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Improving the Quality of Academic Advisors' Practices to Aid Distance Learners' Retention

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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Kenyeta R. Pino under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Abstract

Improving the Quality of Academic Advisors' Practices to Aid Distance Learners' Retention. Kenyeta R. Pino, 2023: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: distance learning, retention, academic advisors, quality assurance

The popularity of distance learning has increased among higher education students owing to its flexibility and convenience, as it enables learning from any location and at any time. Despite the substantial number of enrollments, distance learners are experiencing high attrition rates, leading to low completion rates compared to students enrolled in traditional in-person courses.

Academic advising is a significant contributor to student retention and an effective intervention used to support students at-risk of dropping out; therefore, advisors must provide the same degree of support to their distance learners as they do to their face-to-face advisees. This applied dissertation was designed to assess the quality of academic advisers' practices and determine if their current retention strategies need to be enhanced to successfully minimize attrition rates among distance learners.

The researcher designed a web-based survey with multiple-choice and Likert-scaled questions to capture data for the study. The instrument was sent to academic advisors at a college in South Florida who advise distance learners. The researcher examined what specific academic advising approaches are applied to engage and retain distance learners, how academic advisors foster cognitive development for academic success, and how academic advisors identify and support at-risk distance learners. The study reveals the findings of advisors' practices, implications of findings, and suggestions for future research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Distance education is no longer a new modality of higher education; it is a current reality that is here to stay. With the growing popularity of distance learning, the educational landscape is transforming. Despite increasing popularity, distance learning is characterized by high attrition rates, according to Ragusa and Crampton (2018). Retaining distance learners is increasingly challenging as distance education programs expand (Sorensen & Donovan, 2017). Kara et al. (2019) reported that distance education's most challenging components are a sense of isolation and time management. Students enrolled in a college or university but complete their courses exclusively online or do not have a campus to attend will be referred to as distance learners in this study.

Higher education institutions struggle to provide the same support to distance learners as traditional, face-to-face students (Arhin et al., 2017). Distance learners are not only challenged with feeling disconnected from their educational experience due to the distance between them and their institutions but in part due to their lack of an ongoing positive, supportive relationship with an academic advisor who understands their needs (Burns et al., 2019). Cross (2018) suggested that more robust advising support in distance learning programs needs to be more proactive in providing support to overcome distance learners' disengagement, which leads to attrition. Academic advising models should ideally be tailored to each student's specific needs rather than requiring students to conform to an already established academic advising structure (Wilcox, 2016). This study aims to assess the quality of academic advisors' practices and determine if their current

retention strategies need to be enhanced to successfully minimize attrition rates among distance learners.

The Research Problem

The retention and overall completion of students participating in distance education programs are concerns in higher education (Madi-McCarthy, 2018). Distance learners' dropout rates are significantly higher than those who learn in a traditional classroom (Christensen & Spackman, 2017). Student dropout is defined as a student who discontinues courses or an academic program prior to completion (Aydin et al., 2019). Students are abandoning traditional classroom learning in favor of distance courses due to the convenience of accessing quality education anytime and from any location. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.) of the United States Department of Education, 14.4% of undergraduate students were enrolled exclusively in distance education courses in the fall of 2019. By the fall of 2020, NCES confirmed that an increase of 43.3% of undergraduate students was enrolled exclusively in distance education courses due to the emergence of a global pandemic.

Students enrolled in distance education courses have a 10% to 20% greater failure rate than students enrolled in traditional, face-to-face classroom settings (Bawa, 2016). Student retention is a key sign of an institution's performance; thus, the institution's effectiveness is jeopardized if the alarming trend of dropouts among distance learners persists. Academic advising is a significant contributor to *student retention, which* is why many higher education institutions hold academic advisors directly responsible for retaining students (Uddin & Johnson, 2019). Academic advising is an effective intervention used to academically support and retain students who are perceived to be at

risk of dropping out (Soden, 2017). Therefore, institutions must analyze retention tactics and potentially implement new approaches to increase students' success and that of the institution.

Background and Justification

Academic success and retention are growing concerns in distance education programs offered in higher education (Sorensen & Donovan, 2017). Many distance learners feel isolated and disconnected from their college or university, and the feeling of isolation creates a lack of engagement and increases attrition rates in distance education programs (Mendez & Arguello, 2020). Higher education institutions beginning to expand their distance education programs need to ensure that services are available to the growing population of distance learners. Simpson (2018) argued that student support services such as academic advising could impact students' academic achievement and increase their likelihood of persisting in distance education programs. Therefore, reviewing advisor practices or establishing new best practices may help reduce attrition rates, increase commitment, and meet the needs of distance learners (Simpson, 2018). Further, reviewing advisors' practices may help advisors improve their communication and interactions with distance learners. Advisors should still know how to assist, mentor, provide resources, and empower through the use of technology (Arguello & Mendez, 2019; Ohrablo, 2016).

Deficiencies in the Evidence

While significant research focuses on the theoretical concept that a positive relationship between academic advisors and students affects student retention, many questions still need to be answered, and studies still contain gaps. Currently, no existing

literature evaluates and assesses academic advisors' retention strategies or practices to ensure students' persistence and academic success in distance education programs.

Audience

This study intends to target and support higher education students enrolled in distance education programs, academic advisors, and the overall performance of higher education institutions. The research not only aims to enhance the quality of academic advising services but also to assist with lowering the attrition of distance learners.

Setting of the Study

This study will take place at a community college in South Florida. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission has granted the college accreditation to award associate and baccalaureate degrees. The college has multiple campuses throughout South Florida; however, this research will be conducted at the online campus. The online campus provides degree programs in various disciplines, including Business, Health Science, Social Sciences, and the Arts, among others. Desire 2 Learn (D2L) is the college's online learning platform, allowing students to complete coursework from anywhere in the world. While no in-person meetings are necessary for these courses, the program requires weekly and term deadlines for online course assignments and activities. Students and instructors meet virtually during the course's assigned meeting times through Zoom and D2L. More than ten thousand students with an average age of 25 are currently enrolled in the online campus. Among the students enrolled, more than 40% are first-generation college students, approximately 18% are enrolled full-time, and nearly 82% are registered part-time. Several prestigious publications repeatedly recognize the college for providing quality education at an affordable price.

Researcher's Role

The researcher formerly served as the Student Affairs Director at one of the college's campuses. As the Student Affairs Director, the researcher fostered cooperative relationships with faculty to identify issues and concerns relevant to student success. To aid student achievement, the researcher developed workshops and programs; intervention strategies to promote student participation and retention, specifically focusing on the at-risk student population. Each program initiative was designed to reduce student attrition and encourage degree completion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study aims to measure the effectiveness of current academic advisors' practices through assessment to determine if the services provided to distance learners aid their academic success and retention. Academic advisors' retention efforts must be carefully examined as retention is a critical performance metric for higher education, aiding in quality assurance. A well-designed assessment plan increases program accountability and effectiveness (Zarges et al., 2018). There is a problem with distance learners dropping out of their courses and failing to complete their degrees (Bagriacik Yilmaz & Karataş, 2022). Academic advisors play critical roles in students' lives (Museus, 2021). According to Museus (2021), academic advisors are powerful institutional agents who accompany students on every academic milestone throughout their college careers, thus making it critical to assess and modify current advising models if needed. Professors change from semester to semester, but academic advisers are the individuals that thread each semester together. According to Christensen and Spackman (2017), for institutions to enhance their students' academic performances and overall

graduation rates, they must carefully evaluate their existing academic advising strategies, as these are critical components of student retention.

Definition of Terms

Academic Advising

Academic advising is a collaborative process that applies professional knowledge and skills, both proactive and purposeful. It is also an academic interaction that empowers students to successfully persist in academic endeavors (Larson et al., 2018).

Academic Advisor

Academic advisors are non-faculty staff employees whose primary role is to provide college and university students with comprehensive academic services. The services include academic advising, career assistance, performance evaluations, graduation checks, and other topics pertinent to students' success (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017).

Assessment

Measures performance and provides feedback on knowledge, skills, and attitudes to elevate and improve practices (Mamoon-Al-Bashir et al., 2016).

At-Risk Student

A student who has a greater probability of academic failure or dropping out of school (Dix, et al., 2020).

Distance Learning

A method of teaching in which students and professors engage via the internet with no in-person interaction (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

Evaluation

Judges the quality demonstrated and documents the level of achievement attained (Mamoon-Al-Bashir et al., 2016).

Student Engagement

How colleges and universities make use of their faculty, administration, and resources to provide students with services and opportunities that encourage student participation for their benefit (Tight, 2020).

Student Retention

According to Crosling (2017), students who remain in their studies until completion rather than withdrawing before completion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Distance education is currently considered a modern education modality that is rapidly outpacing traditional higher education courses (Zi-Yu et al., 2020). At the heart of distance education is a fundamental issue: student dropout and student retention (Sorensen & Donovan, 2017). Advising models for reducing attrition with traditional, face-to-face students are well established; however, concepts for retaining distance learners either do not exist or do not fit this student type (Arhin, et al., 2017). According to Ohrablo (2016), many institutions rely heavily on academic advisors to support retention management. Awadh (2018) discovered that many academic advisors focus on repetitive routines and fail to adequately support students of different populations in their pursuit of academic achievement. With increased attrition rates among distance learners, academic advisors' retention efforts must be carefully examined to improve quality assurance. This research review explores the two primary reasons distance learners drop out, the impact academic advisors have on student retention, and the critical nature of assessing academic advisor practices.

This section of the paper identifies seminal articles, sometimes known as a landmark or pivotal research. The articles presented have a significant impact on the field of academic advising. These studies were published many years ago and continue to be cited in current research. Tinto (1987;1975;1993; and 2006), Cook (2009), Cuseo (2003), and Gordon (2004) have all made substantial contributions to the subject of academic advising on topics ranging from the history of academic advising to academic advising practices.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework chosen to guide this current study is founded on Vincent Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure (1993). This seminal theory places great value on student retention, and the effective measures colleges and universities should adopt to minimize student attrition. Tinto's core elements for retaining students include a commitment to high-quality service and education and the development of a solid social and inclusive atmosphere for students. Tinto (1993) argued that strong social integration is essential for student achievement. He believed that a student's decision to depart from their studies is due to social or academic factors. Students can often feel isolated or alone during their college experience. A sense of belonging successfully affects student retention, academic achievement, and graduation rates (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) argued that a positive college experience leads to a positive college outcome. In higher education, Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure is highly researched and remains very influential when depicting variables of student dropout. Tinto's prior research, Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research, published in 1975, focused on student dropouts in higher education. Tinto (1975) described matriculation as a continuous interaction between students and the university's social structures. To this day, Tinto's philosophy of student interaction with academic professionals continues to affect whether students complete a degree or drop out. Soden (2017) argued that a critical factor in student retention is quality engagement between a student and a concerned campus individual, specifically academic advisors.

Distance Learning

Distance education is a way of educating students online (Gilbert, 2015). The birth of distance education dates back as early as the 1800s. Distance education was once performed through practices called correspondence education. According to Kentnor (2015), the process of correspondence education is when professors or instructors send lectures or assignment instructions via mail, and students responded by sending back completed assignments or a list of questions. This method of learning was very time-consuming, as it took professors weeks to communicate back. The growth of distance education continued to emerge over time.

Distance education today is a personalized and accessible experience. The phenomenon of distance learning propels students' lives in two effective ways: one, it benefits the desire to learn at convenient times, and two, it offers valuable technology skills that are practical and rewarding for the workforce (Gilbert, 2015). Distance education has progressed due to the rapid development of technology and is often referred to as online learning (Berg & Simonson, 2016). Online learning is also described as e-learning, blended learning, and remote learning (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Although distance education and online learning share similarities, Singh and Thurman (2019) noted that distance education requires remote access and involves little to no interaction between the student and the instructor, whereas online learning includes the use of the internet and online platforms and can occur in a traditional classroom setting (Park & Shea, 2020). Bawa (2016) noted that today's higher education student populations are more diverse than ever. One group, in particular, is made up of students who take classes exclusively online to complete their degrees. The popularity of distance learning degree

programs is a leading trend in higher education (Bawa, 2016). Flexible scheduling and the opportunity to balance multiple personal commitments are two of the most appealing aspects of taking distance education courses (Muljana & Luo, 2019).

In 2020, a global pandemic emerged, causing colleges and universities to close campuses for safety precautions (Gillies & Britton, 2020). As a result, students were taught entirely online, with the exception of some lab component courses. The pandemic demonstrates why it is essential for students to receive the necessary support to excel in online mediums. The innovation of distance learning will continue to evolve, and to ensure the success and completion of distance learners, it is vital to understand what causes them to discontinue their studies.

Two Primary Factors Affecting Distance Education Dropouts

Students' participation in distance education programs is often voluntary, and their role as a student is one of the many responsibilities seizing their time and focus (Zi-Yu et al., 2020). Willging and Johnson (2016) determined that students depart from distance education programs for a myriad of reasons that are unique to learning in an online setting. It is critical to understand the issues affecting distance learners to improve retention in distance education programs. Sorensen and Donovan (2017) indicated how online student attrition does not correlate to semester periods or levels of students. Students drop out of distance education courses anytime during any semester and at any academic career level. The two most influential factors contributing to distance education attrition are students not feeling a sense of belonging and lack of time management. (Miertschin, et al., 2015; Muljana & Luo, 2019).

Engagement

Considering the number of students enrolled in distance education programs, higher education professionals must consider the primary factors that lead to distance learners' dropping out. Social isolation was identified as a significant contributor (Diehl et al., 2018). Isolation has adverse effects on the development and well-being of students, so much so that it leads to course and program withdrawal (Ali & Smith, 2015). Distance learners who experience a lack of engagement not only feel isolated but also devalued, ignored, and rejected, according to Phirangee (2016). Croft et al. (2015) discovered that students drop out of distance education courses at higher rates than students enrolled in traditional courses because distance education courses are primarily designed for lecturing and include little to no interaction with professors and classmates. Pinchbeck and Heaney (2017) stated that isolation links to distraction during class sessions, and students are more inclined to drop out (Shah & Cheng, 2018).

Ouyang et al. (2020) identified that the best way to help students achieve in distance education programs, colleges and universities must include support strategies that focus on establishing rapport and building relationships. Online support models should prioritize engagement, resulting in student retention and successful academic performance (Ouyang et al., 2020). Support offered by the institution makes a difference in the retention of distance learners (Muljana & Luo, 2019). According to Udermann (2015), using academic advisors as the primary engagers in distance learning programs can positively impact distance learners' retention rates. Engagement is an interaction among students, peers, and academic professionals that contributes to students' college experience, success, and retention (Delfino, 2019). Blakely and Major (2019)

documented how essential engagement is to student satisfaction and persistence and discovered that lack of proper support and engagement are factors causing attrition among distance learners. Zhang et al. (2019) agreed that interactions between academic advisors and distance learners are critical for retention.

Reflecting on the landmark study, Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1993), college students generate a strong interest in their studies and personal development when engagement is effective. The influence of engagement helps students feel more included and confident in their intellectual efforts (Phirangee, 2016). Engagement is a multi-faceted perspective consisting of two central elements – deep attention and effective cognitive process (Ingram, 2018). Deep attention refers to how students participate in learning activities. When students' attention span is limited, cognitive resources are not operating. Without paying deep attention to learning materials, students cannot be fully engaged, ultimately leading to students dropping out. Effective cognitive processes improve learning performance. Ingram (2018) said that effective cognitive processes are active by nature. When describing engagement as an effective cognitive process, Ingram (2018) explained that it is important to distinguish between effective processes and ineffective processes. Effective processes help students understand course material, solve intricate problems, and accomplish goals, while ineffective processes hinder students, making it difficult for them to process information effectively. Effective processes occur when students interact with other individuals who provide a sense of concern and support; therefore, distance learners are not considered engaged if effective cognitive processes are not activated (Ingram, 2018).

Time Management

Self-discipline and time management significantly influence students' persistence in distance education courses (Batbaatar & Amin, 2021). Ineffective time management jeopardizes distance learners' academic success. (Ahmad et al., 2019). Batbaatar and Amin (2021) defined time management as behavior that supports the effective use of time while completing goal-oriented responsibilities. Considering the many commitments distance learners are balancing, effective time management is a valuable skill necessary to develop (Miertschin et al., 2015). Higher education is an investment, and the more time students devote to it, the less likely they will abandon their studies (Wilson et al., 2021).

One of the challenges distance learners face is not dedicating enough time to their program's requirements (Ahmad et al., 2019). When distance learners neglect to manage time, they procrastinate completing required readings, respond poorly to class exercises, and are highly distracted during virtual class meetings, which causes them to struggle academically and ultimately produce attrition rates (Yang et al., 2020). Procrastination is regarded as a dysfunction associated with negative outcomes (Naturil et al., 2018). In a study completed by Batbaatar and Amin (2021), a quarter of the surveyed distance education student population faced challenges with time management, while the remainder either procrastinated or multitasked. Multitasking is the attempt to execute two or more things simultaneously, which generally results in repeatedly switching between tasks or abandoning one activity to complete another (Madore & Wagner, 2019). While it is understood that distance learners typically manage numerous responsibilities at once, multitasking during in-class activities, primarily

lectures, or while studying is a harmful practice that reduces productivity (Ettinger & Cohen, 2019). May and Elder (2018) assert that multitasking negatively affects grade point average, comprehension, recall, test performance, attention and memory, self-discipline, and structure.

Distance education provides learners with greater liberty, but it requires self-discipline for self-development. Gorbunovs et al. (2016) define self-discipline as the second component of time management. Duckworth and Seligman (2017) said self-discipline also entails self-control, meaning the capacity to abstain from unhealthy excesses of anything that may have harmful consequences. Self-discipline is frequently associated with structure and willpower (Gorbunovs et al., 2016). Face-to-face courses provide a structure through in-person class meetings, while distance education attempts to provide a structure through mandatory due dates, email reminders, and digital course calendars (Miertschin et al., 2015). Many distance learners drop out because they struggle with time management, self-efficacy, self-determination, and battle with autonomy, which are essential for success in distance education (Aydin et al., 2019).

At-Risk Students

Higher education students often balance a rigorous academic education with several competing priorities (Horton, 2015). With so many competing responsibilities, Horton (2015) explained that students frequently place personal obligations ahead of academic obligations, jeopardizing their academic performance. Academic advising services must be designed to successfully address underprepared or at-risk students' academic and personal needs. At-risk or academically underprepared students are considered to have a greater likelihood of academic failure or dropping out of school

(Horton, 2015). At-risk students share several characteristics: they are unfamiliar with support, are sensitive to failure, lack study skills, have difficulty managing their time, and have different learning styles (Chih-Yuan Sun et al., 2017). Some at-risk students are first-time college students who struggle to navigate and adapt to the college culture, leading to unmet expectations, self-doubt, frustration, and even departure from the institution (Checkoway, 2018). Academic advisers must recognize that this set of students benefits from extra personal attention during individual advising sessions that emphasize students' academic development. Donaldson et al. (2016) recommend that advisors assess their delivery and consider utilizing an intrusive advising approach to address variables of student attrition before they occur. Intrusive advising is a method that requires academic advisors to contact their students without waiting for students to initiate contact to cultivate a connection that is caring and beneficial (Donaldson et al., 2016).

Retention Overview

Retention and completion are significant concerns in higher education. When it comes to academics and accreditation, every institution is under pressure to develop ways to help students succeed from when they enroll until they graduate (Manyanga et al., 2017). Students' ability to persist until the end of their academic programs and graduate are essential indicators of student achievement and institutional success. There are many different student populations: traditional and non-traditional students, distance learners, two-year and four-year students, transfer students, and students from underrepresented groups, who all contribute to the diversity of student retention. As the student populations

continue to evolve and develop, each institution's approach to student retention must also change.

Tinto, one of the most influential experts in student retention, stated that the issue of student retention was initially approached from a psychological standpoint (Tight, 2020). It was assumed that student retention reflected the student's individual traits (skills and drive) rather than the institution's (Tight, 2020). Students who dropped out, or contemplated dropping out, were labeled mentally ill (Tight, 2020). In the 1970s, this perspective of student retention began to shift. Student retention switched to the role of the institution (Aljohani, 2016). The more Tinto recognized that the institution played a significant role in achieving improved retention rates, the more the researcher associated the concept of student engagement.

Engaged students are more likely to persist (Tinto, 2006). Student engagement has two facets: first, student engagement is how much effort and time students invest into their academics. Second, is how higher education institutions allocate administrative professionals and support services to contribute to their students' academic success. When the term student retention was coined in the 1970s to characterize student persistence, it contained the idea that educational institutions were jointly responsible for influencing students' decisions to drop out (Tight, 2020). Since then, theoretical models have been developed, such as Tinto's Student Departure Model (1993), Bean's Theoretical Model of Student Attrition (1981), the Student-Faculty Informal Contact Model (1980), the Non-traditional Student Attrition Model (1985), and Astin's Student Involvement Model (1984).

History and Development of Academic Advising

American higher education and the concept of academic advising date back to the 18th century (McGill, 2019). Harvard, King's or Columbia, William and Mary, Brown, Yale, University of Pennsylvania, Dartmouth, Princeton, and Queen's or Rutgers were formed during this century. While some form of academic advising existed in the 1700s, historical evidence or proof is insufficient (Gordon, 2004). The existing literature on early academic advising demonstrates how its philosophy had not yet been defined - roles, practices, and structure had not been formed (Grites et al., 2016). Cook (2009) highlighted that college presidents were initially responsible for advising students throughout the colonial time, focusing specifically on intellectual aptitude, extracurricular activities, and personal concerns.

Kenyon College established the first formal academic advising system in 1841, designed to strategically target increasing student enrollment (Cook, 2009). For each student, the college assigned faculty members as academic advisors. During advising sessions, advisors introduced students to course selections and discussed why the courses chosen were appropriate for their professional objectives, abilities, and interests (Cook, 2009). Faculty members continued to serve as academic advisors for students far into the 1950s (Ghanem & Rao, 2021). Soon after, other institutions adopted this practice. Until the 1970s, academic advising was a highly directive and authoritarian process (Cook, 2009). In addition, community colleges, federal financial aid, and more developed curricula emerged in the 1970s, all of which influenced how students were advised, thereby defining the advisor's role. Intrigued by the growth of academic advising, Crookston and O'Banion wrote landmark articles in 1972, influencing the interest in

academic advising as a developmental process for students (McGill, 2019). These growing trends in academic advising culminated in the founding of NACADA in 1977, a pivotal moment in academic advising's evolution toward professionalism (Gordon, 2004; NACADA, 2021).

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) is a professional organization committed to anchoring and advancing academic advising practices (McGill, 2019). The association is committed to fostering the professional growth of academic advisers and stands firmly on the notion that effective academic advising is critical to student progress and academic achievement. NACADA describes advising as a relationship between teaching and learning that includes curriculum and learning objectives (NACADA, 2021). Today, NACADA remains the premier professional association for academic advising (NACADA, 2021).

Over the last 42 years, the professional field of academic advising evolved from an idea to a recognized, critical component of student success due to the diligent work of NACADA members (Justyna, 2016). According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2018), today's academic advisors are now expected to outline each student's course sequence, deliver various types of guidance individually or in groups, provide post-assessment reports, create a personalized retention plan and consistently review it to ensure progress, outline institutional resources, and facilitate student orientations. Academic advisors are expected to accomplish all of this while developing relationships with each student they assist. Academic advisors are not just found in post-secondary institutions but also in middle and high schools (Surr, 2019). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), academic advisor employment is expected to surge by

11% between 2020 and 2030. Some academic advisors earn the bottom 10% of the salary range, roughly $33,000, whereas other academic advisors earn the top 10% salary range, approximately $97,000 (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2021). Academic advisors earn a median salary of $58,120, including those with years of experience. According to Troxel et al. (2022), to work as an academic advisor, at least a bachelor's degree is required. Academic advisors with master's degrees or degrees in fields closely relevant to counseling or education are more likely to earn a higher salary (Troxel et al., 2022).

Academic Advising's Impact on Student Retention

Improving student retention is a top priority for any college or university (Bloemer et al., 2018). Student retention, sometimes known as student persister, refers to continuing enrollment until graduation (Burke, 2019). Student retention is a success measure for higher education (Sanchez-Gelabert, 2020). Seery et al. (2020) reported that colleges and universities succeed when recruiting students; however, though recruiting students is often favorable, retaining students is where the challenge exists, primarily in distance education programs (Shaw et al., 2016). Students who earn a college degree achieve long-term academic success, while institutions achieve long-term profitability (Shaw et al., 2016). More importantly, graduating students demonstrate that institutions are making significant efforts to accomplish the mission of educating and advancing students. Tinto (1987) identified academic advising as a critical component of student retention; he also suggested that effective academic advising should be central to a strong retention plan. Crouse (2021) argued that academic advising should be the foundation and gateway to additional support services rather than being one of many services

provided to improve student retention. Academic advisors should be the connection between other support services if needed.

Advising Approaches

Academic advising is a significant factor in student persistence (Cuseo, 2003). According to Antoney (2020), academic advising is a teaching and learning process; essentially, academic advising is an educational activity that aids college students in developing and achieving educational and career goals. Academic advising is grounded on philosophy, and to be a competent academic advisor, Antoney (2020) argued, one should also be grounded in philosophy with a convincing approach. Practicing academic advising with competence ensures students' academic achievement and retention (Antoney, 2020). This advising tactic is known as an academic advising approach. Advising approaches are proven practices and strategies that assist students in developing the required abilities to succeed academically and professionally (Ruiz Alvarado & Olson, 2020). Academic advising can be approached from a variety of perspectives: student development, cognitive development, career development, learning, retention, and decision-making. Each perspective is shaped by the students' and advisers' objectives. Intrusive and developmental advising, both described here, are two of the most effective advising approaches (Cuseo, 2003).

Intrusive Advising (Proactive Advising)

At-risk students can be found in any higher education institution. Many at-risk students are first-generation college students with no prior college experience, while others are on academic probation, lack motivation, and are considering dropping out of school altogether. Whichever the case, one of the most effective methods of reaching at-

risk students is intrusive advising (Rattin, 2017). Intrusive advising, also known as proactive advising, is a practice requiring academic advisors to initiate contact with their students at critical points in their academic careers to foster a caring and productive relationship (Antoney, 2020). These advisor touchpoints can occur anytime but are most beneficial before students' graduation.

Intrusive advising is dedicated to determining the root cause of students' difficulty and recommending the most appropriate intervention. The proactive advising method was found to have a greater impact on student retention and degree completion than a passive one, according to Rattin (2017). Intrusive advising is deliberate intervention; academic advisors attempt to foresee and identify challenges, concerns, roadblocks, and anything else that has or could potentially obstruct students' achievement. The objective is to foster a sense of belonging and concern from the institution (Herget, 2017). When using a proactive approach, Herget (2017) suggested that advisors should not wait until there are danger signs to connect with students; advisors are also encouraged to contact students during positive events. Intrusive advising is not only about intervening when things are going wrong but also about increasing student motivation, teaching students, and approaching students before problems arise (Ruiz Alvarado & Olson, 2020).

Developmental Advising

Academic advisors use specific approaches to guide students' growth toward self-discovery, setting life goals, and recognizing academic challenges. While there are multiple academic advising approaches advisors adopt, one has historically dominated their preference, developmental advising. The developmental advising approach is a close student-advisor relationship that aims to assist students in reaching their educational,

career, and personal goals, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities (Harris, 2018). The advising relationship, created through conversations with students, catalyzes developmental advising. The advisor focuses on several developmental theories related to cognitive, personal, psychosocial, social, and career advancement (Vianden, 2016). Developmental advising ultimately encourages and aids students in their pursuit of a higher quality of life.

Developmental advising is not just an approach to advising; it is also a method of teaching and learning. Essentially, the role of advisors is to teach students the skills necessary to meet academic and professional goals and provide a supportive environment in which they can make their own decisions (Gordon, 2019). According to Troxel et al. (2022), developmental advising is a framework of shared responsibility. The students' responsibility is to learn from advisors and make sound decisions based on the skills and knowledge acquired during the advising process. McGill (2016) stated that because developmental advising is concerned with the whole student, academic advisors should teach students to be critical thinkers; recognize that every student is at a different level emotionally and cognitively, with varying levels of motivation; balance challenging students while encouraging them; and teach students the process of making a decision. Developmental advising builds students to become more responsible for their own academic and professional goals (Zhang et al., 2019).

Advising Distance Learners

Academic advising is an essential service for distance learners (Allen, 2018). Students' intial encounters for academic services are academic advisors (Bunner & Lloyd, 2020). Academic advisors are integral to distance learners' academic development and

success. Zhang et al. (2019) noted that academic advising is one of the most student-centered divisions in a college or university. Academic advisors heavily influence the retention of all student populations (Muljana & Luo, 2019).

The needs of distance learners are different from traditional students, and advising this unique population can be challenging, considering advisors may never meet these students in person. The most difficult aspect of distance advising is connecting with students (MacDonald & Garcia, 2020). It can be challenging to exhibit interpersonal skills used in face-to-face advising appointments while leveraging technology. Distance learners often experience seclusion while attending classes in an online environment; MacDonald and Garcia (2020) said academic advisors must alter their advising approaches and replicate the face-to-face advisor-student relationship from a distance to prevent those feelings from persisting (Phirangee, 2016). To fulfill the void of human interaction, academic advisors' role in guiding distance learners includes developing relationships, identifying students' disconnects, and assisting them in reconnection. These student-advisor interactions demonstrate the significant effect academic advisors have on student retention and achievement (Simpson, 2018). As higher education continues to evolve, assessing the best practices of academic advisors will continue to re-emerge.

Reviewing Best Practices of Distance Advising

Advising is an essential retention method for student achievement because advisors are among the few institutional personnel with whom students are guaranteed to engage with. Although traditionally, academic advising has been a face-to-face professional service, distance advising has become higher education's latest subject target due to the popularity of distance learning. One of the key best practices for distance

advising is proactive communication (Ohrablo, 2016). Advisor outreach does not need to have a specific purpose in mind; however, advisors should be consistent with communication and leverage it to welcome students in for a session, check their academic progress, and, when necessary, congratulate them on their achievements. (Mondo, 2021). Ohrablo (2016) argued that students and advisors can't build strong advising connections through email and phone conversations because of the lack of visual indicators. For example, because the adviser cannot see students' concerns on their faces, the advisor must deduce it from their tone of voice or written communication. Vice versa, students cannot see the advisor's face to determine if the advisor is genuine or caring. To build a trustworthy, effective advising relationship, the advisor is confined to the strategic use of words and voice inflection.

Mondo (2021) suggested another best practice for distance advisors is planning and preparing for the advising session. It is vital for the advisor to consider what form of technology is effective and best supports online collaboration. Collaboration tools such as phone, videoconference, email, chats, chatbots, scheduling systems, and a virtual advising hub all help increase the student's engagement and can be tracked as a reference. Méndez and Arguello (2020) argued that it is essential to note that technology does not replace the interaction between the student and the advisor; rather, it complements the interaction. It is simply a means to help build personal connections.

A third best practice effective for distance advising is to provide timely responses. Méndez and Arguello (2020) emphasized how students need and desire to have well-timed and accessible support from advisors. Distance learners waiting for a returned call or email do not have a visible reference to comprehend the source of any perceived delay,

which can lead to greater aggravation and a sense of alienation. (Ohrablo, 2016). Another practice distance advisors may use to retain students is to develop and implement early warning systems, which help identify students who are at risk of academic failure (Akcapınar et al., 2019). Akçapınar et al. (2019) suggested that one strategy for retaining at-risk distance learners is considering systems for tracking their academic performance. Early outreach to distance learners helps improve their academic performance and increase their persistence. Lastly, advising is a learning-centered paradigm Antoney (2020). Learning is not just a cognitive process but also a transformative process, including affective development and identity (Gordon, 2019).

Advisors need to approach distance learners with the same methodology they would in a face-to-face setting while keeping their unique needs and limitations in mind. No matter the mode of delivery, the goal of every advising session should be to make students feel valued, heard, and cared for. Advisors should demonstrate their expertise and awareness of student procedures, student concerns, and academic policies within advising sessions. To fulfill this approach, Akcapnar et al. (2019) proposed that advisors should utilize a checklist containing the following items to ensure quality advising at all times:

Did I include a kind and welcoming greeting?

Did I respond to the student's request and go above and beyond to meet their needs?

Did I reinforce student success?

Did I successfully create an atmosphere of shared accountability?

Did I establish a clear outline of the next steps and set an appointment for a follow-up?

Assessing Academic Advising

Retaining students largely fall under the academic advising division, and quality advising is integral to student success (Uddin & Johnson, 2019). Evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of academic advisors is an important professional responsibility, and failure to do so sends the message that the institution does not highly value this student service. Evaluating and assessing professional services is referred to as quality measurement for quality improvement (Cuseo, 2003). Assessment is frequently perceived as a tool for ensuring accountability; it is intended to be a positive, ongoing process focused on providing continual feedback on improving student services (Ozan & Kıncal, 2018). Using the tool of assessment in academic advising is the practice of collecting evidence to drive improvement and support the development of new strategies (Moore et al., 2018). Knowing how crucial academic advising is to student achievement, Moore et al. (2018) made the case that it is important to regularly assess the services offered.

The paradigm of academic advising involves two elements: student learning outcomes, which focuses on students' knowledge, skillsets, and values, and advisor delivery, which concentrates on advisors' competency level and ability to deliver effective advice. When assessing these two fundamentals, student learning outcomes measure impact, and advisor-delivery outcomes measure efficiency and effectiveness (Zarge et al., 2018). This teaching and learning model has generated a need for academic advising to identify and implement strategies to bridge gaps. Among the most compelling reasons for assessment is intellectual curiosity, a genuine desire to know what students are learning, and whether or not learning outcomes are being achieved. (Zarge et al., 2018). According to Moore et al. (2018), assessing academic advising practices is more

than just a data collection exercise; assessment enhances the student learning experience, including engagement, retention, and persistence.

Assessment Versus Evaluation

Why is assessment the preferred method of ensuring quality as opposed to evaluation? Assessment and evaluation are two distinct methods used in higher education to aid students' learning abilities (Baehr, n.d.). Assessment measures performance and provides feedback on knowledge, skills, and attitudes to elevate and improve practices; however, evaluation judges the quality demonstrated and documents the achievement attained (Mamoon-Al-Bashir et al., 2016). These two processes are mutually reinforcing and necessary in higher education. Both processes collect data to identify gaps and address deficiencies, but the way the facts are used in each process are significantly different, with different perspectives.

While evaluation and assessment have become synonymous, they have distinct implications. The term assess is derived from the Latin word assidere, from which the word assist is also derived. In comparison, evaluation stems from the same root as value, implying judgment or estimate of worth. The term assessment will be used throughout this current study since it is not a judgmental process but delivers the idea that its primary goal is to generate validating and constructive input that can assist in improving performance.

Research Questions

There is value in academic advising, and quality advising significantly impacts student retention (French, 2018). Academic advising and student retention are often linked in higher education, and it is vital for institutions to prioritize these two. Cuseo

(2003) proposed that colleges and universities should focus on the practices and strategies of academic advisors to help improve student persistence and retention using the tool of assessment – a systemic strategy for enhancing quality. Student retention is a measurable assessment outcome directly linked to the overall goal of academic advising (Moore et al., 2018). For this study, the tool of assessment will be used to identify areas of academic advising that need improvement to help enhance distance learners' persistence and academic achievement.

Distance education is a popular choice for studying for a post-secondary degree because it allows students to learn at any time and from any location. During the fall of 2020, more than 40% of students enrolled in distance education programs, but 10% to 20% of distance learners either academically failed or dropped out of their program. (NCES, n.d.; Bawa, 2016). This study aims to determine the advisor's effectiveness and help facilitate retention among distance learners. The assessment may also help academic advisors be more self-regulated and exercise assessment on their own to continue providing an impact on retention. Prioritizing quality over quantity achieves institutional goals without alienating or losing students (Moore et al., 2018). The following research questions were created to gain insight into the practices of academic advisors as they relate to distance learners:

Research Question 1

How do academic advisors build relationships with distance learners to best meet their needs, abilities, and interests?

Research Question 2

How do academic advisors identify at-risk distant learners?

Research Question 3

What strategies can be used to promote student retention once at-risk students are identified?

Research Question 4

What strategies do academic advisors implement to engage distant learners and prevent them from discontinuing their classes or programs?

Chapter 3: Methodology

The retention and completion rates of students enrolled in distance education programs are significant concerns in higher education (Madi-McCarthy, 2018). Despite the growing number of students enrolling in distance education programs, only a small percentage of students complete their programs, resulting in high attrition rates among distance learners (Aydin et al., 2019). Dropout rates among distance learners are significantly higher than among students who learn in traditional classrooms (Christensen & Spackman, 2017). According to Aydin et al. (2019), student dropout is defined as a student who discontinues courses or an academic program prior to completion. Given the expectation of academic advisors to positively impact student retention, this study aims to assess the current practices of academic advisors at a South Florida college to improve retention among distance learners.

Through the tool of assessment, this study will analyze advising practices, identify perceived deficiencies, and, if necessary, highlight areas requiring developmental training for academic advisors. Specifically, this study will explore academic advisors' approaches and tactics to retain and engage distance learners. According to a seminal study completed by Cuseo (2008), if something isn't defined, it's impossible to appraise it, let alone make changes to improve it. Assessing the effectiveness of academic advising services accomplishes two goals: (a) proving the impact of performance and (b) improving the quality of performance (Rattin, 2017). Assessments should encourage positive changes in advisor performance, which, in turn, should encourage positive changes in students' retention and completion.

Participants

According to The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2021), academic advisors are administrators and mentors who represent a higher education institution and guide college students academically, socially, and personally. For this study, the researcher will send email invites to academic advisors at least 18 years old who actively advise distance learners at a South Florida community college to be study participants. A *Participant Letter for Anonymous Survey* will be attached to each email (see Appendix A). The letter will contain details explaining the purpose, confidentiality procedures, and consent instructions for participating in this study. To identify advisors who only advise distance learners, the researcher will reach out to the college's Dean of Students Services and the Director of Academic Advising, request a list of the advisors' email addresses, and send them an email invitation.

Instrument

To measure the impact of academic advisors' practices on distance learners' retention and academic success, the researcher developed a*n Academic Advisor Self-Assessment Survey* for this study (see Appendix B). The survey will be administered online and comprised of questions covering three sections: participants' demographics, academic advising services, and academic advisor practices. The survey combines the Likert scale, Rating scale, and written response questions. The *Academic Advisor Self-Assessment Survey* will be supported using SurveyMonkey – a web-based survey development application with enhanced security features for administration and data collection for statistical analysis. The survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. A web-based survey was selected as the most efficient strategy to achieve the

following: (a) the convenience of collecting automated data, (b) saving valuable time by accessing numerous survey participants in distant locations, (c) allowing for more candid responses (d) cost-effective, and (e) visually engages participants (Wright, 2017). Despite the benefits of selecting a web-based survey, Rice et al. (2017) noted that there are also disadvantages and recommended that online surveys be used with caution, regardless of the advantages. The researcher understands that questions in web-based surveys are typically closed-ended, and respondents are only given the option to select one of the predetermined answers. Although closed-ended questions are easier to quantify, there is a possibility that the validity is lower than that of open-ended questions (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). There is also the potential of spam filters set by the recipient or their organization, which is a setting that filters out unwanted or unrecognized emails. Overall, the advantages outweigh the possible disadvantages.

Procedures

Design

The researcher adopted a quantitative method for this study for various reasons. First, a quantitative approach produces numerical outcomes and frequently responds to inquiries such as how often or how many (Daniel, 2016). Second, the study's goal is to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between variables that can be measured accurately and precisely (Amad et al., 2019). Third, to assist leadership in investigating and resolving concerns, a report with data conclusions and statistical significance will be produced to assist them in validating their judgments. Finally, quantitative data can be organized into graphs and tables, simplifying the researcher's analysis process.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher will invite potential participants via email to complete a web-based self-assessment survey following Nova Southeastern University IRB approval. The researcher will also contact the Dean of Student Services and the Director of Academic Advising at a South Florida community college to obtain permission to recruit academic advisors as survey participants and request advisor email addresses. The entire data collection process is expected to be concluded within four weeks. In accordance with this schedule, a reminder survey link will be sent to participants two weeks after the initial request. A final reminder will be emailed two weeks after the initial reminder, along with the submission deadline.

Data Analysis Procedures

Using Survey Monkey's summary information tool, data collected for the four research questions will be analyzed and arranged into summary details. Once gathered, the data will be sorted and prepared according to Creswell's (2018) procedures for quantitative data analysis. First, a codebook will be created. Creswell (2018) explained that a codebook enables researchers to identify the scores allocated to questions. For example, responses to Likert-style questions will be assigned a number between 1 and 4, with 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" and 4 representing "Strongly Agree." Next, the data will be entered into IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.

Descriptive statistics will be used to evaluate the data. Utilizing descriptive statistics, the researcher can assess the mean, median, frequencies, and standard deviation, allowing for a summarization of the trends or tendencies in the data (Creswell,

2018). Finally, the researcher will provide the results from the assessment to the Dean of Student Services and the Director of Academic Advising to review, discuss, and determine if necessary, training development plans need to be implemented to help improve retention rates and completion of distance learners. The results of this study will be described in Chapter four.

Pilot Study

A pilot test of the survey will be conducted to (a) validate content, (b) confirm usability and readability within the web-based survey, and (c) identify potential issues. Participants in the pilot test will be academic advisors at various higher education institutions in South Florida. Three academic advisors will be asked to complete the survey and provide feedback that could be used to modify the original survey. Advisor one advises students at a four-year public university, advisor two advises students at a community college, and advisor three advises students at a four-year private institution. Because these participants actively advise distance learners, the researcher considered their observation influential in piloting the survey for this study.

Pilot Study Feedback

The researcher emailed the instrument and a request for input to three academic advisors for the pilot study. All pilot participants completed the survey and provided comments in response to the request. Participants estimated it took less than 10 minutes to answer the 32 items in the instrument. The participants also stated that the instructions were clear and concise, the survey questions were easy to comprehend, and the answer options were mutually exclusive. All participants indicated that answering the questions

was easy, presented logically, and they felt their privacy was protected. However, one of the advisors expressed an organizational change she thought would be noteworthy.

The advisor mentioned that as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, all programs were moved to an online format, and students were required to take courses remotely. In January of 2022, the advisor stated that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention notified institutions that it was safe to reopen classrooms for full in-person learning, and as a result, all onsite classes resumed, with the majority of courses providing the option for students to participate remotely. This alternative created a hybrid or blended model of instruction where some students attend classes in-person while other students stream class live. The advisor affirmed that more than 83% of enrolled students did not return to the campus and opt to join onsite courses remotely. Prior to COVID-19, academic advisors were assigned to particular student populations based on the first letter of students' last name. Each population represents students' classification; traditional, non-traditional, transient, commuters, and online. The advisor further explained how leadership noticed a significant portion of the student body continued taking classes exclusively online, and decided to send email correspondence requesting all students who live beyond a specific mile radius declare themselves as online learners within their student portals to update their classifications. By definition, these students are distance learners, but are not accurately depicted when weekly reports are generated.

Of the advisor's 242 student caseload, the advisor said, only 68% percent of the assigned students declared themselves as distance learners despite more than 90% residing in other states. The advisor thought it was important to clarify that although the academic advisor assignments did not change, all advisors are now considered distance

advisors due to the mass amount of their student caseloads learning from a distance. While this feedback did not affect the survey questions, instead the researcher used this information as an advantage to the study. Now that all advisors are considered distance advisors, the survey can be sent to a larger sample size, ultimately, the survey can be disseminated to the entire academic advisor staff. With an understanding that advisors' caseloads still include students attending classes in-person, the researcher will modify the survey instructions and strongly emphasize that the survey responses should only convey practices related to distance learners.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to measure the effectiveness of academic advisors' current practices to determine if the services provided to distance learners support their retention and academic success, or if the quality of services needs to be improved. The study was conducted at a South Florida community college and academic advisors who advise distance learners were specifically surveyed. This chapter will present the data analysis findings from the research survey by addressing each research question. The study was based on the following four research questions:

Research Question 1

How do academic advisors build relationships with distance learners to best meet their needs, abilities, and interests?

Research Question 2

How do academic advisors identify at-risk distant learners?

Research Question 3

What strategies can be used to promote student retention once at-risk students are identified?

Research Question 4

What strategies do academic advisors implement to engage distant learners and prevent them from discontinuing their classes or programs?

The Academic Advisor Self-Assessment is comprised of 32 questions separated into three sections. Section one consists of three multiple choice questions; section two encompasses 9 multiple choice questions, and section three consists of 20 personality test styled questions in a Likert scale format where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly

agree. Personality tests are questions that are intentionally repeated but phrased differently and are scored using rating-scale self-reports (Kyllonen & Kell, 2018). Personality assessments are not precise, but they provide fairly accurate profiles traits of an individual and determine if they are suited for a job or possess qualities that will inhibit successful performance on a job according to Heimann, et al. (2022); (Kumar, 2019). Each Likert scale question focuses on the academic advisors' method of action and what they deem to be effective when advising distance learners. The study was founded on four research questions, and they all were analyzed using descriptive statistics to discern the mean, median, and frequencies. SPSS was used to obtain descriptive statistics.

Demographic Characteristics

The survey was sent to 67 academic advisors, which is the entire academic advisor staff representing each campus of the institution located throughout South Florida. A response rate of 46.27% was achieved, with 31 out of the 67 advisors who were sampled. The first section of the questionnaire requested respondents to designate their gender, ethnicity, and age group. The 31 respondents consisted of 9 males (29.03%), 21 females (67.74%), and 1 respondent who declined to specify a gender (3.23%). Of the five age groups, the 35-44 age group contributed the vast majority of survey responses (46.67%), followed by the 45-54 age group (23.33%), the 25-34 (16.67%), the 55-64 (6.67%), and lastly, the 65+ group (6.66%). One respondent skipped this question, as this was not a required answer. The survey participants included three ethnicities, Black or African American (50.00%), White or Caucasian (23.33%), and Hispanic or Latino (23.33%). Asian or Asian American and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander were

also listed as an ethnicity choice but were not selected; one respondent declined to answer. The participant demographics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Survey Respondent Demographic Information

Demographic Item		n	%
Gender			
	Male	9	30
	Female	21	70
	Decline to Respond	1	0
Age Group			
	25-34	5	16.67
	35-44	14	46.67
	45-54	7	23.33
	55-64	2	6.67
	65+	2	6.67
	Question Skipped by Respondent	1	0
Ethnicity			
	Black or African American	15	50
	White or Caucasian	7	23.33
	Hispanic or Latino	7	23.33
	Asian or Asian American	0	0
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0	0
	Decline to Respond	1	3.33

The second section of the survey asked additional questions to learn more about the academic advisor population and the advising services provided to distance learners. For this section, three advisors stopped pursuing the survey and only 28 academic advisors committed to each question. Question one asked advisors about their employment status; 24 advisors (85.71%) are full-time, and four of the advisors (14.29%) are part-time. When participants were questioned about how long they worked as academic advisors, (57.14%) elected 1 to 4 years, (21.43%) elected 5 to 9 years, (3.57%) elected 10 to 14 years, (7.14%) elected 15 to 19 years, and (10.71%) elected 20+ years. A depiction of the breakdown can be seen in table 2.

Table 2

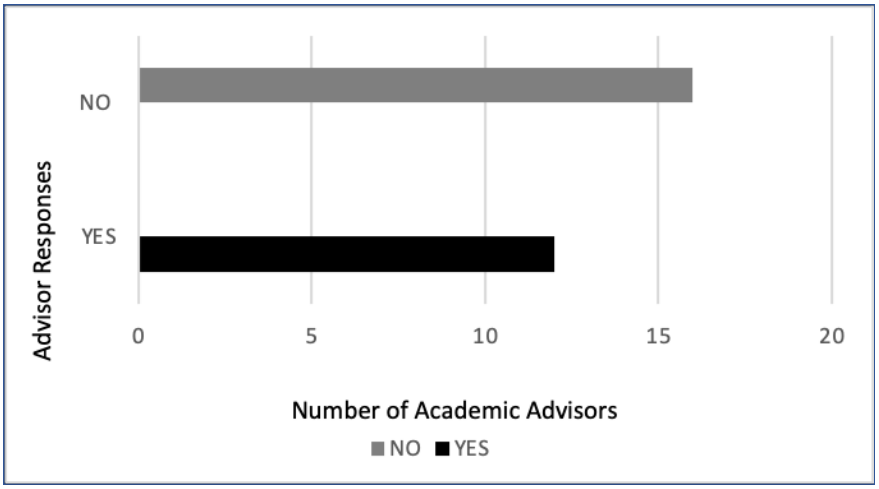
Academic Advisor Overview

Academic Advisor Population		n	%
Employment Status			
	Full-time	24	85.71
	Part-time	4	14.29
Number of Years as an Academic Advisor			
	1 to 4 Years	16	57.14
	5 to 9 Years	6	21.43
	10 to 14 Years	1	3.57
	15 to 19 Years	2	7.14
	20 + Years	3	10.71

The next 7 questions were asked to gain more insight into the advisors' distance learners. Question three requested the participants to indicate how many distance learners they have in their caseload, 13 (46.43%) participants selected 50+ students, four (14.29%) participants selected 40-49 students, three (10.71%) participants selected 30-39 students, two (7.14%) selected 20-29 students, another four (14.29%) participants selected 10-19 students, and the last two (7.14%) participants selected fewer than 10 students. When asked to identify what student classifications the advisors advise, each of the 28 respondents declared they advise for each of the following classifications: freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors, transfer, and transient students. Additionally, the participants affirmed they advise students for all 8 academic programs. Question 10 asked advisors if academic advising appointments are mandatory for distance learners, (57.14%) selected No and (42.86%) selected Yes. The following figure illustrates the responses.

Figure

Required Academic Advising Appointments



Responses from advisors when asked if academic advising are mandatory for distance learners.

The follow up question stated, "If academic advising appointments are mandatory for distance learners, how often during a semester do you require your distance learners to meet with you?" Of the 28 advisors, 13 (46.43%) responded None, 7 (25.00%) answered One, four (14.29%) replied Two, two (7.14%) indicated Three, and the last two respondents (7.14%) said Four or More. Another question asked participants what type of technology is primarily used when communicating with distance learners, (92.86%) reported phone and video conferencing and (7.14%) reported email and online text messaging. The last question of this section asked advisors, how they assess their effectiveness as an academic advisor? Five advisors (17.86%) answered Students' GPA, 23 advisors (82.14%) responded Student Persistence; none of the advisors selected Students' Test Scores, Students' Graduation, or All of the Above as their answer.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1

The first research question focused on how academic advisors build relationships with distance learners to best meet their needs, abilities, and interests. This section consisted of six personality, Likert scale questions and the breakdown of the paired survey questions are outlined below.

The first question asked respondents if they take the time to educate their distance learners how to build a relevant course schedule, (7.41%) strongly disagreed, (29.63%) agreed, and majority of the respondents (62.96%) strongly agreed; no respondent elected disagree as their answer. The second question asked participants if they find it easier to simply tell their distance learners what academic goals they need to meet to improve their grades, (11.11%) disagreed, while 24 respondents (88.88%) equally agreed and strongly agreed; participants did not chose strongly disagree. When asked if they recommend extracurricular activities to propel their distance learners' pursuits, one respondent (3.70%) strongly disagreed, (14.81%) disagreed, (48.15%) agreed, and (33.33%) strongly agreed. Question four was derived from question one, and it asked advisors if they decide the appropriate academic course schedules for distance learners based on their programs of interest and individual needs because students are unfamiliar with planning courses, (7.41%) of the advisors strongly disagree, (14.81%) disagree, (55.56%) agree, and (22.22%) strongly agree. Question five is a spinoff of question three, which states "I find it difficult to consider what type of extracurricular activities my distance learners may be interested in, so I let them decide," one respondent (3.70%) strongly disagreed, 6 respondents (22.22%) disagreed, nearly half the respondents (48.15%) agreed, and 7

respondents (25.93%) strongly agreed. Question 6 is a byproduct of question two that asked advisors if they share the responsibility with their distance learners to plan and develop realistic and measurable semester goals to improve their academic performance, (7.41%) disagreed, (44.44%) agreed, and (48.15%) strongly agreed; strongly disagree was not selected as an answer for this question. Table 3 illustrates the responses.

Table 3

Research Question 1 – Building Relationships

Survey Questions	n	Mean	Mode
BR 1a: I educate my distance learners on how to build relevant course schedules based on their programs of interest and individual needs.	27	3.48	4
BR 1b: Students are unfamiliar with planning courses, so I decide the appropriate academic course schedules for my distance learners based on their programs of interest and individual needs.	27	2.93	3
BR 2a: I tell my distance learners what academic goals they need to meet during the semester to improve their grades.	27	3.33	3
BR 2b: Together, my distance learners and I plan and develop realistic and measurable semester goals to improve their academic performance.	27	3.41	4
BR 3a: I recommend extracurricular activities to my distance learners to help propel their pursuits.	27	3.11	3
BR 3b: I find it difficult to consider what type of extracurricular activities my distance learners may be interested in, so I let them decide.	27	2.96	3

Research Question 2

The second research question asked how academic advisors identify at-risk distance learners. This section consisted of six personality, Likert scale questions and the breakdown of the paired survey questions are outlined below.

The first question asked participants if they purposely look for potential risk behaviors such as lack of motivation, procrastination, insecurity, and lack of self-discipline to determine the best advising strategies for support, 4 participants (14.81%) disagreed, 11 participants (40.74%) agreed, and 12 participants (44.44%) strongly agreed; strongly disagree was not chosen by any of the respondents for this question. Question two stated, "I consistently inform my distance learners of their academic performance by reviewing their attendance and grades as well as helping overcome challenges if they are performing below academic standards," of the responses submitted, (33.33%) disagreed, (40.74%) agreed, and (25.93%) strongly agreed; participants did not consider strongly disagree for this question. When advisors were asked if they regularly establish open communication with professors across academic departments as a strategic early warning practice to determine a point of intervention/prevention, (3.70%) strongly disagreed, (33.33%) disagreed, (48.15%) agreed, and (14.81%) strongly agreed. As a follow-up to question one, the fourth question asked if their distance learners exhibit potential risk behaviors, do they recommend completing their program at a later date when they develop the characteristics necessary to succeed, two advisors responded (7.41%) strongly disagree, 9 advisors selected (33.33%) disagree, and 16 advisors (59.26%) agreed; none of the advisors elected strongly disagree. Question five is a derivative of question two and it states, "I inform my distance learners of their academic performance by sending notices," (7.41%) strongly disagreed, (11.11%) disagreed, (51.85%) agreed, and (29.63%) strongly agreed. Lastly, question 6 is an offshoot of question three, and it states, "I am happy to provide intervention/prevention with my distance learners when they ask and are ready to discuss their concerns," one respondent (3.70%) disagreed, 9

respondents (33.33%) agreed, and 17 respondents (62.96%) strongly agreed; strongly disagree was not selected as a relevant response.

Research Question 3

The third research question sought to identify what strategies academic advisors use to promote student retention once at-risk students are identified. This section consisted of four personality, Likert scale questions and the breakdown of the paired survey questions are outlined below.

Question one states, "I explain to my distance learners what other campus resources are available to them," (3.70%) participants disagree, (55.56%) participants agree, and (40.74%) strongly agree; strongly disagree was not selected. Question two asked respondents if they offer distance learners tips to manage their time better and help them study more effectively, when necessary, (14.81%) disagreed, (48.15%) agreed, and (37.04%) strongly agreed; strongly disagreed was not elected as response by respondents. As a sequence to question one, question three asked if the advisors themselves leverage and build support communities by contacting other campus resources to help them aid distance learners' academic success and engagement, (33.33%) disagreed, (40.74%) agreed, and (25.93%) strongly agreed; participants did not consider strongly disagree for this question. Question four is a sequel of question two, and it states, "I tell my distance learners to consider working on their time management and study skills when their grades are below grade level," one advisor (3.70%) strongly disagreed, three participants (11.11%) disagreed, 12 participants (44.44%) agreed, and 11 participants (40.74%) strongly agreed.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question asked what strategies academic advisors implement to engage distant learners? This section consisted of four personality, Likert scale questions and the breakdown of the paired survey questions are outlined below.

Question one asked advisors if they expect their distance learners to properly set an advising appointment to communicate with them despite different time zones, (3.70%) disagreed, (51.85%) agreed, and (44.44%) strongly agreed; respondents did not select strongly disagree as an answer. Question two asked participants if they personalize communication with their distance learners to get to know them individually to help deliver support that fits their unique needs, one participant (3.70%) strongly disagreed, 6 participants (22.22%) disagreed, 8 participants (29.63%) agreed, and 12 participants (44.44%) strongly agreed. Question three stems from question one, which states "Due to different time zones, I provide my distance learners with a variety of channels to access me, such as online text messaging, video conferencing, email, and phone," three advisors (11.11%) disagreed, 13 advisors (48.15%) agreed, and (40.74%) strongly agreed; respondents did not indicate strongly disagree as their response. Question four subset of question two, and it asked respondents if they avoid unnecessary and distracting topics and focus solely on their distance learners' grades, not their personal attributes.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if the current practices of academic advisors aid distance learners' academic achievement and retention, or if the quality of the advising services and retention methods offered to distance learners need to be improved. Ragusa and Crampton (2018) discovered that students in distance learning programs have high attrition rates, which is congruent to Sorensen and Donovan (2017), who argued that retaining distance learners is becoming more challenging. According to Soden (2017), academic advising is an effective method for providing academic support to students who are regarded as being at-risk of dropping out of school and a key contributor to student retention (Uddin & Johnson, 2019). Academic outcomes such as retention rates, grade point averages, and graduation rates are all positively impacted by high-quality academic advising (Hawthorne et al., 2022).

Distance learners are non-traditional students, who are categorized by a variety of situational and demographic characteristics: gender, age, life roles, employment obligations, personality type, location, level of motivation, and learning styles among other things. In accordance with the findings of Aydin et al. (2019), distance learners often struggle to balance life demands while completing their studies independently as opposed to in a structured class setting. Distance learners also frequently struggle with feelings of isolation and lack of discipline, which has a negative impact on their academic performance and ultimately causing them to drop out. Kardash (2020) suggested that the most beneficial advising tactic for distance learners are advising approaches that are both comprehensive and personalized. A comprehensive approach is an all-encompassing strategy that equips students with both academic and extracurricular

tools for overall student development while utilizing two promising philosophical approaches to advising: intrusive advising, also known as proactive advising, which places the responsibility on the advisor to initiate and maintain contact with students at all times, and developmental advising, which emphasizes the relationship between the advisor and the students (Ruiz Alvarado & Olson, 2020).

Summary of Findings

The researcher designed a 32-item self-report web-based survey instrument broken into three sections that was intended to measure academic advisors' quality of performance. Sections one and two asked questions about the advisors themselves and their distance learners, which generated direct responses. Section three of the survey was comprised of personality style, Likert scale questions. The testing technique behind personality assessments gauges behavior, motivation, and intent, a research tool predominantly used as an indicator of job performance (Menold & Raykov, 2022). The construct of personality questions is written as double-barreled questions or similarly situated pairs of questions worded to present the opposite of one another. The questions are not listed next to each other, instead they are presented at random throughout the survey and required participants to respond using Likert scale answers. Each question was given an equivalent set of agreeable and disagreeable response options, where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree. Although there were slight differences between the correlation of the question pairs, the goal of the survey was for respondents to identify and consider the two items and respond to one of the items in the pair similar to the other item.

The question pairs were written to assess if the advisors incorporate intrusive and developmental advising approaches: how they engage and build rapport; track, evaluate, and assess progress; give, take, and share responsibility; motivate academic and career planning; collaborate with other institutional resources; promote intellectual growth to solve problems and persevere in adversity; and connect academic pursuits with personal interests. This teaching and learning philosophy of advising is to support development by teaching and telling.

Research Question 1

Three sets of paired questions were proposed to recognize how academic advisors build relationships with distance learners to best meet their needs, abilities, and interests.

The first pair of questions focused on advisors' approach to building relevant course schedules for distance learners. The participants who agreed that they educate their distance learners on how to build relevant course schedules, also agreed they decide the appropriate academic course schedules for distance learners.

The second set of questions attempted to determine how participants address planning semester goals to help distance learners improve their academic standing. Respondents who indicated they share the responsibility with their distance learners to plan and develop realistic and measurable semester goals to improve their academic performance**,** also indicated that they find it easier to simply tell their distance learners what academic goals they need to meet to improve their grades.

The third combination of questions aimed to establish how respondents expand on distance learners' interests beyond their schoolwork. In the first item, advisors reported that they recommend extracurricular activities to propel their distance learners' pursuits,

but in the second item of the pair, advisors reported they find it difficult to consider what type of extracurricular activities their distance learners may be interested in, so they let them decide.

Research Question 2

To determine what tactics are used to identify distance learners who are academically at-risk, three additional sets of collaborative questions were created.

The initial pair of questions were designed to ascertain the strategies employed by participants when confronted with indicators of academic vulnerability among distance learners. Participants that selected they purposely look for potential risk behaviors such as lack of motivation, procrastination, insecurity, and lack of self-discipline to determine the best advising strategies for support, also elected that if their distance learners exhibit potential risk behaviors, they recommend them to complete their program at a later date when they develop the characteristics necessary to succeed.

The second grouping of questions asked advisors what steps they demonstrate when distance learners are falling below grade level. Advisors confirmed that they consistently inform distance learners of their academic performance by reviewing their attendance and grades as well as helping them overcome challenges if they are performing below academic standards. Yet, in the second item, advisors also confirmed that when distance learners fall below grade level, they inform them by just sending email notices.

The third twosome of questions was composed to better understand respondents' early warning practices. The respondents who agreed they regularly establish open communication with professors across academic departments as a strategic early warning

practice to determine a point of intervention/prevention for distance learners, also agreed that they provide intervention/prevention with distance learners when they ask and are ready to discuss their academic concerns.

Research Question 3

Two sets of double-barreled questions were composed to discover how advisors encourage student retention after at-risk students are identified.

The first sequence of questions inquired how advisors acquaint distance learners to other academic support services available on campus. Advisors that conveyed they leverage and build support communities by contacting other campus resources to help aid distance learners' academic success and engagement, also expressed they just list out what other campus resources are available to their distance learners.

The second set of items asked respondents how they coach their distance learners to balance their priorities to be more productive academically. Respondents reported in the first item that offer distance learners tips to manage their time better and help them study more effectively, when necessary, but in the second item of the pair, respondents reported they tell their distance learners to consider working on their time management and study skills when their grades are below grade level.

Research Question 4

The final sets of mutually arranged questions were developed to gain insight into the practices used to engage distance learners and prevent them from dropping out.

The first pair of questions asked participants how they form a sense of connection with students who reside in different time zones. The participants who designated that due to different time zones, they provide their distance learners with a

variety of channels to access them, such as online text messaging, video conferencing, email, and phone, also designated that despite different time zones, they expect their distance learners to properly set an advising appointment to communicate with them.

The second group of organized questions asked respondents about their communication style when building rapport with distance learners. In the first item, advisors specified they personalize communication with their distance learners to get to know them individually to help deliver support that fits their unique needs. In the second item, advisors specified they avoid unnecessary and distracting topics and focus solely on their distance learners' grades, not their personal attributes.

Interpretation of Findings

Web-based, personality self-reports with Likert scale were designed to quantify the validity of participant responses because personality assessments with Likert scale answers are common tools of validity when assessing job performance suitability for a particular role (Heimann et al., 2022). This study intended to determine if the current practices of academic advisors need to be improved to increase distance learners' retention and academic achievement, but the findings of this study were not positively correlated because the researcher could not confirm whether the findings of Arhin, et al (2017) and Awadh (2018) are valid. The two authors argued that although there are well-established strategies for lowering attrition among traditional, face-to-face students, approaches for retaining distance learners either do not exist or do not suit this student type and academic advisors' retention efforts must be carefully examined to enhance quality assurance in light of rising attrition rates among distance learners. The researcher examined participants' responses between the two items in each pair, aiming to find

logical confirmation of redundancy among the items; however, the data analysis disclosed incongruent validity with the relationship of quality academic advising and the retention of distance leaners due to the contradictory of answers provided by the respondents. The undesirable outcomes lead to inconclusive evidence.

As previously mentioned, personality questionnaires deliberately ask the same question more than once, but the questions are phrased slightly differently to accurately measure self-reported job-related practices. Regardless of how the question is phrased, respondents' answers should be consistent with each question. All questions were given an equivalent set of response options, where 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree. The researcher interprets the inconsistent responses as lack of attention or a lack of effort, which contributes greatly to replicability and validity issues. Reliability is only established when there is consistency in responses across multiple related questions. Considering the items in each pair were not exact duplicates, the responses reflect lack of care or attentiveness. Research data presented that participants provided uniform responses across all items, although the pairs differed in content. Participants selected "agree or strongly agree" to both items, concluding "agree" as a common mode for each question.

Context of Findings

The findings of this study did not corroborate those of Arhin et al. (2017) and Awadh (2018). The researcher hypothesized that a self-reporting instrument would help establish if the current approaches to advising distance learners resemble quality advising or if the advisors practices need to be improved to be better support distance leaners' academic success and retention. The reasons for these unexpected results are not clear,

and point to the need for future research in this area as well as research to examine the means of linking self-reports with inconsistent responding.

Participants may have been less concerned with providing accurate responses as a result of distinct environmental or motivational influences. Despite the anonymity of the survey, it is possible that respondents selected "agree" due to the assumption that the survey results would implicate them negatively, and advisors responded with bias against the idea of revealing unfavorable findings. Ultimately, this designed method was found to be an unreliable measure of behavior and performance qualities for this study.

Implications of Findings

The aim of this study was to evaluate the quality of academic advising practices and, if necessary, enhance those practices to increase distance learners' engagement, academic progress, and completion. Although the results in section three of this study deviated from the researcher’s expectations, several implications were drawn from the data findings of section two, which indicates a need for improvement in certain areas of advising distance learners.

According to the data revealed in section two of the survey, 57.14% reported that academic advising appointments are not mandatory for distance learners. Mondo (2021) concluded that 83% of higher education institutions require mandatory academic advising appointments for distance leaners and found the requirement to be effective for academic success and completion. Furthermore, Dhawan (2020) proposed that required advising appointments at least twice each semester helps distance learners feel connected with a trusted advocate and encourages advisors to create relationships with their advisees beyond basic standards.

Secondly, data finding divulged that many advisors are assigned to large student caseloads, which is a concern because advisors cannot effectively advise students due to lack of time. According to a study by Tyton Partners (2021), there is a negative correlation between large student caseloads and effective academic advising. As a result, implementing academic advising community teams is suggested as a potential solution. Higher education institutions should employ advising teams comprised of faculty members, student affairs staff, and other administrators who have direct contact with students to collaborate with academic advisors to effectively address students' academic advising needs (Jackson, 2022). This method also has the additional benefit of removing the sense of isolation that is common among distance leaners.

Lastly, advisors reported that the primary tools used to advise distance leaners are phone and video conferencing. This data implied that there may be a need for improved technology. While the existing technology may be useful to advise distance learners, the implementation of an E-advising tool is more effective for facilitating interaction and connections between students and advisors (Arguello & Mendez, 2019). The E-advising software can also be used as a direct resource for scheduling advising appointments, completing academic plans, sharing notes and updates with students and professors, creating early warning outreach campaigns, administering student orientation, and supporting advisor workflows for each student. The aforementioned implications hold great importance in the realm of academic advising, as they facilitate distance learners' timely progression through their degree programs, offer a non-intimidating approach to enhancing advising efforts by fostering a sense of community on campus, and contribute significantly to student retention.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this research approach. First, despite having academic advisors who supported the pilot the survey, one of the limitations of this study was the chosen research design. This instrument asked advisors to evaluate their performance and advising approaches with distance learners through the use of personality styled questions. Although the validity of personality tests is primarily accurate, results are skewed inaccurate when participants answer questions the way they think the researcher would want them to, or just completely not pay attention to the questions when answering.

The second limitation was based on the researcher's failure to ensure all survey questions were marked as required. Because the researcher did not ensure the required feature was enabled for all questions, four respondents stopped providing answering midway through the survey, which did not capture the full depiction of 31 academic advisors. Additionally, the sample size findings were limited to the perceptions of just one institution and only 28 advisors.

Lastly, the timing of the study interfered with possible responses. During the time the survey was administered, advisors were in a peak period. Peak periods are times of a semester when students are transitioning and advisors are inundated with a high volume of student demands and are frantically helping students register for the upcoming term, verify student eligibility to participate in commencement, conferring degrees, and answering non-stop student emails and calls.

Future Research Directions

The results of careless respondents were reflected in the survey data, resulting in ambiguous data analysis. To enhance the efficacy of future research, it is recommended that the researcher devise a strategy for identifying and screening inconsistent responses while also implementing measures to ensure data quality to avoid careless responses, if possible.

Secondly, considering many of the participants had no prior knowledge of advising distance leaners prior to COVID-19, a time before students had the option to complete courses exclusively online, future research should consider what impact to distance leaners' retention rates is made if academic advisors are mandated to complete 15 hours of job-sponsored professional development related to academic advising in general, but a primary concentration in distance advising each fall and spring semester. The professional development can encompass trainings, workshops, institutes, webinars, conferences, or expert guess speakers.

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Appendix A

Participant Letter for Anonymous Survey

Participant Letter for Anonymous Survey
NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled
Improving the Quality of Academic Advisors' Practices to Aid Distance Learner's Retention.

Who is doing this research study?

This person completing this study is Kenyeta R. Pino with the Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. They will be helped by Dissertation Chair, Dr. Sherilyn Poole.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are an academic advisor, at least 18 years of age, and currently advise distance learners.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to measure the effectiveness of academic advisors' current practices and determine if the services provided to distance learners support their retention and academic success.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

You will be taking a one-time, anonymous survey. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You can decide not to participate in this research and it will not be held against you. You can exit the survey at any time.

Will it cost me anything? Will I get paid for being in the study?

There is no cost for participation in this study. Participation is voluntary and no payment will be provided.

How will you keep my information private?

Your responses are anonymous. Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law. No personal information will be collected other than basic demographic descriptors (age, race,

gender). The online survey system will not save IP addresses. All data is password-protected and encrypted. Survey data will be available to the researcher, chair of the research committee, the Institutional Review Board, and any granting agencies (if applicable). All confidential data will be kept securely within the password protected online survey system and computer. Access to the online survey system is only permitted through secure connectivity and requires multi-factor authentication. All data will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by completely deleting all information obtained during the survey. Additionally, the researcher will use a secure deletion software installation that will overwrite data one or more times on the computer.

Who can I talk to about the study?

If you have questions, you can contact Kenyeta Pino or Sherilyn Poole during normal work hours.

If you have questions about the study but want to talk to someone else who is not a part of the study, you can call the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (954) 262-5369 or toll free at 1-866-499-0790 or email at IRB@nova.edu.

Do you understand and do you want to be in the study?

If you have read the above information and voluntarily wish to participate in this research study, please access the survey by clicking the provided link.
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/V7Z5HGK

Appendix B

Academic Advisor Self-Assessment Survey

Section I – Participant Demographics

Read each question and select the answer that best describes you.

* 2. What is your gender?

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Decline to respond

* 3. What is your ethnicity?

- ◯ Black or African American
- ◯ White or Caucasian
- ◯ Hispanic or Latino
- ◯ Asian or Asian American
- ◯ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ◯ Decline to respond

* 4. Define your age group?

- ◯ 25-34
- ◯ 35-44
- ◯ 45-54
- ◯ 55-64
- ◯ 65+

Section II - Advising Services

Read each question and select the answer(s) that best describe your services.

* 5. Are you a full-time or part-time advisor?

- ◯ Full-time
- ◯ Part-time

* 6. How long have you been an academic advisor?

- ◯ 1 to 4 years
- ◯ 5 to 9 years
- ◯ 10 to 14 years
- ◯ 15 to 19 years
- ◯ 20+ years

* 7. How many distance learners do you have in your student caseload?

- ◯ Fewer than 10 students
- ◯ 10-19 students
- ◯ 20-29 students
- ◯ 30-39 students
- ◯ 40-49 students
- ◯ 50+ students

* 8. Which student classification do you advise? Select all that apply.

- [ ] Freshman (first year)
- [ ] Sophomore (second year)
- [ ] Junior (third year)
- [ ] Senior (fourth year)
- [ ] Transfer
- [ ] Transient (non-degree seeking)

* 9. What academic program do you advise for? Select all that apply.

- [ ] Arts, Humanities, Communication & Design
- [ ] Business
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Health Science
- [ ] Public Safety
- [ ] Science, Technology, Engineering & Math
- [ ] Social Behavioral Sciences & Human Services
- [ ] Industry, Manufacturing, Construction & Transportation

* 10. Are academic advising appointments mandatory for distance learners?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

* 11. If academic advising appointments are mandatory for distance learners, how often during a semester do you require your distance learners to meet with you?

- ◯ None
- ◯ One
- ◯ Two
- ◯ Three
- ◯ Four or more

* 12. What type of technology is primarily used when communicating with distance learners?

- ◯ Phone
- ◯ Video Conferencing
- ◯ Email
- ◯ Online Text Messaging

* 13. How do you assess your effectiveness as an academic advisor?

- ◯ Students' GPA
- ◯ Students' Persistence
- ◯ Students' Test Scores
- ◯ Students' Graduation
- ◯ All of the above

Part III - Academic Advising Approach

Decide which answer most accurately describes the academic advising approach you exemplify for each statement.

* 14. I educate my distance learners on how to build relevant course schedules based on their programs of interest and individual needs.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 15. I tell my distance learners what academic goals they need to meet during the semester to improve their grades.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 16. To be an effective facilitator of student learning and success, I purposely look for potential risk behaviors such as lack of motivation, procrastination, insecurity, and lack of self-discipline to determine the best advising strategies for support.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 17. I recommend extracurricular activities to my distance learners to help propel their pursuits.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 18. I consistently inform my distance learners of their academic performance by reviewing their attendance and grades as well as helping overcome challenges if they are performing below academic standards.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

* 19. Students are unfamiliar with planning courses, so I decide the appropriate academic course schedules for my distance learners based on their programs of interest and individual needs.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

* 20. To be an effective facilitator of student learning and success, I purposely look for potential risk behaviors such as lack of motivation, procrastination, and lack of self-discipline to consider the best advising strategies.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

* 21. I find it difficult to consider what type of extracurricular activities my distance learners may be interested in, so I let them decide.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

* 22. I inform my distance learners of their academic performance by sending notices.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

* 23. If my distance learners exhibit potential risk behaviors, I recommend completing their program at a later date when they develop the characteristics necessary to succeed.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 24. Together, my distance learners and I plan and develop realistic and measurable semester goals to improve their academic performance.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 25. I regularly establish open communication with professors across academic departments as a strategic early warning practice to determine a point of intervention/prevention.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 26. Despite different time zones, I expect my distance learners to properly set an advising appointment to communicate with me.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 27. I personalize communication with my distance learners to get to know them individually, which helps me deliver support that fits their unique needs.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 28. I explain to my distance learners what other campus resources are available to them.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 29. I am happy to provide intervention/prevention with my distance learners when they ask and are ready to discuss their concerns.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 30. When necessary, I offer my distance learners tips to better manage their time and help them study more effectively.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 31. When communicating with my distance learners, I focus solely on academic subjects to prevent unnecessary and distracting topics.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 32. Due to different time zones, I provide my distance learners with a variety of channels to access me such as online text messaging, video conferencing, email, and phone.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

* 33. I tell my distance learners to consider time management and study skills when their grades are below grade level.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree