SHINING A LIGHT IN THE LABYRINTH: THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON FACULTY ADVISORS AND THEIR WORK WITH RURAL, FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Emily Aubele

Bachelor of Arts, Westminster College, 1991

Master of Education, Kent State University, 1995

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This dissertation of practice was presented

by

Emily Aubele

It was defended on

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and approved by

Dr. Jill Perry, Research Associate Professor, Administrative and Policy Studies

Dr. David Lott, Associate Professor, Clarion University of Pennsylvania

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. John Weidman, Professor of Higher and International

Development Education, Administrative and Policy Studies

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Emily Aubele, Ed.D

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The purpose of this Action Research study was to investigate the impact of the first iteration of a training and development program for faculty academic advisors. The program intends to assist faculty advisors to enhance and refine the academic advising strategies they employ when working with first generation, rural college students at Clarion University's Venango Campus. This study first explored, through focus groups, the experiences and perceptions of faculty advisors and first generation rural college students related to academic advising. Findings from that exploration served as a basis for the development and implementation of a campus specific academic advising training and development program for faculty, with an emphasis on the advising and self-efficacy needs of the first generation, rural college student. The study found that advisors who have access to training and development opportunities, and institutional support for their advising work with students are better able to employ developmental advising approaches that help to successfully guide the first-generation, rural college student through the transition to the academic environment. Faculty advisors who do not receive regular training and development, or are unclear as to the institutional advising

philosophy, struggle to provide advising services that extend beyond the prescriptive and may

feel underprepared to help students transition successfully.

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PREFACE

I would like to thank the following individuals for the support, inspiration, and encouragement they provided to me throughout this process: Dr. Renee Bloom and Dr. Ellen Foster for taking time out of their crazy schedules to read my first draft and help construct it into something I could stand by, and ultimately upon which I could build the whole project. Dr. Dave Lott, who served on my committee and got me through the last few weeks with his sage commentary: "Well, it's too late to worry about that now!" I will be forever grateful for his guidance and his confidence. Julia Samspon, Erin Shuetz, and Susan Donat-for keeping me Westminster strong. Jayne Shord for her constant encouragement. Sandy Aubele, Matthew Aubele, and Hunter and Cooper Aubele, for being my cheerleaders. My grandparents, Martin and Emma Chew, who always demonstrated the importance of hard work and perseverance. Linda Aubele, I wish you had been able to be here for this.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

Contemporary college students face numerous challenges as they adapt to the environment and ethos of academia. The transition to a new culture, teeming with expectations both explicit and implicit, tests resilience and prods students toward fundamental questions of purpose, meaning, and motivation. It is a time of realization and wonder, confusion and trepidation. It is also an investment of enormous financial and emotional risk. This is especially true in today's economy, where the need for an education beyond a high school degree has never been greater, while at the same time the ability to attain that education is threatened by unprecedented financial and academic challenges (Bohn, 2014; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

These challenges are particularly salient in the post-secondary lives of first generation, rural college students. Often acutely aware that their communities are undergoing tumultuous transformations as the economic bases of industry and agricultural decline, first generation rural college students struggle to transition not only to the college environment, but also to an uncertain future (Tieken, 2016). Rooted in a rural culture that values community, connectedness, and a sense of place, they are cognizant that "going home" after college may well not be an option (Bohn, 2014; Stone, 2014). For some this may be a reality to which they are willing to adapt. For others, it may be an obstacle to success. In either case, first generation rural college students will most often enter academia lacking the cultural capital necessary for successful

navigation of their new environment, and their future environments. For these students, a caring, compassionate, and informed mentor can make all the difference in their journey toward personal and academic success (Vance, 2016).

The academic advisor is well positioned to assume this mentorship role, and to help move students toward greater levels of self-efficacy in their transition to college and career. Advisors who employ advising approaches that include both prescriptive and developmental elements are more likely to successfully assist the first-generation rural college student as they adapt to the expectations of academia. This is especially true of advisors who understand and appreciate the unique challenges and concerns these students face, and in turn shine a light to help them along their way.

1.1   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the first iteration of a training and development program for faculty advisors. This program intends to assist faculty advisors to enhance and refine their advising skills and the strategies they employ when working with first generation, rural college students at Clarion University's Venango Campus. This study first explored the experiences and perceptions of faculty advisors and first generation rural college students related to academic advising. Findings from that exploration served as a basis for the development and implementation of a campus specific academic advising training and development program for faculty, with an emphasis on the advising and self-efficacy needs of the first generation, rural college student. This paper will review the "problem" that led to the

inquiry, the student and faculty perspectives about advising, the training that was subsequently implemented, and the feedback and recommendations which resulted from that training.

1.2   PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

In 2015, Clarion University, under the direction of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and the United States Department of Education, initiated a program to assist students placed on Academic Probation to develop a plan to improve their academic performance and retain eligibility for financial aid. Responsibility for this initiative was housed in the University's Office of the Provost, and managed by the Assistant Provost. Students placed on academic probation were required to meet with the Assistant Provost to discuss performance issues and develop a preliminary Academic Improvement Plan (AIP). Once this meeting was completed, the Assistant Provost emailed the student and his or her advisor, instructing them to meet, complete the AIP form, and develop a plan for monitoring the plan.

Though the intent of the program was (and is) focused on student success and retention, it quickly became apparent that intent alone would not insure student success. A predominant concern immediately developed among faculty advisors related to the "Why" - and perhaps more significantly - the "How" of AIP implementation. Furthermore, the faculty advisors at the Venango Campus felt an added sense of disconnect as they were not within the immediate milieu of the Provost's Office, where the details of this initiative were being discussed in greater depth and breadth. The sense of disconnect was exacerbated when Venango faculty attempted to search for resources to help them understand how to better advise at-risk students and found those resources to be scarce within the University.

These concerns came to my attention as the Director of Student Affairs at the Venango Campus, where student support services and success initiatives fall under my purview. In an attempt to address these concerns, I held several information sessions with Venango faculty to assist them with understanding the AIP process, and the resources on campus to which they could refer students. It was during these meetings that it became clear to me that faculty not only encountered challenges advising at-risk students, but in many cases, were also unclear about their advising role in general. Of particular note was the faculty advisor's concern about their ability to adequately promote student self-efficacy related to the transition to the college environment. Advisors felt their advisee's struggled with adapting to the new academic and cultural expectations, but did not know how to best assist them. As a majority of the students at the Venango Campus are first generation college students, and come from predominantly rural backgrounds, they presented some unique needs in advising sessions. These needs sometimes confounded the faculty, who after years of immersion in academia had become accustomed to a culture that was foreign to the students they advised. Reflecting on this, it quickly became clear that advisors needed training and resources to successfully implement AIP's, and to meet and manage their more general advising matters.

In order to develop a training program that was relevant and responsive to faculty and student needs, it was important for me to gain a more precise understanding of "where faculty were", and also how students experienced and understood advising. Gathering this information was important to this study because these questions seek to understand what faculty advisors believe about the purpose of advising and how well those beliefs mesh with the needs of the students they advise.   Knowing where the faculty are, in their own words, and knowing what the

students expect in comparison to what they experience in the advising process would help better situate the training program within the real world of the advising at Venango.

To that end, the following questions guided the first phase the inquiry:

- What are the unique needs of first generation rural college students at Clarion University-Venango Campus?
- What are the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions faculty advisors have about first generation, rural students?

After reflecting on the data collected in the first phase, the following questions guided the development, implementation, and evaluation of the second phase, which was training the program:

- How will the implementation of a training and development resource help faculty to better advise first generation, rural college students?
- What type of intervention will help faculty advisors to more effectively promote self-efficacy in first generation college students at Venango campus and also increase retention rates within this population?

1.3   SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

Advising is well established throughout persistence and retention literature as a critical component of student success and completion to degree attainment (Addus, Chen, & Khan, 2007; Braun & Zolfagharian, 2016; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Engle, Bermeo, O'Brien, & Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher, 2006; Leach & Wang, 2015; Miller, 2010; Truschel, 2008; Vivian, 2005). Faculty advisors who do not have adequate training, support, and resources related to advising may struggle to provide the kind of guidance that is so important to student success. Inadequate advising practices and processes may, in the worst-case scenario, have an unintended adverse effect on student success, particularly for those students who are at greater risk for attrition. Providing faculty with a cadre of advising tools and offering on-going

professional development and readily accessible resources will help faculty refine the skills and

strategies necessary to move students toward greater self-efficacy and toward making a greater

investment in developing and refining the skills necessary to be successful in college.

2.0   REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is provided by Bandura's Social Cognitive theory and the construct of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Venango Campus faculty have indicated two distinct yet related themes emerge when working with first generation rural college students. These themes include a lack of purpose related to their academic pursuits, and a lack of academic self-efficacy sufficient for undertaking college level work.   Bandura's theory informs understanding of faculty perceptions and will aid in the exploration of issues related to student academic self-efficacy and sense of purpose. In particular, these frameworks suggest how the faculty advisor can facilitate the development of student self-efficacy, and in turn a sense of purpose that informs their academic, life, and career choices. A strong sense of self-efficacy can facilitate greater levels of self-authorship and motivation for success (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). This is particularly important for rural first generation college students, whose unique challenges place them at a higher risk for attrition than their second and third generation peers (Atherton, 2014).

2.2 RURALITY

This study focuses on first generation students who come from a rural background, A growing body of research suggests that students from rural backgrounds have unique needs and challenges compared to their urban counterparts (Ames et al., 2014; Bohn, 2014; Hlinka, Mobelini, & Giltner, 2015; Hodsdon, 2012; Stone, 2014; Tieken, 2016). In particular, students from rural locations report a strong sense of attachment to place and community (Stone, 2014), and this attachment often influences their thoughts and feelings about higher education (Hlinka et al., 2015). Additionally, many rurally located high schools lack the resources necessary to expose students to a broad array of career and lifestyle possibilities outside of their local and regional communities (Stone, 2014). A lack of exposure to these possibilities, and to diverse cultures and experiences can contribute to a rural student's belief that college is, if not a viable option, then is a foreign land for which they are ill equipped to enter.

However, despite the trepidation a rural student may have about higher education, he or she is quick to acknowledge that in order to find gainful employment, training beyond high school is a necessity (Bohn, 2014; Hlinka et al., 2015). When the decision is made to attend a community or other college, rural students struggle with transitioning to a new community that consists of multiple and different values, belief systems, and academic expectations, all of which can be overwhelming and in many ways, threatening (Stone, 2014). Unlike their urban counterparts, who may be exposed to diversity and a less bounded sense of place, rural students struggle to forge an identity that retains their values while at the same time expanding their worldview (Hlinka et al., 2015; Stone, 2014). This struggle adds to the transitional issues first generation students typically encounter. Faculty and staff who work with rural students should be

familiar with these unique issues in order to better assist the student during their transition to higher education.

2.3   FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AND RURALITY

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight. Imagine further that you are a beginner, without previous experience, with nothing to guide you and no one to help you (Malinowski, 1964). This is how Bronislaw Malinowski (1964) described his initiation to field work in the South Coast of New Guinea. Ward et. al (2012) used this illustration to describe the experience of first generation college students as they navigate the complexities of higher education. First generation college students make up approximately 1/3 of all undergraduate students in the Unites States (Smith, 2012) and are commonly defined as students whose parent(s) did not attend college. While some definitions of "first generation college students" include students whose parents have had some college, for the purposes of this study, first generation college students are defined as having no parent who attended college or postsecondary education.

Research related to first generation college students is abundant, with similar student characteristics and challenges reported throughout (Atherton, 2014; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Engle et al., 2006; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Lightweis, 2014; Nomi & American Association of Community Colleges, 2005; Ward et al., 2012). Commonly identified characteristics of first generation college students include:

- They are of a lower socio-economic status (Nomi & American Association of Community Colleges, 2005)
- They are women, and/or belong to an underrepresented racial or ethnic group (Nomi & American Association of Community Colleges, 2005).
- They are more likely to stop out or drop out of college, largely due to unsuccessful academic progress, financial concerns, or conflicting responsibilities (Atherton, 2014; Coffman, 2011; Inman & Mayes, 1999).
- They have less academic preparedness and lower levels academic self-efficacy than their non-first generation peers (Atherton, 2014),
- They are more likely to be enrolled part-time (Grimes, 1997)
- They do not possess the social or cultural capital that often eases the transition to college and better insures persistence to degree attainment (McMurray & Sorrells, 2009; Ward et al., 2012).

McMurray (2009) attribute first generation struggles to the lack of "cultural capital" necessary for successful navigation of the complex culture of higher education. Unlike their second or third generation peers, first generation students often do not experience the same level of parental support and understanding, which makes transitioning to the college environment difficult. Student's often find themselves navigating unfamiliar territory alone, and self-perceptions of academic inferiority hamper the development of necessary academic skills and orientations (McMurray & Sorrells, 2009). The parent's lack of familiarity with college processes and procedures, jargon, and technical resources eliminate them as an informed resource when students encounter obstacles in these areas. While parents are generally supportive of their students' decision to pursue higher education, the lack of "college knowledge" can be counterproductive for the student (McMurray & Sorrells, 2009).

Ward et al. (2012) report similar challenges arising from the lack of cultural capital. Most notably they report how familial relations can become strained when parents do not understand the amount of time, effort, and energy needed to complete college level work. Often times this becomes a significant stressor and forces students to choose between their "new life" at college and their "old life" at home (Ames et al., 2014; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Ward et al., 2012). In his recent work, *Hillbilly Elegy*, J.D. Vance (2016) describes his plight as a first generation,

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poor, rural student who achieved admission to Yale Law School. Despite four years in the Marines and two years at Ohio State, Vance's struggle with his lack of cultural capital continued into graduate school. He describes a career networking dinner event wherein he became so overwhelmed the amount of silverware in front of him he had to phone a friend to ask what utensil to use when (p.212)   Reflecting on his experience he says:

"Social mobility isn't just about money and economics, it's about a lifestyle change. The wealthy and the powerful aren't just wealthy and powerful; they follow a different set of norms and mores. When you go from working-class to professional-class, almost everything about your old life becomes unfashionable at best or unhealthy at worst." (p.220)

The perceived need to choose between school and family is a struggle for rural first generation college students, for whom the pressure to remain actively involved in the family is strong and often at odds with their career and academic goals (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). Many, though certainly not all, struggle to balance their career aspirations with a desire to perpetuate the sense of home and family they experienced in their rural, small communities (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). However, the reality of being able to find sustainable blue collar careers in often economically depressed areas make it difficult to strike that balance (Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Tieken, 2016). Declining trade, agriculture, and industry jobs are necessitating the rural workforce, particularly those of college age, transition to careers that may not be viable options in their communities. The rural first generation student is then beset by the stress of having to transition to a new environment (college) and accepting the reality that "going home" after college may not be an option (Tieken, 2016).

This sense of current and impending displacement can cause a disequilibrium for the student, and may therefore significantly increase the risk of dropping out or stopping out (Ames

et al., 2014). If the student already possesses a lower sense of academic self-efficacy, and believes the conflict too debilitating, the risk of leaving is even more significant. Thus, self-authorship and academic self-efficacy play a critical role in helping bolster the student's motivation to succeed academically and cope with family and community expectations (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Tieken, 2016)

2.4   SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one's ability to successfully demonstrate a behavior necessary to produce a certain outcome (Bandura, 1977). The concept of self-efficacy is a central component of Bandura's Social Cognitive theory, which posits that human functioning is the result of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences, rather than mere reactions to biological or environmental influences (Pajares, 2002). Human beings learn by reflecting on their own experiences and thoughts, as well as watching others (Bandura, 1997). The core of Bandura's theory is the concept of self-efficacy beliefs, from which all behavior stems. What people believe about their capabilities is more motivating to their choice of behavior than what may be objectively "true" (Pajares, 2002). Self-efficacy beliefs strongly influence the choices people make and also help to determine resilience, perseverance, thought patterns, and emotional reactions (Pajares, 2002). Additionally, self-efficacy is specific to a particular task, or achievement. Unlike self-confidence and self-esteem, which have more to do with one's feelings and attitudes towards oneself as a whole, self-efficacy pertains to one's belief about their ability in a specific area (Pajares, 1996). For example, one can

have a great deal of self-confidence overall, but lack a sense of efficacy in a particular area, such as math, or public speaking.

The importance of self-efficacy to academic performance has been well documented over the past few decades (Barbatis, 2008; Chemers et al., 2001; Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010; Zimmerman & et al., 1992). Multiple studies suggest that students who possess higher levels of academic self-efficacy tend to demonstrate higher levels of motivation and investment in their academic pursuits. Efficacy beliefs impact a student's persistence and resiliency, helping to determine how long they will pursue a task to successful completion (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; Pajares, 1996).

For many first-generation college students, academic self-efficacy can be lower than that of their second or third generation peers, causing them to doubt their ability to perform at the expected academic level (Atherton, 2014; Chemers et al., 2001). This uncertainty leads to lower levels of commitment and motivation to succeed, and compounds the transitional difficulties a student may experience (Hlinka et al., 2015). It can also exacerbate a lack of understanding of the availability of resources and how to access them, too often creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of academic difficulty or failure. In these circumstances, students are well served by advisors familiar with four factors that affect self-efficacy; Actual performances, vicarious experiences, forms of social persuasion, and physiological indexes (Bean & Eaton, 2002) .

The most influential factor impacting self-efficacy is actual, or mastery performance. If a student has a history of performing well academically and has been able to overcome obstacles in their academic undertakings, his or her level of academic self-efficacy will be high. If a student has experienced repeated success academically, occasional failures along the way do not lower self-efficacy. However, if past academic performance has been consistently poor,

occasional achievements do little to raise self-efficacy (Pajares, 2002). Critical to raising self-efficacy is the ability to overcome failures and accurately perceive the role that determination and skill contributed to the success.

Another factor that is a major element of Social Cognitive theory and an influence on self-efficacy is vicarious experience. When one sees someone of similar ability achieve, he or she is more likely to believe he or she can attain the same performance outcome (Pajares, 2002). Thus, modeling becomes an important tool for helping students attain higher levels of self-efficacy. When introduced to and mentored by peers of similar background who have achieved academic success, students begin to believe more strongly in his or her own ability to achieve similar successes (Bandura, 1986). The stronger the belief, the more motivation the student has to consistently demonstrate the behavior and actions necessary to achieve (Pajares, 2002).

Social persuasion, particularly from others who are perceived as authorities or knowledgeable of a certain area, also has an impact on levels of self-efficacy. This factor also has the most potential to negatively impact self-efficacy. To be effective, those offering encouragement need to ensure that they are honestly and accurately appraising the place and capabilities of the student with whom they are working. Overassessment that leads to failure can significantly reduce self-efficacy, and to a much greater extent than persuaded achievement can increase efficacy beliefs (Pajares, 2002)

Finally, an individual's emotional state can have significant impact on his or her self-efficacy beliefs. Affective reactions to tasks can inhibit or increase the degree to which a person believes they will be able to successfully perform the task. Anxiety, fear, stress, and other adverse emotions can lower confidence levels and prohibit performance. More positive emotions

lead to higher levels of self-efficacy and a greater willingness to undertake the task (Pajares, 1996, 2002).

The Dewitz, Woolsey, and Walsh (2009) inquiry found that students with higher levels of self-efficacy also scored higher on the purpose in life measures. Higher levels on the purpose in life measures translated into higher levels of academic success, higher levels of general enthusiasm, higher levels of motivation, and a greater ability to manage emotions. Students who did not score high in these areas reported a lesser ability to deal with transitional issues in the college setting. They also reported a greater likelihood of withdrawal based on perceived obstacles such as personal relationships, finances, and lack of integration and engagement with the campus community. There was also a measurably lower level of motivation associated with a lesser sense of life purpose. The lack of motivation negatively impacted the student's orientation toward academic work and engagement with the campus community and support services (DeWitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009).

Faculty advisors are well positioned to significantly impact self-efficacy by being attuned to the students' perceived self-efficacy and being prepared to offer intervention and support via the four factors discussed above. Helping students to increase their self-efficacy can and does have a positive impact on their sense of purpose and their ability to chart their life course. Faculty who are well prepared to help advise students how navigate academic and transitional challenges can be tremendously influential, as will be discussed below.

Pizzolato (2005) also found that students who experienced a "provocative moment," defined as a "disequilibrium in which they questioned and explored their decisions and decision-making process, and in turn revised earlier beliefs or goals," were more likely to advance to a higher degree of self–authorship (Pizzolato, 2005). Students who did not use the "provocative

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moment" to explore internal motivations and values often failed to advance in their stated direction, and were less likely to persist to the second year of college and to degree attainment. These students seemed to possess what Sriram and Vetter (2012) described as a "fixed mindset" wherein obstacles were seen as prohibitive to further successes.

Sriram and Vetter's (2012) work focusing on the efficacy of remedial support for at-risk students found that beyond the academic skills, a "first obstacle" (or "provocative moment", as used by Pizzolato) can be influential enough to impact future academic success. If students demonstrated what Sriram and Vetter (2012) describe as a "fixed mindset," they were more likely to see obstacles as "proof" of their inability to be successful, which negatively impacted their transition to college. However, students who demonstrated a "growth mindset" were able to see setbacks as an opportunity to re-evaluate and change strategies. These students experienced much higher rates of success (Sriram & Vetter, 2012) and can be likened to Baxter-Magolda's (2013) "self-authoring" students who employ self-reflection and evaluation of their decision-making processes to develop more effective approaches to coping with obstacles or setbacks.

In many of the studies included in my review of the literature, another theme was readily apparent, that of an influential mentor who provided students with support, encouragement, and direction. In these cases, students identified that the interaction was a substantial and positive influence on their sense of self and self-confidence (Barber & King, 2014; Magolda, 1998). This influence was often credited as the "saving grace" when setbacks seemed insurmountable. In some instances, the interaction was a moment in time or a happenstance, but in the majority of instances, the influence resulted from sustained interaction and the cultivation of a mentor/mentee relationship (Pizzolato, 2003). It is in this way that faculty advisors are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in the student's academic journey. Through the advising process,

faculty can assist students with the development of the necessary skills to navigate the transition to the college culture, environment, and expectations, and in the process help increase their academic self-efficacy and sense of purpose.

2.5   ADVISING AND FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

Advising is well established throughout retention literature as a critical component of student success and completion to degree attainment (Addus, Chen, & Khan, 2007; Braun & Zolfagharian, 2016; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Engle, Bermeo, O'Brien, & Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher, 2006; Leach & Wang, 2015; Miller, 2010; Truschel, 2008; Vivian, 2005). The advisor is one of the first significant institutional contacts a student will make, and that relationship can make a significant impact on the student's initial impressions about the academic community (Braxton & Mundy, 2002). Advising that considers the whole student, is intentional, and is congruent with the students preferred style and expectations has the most likelihood of creating an environment conducive to student success (Fowler & Boylan, 2010).

Research strongly supports the contention that students are more likely to succeed when they have access to clear and consistent interpretations of institutional requirements and expectations. The advisor is well positioned to provide this type of guidance, and more. As an expert in the discipline, the advisor can help the student identify and develop the characteristics necessary for success in their chosen career/discipline. This has significant consequences for the student in that her or she has not only a reliable guide for navigating the current environment, but also future career cultures (Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). For some advisors,

this marks a change in approach from what they may have experienced in their own academic journeys. As educational institutions distribute responsibility for student success and retention across all constituents of the enterprise, what was once the realm of student support services and retention programs has now become an expectation of all who work with students, especially academic advisors.

The shift in advising that has occurred over the past several decades moves the advising process from a more prescriptive approach to increasingly more developmental and holistic approach (Drake, 2013). Rather than view the advisor/advisee relationship as strictly functional, wherein the advisor imparts information to the student and insures that academic requirements are met, contemporary approaches encourage a more mentoring and personal relationship. In this view, advisors serve to encourage the student along their academic and life path, offering challenge and support as needed throughout the student's academic program (Kimball, 2013).

How to develop these types of relationships can be challenging, especially for faculty advisors who, unlike professional student support staff, may not have training or background in providing a more intentional advising experience. However, Kimball and Campbell (2013) report that

> "No universal prescription applies to academic advising because each situation and the way individuals interpret it differ. Academic advisors must first and foremost understand how a student interprets his or her situation: what has meaning? What has value? The answers inform the strategy the advisor employs." (p.8)

Each advisor can continually develop and his or her own approach and refine its philosophical underpinning. One does not need to merely mirror the approach adopted by the institution, but because of the importance of advising to student success, should be seeking ways to add to their compliment of advising methods. This is especially important when recognizing that different students will present different needs and preferences, and the advisor's ability to adapt to those differences is critical. Kuh (2008) reports that students can learn anything the institution teaches as long as the right conditions are in place for this to occur. Of primary significance is the appropriate amount of challenge and support, which academic advisors are well poised to provide (p.76). From even prior to matriculation, advisors who help students understand what will be expected and what resources will be available set the student on a path of self-sufficiency and success and reinforce the educational process as a shared experience (Kuh, 2008).

While some may be naturally outstanding academic advisors, most successful advising is the result of practice, training, and a commitment to understanding the critically important role advising plays in student success, especially for students whose backgrounds may not have prepared them as well for the transition. Brown (2008) describes academic advisors as "lights in a labyrinth to students" (p.309). These individuals help students "make sense of their past and plan their future" and I would add to that, they help illuminate the present (Brown, 2008). This happens through a relationship that is intentionally developed and cultivated, and is reciprocal rather than hierarchical. In much of our life experiences, those types of relationships don't just happen and then flourish unattended. They take work. How one approaches that work is as different and diverse as each of us are, and that is a critical component of effective advising: understanding the unique circumstance and background each student brings along with them

when they arrive on campus, and adapting the advising relationship to meet those differences (Kuh, 2008).

For example, advisors, often steeped in the nomenclature of their immediate environment, may forget that these students are learning a new language, almost literally. Each campus has its own processes, software, locations, forms, etc. that are often identified by acronyms or jargon. It can be very easy for an advisor to meet with a student and in that time, making multiple references using this internal language. Some students may question and ask for further clarification, but many others may sit passively, overwhelmed by the information, and afraid to ask for more detail. Just this alone can impact the student's sense of self-efficacy and confidence in their ability transition to the new environment (Hlinka et al., 2015). Thus, understanding the general needs of first generation, rural college students, and then the more specific, individual needs is important work that requires constant cultivation in order to help students grow and develop in college and in the years beyond.

In addition to relational skills and procedural knowledge, advisors must also be aware of legal issues they may encounter when working with students. This is particularly true as it relates to Title IX and Clery reporting. As the advising role changes, faculty are increasingly viewed as a confidante as well as a mentor, yet they are representatives of the university's they serve and as such are beholden to processes and procedures related to the reporting of sensitive information. Therefore, training related to these reporting processes and requirements is absolutely critical.

3.0   RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1   APPROACH

This is an Action Research study, designed to address a problem or concern within a specific environment (lack of adequate advising resources at the Venango Campus), implement a plan to address that problem (Training and development, web based resources), evaluate the intervention's impact, and revise the plan according to the gaps or new insights identified by participant feedback. As is the case with most Action Research inquiries, implementing the intervention will be an iterative process of reflecting, planning, acting, and observing (Stringer, 2007). Herr and Anderson (2011) describe action research as having an intervention as an integral component of knowledge generation (p.5) and my inquiry aligns with the action cycles they describe, though this inquiry began in reflection (Stringer, 2007), as illustrated in the figure below (Herr & Anderson, 2011).
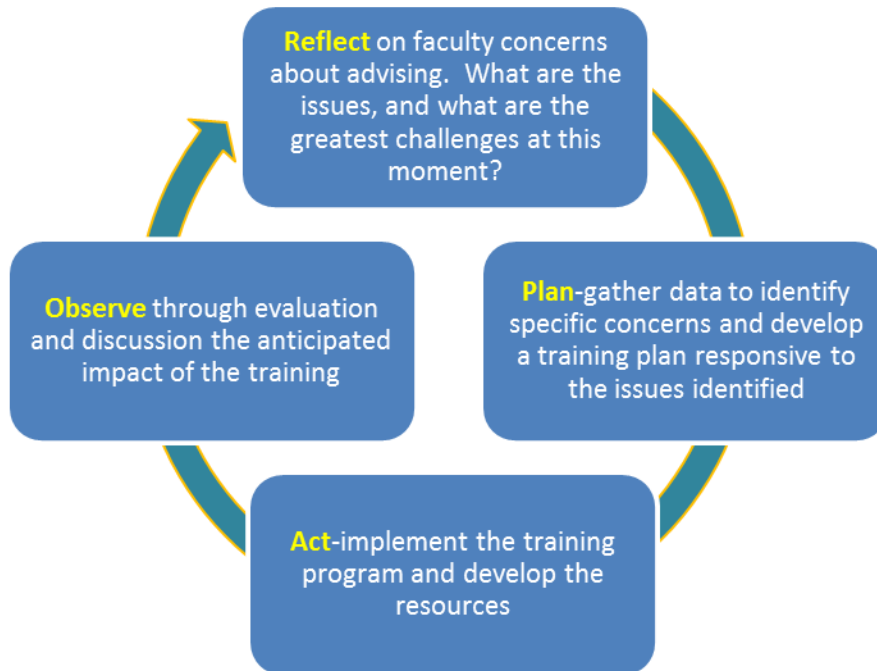
Figure 1 Research Cycle

3.2 EXPLANATION OF POSITIONALITY

Because I conducted this inquiry as an internal member of the Clarion University, Venango Campus with the intent to facilitate a change or improvement in our current advising practices, it seems most beneficial and appropriate to posit this inquiry as an individual action research study (Stringer, 2007). While other members of the organization assisted in providing foundational information that informed the first iteration of the training workshop, the initial cycle of reflecting planning, primarily I undertook acting, and observing. Future versions of this intervention will involve more participants, with the development of a campus based advising committee, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

3.3   CONTEXT

Because of its size, location, and programmatic scope, the Venango campus of Clarion University attracts a substantial population of rural, first generation, low- income students whose academic backgrounds place them at risk for non-success or early university withdrawal. Approximately one third of the 700 predominantly white, first generation students enrolled at Venango are identified as coming from rural areas (Howley, Johnson, Passa, Uekawa, & Regional Educational Laboratory, 2014) and are Pell eligible, meaning they meet low-income requirements for federal financial aid grants through the Pell Grant program. In addition to pervasive financial needs, students at Venango often require academic remediation in one or more subjects. Over one-third of newly admitted Pell-eligible students are designated by Clarion University with the status of "Special Admit" (Engaged Learner). Criteria for Special Admit status are average SAT scores of 846 and high School QPA's of 2.3 ("2009-2010 Annual Fact Book," 2016)compared to standard University admission criteria for new students that require, at minimum, 950 SAT or 21 ACT scores and a 3.0 high school QPA ("2009-2010 Annual Fact Book," 2016).

In their work with numerous academically underprepared students, faculty and staff consistently reported students' expressions of self-doubt. Past academic or life challenges have fostered negative self-perceptions, and a lack of academic or interpersonal self-efficacy. Further, faculty and staff have noticed students' inability to articulate cogent answers to questions related to motivation for attending college (M. Moore, K.Vickers, R. Feroz, J.May, C. Harancher, V. Seybold, personal communication, 2015). Indeed, it is often the case that life goals are vague, making it difficult for students to commit to any particular academic path or invest the personal resources necessary to be successful. This may be due in part to their "rurality" (Stone, 2014)

and their status as first generation college students, as discussed above. Without a strong rationale for the "Why" of enrolling in college, students often struggle with or care little about the "what" in terms of academic paths and "How" of navigating those paths (Sriram, 2012). A tendency toward self-doubt, coupled with unclear goals or reasons for being in college, can give cause for any setback, no matter how large or small, to become insurmountable in the student's mind, leading to withdrawal from the academic process, either literally or figuratively, formally or informally (Sriram, 2012).

At Clarion University and its Venango Campus, academic advising is the responsibility of the faculty, as mandated by the APSCUF collective bargaining agreement. For reasons stated above, the role of academic advisor is one with which many faculty often struggle. Lacking sufficient tools and knowledge to assist students with these more complex concerns of self-efficacy and purpose, faculty often resort to employing a prescriptive advising approach (Allen & Smith, 2008; Hale, Graham, & Johnson, 2009) focusing on the student's major course requirements, registration, and academic progress. However, research has supported the critical impact advisors who employ a more holistic advising approach can have on student success and retention, particularly students who are at risk of non-completion or being academically unsuccessful (Addus et al., 2007; Allen & Smith, 2008; Ames et al., 2014; Truschel, 2008; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Though it is not the role of faculty to provide counseling to students in the traditional sense of counselor and client, faculty may enhance their impact on the first generation, rural college student by employing advising techniques that are congruent with the student's advising expectations and preferred style. Further, faculty advisors may have to adapt their advising style as the student's preferred advisement style changes as they progress in their academic journey

(Hale et al., 2009). Providing faculty with a cadre of advising tools and offering on-going professional development and resources will help faculty move students toward greater self-efficacy and sense of purpose therefore helping the student develop a greater investment in developing and refining the skills necessary for success in college. In order to determine which of the challenges were most prevalent at Venango, and to engage the faculty in the process, I chose to collect some preliminary data to help inform the development of the training and to identify which advising resources would be most helpful.

3.4   METHODOLGY

This study was approved by the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board on October 17, 2017, and by Clarion University Institutional Review Board on October 24, 2016. Data for this study was collected by way of student and faculty focus groups (**Appendix A**). In focus groups, the participant dialogue can provide insight to both the individual and collective experience. Dynamic discussion and dialogue are likely to provoke responses from individuals that may not occur in the singular interview process. This can provide a rich data source for broadening understanding of the participant experience (Menter, 2011).

Data was also collected through an evaluative feedback process, wherein faculty reflected on the training program and discussed how they anticipated the information would affect their advising work with first generation, rural college students (Appendix B). The discussion and evaluation of the training program provided important input for future training sessions and the development of accessible resources to assist with the advising process. In addition to identifying future content for more localized training, the discussion shone a light on a much larger issue

related to the lack of a university wide infrastructure to support and nurture good advising practices.

3.5   FOCUS GROUPS

Two focus groups for faculty and two for students were conducted using a pre-established Focus Group Protocol. Both sets of focus groups included a verbal participation agreement. To identify participants for student focus group, a data processing (DP) request was made to Clarion University Computing Services to identify students coded as "on-the-ground" at Venango Campus, first generation, rural, and who were currently enrolled in their third term at Venango. This request generated a list of 87 students who met the specified criteria. (It should be noted that students who take both online and on-the ground-courses simultaneously may not be coded as on-the-ground and due to time constraints, it was not possible to manually sort a list of students coded as hybrid.) These 87 students were personally invited to participate via email and a letter sent through the United States Postal Service. Of those, 7 students were able to participate in the focus group sessions. The first focus group consisted of 3 students, and the second group of 4 students. Of the 7, 6 were traditional age, 1 was over the age of 30. All of the participants were female and 5 of the students were in the same major field of study.

For the faculty focus group, email and hard copy invitations were sent to the 16 faculty at Venango who are full time and can serve as academic advisors. Of those, 12 are actively advising students.   Of those 12, 7 participated in the focus groups-4 in the first group and 3 in the second group. 5 were female, 2 had been advising for 3 years or less, and 4 had been advising for 10 or more years. The advising load ranged from 4 students to over 100 students.

These focus groups were conducted in order to best inform the development of a relevant and responsive advising training and development resource program. Data collected from each group were categorized into general themes. While the literature suggests particular needs and challenges for both students and faculty in the advising relationship, I wanted to determine which of those needs and challenges were most prevalent at the Venango Campus. Many of the themes addressed in the literature were present in the focus group discussions, and were incorporated into the training program, as will be discussed in the next chapter. In addition, the focus groups helped to identify what faculty believed to be resource challenges they encountered during advising, and how students perceived those challenges to impact their advising sessions.

I would not anticipate that the development of future training sessions would necessitate this method of data collection but instead could depend on the evaluation and feedback process, as well as input from an established advising committee. However, I felt it important that the faculty and the students felt "heard" and that their concerns were adequately addressed in the first training program, as it will serve as the foundation for future sessions.

3.6   TRAINING EVALUATION

At the conclusion of the training session, there was an open period of discussion and feedback related to the material presented. A hard copy evaluation was also provided and participants were asked to identify what aspects of the training were most helpful, least helpful, and what resources they would like to see in the website. The second component of the evaluation asked participants to indicate the level to which they agreed or disagreed that the 4 training objectives had been met. Finally, participants were asked to provide suggestions for

improvement, indicate future topics of interest, and to provide any additional comments. This feedback is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter and serves as the most prominent aspect of this inquiry because of what it revealed about advising at Venango and Clarion University.

3.7   THE TRAINING PROGRAM

The title selected for this training session was "Promoting Student Success Through Advising and Mentoring, and totaled 2.5 hours in length **(Appendix C)**. Though this workshop could have been developed straight from the literature and personal, anecdotal conversations with individual faculty, I felt it was important to initiate a slightly more formal process, so that participants could recognize the training responded to specific concerns they raised. It was equally important to me that they were also able to hear from the students they advise. To build the training upon solicited input seemed an important first step to generating faculty "buy-in" for future phases of the training and development program. The discussion and evaluation at the conclusion of the session affirmed this course of action and generated valuable insights that will significantly impact future recommendations and courses of action.

The student focus groups generated three prevalent themes that aligned with the literature regarding the academic and social self-efficacy of first generation college students, and which resonated with themes identified in the faculty focus groups. Themes identified were:

- Apprehension and uncertainty about being in a new environment, and not knowing what they didn't know, feeling like they were "missing" something they were supposed to do.
- Lack of preparedness for the amount and rigor of coursework.
- Experience of conflict between what professors expected and what

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family/significant others expected and had difficulty balancing those expectations.

After reviewing data collected in the faculty focus groups, four prevalent themes emerged that in some ways resonated with student input, and served as the basis for the training objectives. These themes and objectives are identified in the table below:

Theme	Training Session Objective
Difficulty understanding student motivation and rationale for decisions or lack of action.	Define the needs of first generation and non-traditional students at Venango.
Lack of certainty about the role and responsibility of an advisor. (General)	Identify your personal advising philosophy.
Unclear about "how to help" students beyond course scheduling and advice on where to go for help. (Specific)	Review four advising models.
Information is hard to find at the university level, no central location for assistance with common questions, procedures, information about course flags, sequences, and substitutions, no direction on how to conduct advising from the top down	Acquire tools and strategies for use in advising and goal setting meetings with students.

Table 1 Themes and Objectives

3.8   DISCUSSION OF OBJECTIVES

The objectives for this training, identified in Tab1e 1, were developed from the prevalent themes identified in the focus groups, and informed by Brown's "Critical Concepts in Advisor Training and development" (2008). One of the most important areas to cover had to do with helping faculty begin to understand the advising relationship as a developmental process, wherein they had some responsibility to move beyond the prescriptive approach and toward a more developmental approach (Brown, 2008). While most faculty on the campus strongly desire

to mentor students, how to mentor well can, understandably, present challenges (Kimball, 2013). Consequently this training explored first the characteristics of the students and their unique needs, and then the unique characteristics of the advisors and their needs. The rationale for each of the above objectives is explained in greater detail below:

3.9 DEFINE THE NEEDS OF FIRST GENERATION AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS AT VENANGO

Both students and faculty spoke of what could be considered "disconnects" in the advising process. Faculty felt that students did not utilize technological resources appropriately, including their student portals, academic checksheets, and university email. Further, faculty advisors expressed concern with student's poor communication and time management skills, inability to grasp the level of work required to achieve good grades on coursework, and lack of critical thinking about how to achieve career goals. When asked about individual factors or characteristics add to a student's ability to be successful, one advisor discussed the importance of being able to utilize critical technologies and some challenges with the student's ability to adjust to the technology. He noted:

> "Many of my advisees are pretty much all first-generation students, and some returning adults, first time students and all of a sudden they are thrown into this technology, D2L, MyClarion, email, all that stuff and you have to be looking at your email, your D2L, MyClarion or whatever and I'm not sure that they are getting that upfront. I've spent countless hours just reviewing basic things with students and they just aren't getting it."

Another advisor shared that her advisee's "just didn't seem to understand how much effort they were going to need to put forth, to, you know, do well. Not even great, just well. And then they are devastated and what do you say? Well, this is college." Other advisor's concurred and added examples of student's not being able to manage their time effectively. One advisor said,

> "I think it's the first time away from home thing, all that freedom and they don't know how to handle it. They just aren't prepared and you tell them 'you have to make a schedule, use your syllabus, go see Kyle (The Coordinator of the Academic Resource Center) but come up with a plan because the stuff just builds and doesn't get easier. At least not in our program."

Almost to a person, the advisors indicated struggling with how to help students. Their level of comfort with advising varied, roughly half feeling that the role extended beyond prescriptive advising to more of a mentoring role, and others indicated that their ability to even think about forming mentoring relationships was prohibited by the sheer number of advisee's they were assigned. Two of the faculty that participated had an advising load of over 100 students, about half of which they met with regularly while the other half were away at clinical sites and required a lot less interaction until their final term.

Interestingly, the student focus group revealed the "other side of the story" with respect to what they felt they needed to be successful. When asked "If you had to give your advisor some advice, what would it be?" One student responded "Remember we haven't been here as long as you, all these words get tossed around like you're supposed to know what it is. I still don't know how to do a degree audit, I can use the checksheet that's easy, but all the other MyClarion things? No clue (laughs)" Another student added to this and said,

"Also remember we have other classes and not just yours so professors should talk to each other about papers and tests and quizzes because all of them schedule them at the same time like that's the only class we have and it isn't. I have five classes this term. Plus then I have to work. So they should get that."

Given what appeared to be an understandable disconnect between faculty advisors and students, this objective served to re-focus and remind the faculty of the very real struggles first generation students encountered and that they were in some ways "strangers in a new land," for which advisors could serve as emissaries. To meet this objective I reviewed characteristic identified in the literature, highlighted some commentary from the focused group, reviewed strategies that "work" for first generation students (highlighting advising) and presented a video clip from "Who We Are: First-Generation College Students Speak Out" (WKCDorg, 2009, Janaury 21)

3.10   IDENTIFY YOUR PERSONAL ADVISING PHILOSOPHY

This objective resulted from faculty responses to the focus group questions "In what ways do you feel equipped to advise first generation students at Venango and how did you acquire those skills?" and "In what ways do you feel you influence the success of first year students at Venango?"   The responses to these questions were very similar across all participants, and revealed that none had received any university sponsored training or orientation to their role as advisors, and therefore at times questioned their skills in certain areas. Additionally, they indicated that they had devised their approach from their respective professional backgrounds. One advisor stated:

"I come from the business world, that model. So customer service is huge. I go back to my first academic advisor when I was in college who was horrendous. You'd go knock on his door during office hours and had maybe a 20% chance he was going to be there. When I switched majors, largely because of that academic advisor, when I switched majors, and really got a strong academic advisor, an advisor you knew was not only going to be there for you but give you the right guidance, that mentoring, then it made all the difference, and um, that's what carried me through and why I advise the way I do now. I look at advising as maybe more important, even more important than teaching because I come from the business world where customer service is everything."

Another shared that their belief was:

"I think we do need to teach them, and we do need to guide them, but I also think they are college students and they have to start accepting the fact that, expect that, they have to be able to function, I don't want to say independently, but the expectation, I am not their mother. And I am not going to do everything for them. I'm going to work with them, I am going show them, I am going to answer all the questions they have but they are going to have to learn to fly on their own. Otherwise we are doing them a disservice."

Several advisors said that what they felt was most important was that they themselves stayed on top of what the students needed for their major, and that they paid attention to the details in order to be able to inform them of what needed to happen when. A great deal of the comments focused on what could be described as a prescriptive approach with a touch of developmental inclination, where the advisor essentially moved the student through necessary channels in order to graduate, and offered resources and guidance when able (Hale et al., 2009).

Students did not express dissatisfaction with the advising relationship because there was congruence between what they believed the role of an advisor to be and what they needed from the advisor (Hale et al., 2009). There did not exist any dissatisfaction related to the advising relationship. Students did express concern about their ability to reach advisors outside of scheduled appointments. This largely had to do with the university calendar, particularly at the end of terms, when students were thinking about schedule adjustments or changing majors, and were unable to reach faculty advisors because of the break period. Another factor impacting accessibility was the advisor's advisee load. The sheer number of advisees prevented some advisors from being able to accommodate students during office hours. This conflicted with the type of advising they wanted to provide, which was why the discussion that occurred among faculty during this section was valuable.

To facilitate this objective, there was discussion related to advising goals of the university and as individual faculty advisors. I highlighted some of their focus group responses that revealed clear articulations of advising philosophies and also some of the challenges they encountered adjusting to their role as an advisor. I then distributed a "Statement of Advising Prompts" form from the University of California at Berkeley's "Advising Matters" program (http://advisingmatters.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/general/Statement%20of%20Advising%20Philosophy%20Prompts.pdf). This form prompted faculty to think specifically about their advising practice, influences on that practice, and how they describe or define good advising. It was my intention that reflection on the prompts would help inform their adoption of advising model or models, which was the next objective of the workshop.

3.11   REVIEW FOUR ADVISING MODELS

This section flowed directly from the previous, and was designed to help faculty identify an advising model that resonated with their advising philosophy.   During the focus groups, faculty mentioned several times that they learned to advise by trial and error, by watching more seasoned colleagues, or by recalling their own involvement with academic advisors and either adopting or rejecting certain elements of that experience. Some had developed their own Advising Checklist to insure they covered all the important issues, and others used the checklist associated with the particular major. In order to expose faculty advisors to different research based approaches to advising, this section reviewed four popular models of advising; Prescriptive, Developmental, Proactive, and Appreciative. In addition to outlining basic tenets of each model, I also presented a selection of tools commonly associated with each model, including examples of advising agreements, advising syllabi, and questionnaires that could be used to help advisors better understand the strengths, interests, and concerns of advisees. These tools were one component of the next and final objective related to the acquisition of tools, resources, and strategies that could be used to help shape and guide the advising process.

3.12   ACQUIRE TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR USE IN ADVISING AND GOAL SETTING MEETINGS WITH STUDENTS.

The fourth predominant theme that arose from the focus groups had to do with the centralization and accessibility of information related to advising. Again, to a person, faculty lamented that advising sessions usually entailed searching the university webpage for

information related to course designations (what constituted a General Education Course, what course fulfilled what flags, etc.) In addition to not having that information readily accessible, faculty also had to search different web pages for different forms commonly used in advising. In more difficult advising situations, such as AIP's, things could become even more complicated and confusing, having to click through several sources looking for answers. In order to assist with this problem, I created a page on the Venango Website that included all the links faculty might need to access during advising, arranged topically so as to be more easily located on the page. In addition to those links, I included links to the various tools presented in the overview of advising models, and more information and videos related to the models and first generation students. In addition to this, I reviewed some suggestions related to the use of alternative technologies for communicating with students such as social media, and the sharing of strategies amongst each other in order to enhance advising practices. At the close of this section, we entered the discussion and evaluation stage of the session, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

4.0   FINDINGS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this training program was to begin to respond to two of the research questions guiding this study:

- Will the implementation of a training and development resource help faculty to better advise first generation, rural college students?
- What type of intervention will help faculty advisors to more effectively promote self-efficacy in first generation college students at Venango campus and also increase retention rates within this population?

To that end, the discussion and the evaluation components of this training session spoke to each question. The following sections will summarize these two components, address limitations, and recommend next steps for future iterations of the program. It should be noted that as a result of the discussion, the next phases move beyond training initiatives at Venango and present much broader considerations for the university as a whole.

4.2   DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The advisor training workshop "Promoting Student Success Through Advising and Mentoring" was presented one February 17, 2017. The session ran for approximately 3 hours and included a PowerPoint presentation **(Appendix C)** and time for discussion and evaluation. 5

faculty and 3 staff members attended. The staff members in attendance provide academic and career support to students at the campus and were therefore interested in the content and subsequent discussion. Though I had hoped for more faculty attendance, the smaller group did allow for deeper discussion and examination of the content. I was very pleased with the level of interaction and engagement that occurred throughout, so despite the less than anticipated attendance, the resulting plan of action was very responsive to the identified needs. There were several salient points raised through the discussion, which I will summarize first, and then review the written evaluations.

Four concerns were identified by the faculty during the discussion. The first was that while advising is a responsibility of the faculty, it is not a component of the promotion and tenure process. Faculty who are able to advise according to the CBA are any designated as tenured, tenure track, or full time temporary. In each case, their advising practices are not a formal component of their evaluation and is not taken into consideration when applying for promotion or tenure. Furthermore, there are no rewards or recognitions associated with advising. So, while advising does not impact mobility, it is also not compensated by credit load reductions or supplemental salary. This creates obvious concerns about quality standards related to advising. With no evaluation process in place, and no impact on promotion or tenure decisions, there is little incentive other than the personal to consider advising a central responsibility. Those faculty whom do go "over and above" ("over and above" what is unknown, as no university driven expectation or directive related to advising standards is readily accessible or promulgated) find that their advising loads increase as students talk amongst each other about advising experiences. It was acknowledged that an additional, related concern is that students who request to change advisors are taking an initiative that many students do not take, either out of

unawareness that it is possible or because they see it adversary and do not want to upset anyone. So, in addition to the problem of disparate advising loads, there remain questions about the level and quality of advising students may receive.

This led to discussion about the second concern, which is advising loads in general. In addition to advisors taking on more advisees through change-of-advisor requests, other programs do not have a population of faculty available to share the advising load. In at least three programs offered at the campus, one faculty serves as advisor for 85 to 100 students. Some of these faculty are amenable to sharing the advising load with other faculty outside of their program, but have concerns about that students will not be able to have the same kind of career and professional guidance provided by someone outside of the field. These faculty acknowledge that advising not only serves an academic purpose, but also as an orientation to the professional field, which is critical, especially to first year, first generation students. In response to this, other faculty members confessed to feeling under-utilized. Though they were not connected to any particular major at the campus, they wanted to advise students and work cooperatively with their colleagues to share the advising loads while at the same time keeping the student connected to the specific professional field. How this could happen led to the next item of discussion.

The third concern addressed in the discussion was the lack of policies or uniform procedures to guide or inform the advising process. This was a reiteration of some of the points brought up in the faculty focus groups, but explored in greater detail here. There is no overarching advising philosophy championed by the University. The University Advising Center, which serves a defined population, promotes the National Association of Academic Advisors (NACADA) definition of advising, but again, this center serves a specific population of student within the University, not the general population. There was not a general awareness

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among faculty in attendance that this center even existed or what services it provided. Though the faculty who staffs this center had recently offered a workshop related to advising procedures, and the faculty has been aware of that through emails. However, they did not associate this workshop with the Center, but with the individual faculty who offered it. There was a unanimous sentiment though, that more of it needed to happen, especially for new faculty.

New faculty do not receive any training, orientation, or formal direction related to their advising responsibilities. One faculty member indicated that she had no idea part of her responsibility was to advise students, and only found out about it when a student showed up at her door to request a schedule change shortly after her first day on the job. Faculty members who had been at the university longer recalled a time when there had been some workshops offered regularly through the Provost's office at the proclivity of the then Provost, and one faculty member had even developed a Faculty Advising handbook of her own initiative. Another recalled a time when the Venango campus had an advising committee that had been coordinated through Student Affairs. Unfortunately, none of these efforts were coordinated through any one office or enterprise within the university and eventually fizzled out.

These three concerns flowed directly into the fourth and most critical point – if we consider advising an important influence on student success, why does it not hold a more prominent place within the university? At a time when enrollment and state funding is on the decline, attrition is on the rise, and the students admitted each year are increasingly less well prepared, faculty felt advising could be one of the primary tools implemented to address student retention and success. In addition, it was a resource already in place within the institutional structure, not requiring significant new financial investment or infrastructure development.

Discussion turned to what could be done in the immediate future to begin to address these concerns. This is also what I would consider the next few phases of intervention to be implemented over the course of the remaining terms and next academic year. Faculty expressed a willingness and desire to form a committee that would address advising concern systemically. As will be shown, the next steps to help advisors work more effectively with students do not have as much to do with the implementation of future training sessions, but more to do with how advising is viewed and supported university wide. From that flows the opportunities and resources for each advisor to pursue according to their individual needs. The following table represents my summary of the potential possibilities to explore for each concern:

Problem/Concern	Potential Solution/Intervention
Lack of university wide advising philosophy or protocol	Pilot an advising committee at the Venango Campus (that will include Clarion campus faculty) to coordinate resources, draft policies, and make recommendations to senior administration. Develop "Advising Outcomes" to establish consistency in advising.
Disparity in advising load	Develop advising "teams" which may include faculty not related to the specific academic program but will develop a shared approach and protocol for providing students exposure to the culture and expectations of the particular profession.
Lack of reward for advising	This issue of reward and evaluation can be addressed more specifically in the recommendations from the Advising committee. This should include further exploration of student's experience with advising across the University.
Few resources available to enhance and develop advising skills and processes.	Offer an advising training "curriculum" facilitated by university staff, guest presenters, and faculty advisors who are implementing "best practice" approaches. This could be a sub-committee of the larger advising committee. Continue to consistently upgrade and improve the Venango Campus advising resources page.

Table 2 Concerns and Interventions

4.3   EVALUATION SUMMARY

At the conclusion of the discussion period, participants were given evaluations to complete anonymously **(Appendix B)**. The feedback from those evaluations is provided below, in its entirety. I chose a full summary rather than highlights because the feedback was helpful and because it supports the structure of this study. Additionally, the feedback answers the

question from the faculty perspective, about what they feel they need to better advise first

generation college students.

- **What aspects of the workshop were most helpful for you?** Please explain.

    "Gaining perspective on the student's opinions of the advising process, the advising relationship, and the role of the advisor. And also learning the fundamental styles, Lastly, dialogue with my faculty peers"

    "Results of focus groups. Venango advising page"

    "To know common threats for students and advisors"

    "The list of resources that was available to advisors"

    "Advisee group input results of 7 2nd yr. F.G. Venango students"

    "Seeing the differences between advisor and student perceptions and expectations. As someone who is kind of in between the two sides, it was helpful to better understand"

    "Synthesis of research on advising and FG students"

    "The discussions during the workshop and presentation"

- **What aspects were least helpful? Please explain.** (2 were left blank)

    "N/A"

    "Results of advisor group seemed obvious"

    "I found the entire presentation very helpful. No complaints!!!"

    "N/A"

    "Some of the forms were too small to read"

    "None it was very helpful"

- **How, if at all, has this workshop changed your thinking about advising first generation rural students at Venango?**

    "Has made me more aware of their needs and worries about acclimating. My sensitivity to their position."

"Appreciative advising, use resources given"

"It did not change my thinking"

"I would like to be able to participate more in advising"

"Although I have tried to understand this demographic over the last few years, I still find myself taking things for granted. I will continue to work towards understanding these students better. This workshop is a great reminder of what I need to do better"

"FG Venango have unique characteristics that need special attention vs. FG overall"

"We need a structure or framework of resources, training, assignment of advisors, etc."

"Check our assumptions. Reinforced my thoughts on the unique and specific individual needs FG students may have."

- **What was the most significant thing you learned in this workshop?**

"Reflecting on my thoughts about advising and acknowledging and understanding students thoughts and perspectives"

"Agreements to adapt or use. Website info/specifics"

"Various approaches to advising and each have pros/cons with applicable results"

"There is a large gap between students and advisors, yet both sides tend to be unwilling to be flexible and try to understand the other side. Many ideas in this workshop offer ways to bridge the gap"

"The university has no policy for advising'

"That they may not know my office hours"

"Results of focus groups"

"That the things we take for granted that a student knows (FTIC) may not hold true"

- **How, if at all, will you use and/or apply what you learned in the workshop?**

"Yes, I will be more aware of the individual student's circumstances and that may impact his/her academic and/or social success"

"I will use the handouts given out"

"Use the worksheets"

"I would like to learn more about Appreciative Advising"

"I will take the students specific needs into consideration more, and try to meet them at their level rather than try to make them adapt to me"

"Partnership with students as advisement relevance"

"Will formalize and broaden my use of strategies that work. Will ask students to do/engage in discussions of interventions etc. Appreciative Advising"

"Utilizing the tools to assist students, suggestions, be willing, be familiar with resources"

- **Following this workshop what are one or two things that would be most helpful for you on the website?**

  "Not sure about this questions"

  "Advisement handbook, Advisement/MyCalrion?D2L help tutorials (such as videos) for students and faculty to use."

  "Resources at end"

  "This website is an awesome "one stop shop" for all things advisingwith great links and many resources"

  "Have regular meetings on advising"

  "Worksheets. Guiding students to this area for guidance"

  "Link to checksheets and flagged courses"

The next section of the evaluation asked each participant their level of agreement with the statement "I believe the following workshop objectives were met" and then each objective was listed with the following choices: Agree, Tend to Agree, Tend to disagree, and Disagree. For all objective all participants agreed the objectives had been met. The last section of the evaluation asked the following:

45

- **Please provide suggestions for improvement:** (3 did not answer)

  "I really don't have any. The workshop was both informative and interactive"

  "Integrating a true univ. philosophy advising/consequences as a long term goal and/or research subject"

  "None this was incredibly informative and well done"

  "An advising guide"

  "Good job"

- **Please indicate topics you would like to see in future sessions:** (5 did not answer)

  "Possibly more strategies to help advisors relate to today's college student. I think they know there is a gap but assume the student will bend to their will or fail"

  "Addressing faculty-advisee ratios, i.e. ways to provide quality advisement with overwhelming numbers"

  "Advisor training/Professional development/modelling (training)"

- **Additional comments** (4 did not answer)

  "Venango faculty should decide how to overhaul faculty advising assignments"

  "Thank you for this enlightening review of academic advising"

  "Thank you-mentioning Barnga, a plus for me!"

  "Excellent overview of four models. Tools of advisement good for audience. Unique perspective of FG Venango. New technology to reach students about advisement gave me food for thought"

Feedback from this training correlated with what Brown (2008) has identified as critical components of advisor training, including meeting informational needs, and addressing concepts and tools related to relationship building. Further, participants expressed a willingness to participate in the planning and development of future workshops, also identified by Brown (2008) as a critical component to effective advisor training.

4.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

Two recommendations for immediate action arise from this initiative. The first and most notable relates to the overall organization of advising services within the university and involves the establishment of a faculty led advising committee that can begin to provide guidance and direction to the advising approach at the Venango Campus, and more significantly, to the university as a whole. The absence of an articulated, university wide philosophy and approach to advising prevents the development of a comprehensive system for implementing and assessing advising, including on-going training and professional development. Advising activities should be linked to the overall mission of the institution and should be "in-sync" with the overall operations (Campbell, 2008). Campbell (2008) states that "The vision, mission, goals, and program objectives of an academic advising program are inextricably intertwined with a college or university's central purpose and mission statement" (p.232). In circumstances where this is not the case, alignment should be considered essential and a first objective. This includes incorporating advising into the faculty tenure and promotion process, addressing disparities in advising loads, and developing an advising resource center that can provide ongoing support to advisors and students.

The second recommendation relates to the content of on-going training and development. Training participants acknowledged an interest in pursuing the different advising approaches in more detail. This can be easily implemented and can originate from the advising committee's recommendations. It is important that the content is responsive to not only what the faculty perceive as their needs, but also to what the students identify as needs, particularly as those needs change over time and with increasing exposure to the academic institutional experience.

As stated above, the faculty advisors at Venango very much want to provide a meaningful and supportive advising experience for their advisees. Each wants to encourage the students' sense of self-efficacy and competency during the transition to the college experience, and beyond. However, each faculty comes to the advising role with a different level of background, experience, and exposure to academic advising. Their own sense of self-efficacy is challenged as they explore ways to best advise students. Future training sessions must keep in this in mind in order best meet the needs at all levels (Brown, 2008). Overall, though, the most effective and impactful training and development program will be borne of a clear institutional approach closely linked to the university's vision and mission of student success.

4.5   LIMITATIONS

This inquiry was an incredibly interesting experience for me, though the addition of some elements could have improved the impact on the overall training program. First and foremost, the student feedback was limited to only 7 students, from the same major and general age range, who have transitioned successfully to the college environments. While this provided some substantial testimony to the importance of advising for these students, what is missing is the experience of those students for whom the transition has been more difficult. Having the input of multiple perspectives and experiences could have enhanced the dialogue and may have taken in the training discussion in different directions.

Similarly, it would have been helpful to hear from more faculty, particularly those newer to advising and those who worked with a large number advisees. Though their experiences can be surmised from those of their colleagues, the additional insight may have had an impact on the

content of the training, perhaps lending more focus to ways in which an advisor can work more effectively with a large number of advisees. However, this is just an assumption, because overall it seemed that more foundational content related to student perspectives and approaches resonated well with those in attendance.

Perhaps the greatest limitation to this study, was the inability to build upon or contribute to an institutional approach to advising. This, however, presents enormous opportunity, especially as the university considers the multitude of ways it can respond to enrollment and retention issues that many of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institutions are currently challenged with. A focus on developing and cultivating an institutional focus on advising can serve well the university's on-going efforts to provide exemplary student support services, and include the faculty stakeholders as major contributors to those efforts.

5.0   CONCLUSION

Recently, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) announced that it would be commissioning a study of its operations and those of the 14 universities that compromise the system. Chief among the reasons is to insure that PASSHE provides students with a high quality education that meets the state's workforce needs. PASSHE, however, is not alone in this endeavor. Across all of public higher education in the United States, institutions and systems are grappling with declining state financial support, a diminishing pool of well-prepared prospective students, and greater difficulty successfully retaining students. The ability to survive, let alone thrive, requires that all members of the institution see themselves as change agents with a critical role to play in the story of student success. This is especially true for faculty who also serve as academic advisors.

Academic advising is a crucial component of the college experience, perhaps one of the most essential components. Good advising encourages students to cultivate meaning and purpose in their lives, make important decisions about the future, and use available resources to enhance their learning. However, good advising does not just happen, it is a skill that is nurtured and developed throughout the practicing career of the advisor. Because of this, academic advisors must develop the tools and skills necessary to work well with students, and to develop the kinds of mentoring relationships that contribute to significantly to student success, especially the success of first generation, rural college students.

Likewise, institutions that consider advisors a critical component to student and institutional success should see it as an obligation to provide a strong infrastructure to support advising. Advisors, and advisees deserve to have a mutually rewarding academic relationship that is supported and encouraged by the university. This support, to be most meaningful, should include a compelling vision, adequate resources to realize associated goals and objectives, and institutionally supported incentives for advisors to continually add to their repertoire of skills.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

FACULTY

VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

My name is Emily Aubele and I am conducting a study for my doctoral work at the University of Pittsburgh in the Higher Education Administration Ed.D program , I am conducting a research study on academic advising during the first year of college. This study seeks to better understand student and faculty stakeholder needs, perceptions, and attitudes related to academic advising at Clarion University- Venango Campus, and based on those findings, consider what intervention strategies may be most appropriate for faculty to implement when confronted with difficult advising situations.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you, (a) Academically advise students at the Venango Campus, or you, (b) are a first generation student in your second year, from a rural location as defines by the Pennsylvania Center for Rural Studies.

The research will help me better understand the academic advising process at Venango, especially for first year students from rural backgrounds.

Today you will be participating in a focus group which should take approximately one hour to complete. There is no direct benefit to participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you may stop at any time. Responses will be completely anonymous; your name will not appear anywhere in the final write up; I will assign you a pseudonym should I need to differentiate between respondents in the written paper. There are minimal risks associated with this focus group, and taking part in this serves as your agreement to participate. The University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance office may review the data/records to monitor the conduct of the study. In unusual cases the records may be released in response to an order from a court of law.

During the group interview, I will not be able to guarantee confidentiality because we will be discussing information as a group. Therefore, if you would feel uncomfortable with any of your statements being shared with others in or outside the group, please do not share them during the process. This focus group will also be recorded and all copies will be kept in a locked office in a password protected file.

Does anyone have any questions?

Do I have your verbal consent to participate in this study?

If you would like a copy of this letter for your records, please let me know and I will make you a copy now. Contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that occurred during your participation. If you have any questions about this research please contact the Principal Investigator, Emily Aubele,

esa18@pitt.edu. The Mentor for this project is Dr. John Weidman, john.weidman@pitt.edu,

phone- (412) 648-1772

I want to talk with you about your experiences as faculty who advise students at Venango and what aspects have most rewarding and most challenging. .

Before we begin, let me point out some things to make our discussion more productive. Because we'll be recording for an accurate record, it is important that you speak up and that you only speak one at a time. We don't want to miss any of your comments.

Also, we will only use first names here. No reports will link what you say to your name. In this way, we will maintain your confidentiality. In addition, we ask that you also respect the confidentiality of everyone here. Please don't repeat who said what when you leave this room.

We want to hear from all of you. We're interested in positive and negative experiences, your perspectives, and any comments you may have to help improve your advising experience. So I may sometimes act as a traffic cop by encouraging someone who has been quiet to talk, or by asking someone to hold off for a few minutes.

If everyone is ready to start, we will turn on the recorder and start now.

Let's start with some introductions.

Please tell us your first name, approximately how many students you advise, and how long you have been at the Venango Campus.

Now. Let's focus a bit more closely on your experience with advising.

How long have you been advising students at Clarion-Venango?

Approximately how many students do you advise each semester?

What are some typical questions first year students have during the first advising session?

What individual factors or characteristics do you feel add to a student's ability to be successful in their academics?

What do you perceive to be the unique needs of first year, first generation students at Venango?

In what ways do you feel you influence the success of first year students at Venango?

In what ways do you feel you are equipped to advise first year, first generation students at Venango?

How did you acquire these skills?

Do you think that faculty advising is important for first year, first generation students? Why or Why not?

What suggestions do you have for improving the advising process at Clarion-Venango?

Finally, as I told you at the beginning, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how you perceive the advising experience at the Venango campus is there anything we left out?

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this discussion.

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
Students

VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

My name is Emily Aubele and I wam conducting a study for my doctoral work at the University of Pittsburgh in the Higher Education Administration Ed.D program , I am conducting a research study on academic advising during the first year of college. This study seeks to better understand student and faculty stakeholder needs, perceptions, and attitudes related to academic advising at Clarion University- Venango Campus, and based on those findings, consider what intervention strategies may be most appropriate for faculty to implement when confronted with difficult advising situations.

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The research will help me better understand the academic advising process at Venango, especially for first year students from rural backgrounds.

Today you will be participating in a focus group which should take approximately one hour to complete. There is no direct benefit to participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you may stop at any time. Responses will be completely anonymous; your name will not appear anywhere in the final write up; I will assign you a pseudonym should I need to differentiate between respondents in the written paper. There are minimal risks associated with this focus group, and taking part in this serves as your agreement to participate. The University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance office may review the data/records to monitor the conduct of the study. In unusual cases the records may be released in response to an order from a court of law.

During the group interview, I will not be able to guarantee confidentiality because we will be discussing information as a group. Therefore, if you would feel uncomfortable with any of your statements being shared with others in or outside the group, please do not share them during the process. This focus group will also be recorded and all copies will be kept in a locked office in a password protected file.
Does anyone have any questions?
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If you would like a copy of this letter for your records, please let me know and I will make you a copy now. Contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that occurred during your participation. If you have any questions about this research please contact the Principal Investigator, Emily Aubele, esa18@pitt.edu. The Mentor for this project is Dr. John Weidman, john.weidman@pitt.edu, phone- (412) 648-1772
I want to talk with you about your experiences as students with academic advising, and what aspects have most or least helpful.

Also, we will only use first names here. No reports will link what you say to your name. In this way, we will maintain your confidentiality. In addition, we ask that you also respect the confidentiality of everyone here. Please don't repeat who said what when you leave this room.

We want to hear from all of you. We're interested in positive and negative experiences, your perspectives, and any advice you might have for advisors. So I may sometimes act as a traffic cop by encouraging someone who has been quiet to talk, or by asking someone to hold off for a few minutes.

Let's start with some introductions.

Please tell us your first name, what year you're in, and how long you have been at the Venango Campus.

II.   Now that we know a little about you, I'd like you to think back to when you first started classes at Venango.

Why did you choose the Venango campus?

What were your initial impressions of the campus? Describe your thoughts and feelings about it?

Tell me how you felt about starting college?

How did the idea of taking classes at Venango impact your feelings about starting college?

Now. Let's focus a bit more closely on your experience with advising.

Do you know your academic advisors name and contact information?

How would you describe the role of an academic advisor? What do they do?

How many times have you met with your advisor?

What have you found most helpful about your meetings with your advisor?

Least helpful?

If you had to give your advisor some advice about working with college students, what would you say?

APPENDIX B

PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH ADVISING AND MENTORING

CLARION UNIVERSITY, VENANGO
FEBRUARY 17, 2017

What aspects of the workshop were the most helpful for you? Please explain

What aspects were least helpful? Please explain.

How, if at all, has this workshop changed your thinking about advising First Generation Rural college students at Venango?

What was the most significant thing you learned at this workshop?

How, if at all, will you use and/or apply what you learned in the workshop?

Following this workshop what are the one or two things that would be most useful for you on the website?

Workshop Details

I believe the following workshop objectives were met:

a. Define the needs of first generation and non-traditional students at Venango

Choose one:
4 - Agree
3 - Tend to agree
2 - Tend to disagree
1 - Disagree

b. Identify your personal philosophy of advising and mentoring

Choose one:
4 - Agree
3 - Tend to agree
2 - Tend to disagree
1 - Disagree

c. Review four advising models

Choose one:
4 - Agree
3 - Tend to agree
2 - Tend to disagree
1 - Disagree

d. Acquire tools and strategies for use in advising and goal setting meetings with students

Choose one:
4 - Agree
3 - Tend to agree
2 - Tend to disagree
1 - Disagree

Please provide suggestions for improvement:

Please indicate topics you would like to see offered in future sessions:

Any additional comments:

PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH ADVISING AND MENTORING

CLARION UNIVERSITY-VENANGO CAMPUS
FEBRUARY 17, 2017

Introduction (3 minutes)

1. Objectives (3 minutes)   **Slide 2**
    A. Define the needs of first generation and non-traditional students at Venango
    B. Identify your personal philosophy of advising and mentoring
    C. Review four advising models
    D. Acquire tools and strategies for use in advising and goal setting meetings with students

2. First Generation Students (7 minutes)
    A. Participants define
    B. Play video Slide 3
    C. Working definition for workshop/training
    D. Review characteristics Slide 4

3. First generation students at Venango (5 minutes) **Slide 5**
    A. Predominantly rural students

    B.   Diverse in age and experience

    C.   Many in career transition (80+ Trade Act students currently on campus)

    D. Trying to make career decisions in locations with low job diversity/availability (Major selection may not match skills and abilities, but the goal is to stay local)

    E. May experience family pressures and feelings of marginalization for "thinking they're better"

    F. High school experience may have limited exposure to "the world" - information comes from television and social media

    G. Strong motivation to be successful, unclear on how to be (self-efficacy concerns)

4. What works for FG students (5 Minutes) **Slide 6**
   A. Academic preparation programs

   B. Bridge programs

   C. Peer mentoring

   D. Early financial aid counseling and resource provision

   E. Programs that involve parents

   F. TRIO and SSS programs

   G. Relationships with supportive mentors, faculty, and staff

   H. Advising

5. Student focus group (5 minutes)
   A. Review questions **Slide 8**
   B. Review Student feedback related to their first-year and advising experience at Venango **Slide 9**

6. What "worked" for them (3 minutes) **Slide 10**
   A. Small classes

   B. Professors were nice

   C. Peer support

   D. Got involved with groups and clubs

   E. Advisors explained things that they needed to do for their major, referred them to resources

7. Advising-What is our goal? (5 minutes)
   A. Discussion of perceived goals of advising

8. Advisor focus group questions (3 minutes) **Slide 12**

9. Advisor focus group feedback (3 minutes) **Slide 13**
   A. Discussion of advisor feedback from focus group

10. Defining your advising philosophy (20 Minutes) **Slide 14**
    A. Review advising philosophy prompts form (2 minutes)
    B. Participants complete form (10 minutes)
    C. Group discussion (5 minutes)

BREAK

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11. Adopting an approach (20 minutes) **Slides 15-22**
      A. Review 4 advising models
    I.   Prescriptive
   II.   Developmental (1972)
          •   Some tools used in Developmental Advising
  III.   Proactive/Intrusive (1975)
  IV.   Appreciative (2008)
          •   Appreciative Advising Inventory

12. Suggestions (6 minutes) **Slide 23**
      A. Use technology relevant to students – social media advising page, text alerts, Snap Chat

      B. Establish agreements and expectations from the first meeting and   reinforce throughout

      C. Check assumptions-are students not using/doing something because they don't care or don't know how

      D. Be willing to have the difficult conversations

      E. Be familiar with resources available in the University and community

      F. Implement approaches and tools that best fit your style, but be willing to stretch a little

      G. Share strategies

13. Resources (5 minutes) **Slide 24**
      A. Review online resources and new Venango advising webpage

14. Closing questions/discussion (Open)

Slide 1

Promoting Student
Success Through
Advising and Mentoring

February 17, 2017 Clarion University-Venango Campus

Slide 2

Objectives for today

- Define the needs of first generation and non-traditional students at Venango
- Identify your personal philosophy of advising and mentoring
- Review four advising models
- Acquire tools and strategies for use in advising and goal setting meetings with students

Slide 3

First generation students: Who are they?

Slide 4

First Generation – Definition and Characteristics

A first-generation college student is usually defined as a student whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have not attained education beyond high school. Variant definitions include those who have not completed a bachelor's degree. Approximately 50% of incoming students are first generation (www.firstgenerationfoundation.org/)

- Academically underprepared
- Lack "cultural capital" necessary for successful transition to the college environment (vocabulary, processes, expectations)
- Predominantly come from underrepresented populations
- Less likely to graduate within 4 years - 26% of FG compared to 42% of 2nd and 3rd gen (education.cu-portland.edu/blog/.../first-generation-college-students-graduation-rates/)
- May have higher levels of resiliency due to past life challenges
- May have greater sense of purpose/motivation

Slide 5

First generation students at Venango

- Predominantly rural students
- Diverse in age and experience
- Many in career transition (80+ Trade Act students currently on campus)
- Trying to make career decisions in locations with low job diversity/availability (Major selection may not match skills and abilities, but the goal is to stay local)
- May experience family pressures and feelings of marginalization for "thinking they're better"
- High school experience may have limited exposure to "the world" - information comes from television and social media
- Strong motivation to be successful, unclear on how to be

Slide 6

What works for FG students

- Academic preparation programs
- Bridge programs
- Peer mentoring
- Early financial aid counseling and resource provision
- Programs that involve parents
- TRIO and SSS programs
- Relationships with supportive mentors, faculty, and staff
- ADVISING!!!!

From "Straight from the Source" http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Straight_from_the_Source.pdf

Slide 7

The importance of good mentoring …

Slide 8

Student focus group questions

Why did you choose the Venango campus?

What were your initial impressions of the campus? Describe your thoughts and feelings about it?

Tell me how you felt about starting college?

How did the idea of taking classes at Venango impact your feelings about starting college?

Do you know your academic advisors name and contact information?

How would you describe the role of an academic advisor? What do they do?

How many times have you met with your advisor?

What have you found most helpful about your meetings with your advisor? Least helpful?

If you had to give your advisor some advice about working with college students, what would you say?

Slide 9

What our students said…

Focus groups: 7 second year first generation students from rural locations

- Chose Venango because of it's small environment
- Initial experiences with campus faculty and staff made them feel comfortable
- The people seemed familiar, "homey feeling"
- Even though they were overwhelmed by all the 'newness' they felt they would be successful

As time went on…

- Hard to explain to parents and friends at home they were overwhelmed with work, school, and activities
- Did not anticipate financial issues and needed to work to help pay for school
- Even though people looked similar, they weren't-couldn't make assumptions about things like religion and morals
- Challenged by the amount of work and having to "not just spit information back out"
- Did not want to let people down, felt they should be able to "do college" (Academic self-efficacy concerns)
- Expected to leave high school behind, but found some of the same "drama" and were disappointed
- Relied heavily on peers for support and direction

Slide 10

What "worked" for them

- Small classes
- Professors were nice
- Peer support
- Got involved with groups and clubs
- Advisors explained things that they needed to do for their major, referred them to resources

Slide 11

Advising-What is our goal?

We subscribe to the National Academic Advising Associations definition of advising, which states that *academic advising is an educational process that facilitates students' understanding of the meaning and purpose of higher education. It fosters intellectual and personal development toward academic success and lifelong learning* (NACADA, 2004).

Slide 12

Advisor focus group questions

How long have you been advising students at Clarion-Venango?

Approximately how many students do you advise each semester?

What are some typical questions first year students have during the first advising session?

What individual factors or characteristics do you feel add to a student's ability to be successful in their academics?

What do you perceive to be the unique needs of first year, first generation students at Venango?

In what ways do you feel you influence the success of first year students at Venango?

In what ways do you feel you are equipped to advise first year, first generation students at Venango?

How did you acquire these skills?

Do you think that faculty advising is important for first year, first generation students? Why or Why not?

What suggestions do you have for improving the advising process at Clarion-Venango?

Slide 13

From the advisors...

Regarding advisees:
- Poor time management
- Not checking email
- Lack of familiarity with technologies used at the university
- Not buying books or required materials
- Underprepared
- "Just don't seem to get it"
- Poor communication skills

Regarding the advising role:
- Lack of readily accessible resources for advisors to answer questions (What courses count for what, course rotations, etc.)
- Not knowing what to do to advise, "Figuring it out as you go" No formal training
- Want to help, but don't always know how
- Numerous advisee's
- Sometimes feel frustrated and don't know how to get students to be responsible

Slide 14

Step 1-Defining your advising philosophy

http://advisingmatters.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/general/Statement%20of%20Advising%20Philosophy%20Prompts.pdf

Slide 15

Step 2 – Adopting an approach

Four common approaches

- Prescriptive
- Developmental
- Proactive (the approach formerly known as Intrusive...)
- Appreciative

Slide 16

Prescriptive

Academic Advising Paradigms

Prescriptive Advising

- Focus on course selection and completion
- Advisor does not address more comprehensive developmental issues
- Role of the advisor is narrow and limited

http://www.slideshare.net/bellardi/academic-advising-in-the-new-era

Most commonly understood and expected approach wherein the academic advisor tells the student what to do, and the student does it. Prescriptive advising is linear communication from the advisor to the advisee and places most of the responsibility not on the student, but the advisor. The advisor is required to have the answers.

https://www.missouristate.edu/policy/Op3_26_4_AdvisingTheories.htm

Slide 17

Developmental (1972)

The developmental advising model holds that the academic advisor and the advisee are partners in educational discovery in which responsibility is shared between the participants.

Burton and Wellington (1998) epitomize developmental advising when they say, "A developmental model of advising permits the advisor to help the advisee focus, through self-reflection, on interests and goals." This allows the advisor and the advisee to work together in a collaborative effort to achieve commonly understood goals.

https://www.missouristate.edu/policy/Op3_26_4_AdvisingTheories.htm

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Slide 18

Slide 19

Some tools used in Developmental Advising

- Agreements   http://psychology.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/u79/advagree.pdf

- Advising Syllabus   https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_QhqFbjwvhmMhYTsti-egvNOrMAQLiihLodxvNd6ePs/edit

- Structured Introductions
  https://www.ucollege.edu/files/users/tlc/docs/Questions%20to%20Ask%20Your%20Academic%20Advisor.pdf

http://www.purdue.edu/advisors/whoweare/expectations.html

Slide 20

Proactive/Intrusive (1975)

Earl (1988) describes Proactive Advising as a deliberate, structured student intervention at the first indication of academic difficulty in order to motivate the student to seek help. Proactive Advising uses the good qualities of prescriptive advising (experience, awareness of student needs and structured programs) and of developmental advising (relationship to a student's total needs).

- Early intervention at the first sign of any type of difficulty (risk factors can be identified in the admissions process);
- Introduction of rules, policies and procedures, along with clear explanations and expectations of students;
- Monitoring progress of students to determine how well they are using information provided; and
- Customizing intervention and targeting it specifically toward student needs.
- Similar to our AIP process, except AIP's occur after risks have materialized

http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Proactive-Intrusive-Advising.aspx

Slide 21

Appreciative (2008)

Appreciative Advising is the intentional collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials. The centerpiece of Appreciative Advising are the 6 Phases of Advising

http://www.appreciativeadvising.net/what-is-appreciative-advising.html

Slide 22

Appreciative Advising Inventory

Slide 23

Suggestions

• Use technology relevant to students – social media advising page, text alerts, Snap Chat
• Establish agreements and expectations from the first meeting and reinforce throughout
• Check assumptions-are students not using/doing something because they don't care or don't know how
• Be willing to have the difficult conversations
• Be familiar with resources available in the University and community
• Implement approaches and tools that best fit your style, but be willing to stretch a little
• Share strategies

Slide 24

Figure 2 Powerpoint Presentation

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