

# The Perceptions Community College Advising Coordinators Have of Their Institutional Advising Models: An Exploratory Study

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*This exploratory qualitative study examined how community college advising coordinators describe their roles within the context of institutional advising models. Conducted to address the lack of empirical research concerning advising coordinators, we determined to uncover what institutional and administrative challenges advising coordinators may face within those advising models. Thirteen advising coordinators, employed at separate public institutions within the Northeast United States, participated in this study. Findings demonstrated that split advising models might pose additional logistic or administrative challenges for coordinators, considering their status as middle managers with limited oversight of institutional advising services. Additionally, due to their limited roles as middle managers, advising coordinators may be unable to ensure the consistency of institutional advising practices for students.*

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**KEYWORDS:** academic advising, community college, advising coordinator, advising policy, advising practice, institutional advising model

## Introduction

Advising coordinators manage academic advising services on college campuses (Habley & McCauley, 1987) and are often responsible for ensuring consistency in institutional advising policies and practices (Vallandingham, 2008). With almost 40% of all advising responsibilities split between staff and faculty members and almost 22% of advising reporting lines split between academic affairs and student affairs in community colleges, challenges are sure to ensue (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013). Since advising coordinators are often members of middle management and may not supervise or coordinate all the advising services administered by faculty members and staff, they may experience challenges when promoting institutional change, addressing ineffective or inconsistent advising practices, or ensuring faculty and staff advisors are proactively and effectively using analytic resources (Klein et al., 2019).

These challenges combined with the gap in empirical scholarship addressing the depth of these issues specifically warrants an exploratory study examining the perceptions community college advising coordinators hold regarding their roles within the context of their institutional advising models. The goal of this exploratory study is to guide future research that examines not only the roles of community college advising coordinators but also how institutional advising models affect their ability to fulfill their responsibilities as coordinators effectively. In short: *How do community college advising coordinators describe their roles within the context of their institutional advising models?*

## Literature Review

Extensive literature regarding the seven institutional advising models and their existence within postsecondary institutions is dated but well-established and important to highlight (Crockett, 1982; Frank, 1988; Habley, 1983, 1993, 1997; King, 1993, 2008; Miller, 2012; Pardee, 2004). According to Carstensen and Silberhorn (1979), a limited amount of postsecondary institutions had, in 1979, policies or comprehensive statements regarding their academic advising delivery models. Several years later, institutional advising models were broadly categorized by Crockett (1982) and Habley (1983), who described seven institutional models of advising that transcended every type of postsecondary institution. The following sections will briefly describe each historical institutional advising model, illustrate the documented challenges that exist within this position, and explain the need for additional exploration into the depth of these challenges.

## Centralized Structures

Centralized structure is a self-contained model in which academic advising takes place in a centralized unit such as an advising office that is supervised by a director or a dean (Habley, 1983, 1997; Habley & McCauley, 1987; King, 2008; Pardee, 2004). Strengths of this model include professionally-trained academic advisors whose main priority is academic advising and the

centralized location of the advising unit, ensuring easier student access (King, 2008). This is the second most common model for two-year public institutions, according to the 2011 NACADA National Survey (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013).

### **Decentralized Structures**

In decentralized structures, academic and faculty advisors reside within their respective academic units, allowing for more specialized advising within a specific unit or department (Pardee, 2004). There are two decentralized structures: the faculty-only model and the satellite model (King, 2008; Pardee, 2004). Faculty members are the primary academic advisors for students in the faculty-only model; each student is assigned a faculty advisor in their academic discipline (Habley, 1983). Students who are considered “undecided” work with liberal arts faculty members to decide their academic major (Habley, 1983). In this model, there may be an advising coordinator who supports faculty members in their advising efforts (Habley & McCauley, 1987; King, 2008).

The satellite model involves advising offices being part of an academic unit or within divisions on or off campus (Habley, 1983). At some point during the student’s tenure, the advising responsibilities are often moved from the academic division subunit’s advising office to faculty within that division (Habley & McCauley, 1987). One of this model’s strengths is that advising is tailored within a specific academic unit or division, which helps personalize students’ experiences (King, 2008).

### **Shared Structures**

In shared structures, academic advising is performed not only in a centralized administrative unit by professional and faculty advisors but also in faculty members’ individual academic divisions or departments (Pardee, 2004). There are four shared structures: the supplementary model, the split model, the dual model, and the total intake model.

#### ***Supplementary Model***

In the supplementary model, faculty members serve as students’ primary advisors, while a supplementary advising office provides training and support for faculty members who are academic advisors (Habley, 1983). The advising office, consisting of a limited number of profes-

sional advising staff does not approve academic decisions, but rather supports faculty members by providing professional development and training materials (King, 2008).

#### ***Split Model***

In a split model, academic advising is split between faculty members and professional staff in an advising office (Habley, 1983). This model typically involves faculty members advising students who have already declared an academic major and professional staff advising undeclared students (Habley & McCauley, 1987). Another version of this model involves the advising office working with students who are underprepared in mathematics, reading, or writing (Habley, 1983). After students are prepared academically, they move to a faculty advisor in their academic discipline (Habley, 1983). The split model supports professional programs within the institution that require prerequisite courses (Pardee, 2004). This model is the most common institutional advising model for two-year public institutions, according to the 2011 NACADA National Survey.

#### ***Dual Model***

In the dual model, students have two advisors. Faculty members advise students regarding their discipline-specific requirements, while professional advisors advise students regarding their general educational requirements (Habley, 1983). In this model, the academic advising office not only coordinates all advising services but also advises undeclared students (King, 2008).

#### ***Total Intake Model***

In the total intake model, professional staff members, faculty members, or peers provide all initial advising services, enabling students to receive intensive support and outreach before they are transitioned to an academic subunit or faculty advisor (King, 2008). Declaring a major or obtaining a specific grade point average is required after the initial intake (Habley, 1983), but after this specific achievement or requirement has been fulfilled, the student is assigned to an academic subunit or faculty member (King, 2008).

### **Community College Institutional Advising Models**

O’Banion (1972) explained that academic advising at community colleges should be

inherently different from that at four-year institutions. Although Habley's (1983) institutional advising models transcend those of all postsecondary institutions in their application, the specific institutional advising models that community colleges use to support their students and institutional needs are important to understand.

According to the 2011 NACADA survey, there were three advising models identified as the top responses. 39.3% of responding two-year public institutions utilized a split model (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013). The self-contained model was the second most-utilized (32.6%) and the third was the total intake model (18.8%; Carlstrom & Miller, 2013). Furthermore, the NACADA survey solicited feedback from postsecondary institutions regarding academic advising reporting lines. Of the responding institutions, 24.7% stated that their reporting lines fell within academic affairs, 45.2% stated that their reporting lines were within student affairs, and 21.8% stated that their reporting lines were shared between academic affairs and student affairs (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013). The additional reporting lines and percentages (8.3%) fell between the Registrar's Office, Enrollment Management, or "don't know/choose not to reply" (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013).

### **The Advising Coordinator**

Hines (1981) and Kramer (1981) were the first to reference the role, responsibilities, and challenges of the advising coordinator within the institution. Kramer (1981) described the advising coordinator as a member of middle management with little institutional authority but broad responsibility over the coordination and quality of advising services on campus. In fact, the original responsibilities of the advising coordinator, according to Kramer (1981) and Spencer et al. (1982) were to meet with students for advising, work with faculty members on matters of advising, and attend administrative meetings, as required by the institution. Although the advising coordinator's role may now look the same in many ways, the role and responsibilities may vary based on the institution and the complexity of the advising needs of postsecondary institutions.

Within community colleges, advising coordinators may have similar responsibilities to those at four-year institutions, such as managing staff and budgets in addition to managing the complexities of serving a large population of students who are

often underprepared and underrepresented in postsecondary education (Vallandingham, 2008). However, community college advising coordinators can also face a unique set of institutional and administrative challenges compared to most traditional four-year public and private colleges and universities (Vallandingham, 2008). For example, the general mission of community colleges is to be an open-access public higher education institution that provides affordable educational services to a wide range of traditional and non-traditional students (Bailey, 2015; Bailey & Morest, 2006; Vallandingham, 2008). Community college advising coordinators must be conscious of the advising needs of a more non-traditional student population and be able to facilitate the appropriate institutional support in the forms of trained advising personnel, institutional resource allocation, and professional development and training for faculty advisors (Vallandingham, 2008).

An additional challenge for community college advising coordinators is the various delivery models, which are employed for advising and can affect communication lines between departments and faculty (Vallandingham, 2008). For example, centralized models handle the advising responsibilities from the beginning of a student's academic tenure, then, once a student is established with a schedule and has completed an orientation process, they proceed to a faculty advisor after a specific timeframe (Vallandingham, 2008). However, this scenario can create several challenges for the advising coordinator when organizing the transfer of advising services to the faculty advisor and ensuring the quality of advising services continues beyond the initial institutional on-boarding process (Vallandingham, 2008). Additionally, institutions with shared models face additional challenges related to the coordination, communication, and assessment of advising practices and training resources (Vallandingham, 2008).

Further complicated by the advising coordinator's middle management role (Kramer, 1984; Vallandingham, 2008), advising challenges such as fragmented advising services and oversight, an unclear single point of contact for advising within the advising center, and issues with information dissemination regarding curriculum and policy changes can exist (Karp, 2013; Karp & Stacey, 2013). Additionally, as the reporting lines for advising may be housed within academic affairs, student affairs, or shared between both academic divisions (Vallandingham, 2008), the role of the advising coordinator can be frustrating and

complicated, given the need for coordinated advising (Kramer, 1981).

### Critique of the Literature

The limited literature surrounding the role and challenges of the advising coordinator is strongly focused on advising coordinators who are affiliated with four-year colleges and universities. However, most scholarship centered on the advising coordinator addresses this position vaguely and fails to distinguish between a two-year and four-year college setting. For example, Howard Kramer, who published several articles on the advising coordinator in the 1980s, did not explicitly state whether his scholarship was focused within the two-year or four-year postsecondary context.

In addition to there being very little to distinguish two- and four-year settings, very limited scholarship focuses specifically on the community college advising coordinator at all. Vallandingham (2008), who is the only scholar to address these challenges, described that delivery of advising services, training advising staff and faculty members, and supporting a largely diverse and non-traditional student population were specific challenges.

However, even the examples in Vallandingham (2008) were not exhaustive regarding the challenges that community college advising coordinators face. Furthermore, one cannot assume that past scholarship regarding the advising coordinator, which did not often differentiate between a two-year and four-year postsecondary context, can be unilaterally applied to community college advising coordinators. For this reason, empirical research is necessary in order to establish the specific challenges that community college advising coordinators face and to see if there are similarities or differences to the past generalizations scholars have made.

### Methodology

This study's qualitative research approach was an exploratory phenomenological design, which was chosen to examine the common workplace experiences of community college advising coordinators and their reflections on their institutional advising models. The exploratory approach was most appropriate as limited empirical research exists in this area. The main research question addressed with this study was: *How do community college advising coordinators describe their roles*

*within the context of their institutional advising models?*

Demonstrably, qualitative research is an approach for "exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups" (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). In fact, phenomenologists often believe that understanding and meaning in phenomenological research is based on individuals' personal and life experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers employ a phenomenological research design to understand and highlight the meaning of individuals' experiences within a common or shared setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

### Research Participants

Creswell (2014) explained that for a phenomenological study, research participants must share a common experience. That common experience for this research was the direct supervision of professional advising services at a community college. Therefore, the ideal criteria for selecting research participants included advising coordinators who were employed at a public community college, were in middle management within their postsecondary institution, and ideally held the administrative title of advising coordinator or director. As a member of middle management, advising coordinators often, but not always, occupy an institutional status below the position of dean but lead an academic or administrative department. This definition of middle management is consistent with the existing literature (Floyd, 2016; Marshall, 2012; Pepper & Giles, 2015; Preston & Price, 2012). However, three participants who were identified for this study were not only responsible for coordinating professional advising services on their campuses but also held the administrative title of dean because their institutions did not have a specific "director / coordinator of advising" position. However, each dean directly supervised the professional advising services for that institution and thus were also included in the study even though they held an elevated institutional title. The identified states remain undisclosed to preserve the participants' confidentiality. However, the participant pool was made up of two states within the Northeast region of the United States.

Purposeful sampling is important in phenomenological research because it is essential to ensure that participants are directly associated with the researcher's area of study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used institutional websites

**Table 1.** Demographic information

Research Participant	Job Title*	Institutional Enrollment
Abbie	Dean	Approx. 5,200 Students
Brian	Director	Approx. 4,000-5,000 Students
Chad	Director	Approx. 4,300 Students
Damien	Director	Approx. 3,000 Students
Evelynn	Dean	Approx. 1,700 Students
Faith	Director	Approx. 5,200 Students
George	Dean	Approx. 8,000 Students
Hope	Director	Approx. 6,000 Students
Ingrid	Director	Approx. 4,000 Students
Joseph	Director	Approx. 1,800 Students
Kendall	Director	Approx. 8,000 Students
Luke	Interim Director	Approx. 12,000 Students
Mary	Director	Approx. 1,800 Students

*Note.* \* Official job titles have been removed to preserve the confidentiality of the research participants and names have been altered.

and administrative directories to identify advising coordinators directly responsible for coordinating institutional advising services at each of the community colleges within the two states. After potential research participants were identified, the researcher sent a recruitment email to each one. To verify that potential participants were members of middle management, an inquiry about each participant’s position within their organization was made. Of the total research participants ( $n = 13$ ), three were deans and the remaining 10 were directors (see Table 1). Of the 10 directors, one held an interim title, while the remaining nine held permanent positions.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The data for this study included qualitative interview data gathered through a semi-structured interview process, which is most appropriate for phenomenological research designs (Aurini et al., 2016). Further, a qualitative and semi-structured interview process was most appropriate for this study considering the researcher’s interest in the essence and meaning of the participants’ workplace experiences (Lichtman, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Interviews were conducted over a three-month period.

The interview data was collected, transcribed, and verified for accuracy then analyzed with coding to identify common themes. The specific steps used to identify, organize, and evaluate participants’ significant statements were akin to those presented by Creswell (2013) and Giorgi et al. (2012) which are as follows:

1. First read-through of the interview transcripts to get an initial impression of the responses while taking reflective notes.
2. Open coding of each transcript while highlighting key statements.
3. Compilation of significant statements from all interview transcripts that were then organized according to interview questions.
4. Larger themes were developed using significant statements, which Creswell (2013) and Giorgi et al. (2012) referred to as “meaning units.”
5. Final read-through of transcripts using an established coding scheme to determine if any themes were missed.

Rich narrative descriptions of the experiences were used in the findings section to verify the coded themes in this paper. Finally, the researcher synthesized and described what Moustakas (1994) referred to as the “essence” of the experience in the discussion section of this article. The findings, which have been grouped into themes, align and expand upon the work of Kramer (1981), Vallandingham (2008), and others.

**Findings**

The overwhelming majority of advising coordinators stated that their institution used a split model of advising (10, 77%), utilizing both professional and faculty advisors (see Table 2). Only three (23%) advising coordinators explicitly stated that

**Table 2.** Institutional advising models

Participant	Split Model (shared)	Total Intake Model (shared)
Abbie		X
Brian		X
Chad	X	
Damien	X	
Evelynn	X	
Faith	X	
George	X	
Hope	X	
Ingrid		X
Joseph	X	
Kendall	X	
Luke	X	
Mary	X	

their institution used a total intake model under a shared structure. In institutions using the total intake model, all incoming students received advice from professional advisors before being assigned to faculty advisors. Some advising coordinators also stated that other programs, such as Trio Student Support Services, dual enrollment programs, and Gateway to College programs performed their own onboarding advising. As most community colleges had alternative support programs for different student populations — such as learners with English as a second language, dual enrollment high school students, and Gateway to College students — it cannot be assumed that all student populations, even within a total intake model, were serviced solely by the advising department or office.

**Role Limitations**

Seven advising coordinators (53%) stated that their institutional advising model posed limitations on their roles. Six (46%) were direct in their responses and one (7%) explained minor challenges. For example, Chad, whose institution used a split model of advising, discussed how lack of authority can have a negative impact on the student experience:

I don't have authority over everyone who is advising ... and so, if every advisor is not getting the same resources, training, and support ... then the services provided are not equitable to the student. So, I sometimes struggle when the student is assigned to this professor who I know is just awful ...

because I know they're not going to get good advising.

In addition to lack of authority, Damien, whose institution used a split model, attested that consistency of advising services was also a challenge:

There's no one on this campus who can guarantee consistent advising is delivered to all of our students ... An example is advising technology ... I can train users on the system. I can make it worthwhile. I can package it and hand deliver it to everybody on our campus, which is what I've done. I cannot require everyone to use it ... we're never going to get to 100% participation because that's not something that I have control over in my position.

Faith, whose institution used a split model, shared a similar concern regarding consistency in advising services and how that inconsistency impacts the level of communication within the institution:

[Communication] definitely impacts consistency ... we're not consistent in our practices across the board, [so] it affects the level of communication and advising support that students receive. Also ... we're very big on connection to campus resources for referrals. I think, depending on who the student has as an advisor, some of them have received really good information on referrals if they're having a challenge.

Faith further elaborated on inconsistency in her split model:

A lot of students still don't know who their advisor is several weeks into the semester, which is an issue because we would have hoped by then faculty would have reached out to their students ... having that split model where I don't have control of all of advising definitely impacts what happens ... It's inconsistent at best.

Finally, Ingrid, whose institution used a total intake model, illuminated how having advising services split between Student and Academic Affairs made it impossible to assess how effective advising really was on campus:

I have no way to really assess what's happening outside of my department. ... we handle all new students and all the registering but once they're here, continuous student registration goes down those rabbit holes. ... I ... don't have an opportunity to say what's better, who's doing a better job, other than being able to ... contribute to the conversation as to how we all need to be doing the same things. But I know we're not and I can't control it ... because it is split ... It makes you feel as though you're responsible for ... a wide net ... I think there's a wide net and there are times when I can be blamed for it all ... But for me, personally and professionally, I can only do what I can.

On the other hand, a total of 4 (30%) advising coordinators stated that their institutional advising model did not pose any limitations on their roles as advising coordinators. In fact, Luke explained that his split model of advising opened up the conversation for faculty members and staff to discuss and address advising issues:

... one of the things that I have been excited about is that we're now [discussing] how things should be happening. And that gives me a voice ... [I can then] take that information and go to different levels of management and say, "Listen, faculty and staff don't think that how we're doing things is how we should be doing things.

Though Luke saw the split model as a way to connect the advising gap between faculty members and advising coordinators, Evelyn indicated that although her institutional advising model did not directly affect her role, students were not being fully prepared to leave her institution, an issue that she and her staff were working to address:

Interestingly, we have the best retention and graduation rates in the state of all the community colleges ... I do believe some of that comes from being small, but we have better rates than our smaller partners ... I do think a lot of it comes from the incredible relational model that we use. There are times I even say we're not a social work agency and we shouldn't be doing as much as we're doing. However ... we have to because that's just where we sit in our community. And sometimes I worry that we do so much for our students that they're not prepared to advocate for themselves when they transfer to their institutions ... We've heard that from students: "I wasn't prepared to do as much as I needed to do on my own."

Only two (15%) advising coordinators either stated that they were unsure if their institutional advising model posed any limitations on their role or described experiencing only minor issues with their institutional advising model. For example, Hope stated that although her institutional advising model did not pose specific limitations on her, there were still underlying institutional issues:

I do know that students are not all getting the same experience and that is somewhat frustrating. So, if someone says, "Well, my advisor told me this" and it's a faculty advisor, it might be different than what I would expect regarding the depth of what was being said or some of the other different information ... So, it's challenging too.

### **Academic Affairs vs. Student Affairs**

Seven advising coordinators (53%) attested to the difficulty of academic advising being shared between academic affairs and student affairs. Four (30%) advising coordinators discussed specific complications. Ingrid expressed challenges with

her staff accepting their roles within the enrollment management division after an institutional change. This led to some internal challenges with the staff and the advising coordinator:

So, up until about a month ago, I was under academic and student affairs ... My boss was more ... student affairs, I was more academic affairs because of my work directly with the previous interim VP — work in the catalog registration. I like all these things I do ... Then they just decided that I was going to go over to enrollment ... I thought that is very interesting because everybody is doing enrollment and retention. Everybody is doing academic and student affairs here; it is not a silo like a four-year school. This is a community college, we all have the same goal ... For professional staff ... they had a real difficult time. They feel very much like they are committed ... that they are academic affairs or student affairs and not enrollment management ... So; I am still working on that.

Kendall discussed the perceptions of roles and the need for mutual respect within the divisions, which continues to highlight the challenges between students and academic affairs at community colleges:

I think ... some days it's very collegial and some days it's like ... people just don't understand the complexities of it ... So, I just think it's not necessarily being on different sides of the house it is more having each side of the house respected by the other.

In addition to the need for mutual respect, three (23%) advising coordinators discussed general issues with communication or divisional agendas that affected their roles. Brian shared an account of his experience before he was moved to academic affairs, which highlighted the divide between student and academic affairs:

[Before I was in academic affairs] there was an attitude like, "no I don't have to really talk to him, he is not in my division." But now I'm in their division, I meet with their deans, they see me in all their division meetings and so I'm present. I understand and I empathize with what they're going

through being faculty members as well as their stress with academic advising. I mean, it's been a nightmare ... because you know there's different initiatives and there's different agendas ... It has been very difficult ...

Faith discussed the struggle to get academic affairs to participate in advising-related initiatives:

[Lack of academic participation] definitely impacts advising. So, again, one thing is I have an initiative, it's around before priority registration; we have shirts that say, "are you ready for priority registration?" and then on the back it says, "have you met with your advisor?" So, that's a campus-wide initiative that every single faculty member should be a part of because we should all be a part of getting our students to register in ... priority registration. But we don't get a lot of participation ... Again, we have the same faculty here like, "yes!" Like, "I'm going to wear a shirt!" But it's (always) the same faculty.

Five (38%) advising coordinators stated that their institutions' academic advising being split between academic affairs and student affairs did not pose any limitations on their roles and responsibilities. For example, Abbie was housed within the academic affairs division but supervised the advising staff within the student affairs division. Therefore, she established connections in both divisions that allowed her to have few issues between them. On the other hand, Joseph's institution housed academic affairs and student affairs in the same division, but because of a supportive dean, Joseph attested that the combined divisions did not pose any barriers for him:

[W]e've had very strong deans that are very in touch with what student services is going through and what we want to accomplish in our initiatives ... So, it depends on the dean and we're fortunate right now to have someone who is a faculty member and who has been in the past and ... understands that piece of the puzzle ... So, right now it is a good situation ... But it depends on the dean, I think.

George, a dean within student affairs, was also a participant who didn't see any blurred lines between the divisions and how advising was functioning within the institution:

I have to say that I really feel like, with all of the departments within higher education, academic advising . . . walks the line between both areas. I think that it can fit in academic affairs as much as it fits in student affairs.

### Effect on Student Success

Seven (53%) advising coordinators stated that having academic advising in academic affairs and student affairs may result in students facing issues with the consistency of advising that would ultimately affect their academic success. For example, Kendall stated, "We find a lot of advising mistakes that faculty make and we have to clean them up. We have to report them . . . That's where it's the hardest . . ."

Mary discussed the faculty advising experience, the lack of consistency regarding advising within academic affairs, and the lack of accountability in her account

I think . . . there are certain faculty members that just don't take . . . advising . . . responsibilities seriously and they are not held accountable for it. So . . . one student has an excellent faculty advisor [and] . . . has a great experience; [and] another student [has an] advisor [who] never responds to an email. So, yeah, it's not consistent. It's because there is no accountability. There is no real outline structure or expectations so students are not getting . . . similar quality experiences.

Brian attested that a failure to share information between divisions and a lack of consistency of advising can negatively impact students:

I mean, it's not even just a divisional issue . . . the information sharing wasn't there. The passion to support the student wasn't there. A student who went to Professor X and had a horrible interaction . . . left because they didn't know that they had other places to go . . . I guarantee you, we have lost students because of bad advising. It goes on both ways because I'm not saying student affairs

advisors are perfect either . . . And everybody has a bad day or . . . if a student was misadvised, if they were put into a wrong course, sometimes it . . . will screw it up. A whole semester was blown because they did not take the right sequence of courses and . . . it's a shared screw up on both sides.

Faith agreed that there are inherent benefits of faculty advising, but argued that professional advising should be supplied for first-year students particularly because retention is so critical within community colleges and student success overall:

I think there is definitely a value and a need to have faculty advisors. You know why I would never say that any school should go to a model where there's only professional advisors? I think faculty have a level of expertise that professional advisors just won't have . . . but can it wait until after the first year? Yes! Can we get students adjusted to college life first and make sure that they're actually in the right major? And then once they've adjusted to college and they're set up for success, then move them to the faculty? Yes. I think . . . that helps in retention because now they've got the first year, they're able to really work with an advisor who has taught them the skills they need.

The remaining six (46%) advising coordinators stated there would be no complications that would affect a student's academic success by having academic advising within the academic affairs and student affairs divisions. Luke directly addressed this:

I feel like advising is split because there is this office with student affairs that holds knowledge that students need to . . . access . . . And . . . all the faculty are completely under academic affairs; that combination for advising really allows us to communicate with all these different offices and really be able to say, "Oh look, we noticed this." It is happening and we know who to communicate it to as well because we're so integral to both areas.

Similarly, five of the same six advising coordinators who stated that splitting advising responsibilities between academic affairs and

student affairs posed no limitations on their roles also stated that having academic advising within both divisions would not affect students' academic success.

### **Discussion**

Without being able to oversee all advising services across an institution, community college advising coordinators are challenged to ensure consistency in advising practices regardless of where they operate. Musser (2006) and Bridgen (2017) identified that the documented institutional organization of advising services does not always accurately examine advising services within the institution. Further, in faculty-only or shared models of advising, the academic dean or faculty members — rather than the advising coordinator — usually has administrative control over advising (Christman, 2008). Thus, coordinating advising services at an institutional level may be challenging for all involved. Additionally, it may be challenging to proactively change any advising policies or practices institutionally due to their structure (Christman, 2008). This conclusion, drawn from the research participants' narratives, strengthens the literature regarding the challenges that community college advising coordinators face and highlights the importance for more research about how advising is interconnected within other departments and divisions, especially with a greater emphasis on retention and student success in higher education.

In this study, seven advising coordinators, with enrollments varying from 3,000-15,000 students stated that their institutional advising models posed limitations on their roles. This is concerning as advising coordinators are often responsible for ensuring students receive consistent and effective advising services. Furthermore, fragmented advising services within departments with institutional autonomy can often render advising inconsistent, as mentioned by several participants in this study. Demonstrably, although some institutional programs encourage — or even demand — full autonomy with their advising services, this may create opportunities for campus-wide inconsistencies in advising practices. While centralized oversight is ideal, that oversight may be beyond advising coordinators' responsibilities at most institutions. If so, senior leadership should not only address how advising coordinators will interact with autonomous departments that advise their students but also allow for mechanisms to

address advising issues identified by the advising coordinator. Ideally, a provost or vice president of academic and student affairs should oversee all institutional advising services, enabling the coordinator to effectively navigate challenging issues through their senior leadership, if they cannot handle certain issues directly. Substantial research has shown the positive outcomes of centralized leadership and successful partnerships between student and academic affairs (Frost et al., 2010; Kezar, 2003; & Ozaki and Hornak, 2014).

However, it is naive to assume all community colleges will implement a centralized advising system. Therefore — considering that fragmented or autonomous departments will likely always control a portion of advising services on community college campuses — senior leadership must examine the advising coordinator's role within this institutional landscape. Some questions to consider might be:

- How can the advising coordinator address institutional advising issues that require departmental buy-in from autonomous departments?
- What accountability structures must be implemented to address advising inconsistencies from advisors within those departments?
- Are there mechanisms to ensure that issues with advising can be addressed in a timely fashion when coordinators bring them to senior management?

Finally, considering that community college advising coordinators are middle managers with limited ability to oversee institutional advising services, having academic advising split between student and academic affairs poses logistic or administrative challenges. Vallandingham (2008) explained that shared responsibilities can pose challenges regarding the coordination, communication, and assessment of advising practices and training resources and this study's findings generally align with Vallandingham's claims. Several participants in this study stated that they faced logistical or administrative challenges in their roles due to their limited oversight of advising services at their campus. This suggests that having academic advising responsibilities split between academic affairs and student affairs, without strong centralized leadership, negatively affects advising coordinators' ability to effectively complete their duties as middle managers. Split responsibilities

also negatively impact student success because of uncoordinated advising services and a lack of accountability to address advising issues institutionally. Institutions should consider elevating the role of the advising coordinator within the institutional structure to allow for more accountability over the advising system and more structure to the leadership surrounding academic advising (Kapinos, 2020).

### Limitations

Quantitative and qualitative research have strengths and limitations (Ryan et al., 2007) and a researcher's responsibility is to clarify and address any limitations. This qualitative research has several limitations. First, although there are no set guidelines for specific sample sizes in qualitative research (Mason, 2010), the sample size (13) for this study was relatively small. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be transferrable to all community college advising coordinators. However, Boddy (2016) explained that what constitutes an appropriate sample size in qualitative research depends on the research study's context and scientific paradigm. Therefore, assuming one coordinator per institution, even six or seven community college coordinators may be the equivalent of an entire state's community college system (i.e. Maine, Hawaii, and New Hampshire), which adds additional context and importance to the findings.

Second, although participation in this study was voluntary, there was no guarantee that all participants were completely forthcoming regarding their experiences. There were many factors that contributed to each participants' level of openness, such as the sensitivity of the phenomenon being studied or the confidentiality of the information being revealed to the researcher. Although this could affect the findings, the researcher cannot control for many factors that inhibit participants' openness. However, by discussing the common experience of working within a community college setting, most participants seemed comfortable enough to discuss challenging issues within their institution. Finally, the topic (i.e., the perceived limitations that may exist in each coordinators' role within the context of their institutions' advising model) may have caused participants to be reluctant when asked to critique their institution's advising model, especially if their critique implied issues in their performance as a coordinator.

### Conclusion

Academic advising could have either a direct or an indirect effect on numerous factors associated with student success, including low rates of persistence and completion (Pascarella & Terenzi, 2005). Providing quality academic advising services within higher education is widely proposed as a solution to increase student persistence, transfer rates to four-year institutions, and graduation rates for community college students (Donaldson et al., 2016; Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). However, the problem with providing quality academic advising services is not only managing the organization's unique set of institutional and administrative challenges but also delivering quality advising services (Hines et al., 1980; Karp, 2013; Vallandingham, 2008).

This study highlighted some of the issues facing community college advising coordinators, which is an under-researched topic within advising literature. The findings demonstrated that split advising models might pose additional logistic or administrative challenges for coordinators, considering their status as middle managers with limited oversight of institutional advising services. Additionally, due to their limited roles as middle managers, advising coordinators may be unable to ensure the consistency of institutional advising practices and may not have an immediate solution to fix this issue. Future research should examine the roles of community college advising coordinators and how they navigate their institutional advising models on a larger scale to include more participants or through survey-based methods. Future research could also examine the perceptions of senior management and how they view the advising coordinator's role and their ability to execute their functions as middle managers.

In conclusion, institutional advising models can create problematic issues regarding accountability, where centralized oversight and options for addressing institutional advising issues do not exist. Some issues include restrictive collective bargaining guidelines, multiple supervisors for campus-wide advising services, and fragmented advising services. Several participants in this study described having experienced institutional advising complications between academic affairs and student affairs that could have a direct effect on a student's academic success and retention. Splitting academic advising responsibilities between the academic affairs and student affairs divisions means students could face logistical challenges

that could affect their academic success and retention. Community colleges should reexamine their institutional advising models to confirm that institutional advising services receive centralized oversight. This will not only ensure advising services are consistent but also create an institutional accountability system. If fragmented or autonomous advising services exist within community college departments or programs, senior leadership must not only examine ways to address advising inconsistencies but also ensure the advising coordinator can address issues with advising in a timely fashion.

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