Junior Faculty Advising for Effective Student Growth and Academic Success: A Qualitative Study

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Cover Page Footnote

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Supporting the unique needs of adult learners, also known as non- and post-traditional learners, is critical for colleges and universities. In the U.S., adult learners have been a steadily growing student population in the post-secondary context for the last few decades (Hussar & Bailey, 2014). Some institutions have more adult learners than traditional students (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2012; Soares, 2013). Faculty members play a prominent role in this demographic group's retention and success efforts through academic advising (Brown, 2012; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Addressing adult students' advising needs and the practices necessary to ensure their success is important for all faculty members, especially junior faculty embarking on new teaching roles at state comprehensive universities.

The need to establish and sustain support systems for junior faculty at colleges and universities is critical to their success. When acclimating to their newly acquired teaching roles, junior faculty typically express feeling overwhelmed (Merlo, 2016). In particular, they have to "juggle the various demands of a new institutional culture, while gaining clarity about tenure, establishing meaningful relationships, and working toward a sustainable research agenda" (Gosling et al., 2020, p. 73). Understanding the true time commitments for each of these tasks can be vastly incongruent with reality. Junior faculty who are given advising responsibilities need to be aware of the time commitment required to adequately carry out this function. While all faculty can benefit from elements of this research project, the authors believe this work is particularly beneficial to junior faculty.

The literature clearly shows that advisors play a critical role in the development of traditional-aged college students (Young-Jones et al., 2013). Advisors encourage learners to get involved in student-life initiatives, provide important information to help them navigate the intricacies of a particular college or university, and serve as a source of support for activities inside and outside the classroom (Kuhn, 2008). Moreover, advisors are typically the first contact point for students pursuing their studies at a new institution (Karr-Lilienthal et al., 2013). As such, one would assume that academic advising would be beneficial for adult learners. However, some adult students have noted that academic advising is a

significant source of dissatisfaction (Noel-Levitz, 2008). What are the implications of this issue for junior faculty members tasked with advising adult learners?

The faculty advising model thrives in many colleges and universities (Karr-Lilienthal et al., 2013; Troxel, 2018), but many contemporary terminal degree programs omit training that addresses student advising (Schroeder & Terras, 2015). The lack of training can create difficulties for junior faculty members attempting to navigate their new teaching roles while also attempting to cultivate successful relationships with adult learners. Thus, some scholars have indicated a need for further research focused on learners' perceptions of academic advising (Karr-Lilienthal et al., 2013). Others have recommended studying adult learners' advising needs at undergraduate and graduate levels (Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Therefore, the study's authors—both junior faculty members teaching at a state comprehensive university in the Midwest—conducted a qualitative investigation that focused on the advising experiences of 22 undergraduate and graduate students. The overarching research question guiding this study was: How do graduate and undergraduate adult learners describe their advising experiences with their junior faculty advisors? This research contributes to a small but growing literature base on faculty advising, with an emphasis on junior faculty advisors.

Theoretical Framework

Acclimating to a new teaching role can be stressful for junior faculty. This faculty demographic is often asked to work more efficiently, effectively, and expeditiously on projects with colleagues and in their interactions with students (Gosling et al., 2020). In most post-secondary settings, especially in state comprehensive universities, junior faculty often find themselves doing more work with less resources and address multiple institutional and technological learning curves in the process (Henderson, 2007; Reina & Reina, 2015). Moreover, as junior faculty enter into new relationships with colleagues and students in new institutional contexts, a multitude of implicit and explicit expectations inevitably arise (Harding-DeKam et al., 2012; McCormack, 2005). As such, trust becomes a critical component in meeting such expectations.

The theoretical concept guiding this research was that of the capacity of trust (Reina & Reina, 2015), which established a framework for interpreting the study's findings. The capacity of trust, which is reciprocal and is mutually reinforcing, encapsulates three essential elements: character, communication, and capability (Reina & Reina). *Character* is an essential element as it helps one manage expectations, establish boundaries, delegate work appropriately, and keep agreements—all while behaving consistently. Effective *communication* is another crucial element for establishing trust as sharing information, admitting mistakes, maintaining confidentiality, and speaking with purpose creates connections with others and inspires confidence in relationship building. The third element of

capability acknowledges skills and abilities in others and oneself while involving others in the decision-making process. These three elements help individuals move beyond practices that sustain basic relationships to emphasizing collaborative and purposeful partnerships for transformation. From this perspective, the capacity of trust allows junior faculty to partner with advisees in sharing the overall responsibility for learning and engagement (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

Literature Review

Student Advising. In the mid-19th century, college and university administrators required new students in post-secondary education to meet with faculty members to determine their academic trajectories and to solicit guidance and advice. Advisory meetings were simple discussions focused on the courses that students could pursue to complete their degrees; this was the standard practice for many decades (Kuhn, 2008). Over the years, as more students began pursuing post-secondary education and academic programming expanded, administrators started providing learners with increased guidance and added other resources to ensure their success. Support and resources were provided for adult learners and other underrepresented groups of students, particularly veterans (Borsari et al., 2017; Gault et al., 2018; Karmelita, 2020).

Research indicates that the interactions learners have with faculty and staff members significantly influence their decision to continue their post-secondary education (Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 2010). Student persistence and retention are mainly sustained by "solid academic advising" (Drake, 2011, p. 9). Other research indicates that learners who regularly interact with their advisors are more focused on enrolling in classes each semester, are unlikely to enroll in courses not applicable to graduation, find greater satisfaction with their college experience, and show a greater likelihood of graduating (Grupe, 2002).

Discussing student advising, Schreiner and Anderson (2004) stated, "Academic advising, at its heart, is a relationship between the advisor and the student" (p. 1). Thus, one cannot overestimate the importance of relationships between faculty advisors and student advisees. Advisors provide vast amounts of information that provides learners with a firm foundation for developing and attaining their academic and professional goals. Good practice shows us that effective advisors know when to refer their advisees to specific support services. We also know that faculty and student interactions outside of the classroom correlate with strong student retention. In his seminal work, Astin (1977) wrote that "student-faculty interaction has a stronger relationship to student satisfaction with the college experience than any other variable" (p. 233). Thus, the connections between faculty advisors and student advisees are fundamental to student success.

Early on, faculty advisors primarily assisted learners in selecting classes, but the formation of student development theories, linked to academic advising models,

prompted the creation of multiple advising frameworks. Several approaches have repeatedly surfaced in the literature. The most common advising approaches are *prescriptive, developmental, intrusive, strengths-based,* and *advising as coaching*. The following sections highlight the characteristics that comprise these five advising approaches.

     Prescriptive Advising. Prescriptive advising (Figure 1) is characterized by a connection between advisors and students, where advisors focus on addressing students' immediate concerns and questions (Jeschke et al., 2001). In this approach, advisors are the primary drivers of information. Students ask questions while advisors provide accurate and pertinent facts. This approach is relatively efficient and effective in conveying critical information. However, it does not allow for significant relationship building or for other impactful long-range planning opportunities (Jeschke et al., 2001). In essence, students follow the advice and input received from advisors to earn their degrees. As Figure 1 shows, the flow of information is one-way, from the faculty member to the student, supporting the traditional power structure of a teacher who bestows knowledge upon a receptive student.

Figure 1. *Prescriptive Advising*

Faculty

Flow of Information
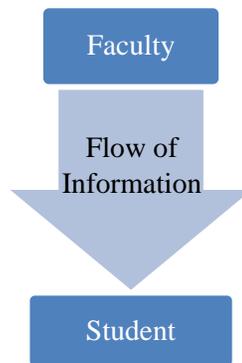
Student

     Developmental Advising. In the developmental approach (Figure 2), students and advisors share the responsibility for student growth and development. Students take significant responsibility for planning their academic trajectory, setting goals to reach their career objectives, and making necessary decisions that they believe will positively impact their lives (King, 2005). This approach is grounded heavily in adult learning, student development, and career development theories, and thus takes a holistic approach to student advising (Jeschke et al., 2001). Faculty guide and support students along the way and spend significantly

more time with them through a series of relationship-building efforts and meetings than with the prescriptive approach (Creamer, 2000). The same-sized circles in Figure 2's Venn diagram highlight this balanced model, in which the faculty member and student share equal responsibility for the relationship.

Figure 2. *Developmental Advising*
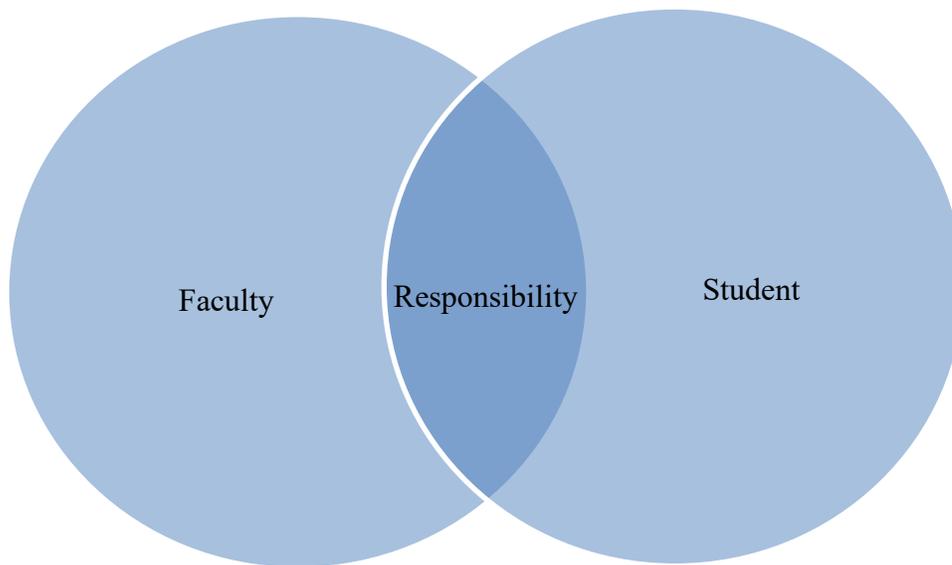
Intrusive Advising. Intrusive advising (Figure 3) has been used with students who fail to meet academic standards. Students who receive academic warnings or are placed on academic probation are less likely to meet with their advisors (Loucif et al., 2020; Thomas, 2017). Therefore, advisors employing an intrusive approach initiate direct communication with students and monitor their support and progress. The diagram in Figure 3 exemplifies the student-focused aspects of this model, as indicated by the central circle surrounded by smaller satellite circles; while the faculty-student relationship is implied, all energy is directed toward the student to address their academic issues.

Strengths-Based Advising. The strengths-based approach (Figure 4) is another method of student advising and emphasizes "student awareness of their strengths, talents, and abilities" (Schreiner & Anderson, 2004, p. 2). Soria et al. (2017) noted strengths-based approaches are "based on the belief that individuals achieve greater outcomes when they discover and develop their natural talents instead of solely mitigating their areas of weakness" (p. 55). This approach prompts faculty to motivate students through confidence, self-awareness, and addressing

challenges in a changing society (Schreiner & Anderson, 2004). The diagram in Figure 4 highlights the autonomy of this student-centered advising model. The strengths-based model allows students to direct how they want to use their strengths for development that emphasizes their academic and professional goals.

Figure 3. *Intrusive Advising*
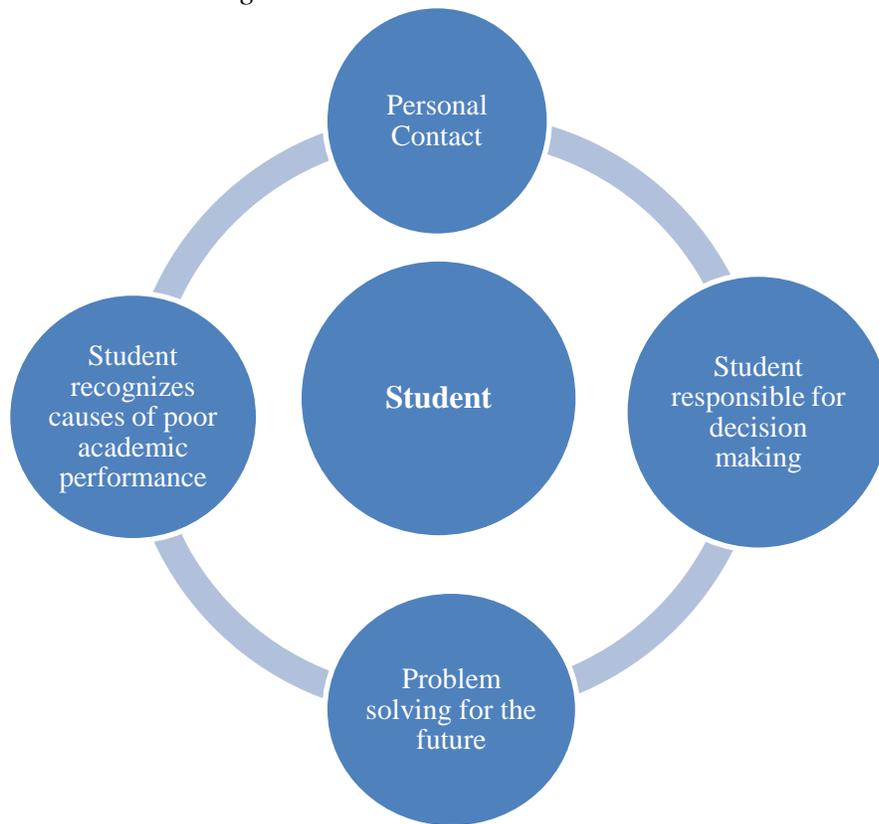
Advising as Coaching. The advising as coaching model (Figure 5) is, like the strengths-based model, a newer approach and was modeled after executive coaching practices found in business (McClellan & Moser, 2011). Characteristics include "Relationship building [including contracting], assessment, feedback, planning, implementing, and evaluation and follow-up" (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001, p. 208). This model emphasizes regular interactions between advisors and advisees and reinforces personal responsibility. The diagram in Figure 5 illustrates advising as coaching in a traditional cycle. This practice model can be effective when advisors have significant time or little time to devote to student meetings (McClellan & Moser, 2011).

Figure 4. *Strengths-Based Advising*
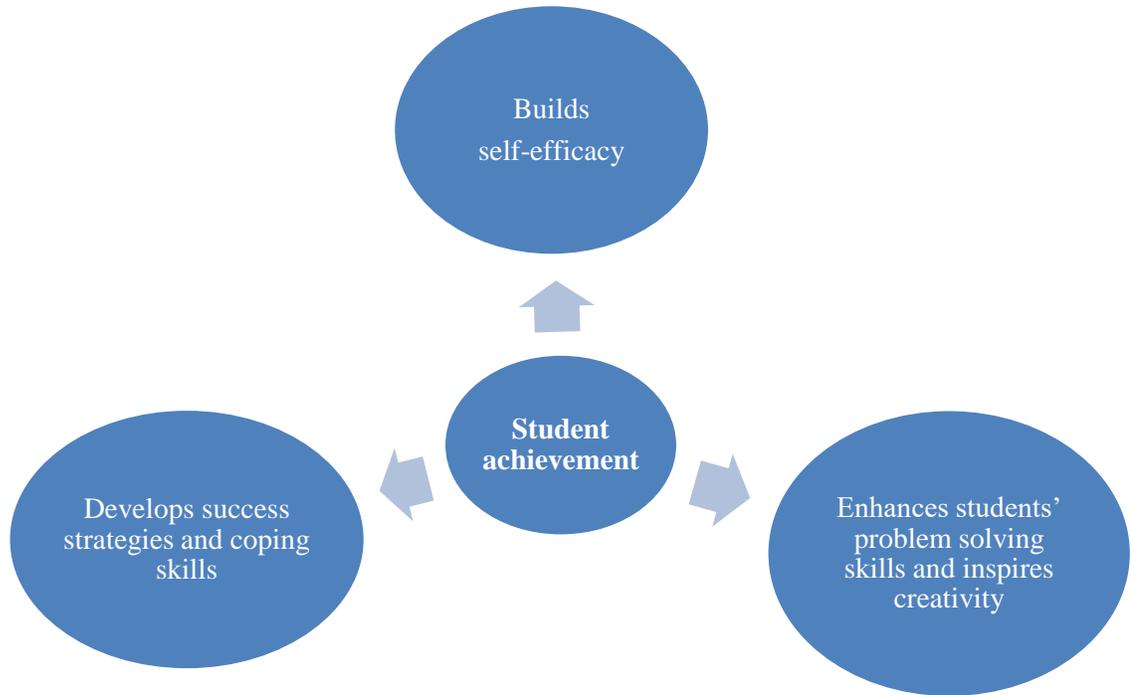
Figure 5. *Advising as Coaching*
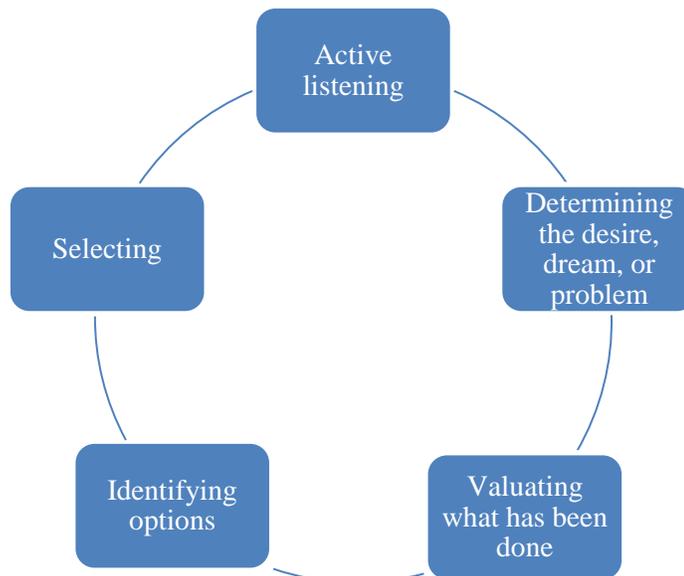
Much advising literature focuses on the history of academic advising and approaches to advising first-time, traditional-aged students in undergraduate settings (Cook, 2009; Larson et al., 2018). This study begins to close the literature gap by providing greater insight into adult learners' individual advising experiences with their junior faculty advisors.

Adult Learners. Scholars have frequently studied adult learners, as their population in post-secondary education has steadily increased for more than four decades (Soares, 2013). The definitions and characteristics of adult learners have been discussed extensively (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Brown, 2002; Choy, 2002; Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners, 1997; Cross, 1981; Hardin, 2008; Horn, 1998; Knowles et al., 2015; Snyder & Dillow, 2015; Soares, 2013; Zach, 2018). While no standard definition exists, some common elements do appear, such as being at least 25 years of age or older (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Snyder & Dillow, 2015), working full- or part-time (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Soares, 2013; Zach, 2018), sustaining themselves financially (Soares, 2013), and having other personal and professional obligations to address (Cross, 1981; Horn, 1998; Soares, 2013). Zach (2018) noted that adult learners primarily pursue their education at state comprehensive universities because the curriculum and support at such institutions are often "related to their job or career aspirations" (p. 13). Despite the burdens of employment, family and time constraints, however, they are more likely to complete their degree programs than their traditional-aged counterparts (Zach, 2018).

Adult learners pursue post-secondary education later in life for a variety of reasons. Over the last two decades, stable jobs have been less plentiful, and adults have realized they lacked the requisite skills necessary to succeed in a changing working environment (Kantrowitz, 2010). Thus, technological and organizational changes have forced many adults to pursue post-secondary credentials to remain competitive in the workforce (Heidkamp, 2013). Moreover, life experiences such as divorce and single parenting have caused many adults, primarily women, to pursue college later as a means to restructure or enhance their lives (Brown, 2002; Kasworm, 2008).

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2019) reported that in the 2018 fall semester, the average age of part-time undergraduate learners pursuing a baccalaureate degree was 27.2 years, whereas the average age of part-time graduate students pursuing a post-baccalaureate degree was 34. Presently, adult learners in the U.S. comprise approximately 35% of the student body at the undergraduate level and most of the student body at the graduate level (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). With the increase in adult learner enrollment, post-secondary institutions have begun providing academic programs and support services that address these learners' needs.

State Comprehensive Universities. Zach (2018) indicated that most studies in postsecondary education "tend to pay more attention to elite schools and flagship universities" (p. 3) than other institutional types. State comprehensive universities (SCUs), also known as regional public universities (Henderson, 2007), are public universities that offer a diverse array of bachelor's and master's degree programs. Grubb and Lazerson (2005) declared that "research and writing on these institutions is exceedingly sparse" (p. 20). Many SCUs initially started as "normal" schools, which Henderson (2007) noted were "single-purpose teacher training institutions…[;] over the course of the 20th century, their curricula expanded to include dozens of different kinds of programs in every academic discipline. They became more comprehensive" (p. 3). Other SCUs were "created as branch campuses of existing universities or originated as community colleges" (Maxim & Muro, 2020, p. 11). The difference between SCUs and larger, flagship universities is that SCUs typically offer very few, if any, research-focused, doctoral-level programs (Olson, 2012). While some SCUs have become research-focused institutions, many continue their role as student-centered teaching institutions (Maxim & Muro, 2020).

SCUs typically recruit students from their local region and concentrate on enrolling a broad range of learners (Zach, 2018). SCUs tend to "educate … students who come to college with a wide range of abilities, skills, and motivation with the expectation that they will be prepared for the world of work" (Henderson, 2007, p. x). Moreover, adult learners who pursue their education at SCUs are far less likely to utilize student services or develop relationships with the community (Zach, 2018). Instead, they "rely more heavily on family and friends for support and motivation" (Zach, 2018, p. 18).

In the Great Lakes region alone, SCUs enroll more local (in-state) and transfer students than their flagship counterparts (Maxim & Muro, 2020). "Regional colleges and universities are more likely to provide direct benefits to the region since most of their students remain there after graduation" (Zach, 2018, p. 7). As SCUs have typically directed their efforts on student access and success, such efforts have influenced the nature of the faculty's role and focused it on student success as well. Orphan (2018) notes, "From the start, these universities have widened educational opportunity by lowering barriers to admission and prizing teaching and student-centered programming over research" (para. 2). Notwithstanding their beginnings, SCUs emphasize the provision of educational access to a variety of learners.

Junior Faculty. Faculty are a crucial component of any university. According to the American Association of University Professors (2014), tenured and tenure-track faculty at four-year colleges and universities commit their time to three areas: teaching, service, and research. The percentages of time spent vary, depending on the institution type (DePauw, 2003). Faculty engage in many projects

and tasks, including creating student-centered courses, conducting scholarly research (discipline-specific), and coaching students individually or in small groups (AAUP, 2014).

Faculty employed at SCUs—especially junior faculty—typically pay significant attention to teaching and service initiatives (Sorcinelli, 1992; Thompson et al., 2020). Henderson (2007) stated that they "spend less time on research and more in direct contact with students than those at research universities…[and] have higher teaching loads and fewer research facilities" (p. 9). With their teaching, service, and research requirements in mind and their lack of training regarding student advising in their terminal degree programs (Schroeder & Terras, 2015), junior faculty at SCUs must find ways to work efficiently and effectively with their adult student advisees.

Researchers' Positionality Statements

The assumptions and biases of researchers should always be examined. Because qualitative research is founded upon researchers acting as the principal data collection instrument, the researchers could significantly impact the participants and environments in which their research is conducted. Patton (2002) warned, "One barrier to credible qualitative findings stems from the suspicion that the analyst has shaped finding[s] according to predisposition and biases" (p. 553). To mitigate any potential issues in this area, the inclusion of positionality statements serves to orient readers to the researchers' predilections and vantage points of a study.

Noreen Powers. I am the youngest of ten children, raised in a middle-class family in a large Midwest city. I attended a large private university as a first-generation college student in the 1980s and 1990s. As a part-time night student while working full-time, it took me a decade to complete my degree in industrial psychology. During this time I had neither the personal nor academic support to be able to pursue a career in higher education. However, the accomplishment of earning my bachelor's degree was the beginning of a rewarding future for me in education leadership.

Upon completing my undergraduate degree, I entered a master of education program. While I was a graduate student, I met an academic advisor/mentor who changed the trajectory of my life. Through her support and advising, I was able to pursue my dream and become an educator. I continued to work full-time, teaching while attending night classes, and obtained my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. My desire to continue researching adult learners led to my dissertation project, titled *Female Students as Online Learners: A Case Study of Navigating Academic Success.* During this time, I had the good fortune to become an adjunct professor at the same private university I had attended. This gave me an opportunity to witness firsthand the role of junior faculty and their responsibilities. Junior faculty were

responsible for advising adult students, conducting research, performing service, and teaching. After completing my doctoral degree, I made the decision to return to the K-12 school system and became an administrator. Over the next ten years I continued on my leadership path, holding such positions as assistant principal, curriculum director, and principal.

All my experiences have led me to my current position as an assistant professor in an educational leadership program, teaching and advising adult students. During my first two years as an assistant professor and navigating all the responsibilities of a junior faculty member, on numerous occasions I have drawn on my experiences with my advisor/mentor and as an adjunct professor. Hopefully, my research, service, and teaching will benefit my adult students and help provide support to future junior faculty.

Russell Wartalski. I attended a large community college and two medium-sized state comprehensive universities as a first-generation college student in the mid 1990s and early 2000s. As with my colleague, it also took me a decade to complete my degree in communication studies, as I did not have strong guidance from immediate family members to navigate the post-secondary environment very well. Attempting to navigate the uncharted waters of higher education at that time was overwhelming, especially as I became an adult learner. At some points, I stopped out of college to pursue full-time work in training and development contexts and gained valuable skills working and helping to develop other individuals in organizational settings. Yet, I knew I would not be able to move forward in my life and career without completing formal education. Thankfully, I made some tough decisions and returned to school to complete my undergraduate degree. I was able to do this with significant academic and social support from a few faculty advisors in my degree program. The faculty advisors with whom I crossed paths were firmly committed to student support, which I believe is what helped me succeed in my academic endeavors during that time.

After completing my undergraduate degree, I continued my education by pursuing a master's degree in the same area of study at the same university. I had the opportunity to work more closely with the same faculty as a graduate assistant, as well as see how new and seasoned faculty responded to a significant enrollment influx of students during that period. The new faculty members hired in the program in the mid-2000s were given advising responsibilities that they never experienced while in graduate school. It was interesting to me to observe and work closely with junior faculty managing their teaching, service, and research responsibilities, while advising mainly adult learners. Collectively, my experiences are what led me to my current professional role: working as an assistant professor in a training and development program providing teaching and advising support to adult learners. During the first three years in my role as assistant professor, I advised 100+ students each year pursuing either the human resource development (HRD) major or minor.

I have interacted with hundreds of students and have hopefully had the same impact on them that my former faculty advisors had on me almost 20 years earlier.

Methods

Upon receiving approval from the institutional review board, the study's authors began an inductive exploration of adult learners' perceptions of advising with their junior faculty advisors. Due to the focus of this study, a qualitative research case study design was deemed most appropriate. Researchers who conduct qualitative research do so to understand the experiences of research participants in a "natural social life" environment (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 418). Moreover, the authors concur with Jones et al. (2006) that qualitative investigators who engage in qualitative inquiry must "become embedded in context and responsive to what is happening in that context" (p. 2).

In a general sense, Merriam (2009) defined the case study methodological approach as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). This approach allows investigators to collect multiple sources of data (e.g., interviews, documents, observations, etc.) to elucidate themes and other salient points for comprehension (Creswell, 2007). Merriam advanced the descriptive case study as a written report providing a "description of the phenomenon under study" (p. 43). As junior faculty members teaching and advising students in high enrollment degree programs in one department at an urban state comprehensive university, the authors of this study regularly advise students and reflect on social and behavioral interactions that influence program retention and academic success. Because we were interested in understanding adult learners' advising experiences with their junior faculty advisors, we adopted the descriptive case study methodology for this study. This methodological approach captured a perspective that has not been previously documented in either the adult or post-secondary education literature.

Site and Sample Selection. This study was conducted at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU), located in Chicago, Illinois. The university consists of the main campus and three satellite locations. NEIU enrolls approximately 8,000 students annually and comprises an ethnic, racial, language, and age-diverse student population. The institution is federally designated as a Hispanic-serving institution. Adult learners constitute the majority of students at the graduate and undergraduate levels (Data Digest, 2018).

This study employed purposeful sampling and 22 individuals contributed to this study, some of whom were advised by the researchers. The individuals who engaged in this study were informed that their participation was optional and they could cease involvement at any time. Moreover, participants who were advised by the study's authors were informed that their grades would not be impacted by involvement in the study.

The research participants were enrolled in one of two programs: an Educational Leadership (Principal Preparation) program or a Human Resource Development (HRD) program. Both programs were housed within a single department at the university. The graduate-level program employed a cohort model, while the undergraduate program did not.

Basic demographic information highlighting the participants is shown in Table 1. All research participants were between 25 and 56 years of age; nearly three-quarters identified as women. All 10 undergraduate participants were classified as seniors and were equitably represented with the graduate-level participants. The 12 graduate-level participants were equitably represented in the first (N=5) and second (N=7) year of the program. The participants were asked to choose pseudonyms to mask their identities.

Table 1. *Research Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Age	Class Standing
Maureen	32	Second-Year Graduate
Diane	26	Second-Year Graduate
Tim	26	Second-Year Graduate
Barb	34	Second-Year Graduate
Terry	46	First-Year Graduate
Nina	43	Second-Year Graduate
Elliott	26	Senior
Martin	25	Senior
Nora	27	Senior
Alex	27	Senior
Florence	25	Senior
Nicole	25	Senior
Maria	46	Senior
Sally	31	Second-Year Graduate
Linda	35	First-Year Graduate
Ann	44	First-Year Graduate
Sally	36	First-Year Graduate
Emily	37	First-Year Graduate
Lynn	28	Second-Year Graduate
Karina	25	Senior
Aaron	37	Senior
Kay	56	Senior

Data Types and Analysis. The authors intended to collect three types of data for this qualitative case study. First, individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The researchers selected individual interviews as the primary data collection method to elicit the adult learners' advising experiences with their junior faculty advisors. Prior to each individual interview, research participants were sent an electronic link to complete the online consent form. The participants' individual interviews resulted in detailed and comprehensive descriptions of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). The telephone interviews were approximately 60–90 minutes in length (Seidman, 2006) and were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription company.

The second type of data came in the form of individual artifacts. Individual artifacts are "written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand" (Merriam, 2009, p. 139) and can provide essential cues or crucial contextual information (Merriam). While not considered a primary source of data, they can provide useful insight, as they "represent some form of communication" (Merriam, p. 139). As a secondary data source, approximately one-third of the research participants provided examples of artifacts for this study. The artifact noted most widely among participants was a program plan.

The researchers attempted to collect a third set of data in the form of institutional records and documents. Although a non-primary data source, institutional documents and records could provide a broader context of the university's culture and a greater understanding of the recruitment, administrative, and academic efforts to support the adult learners in graduate and undergraduate programs (Merriam, 2009). At the time of the initial data collection phase, however, the researchers could not feasibly collect such information because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The target university requested that individuals refrain from coming to campus due to virus transmission rates (City of Chicago, 2020), preventing the authors from examining institutional documents. Therefore, the third intended type of data could not be obtained. While the authors had hoped to collect this type of data, the absence of such information was not deemed to have a negative impact on the findings or outcomes of this research.

Miles et al. (2014) suggested that researchers who conduct qualitative research should engage in the data analysis process "concurrent with data collection" (p. 70). Data were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed as soon as the data collection phase began, with the researchers organizing it into relevant themes preparatory to a more in-depth analysis. Specifically, the authors used the constant comparative method adapted by Merriam (2009), analyzing participants' responses to identify emergent categories. During this open-coding process, participants' responses to each question were placed in one or more categories. Three rounds of coding were conducted to ensure that the findings were representative of the participants' experiences. Throughout each round of coding,

the researchers discussed the findings until they reached a consensus. The final round of coding led to a refined understanding of the key themes that emerged throughout this process.

Trustworthiness is an essential element to consider when conducting qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The researchers implemented several steps to ensure the trustworthiness of their findings. The first method used was member checking. Member checking addresses the concept of credibility by allowing research participants to revise, add, or retract their interview transcript data (Schwandt, 2001). The research participants were given an opportunity to review and revise their interview transcript for accuracy. None of the research participants elected to alter their transcripts. The researchers also used triangulation to further ensure credibility. Triangulation includes multiple data sources and various investigators to confirm findings. This study utilized individual interview data, artifact data, and the expertise of another researcher trained in qualitative methods to ensure the accuracy of the findings (Merriam, 2009). The researchers addressed the concept of dependability by maintaining an audit trail throughout the study (Jones et al., 2006). They kept scrupulous field notes, interview transcripts, artifacts, and personal notes about the research process.

Transferability was also used to address trustworthiness. Transferability is when readers' perceptions of the findings can be applied to similar contexts or experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, transferability was addressed through thick, rich descriptions of adult learners' advising experiences with their junior faculty advisors. The final method implemented, illustrating how the data supports the findings, addressed the concept of confirmability. Confirmability is the extent to which a study's results (and the researcher's interpretation of the results) can be certified by others and shown to be clearly grounded by the data. The methodological approach and the triangulation methods used in this study established confirmability.

Findings

The research participants brought unique vantage points and historical perspectives to this study. The commonalities from the data coding process were organized into three major themes: comprehensive program resources, cultivating and maintaining relationships, and structured and personalized communication.

Theme 1: Comprehensive Program Resources. In this study, virtually all research participants noted the importance of having clear and comprehensive program documentation. The most notable document mentioned was the study/program plan. In the HRD program, the document is referred to as a plan of study, while the principal preparation program refers to it as a program plan. For the sake of clarity, we will refer to the plan of study as a program plan. In this study, both faculty members utilized a general program plan that included information on

individual courses, the sequence in which classes were to be taken, and other pertinent information, including checklists, about college and university graduation requirements. The program plan is typically the first document provided to students at the beginning of their respective programs.

The research participants discussed the importance of the program documents throughout their time in their programs. Alex, an HRD student, noted that his program plan was clear and left "little room for doubt." Maureen, a principal preparation student, echoed Alex's sentiments and declared, "When life gets a hold of you, it is important to have a checklist." The comprehensiveness of the documents provides reassurance to learners for how to effectively navigate their program of study. Students also noted that having access to program documents was key to succeeding in their academic programs. Terry, a newly admitted graduate student, reinforced the importance of having access to advising program documents, indicating that she "could always go back to them for reference." Many adult students have competing life responsibilities and must complete tasks at different times of the day. Nina, a graduate student in the final stages of her program, agreed that document availability is key to keeping students on track with their studies. She noted that she "obtained her program information from the professor and advisor." It was not uncommon for students to access their documents at a variety of times and places. Noting his advisor's practice of making information available, Elliott, an HRD student, said that he "always left advising meetings with a hard-copy plan of study and would receive email copies as well."

Likewise, research participants in both programs noted that design was an essential factor in the production of departmental advising documents. Martin, an HRD student, emphasized the importance of having well-designed advising documents. Specifically, Martin described the program plan as being "visually pleasing and … clearly organized." Well-designed documents that include visuals or other graphics (e.g., charts, tables, etc.) can be useful in "showing progression over time" (Dirksen, 2016, p. 150). As such, program faculty and other stakeholders who work directly with students in a degree program would benefit from assessing and evaluating program documents for both written content and visual clarity.

Theme 2: Cultivating and Maintaining Relationships. For the second theme, research participants expressed the cultivation and maintenance of relationships as a means for flourishing as both a learner and practitioner. Trust was the main element established through the relationship-building process, from the start of an academic program to the end. Creating trust was usually demonstrated by junior faculty advisors through strong interpersonal skills that included being dependable, providing motivation, having flexibility, being an active listener, and extending patience when necessary. Many research participants felt that their first meeting was critical to forming a positive connection with their junior faculty advisors. They also felt that the first few meetings were indicative of how the

professional relationship would unfold with their advisors throughout their respective programs. Students described good advising in terms of a supportive relationship with their junior faculty advisor. Nora, an undergraduate HRD student, noted the importance of relationship building. Nora stated, "Yes, relationship building is important, and it is one of the most important aspects of advising." The advisor/advisee relationship must not be overlooked. When Maureen, a graduate student, was asked about her experience with advising, she said:

> [It was] very positive; So, I think that there was a lot of support throughout the entire program, and I think that was so important to being successful and with all the transitions. There are many transitions that go mentally and physically throughout the program; supportive advisors are key to success.

Support from advisors helps students feel successful and well prepared to tackle coursework. Diane, a graduate student nearing the end of her program, shared her thoughts on this point, stating that her "supportive [advisor] was super helpful." Diane recognized that the relationship she established with her advisor and their ongoing support was imperative in preparing her to be a school administrator. Tim, who was in the last semester of his program, was keenly aware of this point and echoed Diana's sentiments. Tim stated, "I found support to be the most helpful when it came to the job I was hoping to achieve." In particular, Tim found that his advisor listened to him and "was understanding" of his situation, and that the advisor did a "good job of framing things" in helpful and understandable ways. Many research participants discussed how valuable support was provided by their advisors. Supportive advisors demonstrate dependability and create a comfortable environment for their students, which fosters a culture of trust and success.

Aspects of teaching and learning were revealed in the advising experiences of many research participants. Specifically, several participants noted that having their advisors as professors in their program helped build and cultivate trusting relationships. Maureen stated:

> It is helpful to see them in class, too; it helps you to feel comfortable. I like that we had the advisors previously as professors, so by the time we were in our internship piece we already knew you and really had that connection. Knowing the advisor as a professor helped.

Another graduate student, Sarah, said that "during a pandemic and moving to remote learning, it [was] beyond helpful" to have her advisor as a professor in her program. She explained,

> I think that having an advisor would be—I mean, it is going to be helpful no matter what. But we're in such different times right now. Having someone to help you navigate the tricky waters that this is new for everybody. I think that having an advisor during the pandemic or as we are remote is beyond helpful.

Research participants in both programs noted the importance of building a good relationship and having open communication with their advisor. According to

Diane, building a good relationship is very important because it helps establish a feeling of shared comfort between the advisor and advisee. Specifically, Diane described how the relationship helped make the degree process less stressful. Nora noted, "Completing a degree is stressful; however, having someone on your side is beneficial." The relationship between advisees and advisors must incorporate a strong sense of connection (Bloom et al., 2007). Barb stated, "The relationship-building process is key to success." As such, junior faculty can benefit from building strong relationships with their students at the beginning of their program. Establishing a strong sense of support through relationship building will help students navigate the degree process with less stress.

     Theme 3: Structured and Personalized Communication. The final theme that emerged from this study was the necessity of structured and personalized communication. Junior faculty advisors who communicated efficiently and effectively with their advisees sustained the relationship-building process and created space for understanding critical information that would significantly impact learners' academic and professional success. In particular, structured and personalized communication led to a clear understanding of students' program plans, how classes prepared students for specific roles in the workplace, and allowed for individual discussions that helped learners gain clarity in their career trajectories. Students noted that specific content, various media for communication, and the frequency with which junior faculty advisors communicated with advisees were critical to success.

     Structured and organized communication can provide clarity for students enrolled in academic programs. In this study, many students noted that structured communication meant sharing information through various means, including emails, phone calls, text messages, individual meetings, and virtual meetings (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet). One graduate research participant noted that clear and accurate communication kept them on track to success. Barb observed:

> [New] faculty advisors who communicate with their students on a regular basis and have regular check-ins with their advisees keep them on track. Ongoing communication really helps students to stay focused on things like long-term planning and time management.

     Elliott, an undergraduate HRD student, provided another perspective on communication between advisors and advisees. Elliott noted, "[Communication] is a two-way street. I do not think it falls solely on the advisor to make everything happen. The student definitely has to put forth the same amount of effort ... in working with each other." Thus, students also acknowledge the importance and shared nature of communication between advisors and advisees. The undergraduate students noted clear communication as necessary for their success. Nora, an HRD student, felt that she was always able to communicate clearly with her advisor. She stated, "I was always able to meet with my advisor whenever I needed, and we

always figured out a game plan." Likewise, Nicole, also an undergraduate student, noted that "clear and frequent communication … resulted in clear expectations." Finally, Maria gave a slightly different perspective, stating that she liked to meet with her advisor at specific times of the year. She said that she "always initiated communication with my advisor via email to set-up an in-person meeting before each semester started." She went on to say that "he always responded to me right away. I felt like he always had adult students' best interest[s] in mind."

Research participants noted that quick responses to emails, phone calls, and text messages were key to quickly understanding program policies and requirements. Sally indicated that her advisor "responded to phone calls within a day and that was reasonable." Ann noted challenges with the registration website but said that her advisor responded quickly with tips and clear support to complete the registration process. Karina preferred email communication "because of my busy schedule." Karina added that she found her advisor's responses via email both quick and straightforward. Kay, a returning undergraduate student, noted that she appreciated in-person meetings with her advisor. She said, "I liked building rapport with my advisor so that he can get to know my interests and guide me in the right direction."

Discussion

The advisor/advisee relationship is critical to the success of adult undergraduate and graduate students. Good advising is structured and comprehensive; it involves establishing professional relationships with frequent interactions between students and advisors (Cuseo, 2003). Supportive advising practices contribute meaningfully to successful student experiences in college (Light, 2001). However, such practices are often underestimated in post-secondary contexts (Schreiner & Anderson, 2004). This study was designed to address a gap in the literature by exploring adult learners' academic advising experiences with their junior faculty advisors. The data garnered from research participants allowed the researchers to understand the key components needed for adult learners to be advised successfully. Moreover, the key components provided insight into advising practices that support this population.

Figure 6 highlights an advising model that all faculty can use as a guide for advising adult learners. Furthermore, given the newness of the tasks that junior faculty must carry out in their teaching roles, this model can serve as a valuable reference point for this faculty group in addressing advising responsibilities. The model illustrates the three key thematic components necessary for supporting adult student learning and success. The horizontal arrow on the left describes students' entry point for advising with junior faculty members. From that point, students transition into an ongoing, circular process that builds on the themes derived from this study including, accessing program resources, cultivating and maintaining

relationships, and personalizing communication. Students go through this cycle continuously throughout the duration of their program until they have completed graduation requirements. The second horizontal arrow on the right describes the exit point of advising, which is the moment of graduation.

Student advising is an often-undervalued service provided by junior faculty teaching at SCUs (Zach, 2018). This research provides a focal point for addressing adult learners' perceptions of their advising experiences so that junior faculty can become more self-aware of the practices that foster positive connections and good advising practices. Such practices include focusing on comprehensive program resources, cultivating and maintaining strong advisee-advisor relationships, and offering structured and personalized communication.

Our intention in conducting this research was to provide us with a starting point for considering and refining our advising practices, and it was also intended to spark further scholarly discussion and exploration of advising practices for junior faculty at regional universities and institutions. Consequently, this research is intended to create a holistic model of advising for junior faculty and is not an exhaustive account of the current state of practices that could be established for student success.

Figure 6. Undergraduate and Graduate Advising Needs
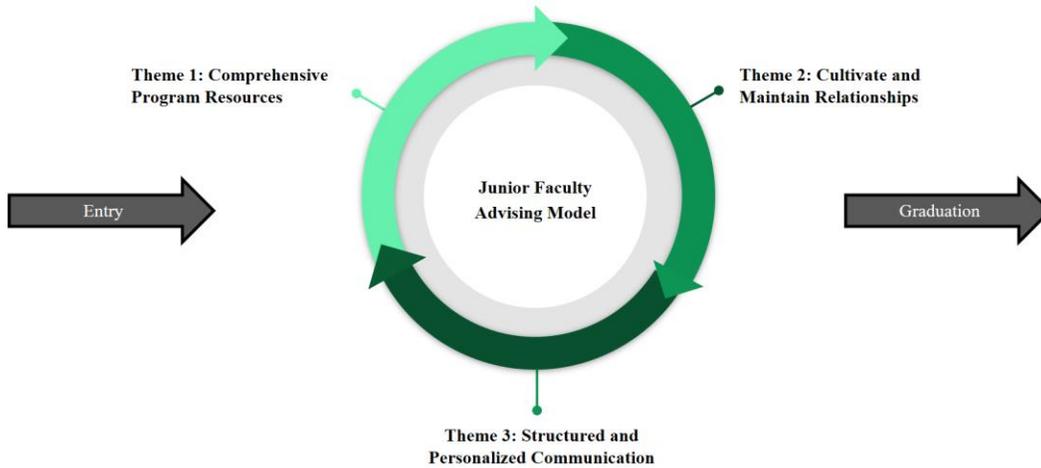
In our opinion, as junior faculty become enmeshed in the culture and institutional practices that characterize their specific universities, they need to be aware of the real-time commitments involved in advising students. Based on our model as shown in Figure 6, junior faculty now have a starting point for thinking about adult students' advising needs. However, junior faculty who are unaware of the time investment necessary to connect with their students ultimately run the risk

of hindering their ability to support students in the long term and hampering efforts to sustain or enhance program growth.

Our research was predicated on how adult learners perceived academic advising with their junior faculty advisors at one regional public institution. We strongly advocate researchers to continue studying adult learners' advising needs. Such research will continue to support student success. As student populations continue to change and academic programs continue to evolve, junior faculty advising practices must also develop to keep pace with student demographics and institutional transformation.

Conclusions

The findings from this qualitative study indicate that adult learners need clear and concise documents, benefit from strong connections with their advisors, and desire ongoing communication through various modalities. Junior faculty in advising roles will be tasked with creating professional advising practices that promote adult learners' unique needs specific to their institutional type.

Implications for Practice. Based on this study's findings, time and resources are important considerations for junior faculty in planning their workload. Junior faculty members have myriad responsibilities that must be addressed in their roles as assistant professors (DePauw, 2003). For junior faculty specifically working at SCUs, time and resources are already a treasured commodity because they tend to teach more classes and take on more student-related responsibilities, yet are still required to conduct research (Zach, 2018).

Moreover, because terminal degree programs do not adequately prepare junior faculty to advise adult learners as part of their teaching roles, support is needed from current institutional stakeholders. Stakeholder support can come in the form of financial assistance (e.g., course release, research stipends, etc.) for ongoing scholarly inquiry, additional practice-related resourcing through teaching and learning centers, or faculty-created working groups dedicated to advising. When advising duties are added to the junior faculty's existing work responsibilities, this creates additional stress (Khalil & Williamson, 2014). The stress is further compounded for individuals teaching and advising in high-enrollment programs (Zach, 2018). Hence, regional colleges and universities must provide significant support for junior faculty to succeed and thrive.

Implications for Research. This study explored the advising experiences of adult learners with their junior faculty advisors. Specifically, the study focused on adult learners' advising experiences while enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program in an educational leadership department at one SCU in the Midwest. The results allowed for a substantial analysis of participants' shared advising experiences. As such, we have several suggestions for future research.

First, a similar study should be conducted that focuses on adult learners' perceptions of advising with their junior faculty in graduate and undergraduate programs but at other institutional types (e.g., liberal arts college, land-grant university, etc.). The difference in institutional type presents opportunities to engage in research with potentially different student demographics. This will provide different vantage points concerning advising needs and practices that support adult learners.

Second, a qualitative study on adult learners' advising needs in different academic departments should be conducted at SCUs. While our study focused on adult learners pursuing degrees in an educational leadership department, the needs of adult students who are studying in other academic disciplines, such as the natural sciences or the performing arts, might yield different findings. Other academic disciplines might have different degrees of impact on student learning and advising.

Finally, a quantitative study that examines adult learners' attitudes toward program documents, relationship building, and communication practices should be conducted. Surveying a larger number of participants will provide more generalizable results that can increase our understanding of adult learners' advising practices and preferences. These suggested research studies would add significantly to our understanding of adult learners and thus provide much-needed guidance to junior faculty advisors.

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