Certifications to strengthen the aims and goals of online programs. The department of online learning proposes a joint effort between Academic affairs and Student Affairs departments at within each college to undergo a program review for the Online Learner Support Certification. The QM Online Learner Support Certification will be used to evaluate online learner support services, identify gaps, and collaborate on solutions to close those gaps.

The Online Learner Support Candidacy+ Certification is a deliberate and laser-focused evaluation of policies, processes, resources and support services for students that prepares your college to earn Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification.

The Candidacy+ Certification track is organized into three phases (or years), but activities from different phases may be completed at any point in the process with the goal of establishing, improving, and documenting that critical student support services are provided for online students and that these services are continuously improved. All activities, as evidenced with data

and reports, will be completed by the end of the candidacy. The Certification details are explained in more detail in Appendix A.

Because of this joint effort your colleges, your Quality Matters' Online Learner Support Certification will be funded by the Office of Online Learning. The Online Learner Support Certification is a nationally recognized certification that few universities have received.

D. Benefits

The goal of this year-long collaboration is to identify gaps of equity and access to online learner support services, and collaborate on solutions to close those gaps. Program reviews help ensure that students have access to essential academic resources and support services to ensure their success in an online learning environment.

The program review process will also assist the university in identifying strengths, challenges, and opportunities in serving online learners. Shared solutions as well as those unique to each College's context and culture can be defined and implemented. Additionally, the Online Learner Support Certification would add value to the Distance Learning area of the fifth year accreditation reports and show the college commitment to online learners.

E. Division of Labor

This section explains the responsibility of stakeholders involved in the Online Learner Support Candidacy+ Certification at a College.

College Provost and Vice Presidents:

- Identify a Program Liaison.
- Identify college leads to represent the following units (the leads will be referred to as the Quality Assurance (QA) Team):
 - Orientation to online study
 - Technical support
 - Academic advising
 - Proctoring and student authentication

- Tutoring
- Grade appeals
- Remote library access
- Accessibility services
- Records and registration
- Financial Aid services
- Billing
- Institutional and student policies
- Identify a technical writer to assist the QA team with drafting data and narrative reports.
- Review the QM application after the QA team responds to the results of the Mock Review.
- Upon reviewing the list of recommendations from the Quality Assurance Team, approve the implementation of recommendations at the institution.
- Review, approve and finalize the QM application for submission to Quality Matters for the Online Learner Support Certification.

Online Certification Coach (Director role or higher):

- Cite internal check on Quality Matters Certification Readiness.
- Find and close gaps in alignment of Data Reports and the Colleges QM Application files.
- Provide training sessions to stakeholders (Program Liaison, Quality Assurance Team, Provost/Vice Presidents) on the QM certification criterion.
- Transcribe and distribute meeting minutes to the Program Liaison.
- Offer an Online Learner Support Kick-Off Orientation and a Mock Reviewer Kick-Off Orientation.
- Facilitate Quality Assurance (QA) Team meetings.
- Provide clarification on certification criterion, host round table discussions, and deliver deadline reminders.
- Post all artifacts in OneDrive, the designated cloud storage utility for the project.

College Program Liaison (Dean role or higher):

- Identify college leads to represent the following units (the unit leads will be referred to as the Quality Assurance Team):
 - Orientation to online study
 - Technical support
 - Academic advising
 - Proctoring and student authentication
 - Tutoring
 - Grade appeals
 - Grade appeals
 - Remote library access
 - Remote library access
 - Accessibility services

- Records and registration
- Financial Aid services
- Billing
- Institutional and student policies
- Earn a QM Program Review Workshop Certification.
- Complete the QM Online Learner Support Candidacy Application.
- Complete the QM Online Learner Support Certification Application.
- Provide solutions to questions formed during the mock review and QM review.
- Schedule meetings with the QA Team and Certification Coach.
- Facilitate QA Team meetings.
- Assess the completion and submission of each unit's Evaluation form, Data Report form, and other application files.
- Select three college reviewers.
- Identify a QM Coordinator (from your institution).
- Ensure Program Liaison, QM Coordinator, Certification Coach and college reviewers participate in the college Mock Review.
- Publish milestone reports throughout life of project.

College Quality Assurance Team:

- Prepares Data Reports, Evaluation Form, and other application files.
- Provides initial data and additional data.
- Make unit recommendations, explain unit rationales and offer suggestions for improvements to the college unit(s).
- Assess the completion and submission of a given unit's Evaluation form, Data Report form, and other application files.
- Uploads prepared/completed files to OneDrive.
- Provide solutions to questions formed during the mock review and QM review.
- Participate in QA Team meetings.
- Collect, analyze and interpret online learner data for the past three years.
- Publish milestone reports throughout life of project.

Mock Review Team:

- Participate in the Mock Review Kick-Off Orientation Meeting.
- Read the Mock Review Lookbook.
- Schedule a pre-review conference call
- Review College's QM application.
- Identify areas for strengthening the aims, evidence, methods, in the form of recommendations that will improve the college's application.
- Meet with the Program Liaison to clarify any questions about the QM application or to request additional data.

- Schedule a post-review conference call.
- Release the results of the Mock Review.

System Student Services Executive:

- Reviews the QM application for completeness and negotiate alignments in all colleges to produce a final list of recommendations.

F. Communication

Throughout the life of the project, we will create a community of connectedness based on best practices captured from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, an institution who received the QM Online Program Design Certification. These best practices include the following:

- Bi-weekly one hour QA Team meetings.
- Weekly QA meetings during the last semester of the candidacy phase.
- Program Liaison and Certification Coach meeting scheduled as needed.
- Bi-Monthly meetings scheduled with the Chief of Online Learning, Program Liaison, Certification Coach, College Vice Presidents (or as needed).
 - Meeting format: Meetings are held face-to-face and online using the colleges web conferencing software, Zoom.
 - To host meeting online, college employees may create a free [Zoom](#) account using their alamo.edu email account.
- Use of a cloud storage system to store and access files. Alamo Colleges District use OneDrive as our official cloud storage system.

Appendix G

APPENDIX G: Community College #1 Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification

Stage One Narrative and Evidence – Online Learner Support

Guidelines:

- All criteria must be met at the 85% level and be accompanied by evidence of a commitment to continuous improvement. All findings must be justified with written recommendations.
- Majority concurrence at the 85% level determines whether a criterion is met or not met.
- The three most recent years of data are to be provided wherever data and statistics are presented in support of the criteria.

Name of Review Team Chair:

Date:

Name of program being reviewed:

Name of institution whose program is being reviewed:

Criteria	Evidence to Submit	Annotations
<p>1. Direct and indirect support for online learners should include remote access to the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation to online study • Technical support • Academic advising • Proctoring and student authentication • Tutoring • Grade appeals • Remote library access • Accessibility services • Records and registration • Financial Aid services • Billing 	<p>Provide</p> <p>1) A list of links to the listed services (and others that may be relevant),</p> <p>2) An explanation of how each service supports the online learner and promotes learner success, and</p> <p>3) A plan to address any identified gaps in service.</p>	<p>An effective response to #2 includes a brief statement from <i>each</i> support service regarding its goals and services for the online learner and how it meets them.</p>

Narrative response, if relevant (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

Community College #1 is fully committed to supporting our online learners. When reviewing our Statements of Commitment for criteria one, several units realized that they do not list any specific support for online learners. However, units have provided support services for all students regardless if they are on or off campus. Through this process, we were made aware of the service gaps for online learners. We plan to address these gaps by creating a web hub or one-stop-shop that will provide online learners with links to all listed services on our website <community college #1 website>

The units that had addressed online learners in their commitment statements included financial aid, remote access to library services, and tutoring. The other units have now addressed online learners and have reviewed and published their commitment statements online. Updating this information online is imperative to our targeted population. Community College #1 has the largest online community in the Alamo Colleges District. We service an average of 3,500 students per semester fully online. This population is expected to increase with our new initiative with the Online Learning Department. This new program is meant to provide access to students entirely online. We recently did the Fall 2018 online learner student profile analysis. The data showed that our online population in average take 4.99 credit hours a semester vs our face to face population (9.35 credit hours). We also learned that we have a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students taking online classes (43.9% vs 37.2%).

List attachment(s) of data files, if relevant, including a Data Analysis Cover Sheet for each:

Response to Criteria 1 | Academic Advising Data Collection Grid for Community College #1

Unit	Evidence to Submit Before The QM Program Review – Criteria 1	Statement of Commitment After The QM Program Review (aligned to Criteria 1->Evidence to Submit)	Identified Service Gap	Plan to address gaps in service
Academic Advising	There was no explanation of remote academic services (statement of commitment) found and no links to those services were found.	Certified Advisors play a vital role in the educational endeavors of students by providing a variety of advising services at key points in the academic journey. These advisors provide comprehensive academic and career advising along with coaching students through academic recovery concerns such as probation and dismissal. The Advising department supports the mission of the college by proactively engaging with students to both support and facilitate optimal learning and successful attainment of their educational goals. To meet the needs of our diverse population, to include the needs of our distance learners, our services are available via email, telephone, face-to-face contact and online via Zoom. In addition, extended hours and weekend hours are available.	A list of academic and support services was not provided to online learners. The advising department no longer experiences gaps pertaining to our current services to online learners since we began utilizing Zoom as our video chat tool. We are able to schedule appointments with our students to provide all of our services via Zoom. This system allows us to meet "face-to-face" virtually with all students and allows us to screen share to provide a visual when discussing degrees, registration steps and other items.	Create a link to the web hubs for remote academic services. The web hub links will live on the Distance Learning Webpage.

Criteria	Evidence to Submit	Annotations
<p>2. A robust process to collect, distribute, and use learner feedback to inform and improve learner support efforts.</p>	<p>Provide</p> <p>1) A description of data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts;</p> <p>2) Representative survey data addressing learner satisfaction with online campus services over the past three years; and</p> <p>3) Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback.</p>	<p>It should not be assumed that raw data speak for themselves. Analysis and interpretation of the data are necessary to determine the effectiveness of support services and to pinpoint areas for improvement. A <i>Data Analysis Cover Sheet</i> is provided for this purpose.</p>

Narrative response, if relevant (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

San Antonio College collects feedback that helps improve our processes on-campus. However, through the Quality Matters Certification process we discovered that we do not collect feedback specifically for our online learners. There were a few units that had distributed general student satisfaction surveys that included online learners. For example, Financial Aid was able to improve their process by creating mechanisms to submit documentation needed to complete student financial aid applications. In addition, other units were able improve their processes based on the feedback that they received that benefited online learners.

All units have now addressed the need to create support mechanisms for our online learners. One mechanism we created was a campus-wide survey specifically for online learners. This survey will collect information to inform how we improve our online student success agenda. San Antonio College’s goal is for our online learners to have the exact same positive experience as our other students. The survey was deployed at the end of Spring 2019 to 3500 students identified as taking all their courses fully online. In an effort to collect satisfaction information with services provided at SAC, each of the 12 units included 2 questions. The survey was deployed, and after three weeks we got 100 responses. Although the response rate was low at 3%, we were able to get some valuable feedback. We will send out the survey next semester right after midterms, which might be a better time for the students to participate; we hope to increase the response rate to at least 10% in the fall. [SAC 2019 Online Learners Survey](#).

List attachment(s) of data files, if relevant, including a Data Analysis Cover Sheet for each:

Please refer to Community College #1 Advising Satisfaction Data Collection Grid.

Data Analysis Cover Sheet for Online Learner Support Criterion 1

Title of the data/evidence presented:

Remote access to services for online students

Description of the data/evidence and the method by which it is collected (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

Attached is a spreadsheet with a worksheet tab titled, “remote access” that has rows for each of the 11 units, links to the unit’s webpage, and plans to address gaps in service. On each of the unit’s webpage, you will read a statement of commitment that explains how the unit supports online learners and promotes learner success. This evidence was accessed from the San Antonio College student support distance learning webpage. Each unit representative accessed their unit’s webpage to identify their statement of commitment for online learners. Additionally, if there was no statement for online learners then the unit lead created one and updated accordingly.

The units identified the need to create a central location for all student support services to online learners. The central location will act as a one-stop-shop for online learners to access online forms, and processes.

Interpretation of the conclusions of the data/evidence (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

The attached spreadsheet shows how each of the units’ support online learners and promote online learner success. We identified the need to add our regular processes to our online platform. Several units such as financial aid, technical support, academic advising, remote library access and billing have collected online learner satisfaction data for three consecutive fall semesters. Some departments have used the data to make improvements on the online learner experience; however, these improvements have been limited addressing specific services. Through the Quality Matters certification process, all departments are now aware of the need to work on a comprehensive plan to meet our online learners’ needs. The initial collective effort will be to assess the online learners’ needs and make them a central component of our strategic planning for enrollment, recruitment and retention efforts.

Explanation of the data’s/evidence’s relevance to program certification (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

See above

Description of how the program/institution has responded to the data's/evidence's conclusions (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

Maintaining this data has enabled the program to identify and close gaps in access to remote services, which resulted in the development of student services web hubs (one-stop-shop) that promotes online support services and influence learner success.

Data Analysis Cover Sheet for Online Learner Support Criterion 2

Title of the data/evidence presented:

Community College #1 Quality Matters Assurance Team Spreadsheet

Description of the data/evidence and the method by which it is collected (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

Attached is a spreadsheet with a worksheet tab titled, "2016, "2017", "2018" that has rows for each of the 12 units, description of the data collected, mechanisms to improve learner support, and data influences to change. This evidence was accessed from the student support services digital files on each units' in the program. Some units used satisfaction surveys, while others used surveys that were tied to specific programs that they oversee in their unit. Most units used various types of survey as a mechanism to gather data for on-campus students and online learners. Surveys are administered electronically through different methods; some units sent them via email, while others administered to them after a service they provided.

There are several units that do not have three years of relevant data/evidence for online learner support. These units provided a statement on how they would address to include online learners in their data collection in the future. In the meantime, all units created a collective survey that will provide key information to help improve current support services for our online learners. This survey was sent out to all students by the Institutional Research Department at San Antonio College. Students who received the survey were online learners for spring 2019. Units will continue to implement best practices to include online learners in their everyday operations.

Interpretation of the conclusions of the data/evidence (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

The attached spreadsheet provides a description of the data, process design to improve learner support and a description of how the data informed changes in the organization. Units that do

not have online learner data provided a statement on how they would address to include online learners in their data collection in the future.

Based on the lack of feedback received it is evident that surveying our online students via email may not be the most effective mechanism to gather feedback. Online learners are required to go through an online orientation, attaching the survey to this requirement may be helpful in gathering data needed to influence change and improve processes. Additionally, we will implement various touchpoints via Zoom (our online conferencing platform) to continue to gather feedback as online learners' progress through their college degree.

Based on the data gathered our interpretations are that most of the units do not have an established mechanism to support our online learners. There are several efforts to increase support for our online learners creating innovative programming that allows participation and engagement via online. For example, we will be streaming events and developing a podcast to keep online learners informed and engaged with the college.

Explanation of the data's/evidence's relevance to program certification (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

The data shown helps in discovering ways that Community College #1 and units can support our online learners. Going through the Quality Matters journey has benefited several of our units to address specific online processes and support. This discovery is important to our program certification because by identifying the needs for our online learners, the college and units can address those gaps. The gaps in services that we provide can be improved by constant feedback and implementation.

Description of how the program/institution has responded to the data's/evidence's conclusions (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

Community College #1 is dedicated in providing the exact services to our online learners as our on-campus students' experience. Units have already changed their statement of commitment to include online learners specifically. In addition, units have added links and attachments of their forms online. These changes will allow online learners to fill out paperwork without having to step foot on campus. Several units are also creating processes that are typically only available on-campus to support online learners so that they can handle all school business via online.

As a group, we have decided to use Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) as process improvement framework. We will keep the current committee structure to make sure we will support each other and share best practices, as well as to discuss data and collectively ensure the success of our online learners. We will use different assessment and strategic planning related events to also discuss strategies for more effective practices for online learners.

Advising Satisfaction Data Collection Grid.

Unit 2016-2018 Data	1. Description of data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts.	2. Representative survey data addressing learner satisfaction with online campus services over the past three years.	3. Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback.	4. Process to Improve
Academic Advising	<p>The data that we collected for Academic Advising looked at a few key points; overall satisfaction as well as the student's satisfaction with customer service, information provided and timeliness of service. The data is collected via Survey Monkey. The survey is sent monthly to all students who have received advising services either face-to-face (including virtual face-to-face), by phone or by email the previous month. The survey is sent to students via their Alamo College school email account. The monthly data is provided to the Advising Team Leads and reviewed to influence change in services as well as provide an opportunity for</p>	<p>For Fall 2016 we had 696 students complete our Satisfaction Survey; of this 12 were Fully Online Learners. Eighty-three percent of Fully Online Learners either agreed or strongly agreed that their overall advising experience met their academic and career needs. Ninety-Two percent felt they were able to meet with their advisor in a timely manner.</p> <p>For Fall 2017 we had 1240 students complete our Satisfaction Survey; of this 400 were Fully Online Learners. Eighty-five percent of Fully Online Learners either agreed or strongly agreed that their overall advising experience met their academic and career needs. Eighty-three percent of students felt they were able</p>	<p>During the Fall of 2016 the Academic Advising Department was under the guidance of an interim Director of Advising and there is no concrete documentation about how the surveys impacted change within the unit.</p> <p>In 2017, The Academic Advising Department noticed that 19.5% of Fully Online Learners felt that they were not provided adequate information about academic policies. Based on this the Academic Advising Department created an intentional year-round professional development series for Advisors to cover such topics as academic policy refreshers/updates, academic advising theory, technical training, etc.</p> <p>The Fall 2018 data shows an increase in Fully Online</p>	<p>Future Surveys will include questions to measure the quality of advising services specifically for online learners</p>

	<p>employee coaching as needed. The monthly data is compiled into a semesterly report (Fall and Spring).</p>	<p>to meet with their advisor in a timely manner.</p> <p>For Fall 2018 we had 801 students complete our Satisfaction Survey; of this 225 were Fully Online Learners. Eighty-six percent of Fully Online Learners either agreed or strongly agreed that their overall advising experience met their academic and career needs. Eighty-three percent of students felt they were able to meet with their advisor in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Learners agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were provided adequate information about academic policies. The Academic Advising Department has continued their practice of providing intentional year-round professional development for advisors. The data indicates that that approximately 30% of our Satisfaction Survey responses were from Fully Online Learners. In response to this data the Academic Advising Department is implemented two changes: (1) the addition of a survey question "What type of student are you? Online, Face-to-Face. or Combination of Online and Face-to-Face" to allow for segmentation of the data by student type and (2) full implementation of online advising via Zoom video conferencing.</p>	
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Appendix H

APPENDIX H: Community College #2 Condensed Quality Matters Application for Learner Support Certification

Stage One Narrative and Evidence – Online Learner Support

Guidelines:

- All criteria must be met at the 85% level and be accompanied by evidence of a commitment to continuous improvement. All findings must be justified with written recommendations.
- Majority concurrence at the 85% level determines whether a criterion is met or not met.
- The three most recent years of data are to be provided wherever data and statistics are presented in support of the criteria.

Name of Review Team Chair:

Date:

Name of program being reviewed:

Name of institution whose program is being reviewed:

Criteria	Evidence to Submit	Annotations
<p>1. Direct and indirect support for online learners should include remote access to the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation to online study • Technical support • Academic advising • Proctoring and student authentication • Tutoring • Grade appeals • Remote library access • Accessibility services • Records and registration • Financial Aid services • Billing 	<p>Provide</p> <p>1) A list of links to the listed services (and others that may be relevant),</p> <p>2) An explanation of how each service supports the online learner and promotes learner success, and</p> <p>3) A plan to address any identified gaps in service.</p>	<p>An effective response to #2 includes a brief statement from <i>each</i> support service regarding its goals and services for the online learner and how it meets them.</p>

Narrative response, if relevant (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

Community College #1 is committed to supporting our online learners. As the Quality Matters team and in particular, each of the respective unit's representatives, throughout the team's meetings, discussion revolved around service gaps for distance education. Units developed Statements of Commitment (SOC) listed in the Criterion 1 spreadsheet, which optimized the opportunities to enhance support for online learners. In many cases, services are available to online learners, but they were not specifically stated on the respective unit's website. Hence, it was recommended that new or revised SOCs be added to their websites. Additionally, the team realized that some of the services for distance education learners were not listed in an easy to find or centralized hub on the college's website. As a result, the team recommended that the web hub or one-stop-shop, with links are added to all listed services on our website and district website (<https://www.alamo.edu/online/support-at-SPC>). All units have now addressed distance education learners and have reviewed and published their SOCs. The college defines St. Philip's Distance Learning Students as:

- Internet students- students taking one or more internet courses; they may additionally be taking hybrid and/or face-to-face classes.
- Hybrid students-students taking one or more hybrid courses; they may be taking internet and/or face-to-face classes.
- Online ONLY students-students taking ONLY one or more internet courses; they are not taking additional hybrid or face to face classes. Internet ONLY students are a subset of internet students.

In Fall 2018, Community College #2 served an average of 13,657 students. Of this number, 7517 took one or more distance education courses. It is anticipated that this population will continue to increase based on new initiatives (e.g. Distance Learning Department), increased marketing, and recruiting efforts.

**List attachment(s) of data files, if relevant, including a Data Analysis Cover Sheet for each:
Academic Advising Data Collection Grid.**

Unit	Evidence to Submit Before The QM Program Review – Criteria 1	Statement of Commitment After The QM Program Review (aligned to Criteria 1->Evidence to Submit)	Identified Service Gap	Plan to address gaps in service
Academic Advising	There was no explanation of remote academic services found and not links to those services were found.	The mission of the Advising Department is to help students with all of their academic pursuits. For distance education learners, you can find contact information for the advisor specific to your degree plan (or assigned advisor found on your ACES my page account). Advisors are available to assist students with completing academic pathways for career mobility and or transfer to university of choice.	A list of academic and support services was not provided to online learners. We began utilizing Zoom as our video chat tool. We are able to schedule appointments with our students to provide all of our services via Zoom. This system allows us to meet "face-to-face" virtually with all students and allows us to screen share to	<p>Create a link to the web hubs for remote academic services. The webhub links will live on the Distance Learning Webpage and the Academic Advising webpage.</p> <p>Statement of Commitment was updated on the unit's homepage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to the admission page was added for students to know

Unit	Evidence to Submit Before The QM Program Review – Criteria 1	Statement of Commitment After The QM Program Review (aligned to Criteria 1->Evidence to Submit)	Identified Service Gap	Plan to address gaps in service
			provide a visual when discussing degrees, registration steps and other items.	how to start registering for distance education courses.

Criteria	Evidence to Submit	Annotations
<p>2. A robust process to collect, distribute, and use learner feedback to inform and improve learner support efforts.</p>	<p>Provide</p> <p>1) A description of data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts;</p> <p>2) Representative survey data addressing learner satisfaction with online campus services over the past three years; and</p> <p>3) Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback.</p>	<p>It should not be assumed that raw data speak for themselves. Analysis and interpretation of the data are necessary to determine the effectiveness of support services and to pinpoint areas for improvement. A <i>Data Analysis Cover Sheet</i> is provided for this purpose.</p>

Narrative response, if relevant (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

Community College #1's QM team reviewed surveys currently administered by the various units of the institution. Through the Quality Matters Certification process, the team discovered that a combined survey with questions from each unit would address the need to gather consistent feedback from distance education learners. The members of the team contributed questions pertinent to their respective units. The QM Program Liaison, in collaboration with the team members, developed the final survey. In Spring 2019, the units distributed a Combined Learner Feedback Survey that included all online learners. Individual units will continue to enhance their processes based on the feedback received through their respective surveys specific to online learners, where appropriate. The combined and/or unit surveys will be administered each year.

List attachment(s) of data files, if relevant, including a Data Analysis Cover Sheet for each:

Academic Advising Analysis for Criterion 2 Data Grid

Unit 2016-2018 Data	1. Description of data collection, distribution, and feedback mechanisms to improve learner support efforts.	2. Representative survey data addressing learner satisfaction with online campus services over the past three years.	3. Documentation of any changes in policy, organization, and resources that have been influenced by learner feedback.	4. Process to Improve
Academic Advising	This unit distributed an Advising Center Survey to all students who have had advising engagement. This survey can be requested from a certified advisor to be completed	2016-2018 Nine questions comprised the survey. Five of these questions measured student satisfaction according to these criteria: student advising experience; advisor	These results help maintain a high level of quality service for all students.	Future Surveys will include questions to measure the quality of advising services specifically for online learners

	<p>online or completed face to face at the time of the advising engagement. This survey does not delineate the separation between online and face to face student populations.</p>	<p>courteousness; student career goal discussions; academic policies; and students meeting their advisors in a timely manner. • The results for all students show a 90-97% satisfaction with this unit.</p>		
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Data Analysis Cover Sheet for Online Learner Support Criterion 1

Title of the data/evidence presented:

Remote access to services for online students

Description of the data/evidence and the method by which it is collected (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

The feedback documented in this section contains two types of results. First, some units involved in the Quality Matters Online Learner Support Certification Candidacy team collected, analyzed, and interpreted individual unit survey data from Fall 2016-18.

Second, as a result of seeking this certification, the candidacy team members identified gaps in processes, procedures, and delivery of services. First, some units did not have three years of survey data. Other units collected survey data that did not reflect the online learners’ experience and satisfaction with the unit’s services. To close these gaps, the candidacy team members contributed questions pertinent to their respective units for the Combined Learner Feedback

Survey. Though it had a low return rate (3.06%), this survey established a benchmark to capture experiences and satisfaction of online learners. The QM Program Liaison, in collaboration with the team members, developed the final survey emailed by the Center for Distance Learning Coordinator in Spring 2019 to current fully online students. Students were given three weeks to complete this survey.

To improve the response rate going forward, Community College #2 will survey students after midterm to increase participation. Units aim to increase the response rate to at least 10%.

Interpretation of the conclusions of the data/evidence (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

The unit results from the individual unit surveys and Combined Learner Survey further captured data evidence. The Combined Learner Survey results for all units is located in Appendix 1. The surveys provided valuable insight on the technical infrastructure, IT Help Desk, and/or the Learning Management System (LMS) to enhance student support services provided to Online Learners. Various unit surveys will be administered each year to online student.

Explanation of the data's/evidence's relevance to program certification (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

The data contained in the survey results is pertinent to the Quality Matters certification process as it addresses the indirect and direct support for online learners. More specifically, the surveys provided information on remote access to Orientation to Online Study, Technical Support, Academic Advising, Proctoring and Student Authentication, Tutoring, Grade Appeals, Remote Library Access, Disability Services, Record and Registration, Financial Aid, Billing, and Institutional and Student Policies.

Description of how the program/institution has responded to the data's/evidence's conclusions (maximum of 250 words suggested as a guideline):

The individual units and Combined Learner Feedback Surveys provide students' perspectives on the effectiveness and satisfaction with the college's effort to support online learners. The feedback will be used to revise support services each year using the QM process model to continuously improve data collection. In response to the need for a consistent survey addressing online learners, the QM Team developed an overall survey with questions from each of the twelve units/services addressed in Criterion 1. This will enable the institution to gather feedback each year specific to online learners.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katrieva Jones Munroe was born in Odessa, Texas and raised in Midland Texas by her parents Freddie Jones and Shirley Jones. Katrieva has served her country in the capacity of a 2009 Fulbright Scholar in Russia, U.S. Science & Technology Delegate in Libya and the U.S. Education Delegate in Cuba. Katrieva was the first faculty to receive the Fulbright Scholar Award within the Lone Star College System and the first African American faculty member at Bashkir State University in Ufa, Russia. Additionally, Katrieva is a 2019 NISOD award recipient, 2019 nominee for the American Association of Colleges and Universities' Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award, 2019 Carolyn Grubbs Williams Leadership Development Institute recipient, Kappa Delta Pi (KDP) Omicron-Eta Chapter member, and a 2020 Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity: Emerging Research Fellow. Katrieva has a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science from the University of Texas Permian Basin, Masters of Science degree in Computer Science from Prairie View A&M University and a Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum & Instruction from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. To date, her greatest loves are her Husband Presley and her son Chase (my favorite son) who keep her going. Katrieva earned her Doctorate of Education in December 2020.

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