Ties That Bind: Academic Advisors as Agents of Student Relationship Management

Jörg Vianden, University of Wisconsin–La Crosse

To affect college retention, academic advisors should act as agents of student relationship management by strengthening the connection between students and their institutions. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with academic advising as perceived by 29 college students at 3 midwestern comprehensive institutions are described. Discussion is framed in the context of student relationship management theory and the critical incident technique. Recommendations for academic advising practice are offered.

KEY WORDS: critical incident technique, relationship management, retention, qualitative methods

In past studies on student perceptions of their college experience, students have reported dissatisfaction with academic advising (Allen & Smith, 2008; Keup & Stolzenberg, 2004; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Recent reports indicate that students consider academic advising of primary importance (Noel-Levitz, 2014). In fact, college students value academic advising more highly than most other aspects of their education (Noel-Levitz, 2010). Although students at 4-year public institutions reported acceptable levels of satisfaction with the knowledge and approachability of their academic advisors, they gave unsatisfactory ratings to advisors who showed little concern for advisee goals or care about their growth and success (Noel-Levitz, 2014).

Student evaluations of advising interactions comprise the principal form of assessment in academic advising (Powers, Carlstrom, & Hughey, 2014). However, some scholars assert that satisfaction measures reflect student bias created by unrealistic or uninformed expectations of the advisor; others point out that student satisfaction measures fail to provide long-term data on the effects of academic advising on student outcomes, including persistence (Powers et al., 2014; White & Schulenberg, 2012). However, critics may not realize that student satisfaction is inextricably linked to positive student outcomes (Elliott & Healy, 2001); for example, satisfaction with the college experience has been cited as one of the most important predictors of student persistence (Schreiner, 2009; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). Where no satisfaction exists, little learning or success follows.

Studies on student satisfaction with academic advising abound in the professional literature; however, no researcher reported using the critical incident technique (CIT) to determine student satisfaction. Like they do for other postsecondary programs, administrators and faculty leaders drive decisions on academic advising, but the student voice often goes unheard when planners design and implement academic advising. In qualitative research studies on academic advising, participants generally answer a set of researcher-created questions or prompts. Through the CIT, participants report, from their perspective, the most critical or memorable incidents, experiences, or encounters with a phenomenon under study (Gremler, 2004; Vianden, 2012); in this study, participant perceptions of academic advising on their individual campus were recorded via the CIT.

In this study, I advance the notion that academic advisors need to act as agents of student relationship management (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007-2008) by building quality interpersonal relationships that improve student bonds with their college or university. The CIT served as the method for data collection and analysis (as per Gremler, 2004; Vianden, 2012). Taken from a larger study of 157 college students who shared 309 incidents about their perceived relationship with their institution (Vianden, 2015), 32 critical incidents about academic advising, as reported by 29 students from three comprehensive midwestern institutions, are presented herein.

Related Literature

Satisfaction With Academic Advising

Students' disappointment with academic advising contributes to student dissatisfaction (Allen & Smith, 2008; Keup & Stolzenberg, 2004; Kuh et al., 2005). The 2014 *National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report* (Noel-Levitz) highlighted academic advising as a core category. In the survey, participants rated the importance of

the following items along with their satisfaction about each: advisor knowledge about major course of study requirements, advisor approachability, advisor's concern about individual student success, the advisor's helpfulness with goal setting, and advisor care toward students as individuals. Students considered advisor knowledge most important (88%) and care about students as individuals least important (74%). Respondents were most satisfied with advisor knowledge (65%) and least satisfied with advisor care about students as individuals (47%). The gaps between items students considered important and their satisfaction with those behaviors spanned from 23 to 27%.

In 2014, nearly 100,000 first-year students and seniors at more than 200 institutions of all institutional types responded to questions about frequency of advising, accessibility of advisors, advising information provided, and primary source of academic advice (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). More than one half of the first-year respondents and nearly two thirds of the seniors reported discussing academic interests, course selection, or academic performance with their advisor between 0 and 2 times per year. Despite this low frequency of discussions of academic purport, most respondents stated that their advisors were available when needed, listened closely to their concerns, and provided useful information about courses. Fewer than one half of the respondents indicated that advisors helped students receive information about internships, study abroad opportunities, or discussed career interests. Perhaps the most surprising results suggest that first-year students receive as much advice from academic advisors as they do from friends and family members combined (33%).

Students expect detailed knowledge from academic advisors; in fact, "[students] value accurate information above all else" (Smith & Allen, 2006, p. 62). In a study of engineering students' satisfaction with academic advising, participants indicated most satisfaction with advisors who provided needed information on course scheduling and sequencing as well as with degree planning (Sutton & Sankar, 2011). In a study with a large sample of undergraduates, Lynch (2004) found that respondents rated departmental or faculty advisors as more accessible than professional advisors, and they ranked professional advisors as more knowledgeable on policies, procedures, and degree requirements as

well as more helpful with nonacademic concerns or when discussing long-term plans. Students who saw professional advisors compared to faculty advisors showed higher overall levels of advising satisfaction.

Student Relationship Management Through Academic Advising

In their recent text for academic advisors, Drake, Jordan, and Miller (2013) emphasized the important connection between academic advisors and advisees in fostering student success. Most of the chapters focus on relationship-building strategies in academic advising, including appreciative advising (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2013), advising as teaching (Drake, 2013), developmental advising (Grites, 2013), advising as coaching (McClellan, 2013), and proactive advising (Varney, 2013). In an earlier study, scholars advocated for academic advising to emerge from a sense of civic friendship with their students:

> The more we rely on technology in this increasingly bureaucratic world, the more we need truly interpersonal communication conveying the feeling of belonging, of being recognized and treated as a unique individual. When students reflect on their university years, they remember people—friends, teachers, and significant others, such as academic advisors—who have made a difference in their lives. (Rawlins & Rawlins, 2005, p. 18)

Kuh et al. (2005) suggested that academic advising links students to their institutions. As a result, academic advisors should use strategies that help students create meaningful relationships with faculty members and staff that extend beyond those needed for the immediate outcomes of persistence and graduation, and they should advocate for the implementation of high-impact practices to aid student success (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). Expanding on Rich's (2007) *7 Habits of Good Teachers Today*, Drake (2013) suggested that care and affection for students should characterize academic advising.

> Everyone in the institution needs to address students' deep human need to feel recognized. Advisors, in particular, play a powerful and central role in student success by providing the opportunity (sometimes the

only one) for an ongoing, durable relationship with someone who cares about their academic goals. (p. 22)

In this excerpt, Drake explained that academic advisors, perhaps more than faculty members and other student affairs professionals, can connect students to the institution. Drake's previous work added to the academic advising literature discussing the advisor–advisee relationship (Drake, 2011) and explaining the positive effects of academic advising on student outcomes, including persistence (Elliott & Healy, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013), satisfaction with the institution (Anderson, Motto, & Bourdeaux, 2014; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Sutton & Sankar, 2011; Teasley & Buchanan, 2013), and overall success (Allen & Smith, 2008; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013).

The theoretical construct of relationship management (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007-2008) guided the present study and provided a lens through which to view the findings. Relationship management is comprised of more than a simple buyer–seller relationship; rather, it focuses on cooperation and collaboration between a firm and clients. Seen this way, relationship management directly applies to the learning partnerships created by faculty members or advisors (facilitators of information) and students (learners) to integrate and share responsibility for learning (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

To introduce relationship management to higher education, Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007–2008) coined the term *student relationship management* (SRM), which implies a life cycle of recruitment, retention, and relationship quality processes. SRM is anchored in relationships that institutional agents (e.g., counselors, advisors, faculty members) create, develop, and maintain with students. For advisors, SRM entails knowing students, creating enduring relationships with them, inviting their input early and often, and communicating with and celebrating them frequently (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007–2008).

Tenets of interpersonal theory (Bruning & Ralston, 2001; Ledingham, 2006) suggest that attitudes clients or partners (e.g., advisees) develop about the organizations in which they function or move play a key role in evaluating the organizations or intended client behavior. Students who express satisfaction about social and academic experiences (e.g., academic advising) at their institutions as well as about personal relationships with institutional agents (e.g., academic advisors) were more likely to persist at their universities than those who felt dissatisfied (Bruning, 2002). Students deeply dissatisfied with their university may choose to transfer, drop out, or stay without becoming loyal alumni (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007–2008). According to a study by Voss (2009), more dissatisfied students engaged in word-of-mouth communication about their institution than did satisfied students. These findings suggest that an institution's overall reputation may be impugned by students unhappy about their relationships with their institutions. Furthermore, students' favorable perceptions of the reputation of their institutions are positively related to student loyalty (Helgesen, 2008). Because as many as 40% of U.S. college students will leave their initial institution to graduate from another (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007–2008), college educators, faculty members, and academic advisors must know the roles that the student–university relationship and resulting student satisfaction and behavior play in the student experience.

Methods

The study is grounded in a social-constructivist methodology to allow a focus on participant perspectives and the meaning they attribute to specific experiences (as per Creswell, 2014). The CIT, a qualitative method, relies on participants sharing detailed descriptions of their encounters, events, or incidents most satisfactory (or unsatisfactory), critical, memorable, or important to them (Gremler, 2004; Vianden, 2012).

Sampling and Data Collection

As part of a larger regional study, data from three midwestern comprehensive and undergraduate-focused institutions were collected. At all three institutions, the institutional research office provided a random sample of 1,000 undergraduates, all of whom were invited to participate in the CIT study. Both face-to-face and online CIT surveys focusing on students' perspectives of critical incidents in the student–university relationship served as the method of data collection. At the point of data collection, combined enrollment at the three institutions totaled approximately 36,000 undergraduates, including nearly 2,800 non-White students (approximately 8%) and 55% women.

The larger study on which this one was based documented 309 incidents from 157 students at the research sites; however, this article only reports 32 academic advising incidents shared by 29 survey participants who completed the online survey through Qualtrics. Slightly more than 10% of all discernible critical incidents were identified in academic advising contexts; this result warrants this study and provides evidence for the salience of academic advising on college campuses.

Participants responded to each of the following questions, typical of CIT studies, for each incident they shared:

- Please think about an especially dissatisfying or satisfying incident, event, or experience at your university. When and where did this incident take place?
- Who specifically said or did what in this context?
- Specifically, why were you satisfied or unsatisfied during this incident or event? What, if anything could have been said or done to increase your satisfaction in this instance?
- In what way has the incident influenced your future thinking, feelings, behaviors, or attitudes? (e.g., I told others how happy I was; I recommended my university to others; I felt proud to be a student at [my university]; I avoided contact with the specific person.)

Of the 29 participants, 28 identified as White, and 13 identified as women. More than 55% of the participants were juniors or seniors.

Data Analysis and Reporting

Because participants submitted their responses to the CIT questions online, no transcription was necessary. I utilized Microsoft Excel to view all submitted incidents from the online survey along with the participants' pseudonyms and demographic data (sex, race, major, classification by credits earned). After determining the 32 incidents that featured academic advising interactions, I open coded the data to describe the reasons participants expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the interaction. Codes included terms descriptive of the advisor or the interaction with the advisor (e.g., *helpful, unresponsive, assuring, unwelcoming, providing wrong information*). Finally, I categorized the 32

incidents into academic advising encounters participants considered satisfactory and unsatisfactory. To report findings, I provide participant quotes that elucidate the attitudes, thoughts, or emotions about the student's level of satisfaction with individual advising encounters.

Limitations

Although this study uniquely provides CIT data on student perceptions about satisfaction with academic advising, some limitations warrant attention. First, the perceptions reflected in the results come from 29 students at three specific state universities. Hence, the transferability of results to other institutional or regional contexts should be considered with caution. Second, the three research sites enroll more than 36,000 undergraduates, resulting in a multitude of different conceptualizations of satisfaction with academic advising; yet, the only voices that emerge from this study are those of the 29 participants.

Third, neither the academic advising structure nor organization at each institution was considered; that is, advising personnel, the policy regarding mandated academic advising, nor the frequency with which professional and faculty advisors communicate about advisees was taken into account in the results. Finally, although online CIT surveys offer accepted ways to collect critical incident data (Voss, Gruber, & Reppel, 2010), researchers cannot follow up with participants to elaborate on a specific encounter or experience. Despite the limitations, the findings provide a rich snapshot of participant satisfaction and dissatisfaction with academic advising at the university level.

Findings

Satisfactory Academic Advising Encounters

Participants ($N = 29$) shared a total of 18 satisfactory academic advising experiences. Several students discussed encounters with caring or supportive advisors, who listened or provided reliable advice. In these cases, helpful advisors instilled a sense of belonging for advisees.

Mandy's (all names changed) comments about her advisor can be considered representative:

[My advisor] gave me a lot of information when I decided to change my major. He listened to me and seemed genuinely interested. . . . I was very satisfied because the information was frank, realistic, and reliable.

I told others I was happy and recommended this service.

Mandy's evaluation of her advisor speaks to the ability of academic advising to connect with students.

Of the satisfactory events, 11 incidents related to helpful advisors, many of whom instilled a sense of belonging. Janet, a senior political science major, shared:

I was struggling with a class—badly! I was distraught and went to my advisor. I decided to demote one of my majors to a minor and she helped me drop [the] course and pick up an independent study. I needed the course so I could remain full-time and also devote my time towards my area of interest within my major. I don't know what I would have done without [my advisor's] help.

Daniel recalled an encounter in which his academic advisor helped "answer questions, even presenting [me] with options to participate in on-campus activities." As a result of this advising experience, Daniel encouraged his friends in the same program "to go talk to [my advisor] because she was very helpful." Alexander, a sophomore who responded while studying abroad, told others about his academic advisor who "made sure she understood my exact situation . . . and walked me through step by step. . . . It made my day and also very excited for my future." This incident description illuminates the way a single satisfying encounter with an academic advisor can elicit enthusiasm about a student's future goals.

A helpful and thorough advisor also influenced Mandy, a senior biology major applying for graduate school, who felt "accepted, important, and very proud to be a member of my major and of [my university] as a whole." A helpful and "very kind" advisor made Ryan, a senior liberal studies major, "feel part of this larger . . . community." Ryan had "heard horror stories . . . about advisors never getting back to [students] and never really help[ing] out. . . . I felt I was a priority [for my advisor], not just another duty assigned. . . . His advice helped me out a lot . . . and still is helping me now." Bryan, a junior community health major, shared an empowering interaction with a helpful advisor: "It was one of the first times that I felt like more than just a number at this school. . . . I appreciated that [my advisor] really took the time to get to know me." An academic advisor who provided "guidance and understanding of what was happening" when Joe (junior, social sciences major) applied to his academic college left him "super satisfied with her help." Because of an advisor who assisted with transferring from a previous institution, William "continue[s] to reassure friends who look into coming to [my university] about my helpful advisors who work hard to get things done for me." This positive word of mouth recommendation from students, which reflects students' favorable view of their institution, should encourage academic advisors, administrators, and staff committed to providing excellence in higher education.

The satisfactory incidents related by the CIT results reveal the ways academic advisors inspire students. They also show that academic advisors instill a sense of belonging, pride, and mattering in the participants. Equally powerful, however, unsatisfactory incidents with academic advising expose the negative impact of advisors who neither inspire nor educate.

Unsatisfactory Academic Advising Encounters

The participants shared a total of 11 unsatisfactory academic advising experiences. Two consistent subcategories of data emerged from the incidents in this category: unresponsive advisors and advisors who provided uninformed or incorrect advice.

Unresponsive advisors affect future help seeking. Four incidents about unresponsive advisors bred dissatisfaction among the participants. Aaron shared that he e-mailed his advisor "several times with questions about what classes [I] should take and what she recommends for freshmen biology major[s]. I never got a response, and it made me feel like I wasn't an important student at [my university]." He further described the incident by sharing "[the experience] affects my future wanting to reach out for help. I stopped seeking help from the [advisor] altogether."

Mary, a communications major, discussed the following incident with a faculty advisor:

She . . . told me to e-mail her when I decided which classes I wanted to take. So I e-mailed her and asked questions, to which she never replied. I sent a follow-up e-mail and another, also to which she never replied. I ended up registering for classes without ever receiving a response to my e-mails. I was

completely unsatisfied because I really felt my advisor didn't care about my college career at all. I understand she is busy, but she should not be advising if she cannot even respond to e-mails. [Now], I keep any conversation with her minimal [and] avoid contact with her.

Mary's comments indicate that while they may not know the intricacies of academic advisors' schedules, students level criticism on the appropriateness of an individual in the advising position.

Kendra shared an incident about a faculty advisor who was also her instructor in a course. After he did not respond to repeated e-mails to discuss her remaining five-semester schedule, she created her own and sent it to him: "He told me twice in class that he would get back to me [but] never did. . . . I expect a lot more from a person labeled 'advisor' . . . and that [this university] would give advising assignments to more reliable instructors." An unresponsive advisor elicited a "very negative opinion of him" from Emily, a chemistry major. At the time of data collection, Emily's opinion of her advisor had "not changed much" since her initial attempts to communicate with him. The academic advising center on Mira's campus led to her dissatisfaction because "it took months to get a response, [my] questions were unanswered, and [I] did not know [my] advisor stopped working at [the institution]." Students may not need to know the reason someone leaves their position, but a routine, courtesy communication should inform advisees that an advisor has left the institution.

According to the critical incidents shared, students grew dissatisfied with institutions that employ unresponsive advisors. They also reevaluated seeking help after dissatisfactory experiences with academic advisors. This finding reveals nontrivial implications for academic advisors and college educators committed to student success.

Wrong advice interpreted as lack of respect. The majority of unsatisfactory incidents featured comments about academic advisors perceived as unknowledgeable, inefficacious, or misinformed. With the assistance of his new advisor, Marcus, a math education major, discovered that his previous advisor had suggested he "take courses that would ultimately not count toward my degree . . . they were essentially useless." Marcus explained that this outcome hurt his "morale and motivation to continue [his] degree." Lainey, a public administration student, shared the following incident about a professional academic advisor she perceived as unknowledgeable about the policies for double or triple majors at the institution:

[My advisor] flat out told me that I could not double major, that is was impossible for me to do. I was so mad . . . that I haven't gone back to her yet. Now, I am adding a third major, so obviously I can do it [at my institution]. . . . Ha, now I am going to have a triple major. Take that! I think that she should have taken the time to get to know me and understand that I am a hard worker and a good student.

Since the encounter, Lainey avoided contact with her advisor and sought out a professor for questions related to academic advising.

Trent shared a detailed narrative about two separate academic advisors he encountered at his institution:

My first advisor was completely uninformed about the classes, requirements, or paperwork necessary to pursue my major or even general classes. She took weeks to return e-mails, and often refused to answer my questions directly but instead recommended I check online. Never once was she polite. My second advisor told me the first time we met that I would never become a physical therapist (what I want to be) and refused to work with me to amend whatever the problem [was]. He then spent the next year blowing off our appointments, disregarding my e-mails, or simply telling me he couldn't help without any direction [as] to who could.

Trent left these encounters feeling "completely disregarded and disrespected as a student at [my] institution. . . . I also really needed some guidance at times and the stress that resulted from all of these interactions only ever made the situation worse." The interactions with his academic advisors left emotional scars that Trent shared when discussing his struggle about "when my advisor told me I could never become the only thing I've wanted to be. Despite his harshness I have continued on my chosen path." Trent, as the other students citing an incompetent advisor, stopped seeking out his advisor "or any other for

that matter." Of course, one wonders about the reasons an advisor would discourage a student from following his or her desired path; for example, did Trent have poor grades or lack other credentials needed to succeed in his chosen field of study? In this case, at least, the student felt marginalized, which reflects the poor handling, at best, of a difficult advising situation.

Evan, a senior social sciences major, experienced a similar emotional encounter with his advisor: "[I met with her] several times about graduation and she told me I was set [but I just found out I am short credits in psychology to graduate]." Knowing he needed to add another semester to his college career, Evan "cried for hours then called [his] parents." It likely happens every spring semester at every institution that students do not have enough credits to graduate; however, how many, like Evan insists, are communicative and diligent with advisors while preparing for graduation?

The unsatisfactory incidents show the feelings of disregard and disrespect of students who feel that advisors provided unknowledgeable or incorrect advice. They also demonstrate that these perceived negative encounters or experiences with academic advisors tax students emotionally. In the students' minds, academic advisors may represent a direct extension of the university; hence, the participants' perceptions of their university may have suffered because of their negative experience with an academic advisor. Because student perceptions of advising can affect their satisfaction with their college experience and institution, advisors need to provide inspirational advising and avoid behaviors that breed dissatisfaction among students.

Discussion and Recommendations for Practice

The findings point to two definitive conclusions about the 29 participants in the study. Positive advising encounters enhanced participants' satisfaction with academic advising, and statements by satisfied respondents demonstrate that they also affected the way students feel about being a member of the institution. Unsatisfactory advising experiences discouraged participants from seeking future interactions with advisors, citing harmed emotional well-being and doubts about mattering to their institutions.

Build Interpersonal Relationships

Participants shared 18 satisfactory incidents regarding academic advising, 7 more than related unsatisfactory encounters. While these differenc-

es cannot be evaluated quantitatively, they may call into question previous findings that students express more dissatisfaction with academic advising than with any other program experienced during their undergraduate careers (Allen & Smith, 2008; Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2014; Keup & Stolzenberg, 2004; Kuh et al., 2005) and that satisfaction with academic advising positively affects overall satisfaction with the institution (Anderson et al., 2014; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Teasley & Buchanan, 2013; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

The findings point to the participants' relationship orientation, which confirms the majority of extant research findings that show that academic advising can connect students to the entire university, not just establish satisfaction in the context of the typical advisor–advisee relationship. Specifically, participants of the study indicated high levels of satisfaction with advisors who exhibited positive accessibility or availability behaviors, listened to their concerns, and provided helpful or useful information as has been suggested in other studies (Lynch, 2004; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014; Noel-Levitz, 2014; Sutton & Sankar, 2011).

Most importantly, the findings from the CIT study on satisfactory incidents in academic advising confirm extant research about the positive effects of the academic advising relationship with students (Drake, 2011; Kuh et al., 2005). Some participants who relayed positive encounters with academic advisors shared that the advisor instilled a sense of pride in the institution, a feeling of acceptance and mattering, and a sense of belonging. Students who reported satisfactory critical incidents felt like the institution prioritized them based on their advisor's expressed interest in and care for them, and students readily shared positive advising encounters with friends and relatives and recommended their institution as a result.

Institutions should conduct their own CIT assessment of academic advising and explore the advising behaviors and strategies that positively affect student outcomes. Localized results not only allow administrators to recognize excellent academic advising and the advisors who provide it but they also can be used to restructure practice so that it focuses primarily on relationship quality between advisor and student. Advising that evokes positive emotional responses in students will likely bring about student persistence and loyalty to the institution (Bruning, 2002; Rawlins

& Rawlins, 2005; Vianden & Barlow, 2014, 2015).

Expect Advisor Responsiveness and Knowledge

Participants in this study reported fewer unsatisfactory critical incidents than satisfactory academic advising encounters. However, the strong emotions elicited, including tears, in the participants who encountered unresponsive or unknowledgeable advisors indicate a feeling of unimportance, sense of not belonging, drop in morale, and decreased motivation to persist. These findings support research that suggests advisors who show little concern for goals, growth, or overall student success fuel student dissatisfaction (Noel-Levitz, 2014). The findings also refute claims by scholars who purport that satisfaction measures used in academic advising research are flawed because they are based on unrealistic or uninformed student expectations (Powers et al., 2014; White & Schulenberg, 2012). Higher education leaders must acknowledge student perceptions of institutional services, even those based on unsophisticated thinking, because they drive student beliefs of and experiences at their university (Vianden & Barlow, 2014, 2015). Institutions can ill afford situations in which students avoid seeking help from academic advisors because of past unsatisfactory encounters. Colleges and universities that face criticisms from external constituents about rising cost and decreasing quality cannot afford negative word-of-mouth from students distraught by a poor academic advising interaction (Voss, 2009).

Institutional leaders who direct academic advising need to assess the levels of student dissatisfaction with academic advising. The small sample in the present study may not indicate the levels by which academic advisors blatantly disregard students or provide wrong advice. However, because the three research sites enroll a total of 36,000 undergraduates, the dissatisfaction may extend to an unknown number of nonparticipants, providing ample reasons for concern.

Perhaps not a foregone conclusion, all professional and faculty advisors need to be meticulously trained and tested on their knowledge of policies, rules, and regulations that govern course requirements, course sequences, and registration processes at their institution. If evidence exists that academic advisors provided wrong guidance to students, institutional policies should offer recourse to misadvised students, such as options to retake courses without penalty, and advisors should be retrained. In addition to providing accurate information, all advisors must respond to students within a reasonable timeframe, perhaps 24 to 48 hours. If the individual advisor is not responsible for providing the information or not knowledgeable about the specific context, they must provide quick referrals to knowledgeable resources who can answer a student's question.

Evidence suggests that faculty advisors may be less knowledgeable (Lynch, 2004) than professional advisors and some may express disinterest in academic advising. At institutions where academic advising is required as part of teaching or service requirements for faculty, deans and department chairs must hold faculty members accountable. Faculty colleagues should create intradepartmental expectations for responsive and knowledgeable advising and train colleagues to meet agreed-upon standards. The institutional reputation, and more importantly, overall student persistence and success should not depend on academic advising haphazardly delivered or not delivered at all (Helgesen, 2008).

Ties That Bind—Use Bonding Strategies in Academic Advising

Bean (2005) asked, "Do faculty and staff members understand the importance of . . . providing [services] in a way that students appreciate so that students develop positive attitudes toward the college?" (p. 239). Everyone at the institution must find ways to communicate caring about students and must demonstrate commitment to developing, mentoring, and partnering with students. To this end, college educators should employ simple bonding activities to connect students more strongly to the institution (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007–2008). Academic advisors should train all frontline and professional staff in basic relationship building and customer service behaviors, and they should invite students to evaluate staff behavior at all levels. All personnel, regardless of stature on campus, must strive to meet the highest standards of relationship quality when interacting with students (Rawlins & Rawlins, 2005; Vianden & Barlow, 2014, 2015).

Further, academic advisors should learn and frequently use student names, require or incentivize advising visits, or conduct open houses where students can meet advisors, faculty

members, and other students in informal settings. Students should be invited to evaluate academic advising practices, to discuss innovative forms of advising such as satellite or online advising, or share thoughts about using social media in advising. In terms of celebrating students, academic advisors should explore sharing student academic, personal, or professional accomplishments via social media, like Facebook or Twitter.

Deeper bonding activities include giving academic advisees a voice in issues critical to institutional governance. Academic advisors should ensure student engagement on important academic committees, including those relating to academic policy, curriculum reform, academic ineligibility regulations, or strategic planning committees. Academic advising leaders must review and involve students in revising all advising-related policies (e.g., course sequence, registration, general requirements, academic ineligibility) to ensure such regulations position student success above institutional interests.

Summary

This CIT study confirmed that academic advisors have the opportunity to bind students strongly to the institution by creating an ongoing, durable relationship with someone who cares deeply about student success (as per Drake, 2013). Therefore, everyone at the institution should refer to academic advisors as agents of student relationship management (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007–2008), and advisors should receive the training and professional development to act in this important role for the institution. The advisee–advisor relationship may positively affect student persistence and ensure students become supportive alumni of their alma mater.

Confirming existing research, the CIT study showed that academic advisors significantly affected the participants' collegiate experience. Satisfactory encounters with helpful and supportive academic advisors resulted in students perceiving they mattered to the institution as well as increased their sense of belonging and pride for the institution. Unsatisfactory experiences with unresponsive or unknowledgeable advisors affected respondents' morale and motivation and prompted students to avoid seeking contact or assistance in the future. The study further showed that students share positive and negative experiences about academic advising with people important to them, translating as either positive or detrimental word-of-mouth marketing for the institution. Because of the emotional response of students to academic advising, positive and long-lasting relationships must be developed between advisors and advisees. Furthermore, staff and faculty must be held accountable to high levels of knowledge, response, and care.

References

Ackerman, R., & Schibrowsky, J. (2007–2008). A business marketing strategy applied to student retention: A higher education initiative. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 9*(3), 307–336. doi: 10.2190/CS.9.3.d

Allen, J. M., & Smith, C. L. (2008). Importance of, responsibility for, and satisfaction with academic advising: A faculty perspective. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(5), 397–411. doi: 10.1353/csd.0.0033

Allen, J. M., Smith, C. L., & Muehleck, J. K. (2014). Pre- and post-transfer academic advising: What students say are the similarities and differences. *Journal of College Student Development, 55*(4), 353–367. doi: 10.1353/csd.2014.0034

Anderson, W., Motto, J. S., & Bourdeaux, R. (2014). Getting what they want: Aligning student expectations of advising with perceived advisor behaviors. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher, 26*(1), 27–51.

Baxter Magolda, M. B., & King, P. M. (2004). *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Bean, J. P. (2005). Nine themes of college student retention. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 215–244). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Bloom, J. L., Hutson, B. L., & He, Y. (2013). Appreciative advising. In J. K. Drake, P. Jordan, & M. A. Miller (Eds.), *Academic advising approaches: Strategies that teach students to make the most of college* (pp. 83–100). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bruning, S. D. (2002). Relationship building as a retention strategy: Linking relationship attitudes and satisfaction evaluations to behavioral outcomes. *Public Relations Review, 28,* 39–48. doi: 10.1016/S0363-8111(02)00109-1

Bruning, S. D., & Ralston, M. (2001). Using a relational approach to retaining students and building mutually beneficial student–university relationships. *Southern Communication*

Journal, 66(4), 337–345. doi:10.1080/10417940109373212

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Drake, J. K. (2011). The role of academic advising in student retention and persistence. *About Campus*, 16(3), 8–12. doi:10.1002/abc.20062

Drake, J. K. (2013). Advising as teaching and the advisor as teacher in theory and in practice. In J. K. Drake, P. Jordan, & M. A. Miller (Eds.), *Academic advising approaches: Strategies that teach students to make the most of college* (pp. 17–32). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Drake, J. K., Jordan, P., & Miller, M. A. (Eds.). (2013). *Academic advising approaches: Strategies that teach students to make the most of college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Elliott, K. M., & Healy, M. A. (2001). Key factors influencing student satisfaction related to recruitment and retention. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 10*(4), 1–11. doi:10.1300/J050v10n04_01

Gremler, D. D. (2004). The critical incident technique in service research. *Journal of Service Research, 7(1)*, 65–89. doi: 10.1177/1094670504266138

Grites, T. J. (2013). Developmental academic advising. In J. K. Drake, P. Jordan, & M. A. Miller (Eds.), *Academic advising approaches: Strategies that teach students to make the most of college* (pp. 33–44). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Helgesen, Ø. (2008). Marketing for higher education: A relationship marketing approach. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 18*(1), 50–78. doi:10.1080/08841240802100188

Keup, J. R., & Stolzenberg, E. B. (2004). *The 2003 your first college year (YFCY) survey*: *Exploring the academic and personal experiences of first-year students* (No. 40). Columbia: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Kimball, E., & Campbell, S. M. (2013). Advising strategies to support student learning success: Linking theory and philosophy with intentional practice. In J. K. Drake, P. Jordan, & M. A. Miller (Eds.), *Academic advising approaches: Strategies that teach students to make the most of college* (pp. 3–16). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., & Whitt, E. J. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ledingham, J. A. (2006). Relationship management: A general theory of public relations. In C. H. Botan & V. Hazleton (Eds.), *Public relations theory II* (pp. 465–483). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Lynch, M. L. (2004). A survey of undergraduate student reactions to academic advising. *NACADA Journal, 24*(1&2), 62–74. doi: 10.12930/0271-9517-24.1-2.62

McClellan, J. (2013). Advising as coaching. In J. K. Drake, P. Jordan, & M. A. Miller (Eds.), *Academic advising approaches: Strategies that teach students to make the most of college* (pp. 159–175). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

National Survey of Student Engagement. (2014). *Topical module: Academic advising*. Retrieved from http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/modules/2015/NSSE%202015%20Academic%20Advising%20Module.pdf

Noel-Levitz. (2010). *The 2010 national student satisfaction and priorities report*. Retrieved from https://www.noellevitz.com/documents/shared/Papers_and_Research/2010/SSI_private%20report%20A_0810%20indd.pdf

Noel-Levitz. (2014). *The 2014 national student satisfaction and priorities report*. Retrieved from https://www.noellevitz.com/papers-research-higher-education/2014/2014-national-student-satisfaction-and-priorities-report

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Powers, K. L., Carlstrom, A. H., & Hughey, K. F. (2014). Academic advising assessment practices: Results of a national study. *NACADA Journal, 34*(1), 64–77. doi: 10.12930/NACADA-13-003

Rawlins, W. K., & Rawlins, S. P. (2005). Academic advising as friendship. *NACADA Journal, 25*(2), 10–19. doi: 10.12930/0271-9517-25.2.10

Roberts, J., & Styron, R. (2010). Student satisfaction and persistence: Factors vital to student retention. *Research in Higher Education Journal, 6*(3), 1–18.

Schreiner, L. A. (2009). *Linking student satisfaction and retention*. Coralville, IA: Noel-Levitz. Retrieved from https://www.ruffalonl.com/

documents/shared/Papers_and_Research/2009/LinkingStudentSatis0809.pdf

Schreiner, L. A., & Nelson, D. D. (2013). The contribution of student satisfaction to persistence. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice, 15*(1), 73–111. doi:10.2190/CS.15.1.f

Smith, C. L., & Allen, J. M. (2006). Essential functions of academic advising: What students want and get. *NACADA Journal, 26*(1), 56–66. doi: 10.12930/0271-9517-26.1.56

Sutton, K. L., & Sankar, C. S. (2011). Student satisfaction with information provided by academic advisors. *Journal of STEM Education: Innovations and Research, 12*(7), 71–85.

Swecker, H. K., Fifolt, M., & Searby, L. (2013). Academic advising and first-generation college students: A quantitative study on student retention. *NACADA Journal, 33*(1), 46–53. doi: 10.12930/NACADA-13-192

Teasley, M. L., & Buchanan, E. M. (2013). Capturing the student perspective: A new instrument for measuring advising satisfaction. *NACADA Journal, 33*(2), 4–15. http://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-12-132

Varney, J. (2013). Proactive advising. In J. K. Drake, P. Jordan, & M. A. Miller (Eds.), *Academic advising approaches: Strategies that teach students to make the most of college* (pp. 137–154). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Vianden, J. (2012). The critical incident technique in student affairs research and practice. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *49*(3), 333–346.

Vianden, J. (2015). What matters most in college to students: Exploring critical incidents in the student-university relationship. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 52*(3), 287–299.

Vianden, J., & Barlow, P. J. (2014). Showing the love: Predictors of student loyalty to under-graduate institutions. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 51*(1), 16–29.

Vianden, J., & Barlow, P. J. (2015). Strengthen the bond: Relationships between academic advising quality and undergraduate student loyalty. *NACADA Journal 35*(2), 15–27.

Voss, R. (2009). Studying critical classroom encounters: The experiences of students in German college education. *Quality Assurance in Education, 17*(2), 156–173. doi: 10.1108/09684880910951372

Voss, R., Gruber, T., & Reppel, A. (2010). Which classroom service encounters make students happy or unhappy? *International Journal of Educational Management, 24*(7), 615–636. doi:10.1108/09513541011080002

White, E., & Schulenberg, J. (2012). Academic advising—a focus on learning. *About Campus, 16*(6), 11–17. doi: 10.1002/abc.20082

Young-Jones, A. D., Burt, T. D., Dixon, S., & Hawthorne, M. J. (2013). Academic advising: Does it really impact student success? *Quality Assurance in Education, 21*(1), 7–19. doi:10.1108/09684881311293034

Author's Note

Jörg Vianden is an associate professor in the Department of Student Affairs Administration at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse. He holds a doctorate in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Indiana University and teaches most of the graduate courses in his department, including Assessment in Student Affairs, History of Higher Education, and Student Development Theory. His research focuses on the student–university relationship, on men and masculinities in higher education, and on social justice in higher education. He can be contacted at jvianden@uwlax.edu.