THE INFLUENCE OF ADVISOR-ADVISEE RELATIONAL FIT ON THE COLLEGE ACADEMIC ADVISING EXPERIENCE: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

A doctoral thesis presented
by
Elizabeth M. Higgins
to
The School of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in the field of
Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
February 2015
Abstract

Academic advising is viewed as an important aspect of a successful college experience, yet it is difficult to link the relational fit of a dyadic pair to the academic advising experience of students and their advisors. The purpose of this study was to explore how college students and advisors within academic advising relationships perceive their relational fit and how the fit influences the college academic advising experience. Ten faculty-student advising pairs participated in this study. The researcher utilized a collective case study approach to examine the relational nature of bounded pairs in the advising context. Peplau’s interpersonal relations theory provided the lens to explore the scaffolding of relational development within a professional practice. The participants revealed that the connectedness between the advising pair was influenced by the development of the relationship over time. The participants perceived that the authenticity of the faculty advisor created the foundation for relational growth and an increase in connectedness between the pair. In addition, the independence of the student partner is the culminating outcome of the relational learning experience. The findings are relevant for institutional leaders, advising practitioners, students, and individuals who study the field of academic advising. Additional research is needed to explore the influence institutional and student type has on the development of relational fit of bounded advising pairs in the academic advising context.

Keywords: academic advising, advising relationship, advising pairs, relational fit, connectedness
Acknowledgements

It is a true blessing to be surrounded by such amazing people. I want to especially thank and acknowledge my husband Dan. Your unwavering support was the primary ingredient to my successful learning process. This journey would not have been a reality without your patience, understanding, and belief in me. Dan I am grateful we share a life filled with love and laughter.

I want to thank my father, Rosaire Dostie, who encouraged me during every phone call. Thank you for all of your prayers and being an example of strength. I also want to thank my sister Mary Ann for keeping me grounded in family and giving me sisterly advice. Your words of wisdom through the lens of reality always put me back on track. I am grateful to Suzie, Robin, and Betsy who were my constant cheerleaders, friends, and sounding boards throughout this process. Thank you to all of my friends and family members who have queried and supported my progress while being patient with my absence.

Many thanks to my work family for your support and encouragement. You always found time to show your interest and offer kind words that kept me energized. I especially want to thank Dr. Susan McWilliams who coached me through the transition of becoming scholar. A great deal of appreciation goes to Dr. Susan Campbell, my mentor, friend, and external reader. Throughout the thirty years we have known each other you have always set high expectations that were balanced by a healthy dose of support. Thank you for your confidence in me. You have positively influenced both my personal and professional life.

I am extremely grateful to my advisor, Dr. Kimberly Nolan. As my professor for my first course you set the high standard that jolted me into being the committed scholar-practitioner I am today. You are an outstanding advisor who develops the relational fit through authenticity, trust, high expectations, and insightful conversation. I am deeply appreciative of your guidance and professional insight. Dr. Joseph McNabb, thank you for providing the expert feedback that
expanded my thinking. I was very fortunate to have such an amazing committee. Each of you will always be held in high regard.

Finally, I would like to share my gratitude to my mother, Juliet Dostie, and aunt, Sister Cecilia Dostie. Although they have passed on years ago their influence on my fortitude, endurance, and understanding of the true meaning of life and learning is forever ingrained in my soul. Thank you for sharing your love and sagesness.
# Table of Contents

**Chapter One: The Research Problem**

- Statement of the Problem ......................................................... 8
- Significance of the Problem ..................................................... 9
- Research Questions .............................................................. 12
- Summary and Organization of the Study .................................. 12
- Peplau’s Interpersonal Relations Theory ................................... 13

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

- Academic Advising ............................................................... 22
- Relational Fit ............................................................................ 29
- Persistence and Success ......................................................... 40
- Summary ................................................................................. 44

**Chapter Three: Methodology**

- Research Design ....................................................................... 47
- Research Tradition .................................................................... 47
- Site and Participants ................................................................... 49
- Recruitment and Access .......................................................... 51
- Data Collection ......................................................................... 52
- Data Storage ............................................................................. 54
- Data Analysis ........................................................................... 54
- Validity and Credibility ............................................................ 58
- Protection of Human Subjects .................................................. 61
- Conclusion ............................................................................... 62

**Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis**

- Institutional Documentation ................................................... 63
- Survey Reports ......................................................................... 64
- Advising Network ..................................................................... 65
- NEASC Accreditation Self Study ............................................. 67
- University Catalog .................................................................... 68
- Promotion and Tenure ............................................................ 69
- Conclusion ............................................................................... 70
- Interviews ............................................................................... 72
- Connection ............................................................................... 73
- Ease and Likability .................................................................... 74
- Comfort .................................................................................... 78
- Authenticity ............................................................................. 80
- Supportive Actions ................................................................. 83
- Availability and Responsiveness ............................................. 84
- Confidence in Each Other ....................................................... 87
- Learning Opportunities ........................................................... 90
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice</th>
<th>109</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Actions</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Development</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Practice</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References</th>
<th>135</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A – Faculty Recruitment Email</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B – Student Recruitment Email</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C – Informed Consent</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D – Interview Protocol</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E – Confidentiality Agreement</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One: The Research Problem

Academic advising is an area of higher education that is being highlighted for its connection to the retention and persistence of students. Light (2001) states that good advising is an underestimated characteristic of a student’s success in college. The relationship between an advisor and student is the most critical component of the academic advising experience (Crookston, 1972). Students are often assigned an advisor based on available capacity of the advisor rather than the appropriate fit for developing an advising relationship. Advisor assignments based on student major, program, and advisor capacity leave the development of the advising relationship to happenstance. Advisors selected without utilizing a method to identify the suitability of the advisor-advisee match is a concern (Beasley-Fielstein, 1986).

Statement of the Problem

The practice of assigning students to advisors based on academic major, advisor capacity, and specific programs puts little emphasis on whether the two individuals will be able to develop a strong working relationship. Institutions focus energy on ensuring that their students have access to academic advisors and resources. At some institutions, students utilize a centralized advising center and meet with whoever is available while others assign an advisor to each student (Nutt, 2000). Issues such as untimely advisor assignments, lack of advisor availability, uneven expectations, limited knowledge, and unfriendliness are common struggles (Allen & Smith, 2008; Barbuto, Story, Fritz, & Schinstock, 2011).

It is useful to apply a number of perspectives to the academic advising relationship within the context of higher education. Fit, trust, retention, engaged learning, partnerships, and teaching are all important factors to understanding the advising relationship. Research shows that appropriate pairing of individuals has been found to be an important element for developing
relationships and for success in mentoring (Nick, Delahoyde, Del Prato, Mitchell, Ortiz, Ottley, Young, Cannon, Lasater, Reising, & Siktberg, 2012). Although not every advising relationship has a mentoring component, characteristics of mentoring are found within advising relationships. One primary characteristic that promotes relationship effectiveness in both mentoring and advising is the compatibility of paired individuals. Other factors such as trust begin to influence the relationship as it develops. Allen and Smith (2008) recommend that the advising relationship be built on a foundation of trust where students depend on the advisor to accept them for who they are, give accurate information, and provide learning opportunities to develop skills and take responsibility for their own educational experiences.

Light’s (2001) research indicates the importance of good academic advising and the powerful connection between a successful college experience and a student’s interaction with an advisor. Tinto (2007) makes it clear that one of the keys to the retention puzzle is the focus on engaged learning, the most recent paradigm in the field of academic advising. The academic advising relationship is a critical element in engaging in the student learning experience and the student progression to graduation (Campbell & Nutt, 2008). Advisor-advisee relational fit is an under-explored aspect within the academic advising, engagement, and retention literature. Further investigation is warranted to fill this gap in the literature pertaining to the nature of the advisor-advisee relationship (Harrison, 2009). Therefore the problem under investigation was the insufficient literature on relational fit within the academic advising context.

Significance of the Problem

Graduation rates have become the core indicators of success in higher education (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, 2012). In a 30 year summary of college completion trends, it was found that approximate 30% of new students do not return for a second year of study and less than 50%
graduate within five years of starting at 4-year public colleges (ACT, 2013). It is predicted that by 2018 a post-secondary education will be a requirement of 63% of the available jobs (Carneval, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). While society is placing a higher emphasis on the necessity of a college degree for job attainment, higher education is also putting substantial effort into solving the retention and persistence puzzle.

The literature shows that good advising positively influences student retention (Bean & Kuh, 1984; Pascarella, 1980). Academic advising is noted as one of the three main contributors to student retention (ACT, 2010). Tinto (1993) relates retention and graduation to early student engagement. The advisor plays the role of teacher in the engaged learning paradigm of academic advising (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Lowenstein, 2009). Educational relationships, like those developed through academic advising, assist students in the developmental process of the learning paradigm through self-reflection, challenging experiences, and continuous support (Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009; Simmons, 2008). Allen and Smith (2008) posit that “good academic advising may very well be the key to success for many students” (p. 409). The advising relationship is an opportunity to positively influence persistence to graduation by creating a supportive environment and personal link to the institution (Nutt, 2000; Metzner, 1989). The connection that can be created through the advising relationship can assist in integrating a student into the institutional environment, increasing the academic and social commitment to remain in school (Bean & Kuh, 1984; Bean, 1985; Tucker, 1999).

The influence that a strong advising relationship has on retention, persistence to graduation, and personal development could assist the nation in achieving Goal 2025. Applegate (2012) outlines the role academic advising can play in achieving the Lumina Foundation’s Goal 2025 that is focused on increasing the college graduation attainment in the United States from
40% to 60%. To attain this goal an additional 278,000 students must graduate with a college degree each year. Implementing a collaborative student persistence effort that includes a focus on academic advising can assist institutions in increasing retention (Metzner, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Academic advising’s role in accomplishing Goal 2025 is outlined as creating advocacy, partnerships, pathways, and conversations focused on breaking down barriers; in developing support networks; and in creating data-driven change focused on student needs and goals (Applegate, 2012). Developing compatible advising partnerships focused on learning, trust, personal development, and educational goals will assist in accomplishing Goal 2025. Early engagement within the advising process through a good advisor-advisee fit is a first step in this process.

The connectedness an advisor and advisee experience defines their advisor-advisee fit. The examination of advisor-advisee relational fit assists in developing an understanding of what creates a compatible advising partnership, highlights the factors that contribute to relational fit, and clarifies how the fit influences the student and advisor experience. The contributing relational factors of advisor-advisee fit inform the development of advising relationships and the practice of academic advising. Exploring advisor-advisee fit in the academic advising relationship reveals whether fit matters when building the relationship and if fit is the component that promotes a strong, successful advising relationship.

This research gives a voice to the dyadic advising pairs who have developed relational fit through a cumulating advising experience. An increase in knowledge of the advising relationship informs advising practitioners on the factors that influence the relational connectedness throughout the development of the advising relationship. Employing an advising
approach that promotes relational fit potentially builds stronger relationships while decreasing advising complaints and requests for assignment changes. A better understanding of fit informs the practice of advising by providing advisors and students clear expectations of the advising relationship and overall experience (Dillon & Fisher, 2000). Institutional leaders, advising coordinators, advisors, students, and individuals who study the field of academic advising can benefit from this research. The findings inform advisor professional development, the practice of advising, leadership decision-making, and the student and advisor experience.

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided the research on advisor-advisee fit within the academic advising relationship:

How does the relational fit within the academic advising construct influence the student and advisor experience at a 4-year public university?

What perceptions do college students and their academic advisors have regarding their connectedness?

How do college students and their academic advisors describe their relational fit?

**Summary and Organization of the Study**

This thesis is organized according to the steps taken to explore the advisor-advisee relational fit within the context of academic advising in higher education. Chapter one concludes with a discussion of Peplau’s interpersonal relations theory as the theoretical framework guiding this study. Chapter two contains a review of the literature related to the components, approaches, and relational aspects of academic advising and the role of advising in college student persistence and success. The current state of the research and deficiencies in the literature are also included in chapter two. Chapter three includes a description of the research methodology used to investigate the problem, as well as information about the participants, data collection and analysis methods, and measures used
to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings. In addition, chapter three contains the steps taken to protect the study participants. Chapter four includes a detailed analysis of the data collected from the participant interviews, observations, and institutional data. A discussion of findings as situated within the extant literature and informed by Peplau’s interpersonal relations theory is included in chapter five. In conclusion, chapter five provides recommendations for practice and implications for future research that are based on the research findings.

**Peplau’s Interpersonal Relations Theory**

Professionals within the academic advising and nursing professions assist individuals through a relational process. Each profession has experienced a paradigm shift over the last fifty years that has placed primary focus on the relationship between individuals. Advising has shifted from its initial prescriptive approach to the most recent paradigm centered upon teaching and learning (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Lowenstein, 2009). The nursing profession has also changed from an act of execution of physician directives to one that completely focuses on the wellbeing of the patient (Gastmans, 1998). An emphasis on the responsibility for the relational nature within the professional practice of advising and nursing has grown because of these significant paradigm changes. The shift in the profession, science, and practice of nursing was influenced by Hildegard Peplau’s development of the interpersonal relations theory.

Peplau’s interpersonal relations paradigm is a mid-range theory that has been used in the field of nursing to inform and transform the nurse-patient relationship (Haber, 2000). Commonly used in nursing, this medical theory focuses on interpersonal relations within a professional practice making it an appropriate lens for investigating the professional practice of academic advising. Interpersonal relations theory assists in understanding what happens during a relationship within a helping profession as well as the meaning-making gained through experiential learning (Gastmans, 1998; Haber, 2000; Peplau, 1991/1952).
Peplau (1991/1952) defines the professional practice of helping and caring as an educative instrument that promotes personal growth through an interpersonal process that is both significant and therapeutic. Purposeful interactions are accentuated as a necessity within the interpersonal process (Senn, 2013). The interpersonal process within a professional practice is viewed in four relational phases: orientation, identification, exploitation, and resolution (See figure 1). Throughout these phases the emphasis is on the relations, interactions, connections, and linkages between two or more people (Peplau, 1992; Senn, 2013).

![Four Phases of Peplau's Interpersonal Relations Theory](image)

Interpersonal relations theory is used to explore the relational encounters found within academic advising. Peplau (1991/1952) bounds the interpersonal relationship by time. Advisors are often the first and last person a student sees as they enter and exit higher education (Jordan, 2000). At the time of entry, orientation to the relationship and institution is critical for setting the stage for a growth oriented relationship (Simpson, 1991). During the orientation phase the advisor orients the student to the institution and the relationship while the student assesses the reliability, integrity, and authenticity of the advisor.
The orientation phase is a listening and data gathering phase where interest in individual concerns and receptivity of individual situations are highlighted. This phase focuses on two strangers coming together and developing a foundation for their relationship (Simpson, 1991). Peplau (1991, 1997) acknowledges the individual’s tension, anxiety, and stress due to a new environment and unfamiliar people, routines, and vocabulary. During the orientation phase in the practice of advising students view the advisor through a lens of past experiences. Trust, reliability, integrity, and authenticity are assessed by the student. Both advisor and student are full participants in the professional, non-social collaboration that includes questioning, observing, and creating awareness. The advisor is in an educator and resource person as the student realizes the need for knowledge (Marchese, 2006). Expectations and goal development begin during this phase.

Throughout the identification and exploitation phases individuals within the interpersonal relationship clarify their roles, develop and revisit educational and professional goals, focus on service usage, solidify trust, and begin the shift to independence (Peplau, 1991/1952). The identification phase in advising begins the shift from student dependence on the advisor to dependence on self. There is a recognition and acceptance for the need of help on the part of the student. The advisor’s role of educator continues through a constructive learning environment where the student focuses on situational cues and independently responds to them (Peplau, 1991/1952). The student increasingly feels a sense of belonging within the process of dealing with the issues, creating readiness for independence (Marchese, 2006; Peplau, 1991/1952). The advisor plays a reassuring role while clarifying expectations (McCamant, 2006). Goals continue to be developed and revisited.
During the exploitation phase the interpersonal relationship is grounded in trust and the full utilization of available services. The exploitation phase overlaps between the previous phase of identification and the final phase of resolution. The exploitation phase leans on the experiences within the prior stages while the future of self is explored (Peplau, 1991/1952). The struggle between being dependent and independent continues while the individuals involved work together in preparation for separation in the final stage.

Peplau’s (1991/1952) resolution phase helps to illuminate autonomy, development of new goals, learning experiences, and achievements at the time of departure from the relationship. The final phase of resolution, also referred to as termination, is a time of separation. This phase is dependent on the level of individual growth and development from the previous phases (Peplau, 1991/1952; Simpson, 1991). Within an advising relationship, the student takes full responsibility and is able to be independent. Energy is also focused on developing and achieving new goals. The resolution phase is the culmination of the learning experience made possible by goal-directed work (Peplau, 1991/1952).

Simpson (1991) describes the interpersonal relationship as a learning experience. Each individual involved can learn and benefit from the interaction within the relationship. Peplau (1997) posits that the knowledge the professionals have regarding their practice, along with the information about the individual with whom they are working with, creates a learning event. Learning is created through the interaction and professional application of sharing knowledge throughout the continuum of the relationship (Peplau, 1997). Throughout the continuum, the role of the professional practitioner can change.
Practitioner Roles

The consideration of roles is essential in an interpersonal relationship to ensure individual needs are met (Peplau, 1991). Interpersonal relations theory outlines six possible roles of the practitioner that include stranger, resource person, leader, counselor, surrogate, and teacher (Peplau, 1991/1952; Simpson, 1991). Each role has the overarching approach of embracing the person as an individual to promote the growth of the relationship and a cooperative working alliance (Simpson, 1991).

Peplau (1991/1952) defines individuals at the beginning of the interpersonal relationship as strangers: individuals who are not acquainted with one another. The professional practitioner takes on the role of stranger and is responsible for accepting the relational partner for who they are and relating to the individual as a person who is emotionally able (Peplau, 1991/1952). Within this role it is important that the practitioner be mindful not to stereotype individuals to ensure that an environment for good relationship building is cultivated (Simpson, 1991).

A relationship that promotes personal growth must balance providing information with guiding the reflective meaning-making opportunities (Baxter Magolda, 2004). The role of resource person within an interpersonal relationship requires providing information and answers to particular questions while creating opportunities for learning (Peplau, 1991/1952). Making professional judgments regarding a balance between information and opportunities for learning is critical to ensure that a healthy amount of stress is maintained (Simpson, 1991). The resource role also allows for individuals to prepare for the future.

Preparing to meet future challenges is influenced and facilitated by leadership (Yukl, 2010). Peplau (1991/1952) promotes democratic leadership within an interpersonal relationship. Democratic leadership encourages the active involvement of both individuals in working on the
current state as well as designing a plan for attaining future goals. Although democratic leadership is preferred, other styles of leadership can also affect the quality of the role and relationship (Simpson, 1991). For example, autocratic leadership will be influenced by policies and procedures while laissez-faire leadership will decrease support. The ability for the professional to assess the situation and needs is imperative to supporting useful learning opportunities (Peplau, 1991/1952).

Supporting students in becoming more aware of themselves is a skill found in the role of the counselor within interpersonal relationships (Simpson, 1991). Trust becomes an important element in developing a relationship where awareness and acceptance of self and meaning-making are integral in moving individuals toward goal attainment (Peplau, 1991/1952; Simpson, 1991). The soft skills of listening, receptive body language, and appropriate questioning can assist in the building of rapport and the development of trust (Thornhill & Yoder, 2010). Barnett, Roach, and Smith (2006) suggest the development of soft skills creates a more effective relational environment focused on goal attainment.

Individuals interacting with a professional practitioner will at times use their relational partner as a surrogate. In the surrogate role the professional is related to as if they were a person from a previous relationship such as a mother, sibling, or authority figure (Simpson, 1991). Feelings of the past are reactivated due to the current situation availing the professional the opportunity to help their relational partner to become aware and work through the issue (Peplau, 1991/1952). It is important to note that the professional partners can choose whether to react to the surrogate roles being presented. However, the practitioner can assist in the development of the individual while in this surrogate role (Simpson, 1991). The surrogate role allows for an opportunity for the relational partner to provide a learning opportunity.
Understanding of self and learning are the primary areas of focus within academic advising when viewed through Peplau’s interpersonal relations theory. Simpson (1991) highlights the teaching role as an opportunity to create learning through discussion focused on assessment and agreement of goals. Senn (2013) posits that purposeful interactions within an interpersonal relationship support the identification of goals by focusing on an understanding of behavior as well as individual needs, skills, and strengths.

A learning perspective allows the professional process of advising to assist the student in developing awareness and meaning through a growth oriented interaction. The advising process promotes student engagement by being a constant connection to information, learning opportunities, and personal investigation of goals, strengths, and interests (Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, Hawthorne, 2013). The collaborative working alliance focused on common goals promotes learning and the development of the student (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001). Through the relational interactions with a professional, students are experiencing a transformational learning process of self.

Academic advising is rooted in practice and grounded in the relationship between the advisor and student requiring active participation of each individual. The advising interaction is focused on an active dialog between two individuals in order to promote an engaged partnership (Johnson & Morgan, 2005; Lowenstein, 2009). Peplau (1991/1952) stresses the importance of full participation of the active partners in an interpersonal relationship. Interpersonal relations theory creates a lens to examine the active engagement of the academic advising relationship from the beginning to the end of the connection.
Relational Elements

The elements of trust, communication, and connectedness are found in academic advising relationships. All of these elements begin their development in the orientation phase and are carried throughout the interpersonal process while preparing to exit during the resolution phase. Trust is the foundation that the academic advising relationship is built upon (Allen & Smith, 2008). Peplau (1991/1952) also found trust to be essential in an interpersonal relationship. As the cooperative working alliance develops and the personal inner experiences are explored, the development of trust creates a bond between the two individuals (Bordin, 1979, 1983). Trust within a relationship provides an avenue for the students to be accepted and respected for who they are, be given accurate information, and be provided learning opportunities to develop skills and understanding (Allen & Smith, 2008; Marchese, 2006; Peplau, 1997).

Communication is another important element found within an interpersonal relationship. The professional practice of advising involves the use of questioning, listening, and explaining to encourage ongoing engaged conversation. Communication allows for each relational partner to gather information that informs and forms their relationship. Communication is a key interactive component highlighted as the core of an interpersonal profession (Harrison, 2009; Gastmans, 1998).

Peplau (1997) stresses the importance of connectedness within an interpersonal relationship to support ongoing meaningful and effective interactions that promote the holistic understanding of the individual. Within the advising context, connectedness between individuals can positively influence student success because advisors understand the needs of the students, enjoy relating to them, and provide students with informed responses (Dillon & Fisher, 2000; Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011). Connectedness within the advising relationship
is viewed as the advisor-advisee relational fit. Peplau’s interpersonal relations theory draws from the interactions and examines how the individuals fit together because of their patterns of behavior. The utilization of this theory informs the relational fit between the advisor and the student that he/she advises.

Viewing academic advising relational fit through Peplau’s interpersonal relations theory in nursing informed the problem of practice and assisted in answering the research questions. Other theories within the advising literature examine portions of the academic advising experience as it relates to retention, human development, mentoring, leadership, and trust (Allen & Smith, 2008; Barbuto, et al., 2011; Fielstein, 1987; Young-Jones, et al., 2013). These theories have informed the advising practice while leaving a gap in the examination of relational fit. Although Peplau’s interpersonal relations theory is not an exact match within the researched profession, it does take into consideration the relationship through professional practice, the continuum of the relationship, and the notion of relational fit.

The interactions and growth process viewed through Peplau’s interpersonal relations theory informed the exploration of the academic advising relationship throughout its orientation, identification, exploitation, and resolution stages. The changing roles of the advising professional assist in the growth of the student within a relationship focused on learning (Simpson, 1991). The effect the relationship has on the student’s and advisor’s academic advising experience, the contributing factors of relational fit, and whether relational fit matters are explored using Peplau’s theory as a lens.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the body of literature relevant to academic advising, the relational nature of academic advising, and academic advising’s
significance to the college student experience. This literature review begins with an introduction to academic advising and its paradigm shifts from the prescriptive to developmental approach, followed by the teaching and learning approach. Because academic advising is based on the relationship, literature regarding its relational nature is explained. Key components include the development of relational skills, interpersonal communication, trust within relationships, attitudinal and experiential elements, and alliances within working relationships. The author then focuses on the role of academic advising in student persistence and success. This doctoral thesis focuses on how the relational fit within the academic advising construct influences the college student and advisor experience in hopes of increasing awareness of its importance to student success.

**Academic Advising**

Academic advising is a relational aspect of higher education where a student and advisor have the opportunity to interact and focus on student development and learning (Lowenstein, 2009). The academic advising relationship is a vital component of a student’s success (Crookston, 1972; Frost, 1991). Jordan (2000) acknowledges advisors as life strategists who assist students in developing critical thinking, learning, and life management skills while helping them make informed realistic decisions and identify goals. Academic advising is focused on student growth and ongoing interaction between the student and advisor (Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982; Frost, 1991). Although noted for its important role in the student’s college experience, academic advising has developed within higher education over time (Frost, 2000).

The need for advising was initiated when institutions of higher education created the course elective system in the 1870s (Kuhn, 2008; Frost, 2000). Individuals began to provide guidance to assist students in choosing particular courses and pathways through the curriculum.
The focus of student support and services grew along with the expansion of higher education (Jordan, 2000). The 1970s brought much attention to academic advising as individuals involved in the profession began to compare and investigate their work (Beatty, 1991; Kuhn, 2008). Throughout its development, academic advising has been classified as having one of three approaches: prescriptive, developmental, or teaching and learning.

**Prescriptive**

Until the 1970s academic advising was primarily viewed as a prescriptive activity of assisting students in course choice and policy compliance (Frost, 2000; Lowenstein, 2009). Through a prescriptive approach, advisors act as the authority, telling students what to do and expecting them to follow-through on the advice given (Smith, 2002). The advisor rather than the student has the ultimate responsibility and authority in the prescriptive advising process (Teasley & Buchanan, 2013). A prescriptive advising approach focuses on providing one-directional information coming from the advisor to the student (Lowenstein, 2009).

Although the literature states that information and directions are important functions for student success, they are only one aspect of student advisement (Creamer, 1980; Fielstein, 1987; Lowenstein, 2009; Teasley & Buchanan, 2013). Harrison’s (2009) quantitative study focused on faculty perspectives of advising reveals that knowledge of the curriculum, institutional processes, and resources is the most frequently reported characteristic of effective faculty advisors. Although the sample size is small, the study complements the quantitative research of Barbuto, et al. (2011), that studied transformational advising. The responses from 407 college students revealed a concern that advisors were offering answers rather than assisting students in developing problem solving skills. These two studies indicate that advisor informational competency and the sharing of knowledge rather than assisting students in working through
situations is of greatest importance. The advising approach that is focused on the sharing of information and knowledge with students promotes the prescriptive model rather than the developmental approach to advising.

**Developmental**

Academic advising was embraced as a prescriptive activity until Crookston’s (1972) seminal article launched a significant paradigm shift toward developmental advising. Although the article was first to describe advising as a teaching and learning function, its primary focus was the developmental approach. Crookston (1972) highlighted the concept of developmental advising stating that it “is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student’s rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluating skills” (p.78). Lowenstein (2009) asserts that Crookston (1972) shifted the one-directional advising dialog to a two-directional interaction that promotes active involvement of both parties. O’Banion (1972) complements Crookston’s (1972) developmental advising introduction by noting the purpose of academic advising as the development of the total potential of the student. By adding the developmental approach, academic advising no longer subscribed to a single prescriptive paradigm but one that is holistic in nature. Advisors working within the developmental context are concerned with supporting the student’s personal, educational, and professional growth, goals, and objectives (Frost, 1991; Jordan, 2000). In a quantitative study of 429 undergraduate students, Hale, Graham, and Johnson (2009) found that 95.5% of students have a strong preference for developmental advising. The results of this study indicate that students desire more than information from their advising experience (Hale, Graham, & Johnson, 2009).
To learn through the developmental advising process students are challenged to think critically, solve problems, and make meaning of their experiences (Lowenstein, 2009). Thus, a broader perspective of advising requires advisors to acquire knowledge on a variety of topics, enabling them to discuss and support goal setting, growth opportunities, and student learning (Creamer & Scott, 2000). Advisor utilization of both the developmental and prescriptive advising approaches can provide students specific information and advice while also assisting in examining student goals and learning experiences.

There is evidence that developmental and prescriptive advising complement each other in the college student transition process (Fielstein, 1987; Weir, Dickman, & Fuqua, 2005; Teasley & Buchanan, 2013). Advisors can invoke both approaches of academic advising while working with students. A study of 187 undergraduate college students was conducted to investigate student preferences for developmental and prescriptive advising (Weir, Dickman, & Fuqua, 2005). The findings of the study do not support the exclusive use of one approach over another. To successfully accomplish a particular advising task, Weir, Dickman, and Fuqua (2005) recommend early determination of the student’s preferred advising approach or needs.

In some instances, students will need direct information and resolutions to problems, while at other times students have a need to holistically work through an exploration or decision-making process (O’Banion, 1972). Teasley and Buchanan (2013) surveyed three separate groups of undergraduate students varying in size between 150-190 participants. Each group was asked questions regarding the prescriptive and developmental approaches of their advisors as well as advisor traits. The findings indicate a need for prescriptive and developmental approaches to advising that supports student needs for more holistic opportunities of institutional engagement and for better understanding of information and processes. The literature emphasizes the
importance of academic advisors and students sharing the responsibilities and engaging in the teaching and learning process of advising to accomplish the balance between the two approaches (Crookston, 1972; Frost, 2000; Weir, Dickman, & Fuqua, 2005).

**Teaching and Learning**

The most recent paradigm shift found in the advising literature accentuates the role of the advisor as teacher and the student as learner (Barbuto, et al., 2011; Daller, Creamer, & Creamer, 1997; Lowenstein, 2009; Ryan, 1992). Crookston (1972) introduced advising as teaching, explaining that the role of teacher consists of any interaction in the student’s experience that adds to the growth and development of the learner. Lowenstein (2009) highlights the teaching and learning paradigm by stating that “the excellent advisor plays a role with respect to a student’s entire curriculum that is analogous to the role that the excellent teacher plays with respect to the content of a single course” (p. 123). Ramos (1994) concludes that advisors are teachers who utilize their offices as classrooms to teach the curriculum of advising: the facilitation of growth. Advisors are the teachers who assist the student learners in making sense of the entire curriculum rather than a single course (Ramos, 1994).

Ryan (1992) provides a comparison of effective teachers and advisors that highlights the similarities of their knowledge, skills, and characteristics. Most notable are listening, questioning, learning, engagement, respect, genuineness, approachability, availability and the ability to evaluate, support diversity, share enthusiasm, and set goals (Appleby, 2008). The research conducted by Daller, Creamer, and Creamer (1997) supports Ryan’s (1992) teacher-advisor comparison by concluding that the main objective of the advising interaction is assisting students in becoming independent learners through education and instruction. Although not
noted within Ryan’s (1992) comparison, it is evident that both teachers and advisors lead the learning effort.

Existing evidence suggests that the advisor is the leader of the teaching and learning advising approach that formally links the educational mission with student goals (Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982). Barbuto et al., (2011) conducted research examining advising behaviors of 407 college students. Results portray the advisor as a transformational leader in the learning process. Advisors who are transformational are focused on the student as an individual, encourage independent thinking, motivate through inspiration, and act as role models for students (Barbuto et al., 2011). Academic advising as teaching and learning provides students with the opportunity to gain an understanding of the environment, themselves, others, and their entire curriculum through a transformational developmental process (Lowenstein, 2009).

Researchers and educators have emphasized the student’s role in the teaching and learning paradigm of advising (Hester, 2008; Jordan, 2000; Lowenstein, 2009). Learning within the advising context is the construction of meaning-making, skill identification and development, critical thinking, sequences of experiences, learning strategies, and the scaffolding of knowledge and transferable skills (Lowenstein, 2009). As students engage in thinking and exploring their course of study, as well as current and future educational and career goals, they are involved in the research aspect of learning (Hester, 2008). During the learning process of advising, students can build their learning confidence through the exploration of beliefs and abilities that will positively affect their success (Jordan, 2000). To assist students in the learning process advisors need to understand how to encourage student development and learning through advising.
Reflective Conversations

The available research on learning partnerships encourages reflective conversations in the academic advising process. Baxter Magolda’s (2008) longitudinal study of self-authorship in young adults ages 18 to 39 provides a 21-year examination of 30 student experiences. The research findings support that self-authorship built through reflective conversations strengthens relationships and connections with others. In addition, a reflective approach to academic advising can assist students in developing their problem-solving skills and meaning-making of their current state.

A study completed by Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) further investigated reflective conversations and their influence on the development of students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 senior college students to investigate the outcomes of reflective conversations through learning partnerships. Results highlighted the developmental changes of college students that are influenced through external pressures, intrapersonal tensions, transition of self-talk and beliefs, and knowledge construction. According to Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) the understanding of success and failure outcomes through the actions of self within the environment and in the decision-making and knowledge construction assists in helping students move towards self-authorship. As a result, guided reflection in the advising process enhances students’ ability to dig deeper into their current situation and themselves as independent thinkers and decision-makers.

The aforementioned studies found active listening, conversing, encouragement, meaning- and decision-making in the roles of academic advising and learning partnerships. The act of reflection is highlighted in the learning partnership role. Intentional reflective conversation will need to be incorporated into the ongoing academic advising practice to develop
learning partnerships within the academic advising relationship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Individuals develop self-authorship by willingly reflecting upon and processing challenging situations (Pizzolata, 2003). Through the process of self-authoring the advisor can assist their students in developing self-trust through the discovery of and reflection on academic major, life, and educational decision-making. Findings show that the advisor plays an active role in the development of learning partnerships providing challenge, support, and connection through the relational nature of reflective conversations (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

**Relational Fit**

Literature in the field of academic advising highlights the critical importance that the academic advising relationship has in the student’s college experience (Crookston, 1972; Ender, 1994; Harrison, 2009). Over the last thirty-five years of literature and research, the interactive relationship between the advisor and the student has consistently remained the core of the advising practice (Harrison, 2009). This interactive relationship includes the active participation of both the student and advisor.

Research on advisor-advisee relational fit is limited, but the literature on mentor-mentee fit is helpful when exploring appropriate dyad matching. The review of the mentoring literature found that as is advising, mentors are often assigned because of their availability rather than the appropriateness of the individual match (Nick et al., 2012). The success of the relationship is also supported by meeting the needs of both the mentee and mentor (Bozeman & Feeney, 2008). Bozeman and Feeney (2008) note that the mentee has a need for and benefits from the knowledge shared by the mentor, while the mentor also receives benefits from the relationship. These benefits include leadership experience, professional network expansion, and increased social capital. Therefore, there is an increase in the relationship investment by both parties when
A good relational fit has been created by meeting the needs of each individual (Bozeman & Feeney, 2008). The study conducted by Nick et al., (2012) found that focusing on the needs of the individuals during the mentor assignment process assists in shaping positive outcomes of the relationship.

Appropriate pairing of individuals is essential to promote functional success. A best practice of developing mentoring relationship is matching two individuals to promote relational fit, especially if the match is made with input from the mentor or mentee (Nick, et al., 2012). Similar to other dynamic relationships, research results from the Jackson, et al. (2003) study of 16 faculty mentoring experiences showed that the chemistry between the paired individuals is essential. Each person brings his or her individuality to the relationship, increasing the importance of making appropriate dyad matches.

Dyad matching is not a one size fits all approach and should consist of pairing individuals for appropriate fit to increase the quality of the relationship (Bozeman & Feeney, 2008). Crookston (1972) supports Rogers’ (1962) relational quality claim when he asserts that the quality of the advising relationship is critical. The quality of academic advising can be enhanced through professional development opportunities (Huggett, 2000).

**Skill Development**

Beres (2010) states that the relational component of advising is the most challenging area when providing professional development opportunities for academic advisors. Advisors can promote change and growth in their own advisees by participating in professional and personal development activities (Jordan, 2000). Increased self-confidence and competence in advising skills gained through professional development prepare the advisor to assist the student to succeed (Hughey, 2011).
To understand what contributes to effective academic advising, Allen and Smith (2008) examined thirty years of the advising literature. Through the review, five domains that contribute to quality academic advising were identified. These authors posit the need for advisors to develop a skill set encompassing the five domains of individuation, integration, referral, shared responsibility, and information.

The individuation domain complements Jordan’s (2000) claim that it is important for students to be accepted for who they are, in the moment, with no judgment attached. Smith and Allen (2006) found in their study consisting of 2,193 undergraduate students, that the advisors’ individuation function of focusing upon such elements of advising as course selection, while taking into account student skills, abilities, and interests was rated high in importance. In a subsequent study of 171 faculty, Smith and Allen (2008) found that faculty do not rate the individuation function highly. Issues pertaining to the advising relationship commitment are showcased through the disconnect between what students and faculty believe to be important. The individuation approach requires knowledge of the student as an individual plus information about the student’s academic details and the institution as a whole. Knowledge of both the student and institution allows the advisor to provide learning opportunities for academic and institutional integration. Smith and Allen (2008) found that faculty rated knowledge of the academic and degree requirements high, rather than knowledge of the student as an individual and the institution as a whole, making integration through faculty advising challenging.

According to Vincent Tinto’s theory of student departure, academic and institutional integration is a significant factor in student success (Tinto, 1993). Although the elements involved were found to be varying in importance, students and their advisors work together to connect their academic, career, and life goals to their major, general education requirements,
major choice, and community based learning opportunities (Allen & Smith, 2008; Smith & Allen, 2006). Connecting student goals to opportunities may require some aspect of referral. Referral is necessary for both academic and non-academic issues that may arise. The referral process requires action from both the advisor and advisee. The literature stresses the importance of a shared responsibility within the advising relationship where the advisor supports students in taking an active role, encouraging students to build their own problem-solving, decision-making, and planning skills (Allen & Smith, 2008; Crockett, 1985; Frost, 1991).

Smith and Allen (2006) found in a study of undergraduate students, that the receipt of accurate information plus assistance in understanding how things work at the institution had the greatest importance rating in advising. Students are in high need of accurate information regarding their degree program and planning for graduation as well as in understanding how things work to assist in the development of their institutional navigation skills. In a subsequent study, Allen and Smith (2008) confirmed the provision of accurate information regarding degree requirements to be a critical component of a successful advising relationship. The informational component, however, is only one of the required skill sets necessary for a successful academic advising relationship.

The relational component of academic advising requires an advisor skill set for building and maintaining an advising relationship with students. Beres (2010) recommends that advisors be competent in three critical content areas that include relational skills, theoretical concepts, and informational materials. The relational content area consists of communication skills, conversational approach, and non-verbal behaviors. Moreover, Barnett, Roach, and Smith (2006) stress the importance of developing attending behavior and listening skills as part of the advising toolbox. Findings from Barnett, Roach, and Smith’s (2006) small-scale experimental
study investigating advising micro skills demonstrates that advisors who are trained in and use micro skills are perceived as more understanding and interested in the student. In addition, students were more comfortable and satisfied with the advisor. Although the experimental study was small-scale, the relationships between advisor communication skills and the advising experience was examined bringing insight into the use of micro skills in an advising session and the importance of advisor training.

The results of Barnett, Roach, and Smith’s (2006) study advocates for an advisor’s physical presence to be receptive. A receptive presence is gained through steady eye contact, open posture, and squarely leaning towards the individual, sending positive messages of interest and attentiveness to the student. In addition, Thornhill and Yoder (2010) strongly suggest that good questioning skills, tact, and honesty are also critical interpersonal skills. The use of all of these interpersonal skills in the advising relationship encourages conversations.

**Communication**

The role of academic advising depends on the ability of the advisor to communicate and build relationships that provide a foundation for meaningful conversations and interactions (Hughey, 2011). Research completed by Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino (2004) investigated student advising preferences regarding approach, emotional nature and depth of the relationship, and advisor type and gender. The study of 468 undergraduate students revealed that depth of the advising relationship was most important along with valuing the type of advisor and the relationship’s emotional nature. All participants showed preference for a professional or faculty advisor who created a warm and supportive relationship. Participant response to the advising approach was of less importance. The results of this study challenge the literature that specifically credits developmental advising as key in developing the warm and supportive
relationship (Creamer & Creamer, 1994; Jordan, 2000; Hughey, 2011). Although the approach of academic advisors may differ, the relational nature is a vital component in the advising process.

To be engaged in the advising process students need to take an active responsible role in the partnership (Johnson & Morgan, 2005). Students are more apt to engage in the process if rapport has been built between the advisor and advisee. Dillon and Fisher (2000) highlight the importance of communication and rapport in their study of 50 faculty members regarding their perspectives of the academic advising interactions. Good communication, rapport, and respect are imperative when helping students in decision-making, goal identification, and problem solving (Dillon & Fisher, 2000). Harrison’s (2009) study of faculty perceptions complements Dillon & Fisher’s (2000) results. Harrison (2009) identified effective academic advisor characteristics that promote teaching and learning in the advising context. Curriculum and institutional knowledge as well as advisor availability were the most frequent responses followed by communication, honesty, empathy, and patience. Importance of communication in both studies was a common finding.

Through direct conversation an advisor is able to increase understanding of the student’s situation, share information, and identify areas for student growth and assistance (Jordan, 2000). These interactions require advisors to have good communication skills and the cognitive knowledge to appropriately assist students (O’Banion, 1972). The advisor becomes the facilitator of information helping students to realize its usefulness and meaning to their current and future situation while developing involvement within the advising relationship (Fox, 2008).

Nutt (2000) states that students will often not be the initiator of the advising interaction making it important for an institution to create strategies to promote engagement in advising.
activities. These strategies include direct, electronic, and hardcopy communication, group advising activities and programs, registration blocks, priority registration incentives, and passive web-oriented educational material. However, to develop a relationship, direct interaction between both the advisor and student must occur.

The advising process promotes student engagement by being a constant connection to information, learning opportunities, and personal investigation of goals, strengths, and interests (Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, Hawthorne, 2013). These opportunities for growth are made available through on-going communication. The research of Young-Jones, et al. (2013) explored the academic advising expectations and experiences of 611 student participants. Results indicate that discussions about academic life within advising meetings help advisors identify areas of support needed for the student’s success. These areas include study skills, self-efficacy, and campus navigation.

Through advising conversations and questioning, students have the opportunity to reflect on and create their futures. Advisors who listen to student stories can gain valuable knowledge, provide encouragement, clarify issues, and “tease out positive threads of hope” (Jordan, 2000, p. 27). These interactions can assist in creating the important trusted environment where a student feels the support and comfort necessary to share information and stories, ask questions, and experience self-exploration (Hughey, 2011).

Trust

According to Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Rubin, (2010) trust exists when individuals within a partnership are able to depend on each other to meet needs and facilitate goals. Campbell, et al. (2010) conducted two studies focused on relationship perceptions over short periods of time. Study one consisted of 103 pairs while study two had 67 pairs. Although the
study participants were dyadic pairs in intimate relationships the results highlight trust as a
central and powerful predictor of relationship quality. This finding supports Allen & Smith’s
(2008) research that notes the need for trust by highlighting student reliance on the academic
advisor for information, skill development, learning opportunities, respect, and encouragement.

The concept statement for the National Academic Advising Association (2006) states that
although advising is delivered in various ways, “the relationship between advisors and students is
fundamental and is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and ethical behavior” (Pedagogy of
Academic Advising, para. 1). Allen and Smith (2008) posit that trust is the foundation that the
academic advising relationship is built upon. When students arrive on campus they are expected
to ask questions and share concerns with their advisor, someone that they do not yet know.
During advising interactions, the advisor’s interpersonal skills provide the foundation for
building trust and creating rapport (Thornhill & Yoder, 2010). Each advising interaction is an
opportunity to continue to build trust.

Advisors have positive and challenging conversations with students throughout their
college experience. When one individual trusts another, the delivery of challenging information
is well received compared to how it may be accepted in a relationship absent of trust (Mahoney,
2009). Advising relationships are often collegial and collaborative with students depending on
advisors for advice, accurate information, assistance in goal setting and attainment, and
understanding of the institutional landscape. A study that identified themes for appropriate
matched academic mentoring dyads, conducted by Nick, et al. (2012), found that collegial and
collaborative relationships exist only when they are grounded in trust and respect, highlighting
the importance of trust in the advising relationship.
Trust must be established and maintained if a meaningful, long-term advising relationship is to exist (Ender & Wilkie, 2000). It can be challenging for individuals who receive their advisement through multiple advisors to build rapport and trust. A multiple advisor approach like those found in some advising centers, makes it difficult to build consistent, trusted relationships when students have no guarantee of meeting with the same individual over time (Mahoney, 2009). Ender & Wilkie (2000) recommend assigning students to a particular advisor to encourage the ongoing relational development.

Trust takes time to build and is recognized as an important element in the advising relationship (Beck, 1999). The relational nature of academic advising requires a level of personal information to be shared by the student and the advisor. The element of trust assists in creating a safe atmosphere where students can share, knowing that they will not be judged or rejected (Jordan, 2000). In their study of dyadic pairs, Campbell et al. (2010) found that individuals will often discontinue their relationship before entering into a long term commitment if they believe that their partner cannot be trusted. A relational discontinuance has implications for institutional retention rates and highlights the importance of grounding the relationship in trust and creating a good advisor-advisee fit.

Relational Elements

Literature on interpersonal relationships asserts that individuals who work within helping professions can be very different in personality, orientation, and approach yet be effective because of the attitudinal and experiential elements they bring to the relationship (Rogers, 1962). The first of these elements is congruence, defined by Rogers (1962) as the act of being genuine and sharing the real self with the relationship partner. The advising research adds authenticity to the congruence element in an advising relationship (Harrison, 2009; Schreiner, et al., 2011).
Genuineness and authenticity increase the quality of the student interaction in the advising relationship (Schreiner, et al., 2011). Harrison’s (2009) faculty advising study found that the genuineness and authenticity within the connections made between institutional personnel and students positively affected academic advising interactions. Being a congruent or genuine partner promotes the individual’s learning, constructive change, and development (Rogers, 1962).

According to Pascarella (1980) a student’s development in college is influenced through faculty interactions. Harrison’s (2009) research supports the influence that authenticity of the student-faculty relationship has on the developmental growth of students through the promotion of “competence, autonomy, purpose, and integrity” (p. 232). Authenticity and accountability are unique advisor qualities found to be important in the student-faculty relationship (Harrison, 2009). In addition, student follow-through actions comprise an area of individual growth that has been found to be positively influenced through the authentic advising relationship (Jordan, 2000).

Empathy, positive regard, and unconditional regard are the remaining three elements that support a growth-oriented relationship. Having and sharing empathetic understanding of an individual’s situation without judgment or analysis communicate a sense of valuing, worthiness, and openness (Rogers, 1962). The qualitative research study of successful at-risk students supports the claim that the advisor accepts and meets students where they are in an empathic climate (Schreiner, et al., 2011). Acceptance is also found in both the positive and unconditional regard elements. A relationship grounded in acceptance promotes strength, sureness, courage, and confidence towards the changes in one’s life (Rogers, 1962). In addition to trust, acceptance and confidence are also among the key components found in the concept of relational bond or connectedness within working alliances (Bordin, 1979; Horvath & Greenberg, 1989).
Working Alliance

Working alliance is a concept that focuses upon the strength of the alliance between individuals involved in a relationship focused on change and shared goals (Bordin, 1979; 1983). The foundation of the alliance is built through the focus on collaborative work that includes goal identification (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001). The working alliance literature acknowledges that the focus on goal identification and agreement upon the role of each individual in attaining the goals is critical in developing a relationship centered on shared responsibility and collaboration (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993; Bordin, 1983).

Working together on common goals highlights the connection developed between the advisor and advisee through their cooperative and collaborative efforts (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001). Through a study on the working alliance between students and graduate advisors Schlosser and Gelso (2001) identified three dimensions of an advising working alliance: rapport, apprenticeship, and identification-individuation. Study participants were 281 graduate students at varying stages of their program. Although the study does not focus on undergraduate advising it is significant because it is the first to explore advising through the lens of working alliance. Highlights of the research include the act of working together on a common goal, the development of an emotional bond, and the positive influence found within the advising relationship.

The positive personal attachment found in working alliances includes shared trust, acceptance, and confidence in one another (Bordin, 1979). The time individuals spend together, along with the work that they focus upon, allows for a level of liking, caring, and trust to be shared (Bordin, 1983). This combination creates a shared bond described as emotional energy (Lawler, 2001) or emotional bond (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001) found in interpersonal
relationships. The significance of the personal bond is found in the works of Pascarella (1980) and Tinto (1988). These works explain that the personal bonds students develop with individuals and the institution bind their membership to the community, and in turn, creates a positive influence on student success and persistence to graduation.

**Persistence and Success**

Through studying 20 colleges and universities, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt (2005) found student success measured by student persistence and retention rates is positively influenced by student engagement. Student engagement outcomes are met through the action oriented roles of the institution and the student. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) posit that it is student effort and involvement in academic activities, interpersonal interactions, and extracurricular opportunities that have the highest impact on student success. To promote student success, institutions need to tailor their energy to support student involvement in the high impact activities that influence student engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). One of the most utilized high impact student services offered to college students is academic advising, making the advising interaction an opportunity for engagement (Carney & Barak, 1976). Involvement in engagement activities like academic advising assists students in becoming part of the institutional community.

**Institutional Commitment**

Out of classroom interactions such as academic advising can be the central point of connection that can assist students in developing institutional commitment (Pascarella, 1980). The quantitative study of the needs, expectations, and success of 611 undergraduate students by Young-Jones, et al. (2013) found that academic advising positively influences student success. The students’ personal responsibility for academic success is enhanced through an academic
advising experience that supports the development of student self-efficacy and study skills while assisting in the understanding of academic requirements and available resources (Young-Jones, et al., 2013). Young-Jones, et al. (2013) complements Bean’s (1985) study that found a direct correlation between institutional fit and the students’ commitment to success.

Students decide to leave college because they lack commitment to the institution and their educational goals (Tinto, 1988). On-going contact with staff and faculty can help students feel like they are part of the college community and assist them with separating from their past (Tinto, 1988). Particular attention should be given to these connections during the student’s initial orientation and carried through to the first 6 to 8 weeks of the semester and even to the end of the first year (Bean, 1985; Tinto, 1988, 2007).

Two studies highlight the significance of interpersonal interactions between faculty and students. Bean and Kuh (1984) gathered data from 1,096 freshman and sophomore undergraduate students and found advisor contact as a predictor of faculty interaction. In addition, Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) found in a longitudinal study of 1,457 undergraduate students that faculty interactions had a positive effect on student social and academic integration. Findings show that interpersonal interactions between faculty and students offset a low commitment to completing a college education. Pascarella (1980) notes student behaviors and attitudes regarding persistence and retention are influenced by faculty interaction. An increase in student and faculty interaction creates an institutional bond and student commitment to the institution that decreases the likelihood a student will withdraw from college (Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1988).
Institutional Integration

Social and intellectual contacts create an integrated community membership for the student (Tinto, 1988). The first step in achieving integrated membership into an institution of higher education is a transition into enrollment status through a separation from their pre-college life. The separation and transition to the college experience can be exciting and stressful. Tinto (1988) highlights the importance of institutions providing assistance for students who do not have the coping or problem-solving skills necessary to work through the transition. As Tinto (1993) points out, students decide whether to stay or leave an institution during the separation and transition time period making early assistance an important element of persistence. Institutional intervention through the academic advising relationship can influence the probability of a student’s decision to stay in college.

Institutions have established programs to support successful student transition and institutional integration. These programs are focused on social and academic adjustment, integration, and support. Tinto (1993) highlights orientation courses, learning communities, student groups, academic advising and academic support services as possible success initiatives. It is important to stress Pascarella and Terenzini’s (2005) point, that in order to have a positive influence on retention and persistence the student and the institution need to be responsible for engagement actions. This responsibility consists of being committed to either engage in, or provide opportunities for, successful student separation and transition into college level living and learning.

Academic advising is an aspect of higher education that assists institutions in increasing student retention (Creamer, 1980; Metzner, 1989). A study of 1,033 undergraduate students conducted by Metzner (1989) provides data that supports academic advising as being one student
service in a collection of institutional efforts that can positively affect student retention. Harrison (2009) found in a study of faculty advisors that purposeful advising interactions affect persistence and retention by guiding students through college transition and integration, assisting in identifying and pursuing educational and career goals, and influencing decision-making and attitudes toward learning. Creamer (1980) outlines a four step advising retention model that includes ethical recruitment of students, an honest institutional orientation, a constant stream of information, and a developmental approach to advising.

Creamer’s (1980) retention model focuses on ethically recruiting students for whom the institution is a good environmental and academic fit. Assisting students in understanding the institutional landscape and information, developing educational and personal goals, and making appropriate decisions, orients new students. When following Creamer’s (1980) model, a holistic approach to advising is utilized to focus on student values, goals, campus integration, and academic achievement and support while providing students with an opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship with trained personnel.

Meaningful Relationships

Student persistence and retention is supported by meaningful relationships with faculty and staff (Light, 2001; Metzner, 1989). Schreiner, et al., (2011) interviewed 62 students and 54 faculty and staff regarding the attitudes and behaviors of the campus personnel that contribute to high-risk student success and persistence. The researchers found that attitudes and behaviors of faculty and staff had a positive effect on student success and persistence. Student interviews highlighted the most common positive descriptors of college personnel as genuineness, authenticity, and commitment to students. Other top descriptors include positive, knowledgeable, intelligent, passionate, energetic, outgoing, enthusiastic, humorous, fun, and
challenging with high expectations. Richard Light’s (2001) longitudinal study of over 1,600 college students over a ten year time period complements Schreiner et al.’s, (2011) findings and recommends that students get to know at least one faculty member fairly well and have at least one faculty member get to know them fairly well.

The faculty or staff’s desire to connect with students to make a difference and to create intentional personal connections are two common themes found in each study. The research studies revealed that it is the “people, rather than programs, services, or institutions, who retain students” (Schreiner et al., 2011, p. 336) supporting Rogers (1962) argument that the quality of the interpersonal relationship continues to be what is most important.

**Literature Review Summary**

The higher education literature has highlighted academic advising relationships as an important component of student success. Much of the literature focuses on the three main approaches to advising and advising’s connection to student success while claiming the importance of the relational aspect of the advising pair. The development of advising relationships and relational bonds are areas that have limited discussion in the current literature. Research is needed to expand the literature through an exploration of interpersonal relational development in the advising context.

Several gaps remain to be investigated. Although there is graduate level research exploring academic advising through the lens of working alliance, the concept of working alliance is absent in the undergraduate advising literature. Thus, further exploration of undergraduate working alliance is needed to provide insight into the advising pair working together, the development of a shared bond, and the positive influence found within the advising relationship.
While the literature has shown that pairing individuals for appropriate fit in an interpersonal relationship promotes functional success, the research is focused on mentoring relationships and is non-existent in the literature regarding academic advising. Similarly, dyadic pairs were studied within intimate relationships showing that trust is a central and powerful predictor of the quality of the relationship. A study of advising pairs is warranted to investigate the element of trust within the relationship.

Advisors play an important role in integrating students into the fabric of an institution of higher education. Thus, it is essential that advisors have the necessary skill set to build and maintain interpersonal relationships with students. The scarcity of the available research investigating the use of advisor micro skills highlights the need for further study. Additional research is needed to provide insight regarding the influence advisor skill level has on the advising experience.

The current qualitative case study begins to fill the gap in the literature by examining the academic advising experiences of student and advisor dyadic pairs. In-depth reflections provide an understanding of academic advising relational fit through individual perspectives and meaning-making. The purpose of this case study was to gain an understanding of the lived social interactions of the academic advising relationship and explore how relational fit within the academic advising context influences the student and advisor experience.

**Chapter Three: Methodology**

This research sought to understand how college students and advisors within academic advising relationships perceive their relational fit at a 4-year higher education institution. Connectedness within the advising relationship is viewed as the advisor-advisee relational fit. An exploration of how college students and their advisors perceive the advising relationship fit
provided descriptors of relational fit and an understanding of what contributes to fit within the advising relationship context. An understanding of the advising relationship and its influence on the student and advisor experience was shaped by the unique individual perspectives of each participant. The following questions guided the research on advisor-advisee fit within the academic advising relationship:

- How does the relational fit within the academic advising construct influence the student and advisor experience at a 4-year public university?
- What perceptions do college students and their academic advisors have regarding their connectedness?
- How do college students and their academic advisors describe their relational fit?

The research questions focused upon the perceptions individuals glean from the face-to-face social exchange of the advising relationship. The researcher guided the participants through an in-depth reflection to create meaning and bring understanding to the social interaction of academic advising (Ponterotto, 2005). Through the interpretive paradigm a subjective approach to the social world allowed for the ongoing relational process created by the individuals involved in the relationship to be investigated.

The interpretive paradigm guided this study by focusing on the individual views and meaning of the lived social interaction (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). An in-depth exploration of the advising relationship created a definition of the situation that reflects the social reality through the perceptions of the individuals who experienced the interaction. Burrell and Morgan (1979) describe this process of exploring perceptions as getting inside the phenomena to create understanding from within.
Research Design

An understanding of the concept of advisor-advisee fit and the revelation of whether fit matters within the college level academic advising relationship was gained through this qualitative research study. As the advising relationship was explored, a qualitative approach created flexibility allowing interactive inquiry that provided an opportunity to modify or add questions as the research progresses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Flexibility is an important aspect of exploring the relational nature of advising because of the possibility of varying experiences. Questioning and conversing with individuals that have lived the experience provided in-depth information that assisted in understanding the uniqueness of the case through a reflection of the experience (Stake, 1995).

Relationships are complex entities that require questioning of the individuals involved in order to delve deeply into relational perceptions. Academic advising experiences from the view of the student and advisor were explored. Through a qualitative approach, the researcher gathered the subjective perceptions of the participants and compared and contrasted them to develop themes that reflected the experiences within the academic advising phenomena. A subjective meaning was gained through reflection on the experience by individuals who had an immediate context of the advising experience. The collection of multiple subjective meanings was compared to develop shared or differing interpretations used to answer the research questions.

Research Tradition

The research questions informed the researcher in identifying the methodology. The questions focus on participant perceptions of relational fit and the influence fit has on their experience which lends itself to a case study approach (Yin, 2014). A case study approach
supported the examination of the relational nature of advising in a real-life context bringing a uniqueness to the understanding of this particular human experience and illuminating the advising relationship issue (Merriam, 2009). The advising relationship, not individual students or advisors, was the case’s issue under investigation. The examination of student and advisor perceptions of the advising relationship provided an in-depth understanding of the paired entity.

The paired participants within advising relationships became the bounded systems that were examined through multiple forms of data, making this research a collective case study (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of the collective case study was to better understand the cases as a whole within a specific context (Stake, 1995). The advising relationship within academic advising was the shared contextual link that was closely examined through data collection and analysis.

Although identifying the commonalities of the collection of cases is a goal, the understanding of each individual case is imperative (Goddard, 2010). All of the data collected through interviews, observations, and documents pertaining to each pair is considered part of the individual case (Patton, 1990). The research questions and method of data collection and analysis for each case is identical in a collective case study (Goddard, 2010). Each case is analyzed separately followed by the analysis of the collective whole to identify generalizations within a particular context (Merriam, 2009). The development of a deep understanding of each bounded case provides an understanding of the entire collection of data.

Each individual case is bounded together by a distinct category in a collective case study (Merriam, 2009). The bounded advising pairs were the unit of analysis that was heavily relied upon in the case study tradition (Merriam, 2009; Yin 2014). The focus on the bounded context of this collective case study complemented Miles and Huberman’s (1994) research approach.
Miles and Huberman’s (1994) approach focuses on how the inductive process progressively builds the understanding of data. Gap identification, lack of clarity, connection building, meaning-making, and flexibility for change are focused upon to develop better-quality data. The case study analysis process utilizes raw data from interviews and involves the triangulation of data by collecting additional evidence from case related documents, artifacts, observations, and historical records (Yin, 2014).

Development of a cognitive map of the case through a recursive approach to data analysis makes the study “richer and more powerful” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 86). Themes and conclusions are identified through the data analysis process enabling the researcher to share rich, thick descriptions and convey the meaning of the case through their personal understanding (Merriam, 2009). The descriptions provide the reader with an opportunity to understand the specific real-life phenomenon and relate it to their own situation (Stake, 1995).

**Site and Participants**

The chosen research site was a public university in the northern region of New England. During the Fall 2014 semester there were approximately 8,400 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in 50 undergraduate and 27 graduate programs found within four academic colleges and a School of Law. The research site is the state's only public metropolitan university and is the second largest institution within a 7 university state system. The university is comprised of three campuses located in the central and southern part of the state. The research site is considered to have the most diverse student body in the state although only 12% of the students self-report an ethnicity other than white. The institution’s student population consists of 58% full-time students with the average age of an undergraduate student being 28, and more than half of the student population (59%) being female.
The research site employs multiple approaches of academic advising including faculty-only, split, and dual models (Habley, 1983). Each academic unit makes the decision on which model to utilize for its area. Although professional staff and faculty perform academic advising for the undergraduate student population at the research site, only faculty were chosen to be the advisor participants. By choosing only faculty advisors, the student and faculty pairs create a homogenous sample.

The intent of using a homogenous sample is to include individuals who share membership and characteristics within a particular subgroup (Creswell, 2012). The homogeneous sample in this study included faculty and students who were in an established advising relationship. To identify participants who have experienced the advising relationship phenomenon and are able to share their understanding of their experience, a purposeful criterion sampling was used (Patton, 1990).

Student and faculty advising pairs made up the participant sample. The student sample criteria included undergraduates who were in their sophomore, junior, or senior year, were in good institutional academic standing, have had continuous enrollment, and transferred no more than 30 credit hours. The academic advisors were faculty who had responsibility for advising college students at the sophomore, junior, or senior level from different majors. The mere fact that the advisors were faculty who advised individuals that meet the student sample criteria made them appropriate participants.

There were 10 advising pairs identified, each consisting of one student and one faculty advisor (See figure 2). The sample allowed for an in-depth inquiry of the shared phenomenon of the case study (Yin, 2014). Each advising pair was in an established advising relationship defined as having met more than 3 times since being officially assigned to each other. For the
purposes of this study, “met” was defined as a meeting between the student and advisor for the purpose of discussing a topic related to the student’s college experience.

Figure 2. Participant Pairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair #</th>
<th>Type and Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years Paired</th>
<th>How Matched</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student - Bonnie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Student requested advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Cecilia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student - Megan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Student requested advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Ellie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student - Melissa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student requested advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Gary</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Student - Rachel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Dept. Assignment – by interest within major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Casey</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student - Jennifer</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Dept. Assignment – by interest within major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Deborah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Student - Peter</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dept. Assignment – random by major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Daniel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Student - Kathryn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dept. Assignment – random by major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Richard</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Student - Hazel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Dept. Assignment – random by major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Leaann</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Student - Sue</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dept. Assignment – random by major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Casper</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Student - Tracy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dept. Assignment – random by major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty - Joseph</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment and Access

After receiving IRB approval from both Northeastern University and the research site, targeted recruitment took place to identify students and academic advisors who met the study’s criteria. Screening of possible candidates was necessary to ensure that the study’s participants were appropriate (Yin, 2014). The Office of the Registrar at the research site ran a computer query using the sample criteria to identify students and their advisors from the Student Information System. The generated data set included student name, student id number, accumulated credit total, current grade point average, transfer credits, major, student e-mail address, telephone number, advisor name, and confirmation of continuous enrollment status.

The data were sorted by advisor and an electronic request (Appendix A) for participation was sent to the identified faculty. The request queried the faculty’s interest in the study and
outlined the purpose of the study, criteria for participation, compensation ($25 Visa gift card per participant), researcher contact information, and a list of their student advisees who qualified as participants. Interested faculty were asked to identify the student/s from the list whom they have met with at least 3 times and would like to be matched with for the study.

After identifying the faculty participants and their preferred match, the potential student participants were sent an electronic request for participation (Appendix B). The request outlined the purpose of the study, criteria for participation, compensation ($25 Visa gift card per participant), researcher contact information, and the fact that their advisor identified them as the student they would like to be matched with for the study. The advisor was copied to the e-mail to assist in validating the request.

Data Collection

Yin (2014) states that defining aspects of case studies include providing an in-depth understanding of an issue while collecting data through multiple sources. This study included interviews and the review of documents such as institutional surveys, accreditation reports, promotion and tenure guidelines, and researcher memos. A rich supply of data was the product of the entire collection of data.

Following Patton’s (1990) recommendation, the first step in data collection was the review of institutional documents. The review provided the researcher with information regarding the goals, decisions, processes, and activities of academic advising within the institutional context. The information provided through these documents informed the researcher’s interview inquiry.

Document review creates an investigative atmosphere free from researcher intrusion, providing the possibility for informative data within the institutional context (Merriam, 2009).
The institutional website hosted the documents for review. Documentation that had data related to the institutional advising context included the promotion and tenure guidelines, undergraduate catalog, accreditation report, the Advising Network (an advising training site), graduating senior surveys, the National Survey of Student Engagement results, and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement results. Identifying data that informs the institutional context assisted in maximizing what could be learned and gave the researcher a better understanding about the case (Stake, 1995).

For this study, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews that focused on the central phenomenon of the academic advising relational experience. Each in-person interview was conducted separately. The researcher first introduced the study and reviewed the consent form with each participant (Appendix C). After gaining the participants’ signature, the researcher began to audio tape the interview using two digital recorders. The utilization of two recorders provided a backup in case of accidental failure. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes in length, providing ample time to gather data from each individual. Open-ended questions were used to promote a sense of freedom to respond in addition to unconstrained answers through the participants’ own experiential lens (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2006). A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

All but one faculty advisor interview took place in the faculty’s office, providing the researcher with an opportunity to observe the physical space that the faculty and student pair used for their advising appointments. According to Yin (2014) the physical environment provides observational evidence that can provide additional understanding of the context or the phenomenon. Based on the recommendation of Merriam (2009), field notes were written immediately after the interview to document the direct observation experience and reflection.
Field notes contained a summation of what was observed including a diagram of the setting and a complete description of the physical space and the behaviors of the participant. Field notes also captured the reflective thoughts of the researcher including initial reactions, intuitive responses, impressions, perceptions, and hypotheses about the participant and office setting (Merriam, 2009).

**Data Storage**

After each interview the digital recordings were uploaded to a password protected computer and saved to a USB external drive. Handwritten notes and the USB external drive were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s home. Each audio recording was shared with and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist with experience in working with confidential data. A signed transcriber confidentiality agreement can be found in Appendix E.

Transcriptions were electronically sent to each participant for their review. Participants were only sent their specific copy and asked to check for accuracy. All audio tapes, transcriptions, and correspondence with participants was stored electronically in a password secured computer and a USB drive. A hard copy was locked in a personal filing cabinet at the researcher’s home. Electronic and physical data destruction is planned for once five years have passed from the study completion date.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis of a case study is an emergent, recursive, and dynamic process (Merriam, 2009). The data analysis process is not a singular event, it is a progressive process that occurs during the collection and review activities of the case study. During the data collection activity a basic analysis begins and continues after each activity is completed. The ongoing data collection
and analysis process makes data collected in the field the building blocks for data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The bounded faculty-student advising pairs of the case study provided a unique opportunity to explore the social experiences of dyadic pairs. The interview data were analyzed as a bounded pair. It was necessary to complete the individual interview coding first, followed by an analysis of each advisor-student pair. In addition to identifying themes found within each pair, commonalities of experiences and perceptions across the bounded pairs were identified and examined.

The researcher began the data analysis process by listening to each interview to become familiar with the data while waiting for the completed interview transcription. Following the receipt of each transcript the researcher read it multiple times to enhance familiarity and begin to identify initial codes, ideas, conflicting data, and possible themes. This process directed the ongoing data collection by highlighting gaps or areas in need of further investigation that were attended to in future interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A more intensive analysis of the data commenced after all of the data were collected. The analysis of the case study documents revealed what each author believed to be important, giving insight to the institutional context (Merriam, 2009). In addition to interview transcriptions, the case study documents consisted of the Advising Network (advising training site), undergraduate catalog, promotion and tenure guidelines, accreditation documents, graduating senior surveys, and the results from the most recent National Survey of Student Engagement, and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement. Using content analysis, the types of messages, frequency, and meaning were gleaned from the documents (Merriam, 2009; Altheide, 1987).
Field notes, memos, institutional documents, and interview transcripts were analyzed using In Vivo and Initial or Values First Cycle coding methods. The coding identified in this initial coding step was revisited for a more in-depth analysis using Axial Coding to review the data and identify the most dominant codes (Saldana, 2013). A code mapping process followed to interconnect the components and reveal the overarching themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The first round of coding began by reading the transcripts and institutional documents two times to heighten the researcher’s awareness of the elements within the conversations and documentation. Two coding methods were used to provide a richer perspective of the interview data during the first cycle coding. While both coding methods are designed to assist the researcher in finding meaning, In Vivo Coding was used to capture the exact words of the participant and Initial Coding was used to focus on identifying processes (Saldana, 2013). Initial Coding and Values Coding was used for the review of institutional documents. In addition to processes and actions identified through Initial Coding, Values Coding provided insight into the priorities of the authors and institution (Saldana, 2013).

A hand coding approach was utilized to identify and cluster codes, map connections, and discover and shape overarching themes. A three inch right margin on the hard copy transcripts and an inch margin on the printed institutional documentation provided ample space to make coding notations. As coding proceeded, the researcher constantly made choices in regards to what coding method to use for a particular line of data and the data’s relation to the research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Analytic memos were written during and after completing all of the first round coding of the data.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), memos are an opportunity to document the immediate reflective thoughts to oneself about the data. The researcher utilized memos to
capture reflective thoughts and begin to weave the data together, capturing ideas, concepts, and categories. The creation of each memo fostered a critical thinking process focused on the data collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Memo writing was used to assist in securing thoughts throughout the data collection and analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Stake’s (1995) focus on good thinking as a key component to good research was a focus of the researcher’s memo writing process. This process of purposeful thinking supported Saldana’s (2013) stop and write approach to analytic memo writing as a natural part of the iterative process of coding. Writing memos allowed the researcher to reflect on the data while having permission to make connections, ask questions, wonder, and jot down random thoughts about the participant experiences and institutional documentation.

Writing memos about the data relationships was helpful in clarifying how the themes connected to each other as well as the research questions and the potential influence on practice. Memos were used as a sense-making tool to highlight researcher data associations, note and clarify ideas, and add to previous coded data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Written summaries were generated to pull all the information together to begin to develop data displays and conclusions.

Second Cycle coding included an Axial Coding approach to develop categories from the First Cycle coding process. Utilizing Axial Coding the researcher reread all the coded transcripts of each bounded pair to identify similar experiences, descriptions, thoughts, and feelings. Institutional documents were reviewed to identify similar goals, processes, and values. Memos and field notes were also examined for emerging themes.

Axial Coding memos were developed to capture the reflective thoughts of the commonalities, connections, and patterns found within and across pairs and documents. The
Axial Coding memo focused on the context, conditions, interactions, and consequences of the case study data (Saldana, 2013). The memo created another dimension in the data analysis where the researcher discovered something that wasn’t evident when the data was separate (Saldana, 2013).

The transcript and documentation analysis process created a dimension of thought that became data points that act like puzzle pieces. Each piece assisted in pulling together the experiential picture of all available data. Categories identified through the Axial Coding process connected to subcategories to create a map of interconnected data. All data were compared for commonalities, connections, and patterns to identify themes.

The researcher utilized Miles and Huberman’s (1994) within-case and cross-case analysis approach for the final stage in the analysis process. These approaches required the researcher to connect the dominant codes and sub-codes to relational components, behavior, and experiential impact of the participants. The researcher verified patterns and themes identified throughout the analysis process and identified new ones that emerged through the final analysis process.

Validity and Credibility

Researcher bias. The researcher has been involved with academic advising at the college level for over twenty years. Throughout that time period the researcher has advised hundreds of students while supervising advising professionals, and is involved in administrative oversight of some advising activities at the research site. Completing research at one’s own institution requires a balance of power, making it essential that no direct reports were study participants and that the researcher was not able to influence the performance assessment of any participant (Seidman, 2006). Although no participants were direct reports, the researcher was
consciously aware of her position of leadership throughout data collection. Participants were told during the research process that all information shared was confidential.

Due to the researcher’s professional practice she was biased towards the need for strong advising relationships between the academic advisors and the students they advised. Through this experience she has seen her own students and the students of other advisors benefit from meaningful relationships grounded in trust, challenge, and support. The researcher has also been the recipient of student complaints and advisor change requests, creating awareness of issues within academic advising. A “preconceived position” is a common condition for case study researchers because of their need to understand the issue being studied (Yin, 2014, p. 76).

Within the case study approach, an understanding of the issue along with investigating how individuals explain their reality creates a need to seek, explore, and include data that is contrary to the researcher’s own views (Yin, 2014; Merriam, 2009). To counteract the biased position the researcher consciously bracketed her thoughts and feelings regarding academic advising to encourage an approach towards open-mindedness, skepticism, and curiosity as data were collected and analyzed (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

**Limitations.** It is critical for effective advising programs to have a mission statement, student learning outcomes, and goals that support the institutional mission (King, 2008). The research site did not have a unified approach to academic advising, possibly creating uneven expectations and approaches to advising. It is unclear if the unevenness had an effect on the academic advising relationship. In addition, the lack of clear expectations for advising reflected an advisor note system that had no enforced standards or protocol for faculty advisors.

The sample size of 10 advising pairs is relatively small, limiting how broadly the findings can be applied to other institutions and the advising profession. However, the multiple case
approach of 10 bounded cases provided the possibility of the study to be directly replicated (Yin, 2014). Although as Merriam (2009) points out, the variation of the cases increases as more cases are included in the study, which in turn, creates a more compelling interpretation of the data.

**Potential threats.** Participants received compensation for their involvement in the study. Although small, the compensation may have swayed participant motivation. The researcher remained conscious of the possible influence compensation had on participants. In addition, the mortality of the participant advisor-advisee pair would have been disrupted if one participant decided to leave the study. If one individual within the pair had left, the data collected regarding the pair’s experience would have been one-sided.

**Rich thick description.** The multiple sources of data has availed the opportunity to provide a rich, thick description of the case study. In-depth descriptions of the interviews and documents are offered to illuminate the reader’s understanding of the relational nature of advising (Merriam, 2009). Readers will be able to use the description provided to judge the transferability of the study to another setting (Creswell, 2013).

**Member checking.** Member checking was employed to ensure the validity and accuracy of the transcripts (Carlson, 2010). Participants were sent an electronic copy of their transcript and asked to check for accuracy. Triangulation was employed for the purpose of validating that the data supported the findings, interpretations, and conclusions within the study (Patton, 1990). Consistency of the findings was achieved by collecting data from multiple sources, including interviews, institutional documentation, observations, and researcher reflections. Findings regarding relational connectedness and development were questioned and confirmed by comparing participant perceptions with observation and institutional data. The members of the
thesis committee provided extensive feedback to enhance credibility and accuracy of the data, and themes, and to identify any potential gaps in the analysis.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The principle of respect for persons guided the protection of participants in this study. Permission from the Institutional Review Board was received from both Northeastern University and the institutional research site before any data collection from participants began. Complete voluntary participant consent was gained from participants by providing details of the study including procedures, purpose, confidentiality, opportunity for withdrawal, known risks, and benefits (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This information allowed participants to make an informed decision on whether to participate in the study. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point in time without penalty. There were no known risks associated with participation in this study. In addition to compensation, a benefit for participation included an enhanced understanding of the individual’s role in the academic advising relationship.

Although the researcher has managerial oversight of some areas that perform academic advising at the chosen research site, the individuals involved in this study were not direct reports. The elimination of direct reports from this study minimized any opportunity for coercion or undue influence on participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the anonymity of academic departments, advisors, and students. Individuals were asked to participate in member checking of their transcripts to ensure that their comments were correctly captured. Interview audio recordings and memos were secured in a locked filing cabinet and password protected computer. Once transcriptions of the recordings were completed the audio recordings were destroyed.
Conclusion

The exploration of advisor-student relational fit within the academic advising context at a 4-year public institution was the focus of this study. The case study methodology supports the analysis of multiple forms of data to form a rich description of the experience of the participants. The interpretive paradigm, as described by Rubin and Rubin (2012) guided this study by investigating individual views and meaning of the lived social interaction found within the advising relationship. Investigating the case’s issue, the advising relationship, was enhanced by exploring perceptions of individuals involved and the institutional context to gain what Burrell and Morgan (1979) posit as an understanding from within.

The qualitative approach allowed for the subjective perceptions from the social exchange of individuals within an academic advising relationship to be gathered through semi-structured interviews. Study participants were a homogeneous group of faculty-student advising pairs chosen at one Northern New England institution of higher education. Institutional documents and environmental observations at the research site provided informative data regarding the institutional context (Merriam, 2009). Miles and Huberman’s (1994) recursive data analysis process was followed to code and identify themes using the variety of data from all sources.

The rich thick descriptions and the meaning gleaned from the case study research provide the advising profession with an understanding of the specific real-life phenomenon of relational fit in the academic advising context (Stake, 1995). Advising administrators, institutional leaders, and academic advisors benefit from gaining insight into the advising relationship to enhance the learning experience of students and further explore the phenomenon within their own institutions.
Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore how advisor-advisee relational fit influences the college academic advising experience. Understanding how college students and their advisors within academic advising relationships perceive their relational fit informs what contributes to their connectedness and provides descriptors of the relational fit. The analysis of the interview data provided three superordinate themes and nine sub-themes. The superordinate themes and sub-themes include: 1) connection (ease and likability, comfort, and authenticity); 2) supportive actions (availability and responsiveness, confidence in each other, and learning opportunities); 3) relational development (acceptance of the individual, student growth, and advancement of the relationship). Themes found in five or more participant pairs were identified as superordinate and sub-themes. Interview field notes, memos, and observations supported both the superordinate and sub-themes identified within the interview data analysis.

Institutional documentation was also analyzed to assist in the understanding of how academic advising is portrayed and perceived within the institutional context. Documents included survey results, a web-based advising portal, accreditation report, university catalog, and faculty evaluation documents. Three superordinate themes were identified from the analysis: institutional priority, unevenness, and connections.

Institutional Documentation

A document analysis was conducted to inform the researcher’s interview inquiry. The documents that were reviewed as part of this collective case study included graduating senior surveys, the National Survey of Student Engagement and Faculty Survey of Student Engagement Comparison Report, the Advising Network (an advising training site), accreditation report, university catalog, and promotion and tenure guidelines. Each of these documents was reviewed
to provide the researcher with information regarding the goals, decisions, processes, and activities of academic advising within the institutional context.

**Survey Reports**

Two survey reports were reviewed to identify the student and faculty respondents’ reflections on academic advising. The research site had a report that compiled three years of Graduating Senior Survey data from 2009 through 2011 and another 2012 report that compared the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) results.

The data from the Graduating Senior Survey report clearly indicated issues with academic advising. Students shared their need for clarity of degree requirements and policies, consistent information, and career guidance. The respondents also highlighted a need for a connection to be made between academic majors and available jobs as well as employment advice and career opportunities. The NSSE and FSSE Comparison report supported the lack of career advising finding identified in the Graduating Senior Survey. The NSSE and FSSE Comparison also found that few students reported talking to faculty about career plans (first year students 27%; senior students 35%). These findings indicate that students have a high need for a clear understanding of graduation expectations as well as how their educational investment will provide them a career pathway after achieving their degree. Although clarity of requirements and policies and career guidance is important to students, there is a gap in the service provision to meet their needs.

The Graduating Senior Survey report points out that students are feeling disconnected from their advisors. The NSSE and FSSE Comparison report supports this finding by noting the low student-faculty interaction results (first year students 34%; senior students 38%). Student
respondents in the Graduating Senior Survey requested an increase in concern from faculty for their students as well as an increase in communication from faculty who are concerned for them and their progression to graduation. Responders noted a need for faculty who listen and have passion for students and their professional field. These findings indicate the students’ desire to matter within the institutional community. The desire to matter suggests that the relationship with their faculty advisor did not provide adequate connection to the institutional community. In addition, the Graduating Senior Survey revealed a need for more advisors with a higher level of advising skill and knowledge of course sequencing indicating a need for advisor professional development.

Overall, the surveys identified a belief that faculty are disconnected from students and the institution. In addition to career advising, students want correct information and connection with their faculty within the advising context. The survey findings highlight the need for an increase in communication from faculty who have genuine concern for students and academic programs. These findings indicate a need for an increase in communication and relational development between the advisor and student to assist in strengthening the advising relationship. The Advising Network also highlights advisor-student communication.

**Advising Network**

The Advising Network is the research site’s academic advising training and information portal. It hosts educational modules, advising timeline, electronic form bank, and instructional videos for students, faculty, and staff. Although not a mandatory education program, the university community is encouraged to utilize the site as a regular information source and training tool for new academic and peer advisors. The lack of institutional expectation to utilize
this educational forum downplays the importance of advising, implying that advising is not an institutional priority.

The Advising Network hosts national and campus literature and data regarding informational, conceptual, and relational elements of academic advising. Informational aspects include policies and procedures, a glossary of terms, important dates and forms, requirements, and referral resources. The conceptual aspects highlight advising as teaching and learning in a changing relationship. The Advising Network also outlines support services, the roles and responsibilities of advisors and students, and academic advising’s connection to retention and persistence of students. The relational aspects of advising within the portal highlight its importance in the national advising standards. Although the relational component of academic advising is important, the Advising Network lacks any educational opportunities to develop relational skills such as interviewing, rapport building, student decision-making, and advising special populations. The lack of information regarding the relational aspects creates a mismatch between national advising standards and institution’s priorities and commitment for the development of advising relationships.

The Advising Network is a rich resource for assisting the entire institutional community in understanding academic advising. However, it is a resource that is not fully recognized in the institutional documentation. The Advising Network was only referenced in the university catalog and the NEASC Self Study making it absent in any of the other documentation reviewed. The absence of the Advising Network in the other documentation indicates a resource that is not fully embraced by the institution’s advising community.
NEASC Accreditation Self Study

The research site’s NEASC Accreditation Self Study was reviewed to understand the institution’s current and projected standing on academic advising. Throughout the Self Study learning, student support, retention, and fiscal sustainability were highlighted. The institution has been experiencing much change and noted its priorities as fiscal sustainability and improving student persistence toward graduation.

Academic advising has been consolidated to improve student service and support. Some academic programs have implemented changes in their academic advising programs with a documented 4% increase in retention. The Self Study also reported that in response to institutional assessment data 80% of the departments made improvements to their delivery of academic advising. However, the study did not provide any documentation of the changes.

The report stated that in theory, a strong academic advising relationship improves student success. Although acknowledging its relation to student success, the study highlighted concerns of increasing the administrative burden on faculty members. In addition, there is also a concern for the increased demand on faculty in regards to advising, programmatic and curricular management, and community service without consideration for expertise and other responsibilities. These concerns reveal that the institution equates advising with an administrative process rather than a student-faculty relational experience. Equating advising with an administrative process suggests why students are experiencing a lack of connection with their faculty advisors.

The Self Study document does stress the importance of gathering evidence concerning the effect of additional administrative responsibilities on faculty teaching and advising. In addition to the assessment of academic advising, the report highlights the need for engaging
students in career conversations and linking academic programs with career opportunities. This finding gives support to the need for career advising revealed from the analysis of survey documents. The prominence of the need for career advising in multiple documents provides the evidence that students perceive career development as a critical component of the advising relationship.

The NEASC Self Study clearly identifies academic advising as an area that has potential in assisting the institution with increasing retention and persistence of its students. The integration of some student service areas showcases institutional commitment for the improvement of persistence activities such as academic advising, but concerns remain regarding inequity of faculty advising loads, career advising, and appropriate assessment of advising. Although the student services integration indicates institutional commitment to improve academic advising, the student experience remains uneven. The unevenness in experiences makes it difficult for all students to benefit from academic advising.

**University Catalog**

The uneven nature of the delivery of academic advising is showcased in the site institution’s catalog. The catalog is the official document that houses the institutional commitment to its student population along with university policies and procedures. In addition to general policies and procedures, each academic college is highlighted along with a thorough outline of each academic major.

The catalog generally defines academic advising as a service offered for assistance and a mechanism for approval of academic actions. Although a vague description is provided, discussion of academic advising is almost non-existent in the 400+ page document. Advising is mentioned within five different areas of the catalog: a student service area, an academic college,
and three academic majors. Only two of these areas mention the advising relationship. The student services area within the catalog highlights an integrative approach to advising that focuses on student needs through close contact while an academic department notes academic advising as a collaborative relationship. The limited mention of the advising relationship within the catalog indicates that the majority of the institution understands academic advising to be more of an administrative service rather than a relational component of the student learning experience. The limited focus on advising throughout the catalog showcases the unevenness of advising also found in the promotion and tenure guidelines.

**Promotion and Tenure**

The promotion and tenure documents guide each department’s evaluative decision-making process for faculty. There were 27 department promotion and tenure documents available for analysis. The guidelines were reviewed to identify how academic advising is taken into consideration when a faculty member is evaluated for promotion and tenure. Each document outlined the criteria for review, focusing on three primary areas: teaching, research, and service.

All of the documents highlighted teaching excellence as the primary area of evaluation. Scholarly contributions were noted to be closely linked to an individual’s teaching ability. Service to the university, department, and community was also reported as a significant aspect of the faculty evaluation process. Academic advising was mentioned in 21 of the 27 promotion and tenure documents. Although mentioned, there was an unevenness in the degree in which advising is weighed in the review process. The unevenness found in the promotion and tenure documents complements the finding of unevenness in the Self Study and Catalog. In addition,
the unevenness implies that there is a lack of congruency among the faculty and institution regarding the importance of academic advising in the student learning experience.

Academic advising as a criteria for evaluation was specifically mentioned in either the teaching or service categories in 14 of the 21 documents noting advising. The remaining 7 documents that note advising mention the need for faculty being available for student advising during office hours, summer orientation, or co-curricular advising. In addition, the promotion and tenure documents had only five departments note the importance of building a relational connection with students indicating that the advising relationship is not a priority of the campus in the promotion and tenure process.

Comparing the list of the 14 departments that specifically noted academic advising as a criterion with the departments represented in this case study, it was found that 5 participant pairs are in majors that have no mention of faculty responsibility to advising. Interestingly, these five departments do not use academic advising as a criteria for evaluation yet these 5 advising pairs reported a positive academic advising experience. This finding indicates that promotion and tenure of the five faculty members are unlikely to have been motivating factors for their students’ positive advising experience.

Conclusion

The purpose of reviewing the research site’s documentation was to inform the researcher of the institutional context of academic advising. The information gleaned from the review pertained to the priorities, decisions, processes, and activities related to academic advising. There were three superordinate themes identified through the document review: institutional priority, unevenness, and connection.
Academic advising was not identified as an institutional priority in any of the documents reviewed. The review found four documents that noted academic advising as an important student experience: university catalog, NEASC Self Study, student surveys, and the Advising Network. Although noted as important in these documents, the student responses in the survey documents showcase a contradiction between what is indicated by the institution as important and the reality of the student experience. This contradiction informed the researcher as she approached the interviews noting each participant’s value assigned to academic advising and their experience within their actual advising relationship.

The catalog, promotion and tenure guidelines, and NEASC Self Study highlight an unevenness in the academic advising experience at the research site. Departments differ on their approach to and evaluation of academic advising. Faculty experience an inequity in their advising loads across departments and there is a lack of agreement of whether advising is a service or an aspect of teaching. This finding apprised the researcher that departmental expectations and practices may have influence on the faculty participants’ approach to academic advising. Although the influence on the advising approach may exist at the institution, the faculty participants agreed to participate in the study because of their good advising connection, implying an unevenness in the advising experience across the institution.

An uneven presentation within the documents was found in the area of advising skills. Students shared the need for an increase in the faculty advising skill-set (i.e., information consistency, career advising, and clarity of policies). Having an understanding of how students perceive the advising skill-set allowed the researcher to pay close attention to how the student participants perceived their faculty advisors’ skills within the advising context. The review of the documents also highlights a lack of educational and assessment opportunities to improve
advising. Although not part of the interview protocol, this finding indicated an institutional need that informed the researcher of potential areas for improvement.

Although showcased in the Advising Network and the NEASC Self Study as important, but found lacking in the promotion and tenure documents, connection between faculty advisors and students was highlighted in student surveys as needing improvement. Students identified a disconnect with faculty, requesting more faculty communication as well as faculty who were role models, passionate and willing to listen. These findings demonstrate the need for students to feel connected with their faculty advisor. The need for connection influenced the researcher to give particular attention to the relational connection in the interview process.

The Advising Network and the NEASC Self Study identified the advising relationship as an essential component of the advising experience while the promotion and tenure documents had only five departments indicating the importance of a relational connection with students. A relational connection with faculty is a priority of students and is mentioned as important in some institutional documentation. Although portrayed to be important, faculty connection is not fully experienced by students, informing the researcher of an area to investigate during the interview process and analysis. In addition to being a theme within the document analysis, connection became one of three superordinate themes revealed through the interview analysis.

**Interviews**

An interview inquiry was conducted to explore the social experiences of dyadic pairs in the academic advising context. Ten faculty-student advising pairs were interviewed as part of this collective case study to gain an understanding of how college students and their advisors perceive their relational fit. Each individual was interviewed to gain insight into the lived social experiences of the bounded pair. Three superordinate themes were identified through the
interview analysis: connection, supportive actions, and relational development. Connection is the first superordinate theme that begins to define relational fit within the academic advising context.

Connection

The connectedness experienced by the advisor-advisee dyad defines their relational fit. In this collective case study connection is defined as the energy individuals feel when they are supported and gain strength from a relationship where they are seen, heard, and valued in a non-judgmental way (Brown, 2010). The first superordinate theme in this study captured the energy that is experienced between the advisor and the student within the advising relationship. During the interviews, the majority of the participants paused and seemed to be searching for the correct words before sharing their description of the relational fit. Melissa, a student participant, captured the difficulty participants had when describing their relational fit when she stated:

You just know it’s going to be a great relationship, that’s how I would describe it. It just happens, I don’t know how to put it into words. You experience it once and you just know that that’s it and there’s nothing else, and you just have to go with it. You know everywhere. It’s an overwhelming feeling I guess. It’s weird, you can’t put a word to it until you experience it and even then you can’t really describe it.

Academic advisors are the students’ consistent connection to the institution. The student will often meet their advisor early on in their experience and work with them through graduation. The connection theme highlights the need for an honest, straightforward relationship that has a sense of realness and natural rapport. The superordinate theme of connection also captures the participants’ relational experience of liking each other and feeling comfortable and at ease with an individual who is new to their life.
Ease and Likability

Participants described their advising relationship as easy and that they liked one another. The student understanding of institutional processes and course sequencing allows the pairs an opportunity to better understand each other through more meaningful conversations, making the interaction easier. When asked about what is valued most in the advising relationship, the faculty participant Leeann replied, “She’s so cognizant and aware of what the structure of the curriculum is, she can navigate for herself but she just at times needs feedback . . . so I would characterize it as an easy relationship, . . . she meets me halfway.” Leeann describes her relationship as easy because her advisee understands the degree requirements. The advisor also highlights the student’s active engagement in the relationship suggesting that it is an active partnership of both individuals. Hazel, Leeann’s student advisee, stated, “It’s really important they get to know a little bit about you. For instance I had a period of time when my grandson was living with me and I was his primary provider and it was very stressful for me . . . but by knowing, Leeann can turn me away from classes that might be more work than I can handle.” Hazel suggests that the knowledge her advisor has about her makes it easier to choose classes that are appropriate for her degree and personal situation because of her advisor’s insight. The student comment also implies a level of caring for the success of the student by matching the current reality of the student with appropriate classes.

Similarly, faculty member Casey stated that her advising responsibilities were a lot easier and that “we talk about other things, like not what classes are offered when. So we can kind of branch out with our conversations.” Rachel, Casey’s student, concluded that her current employment situation relates directly to conversations and connection with her advisor. She stated, “We talk about what would be good in my resume, what would be good things for me to
do during my undergraduate and that’s part of the reason why I got this [professional field] hospital job.” This advising pair suggests that it is the additional knowledge gained by conversations outside of registration and course sequencing that aids in the creation of ease in the relationship and expands the conversation. The pair also illustrates that the advising experience is more than course selection and degree planning.

Time spent on discussions of topics outside of institutional navigation and course selections also allowed for an opportunity to get to know each other, correlating to a sense of likability. These conversations did not focus only on the student. The advisor-advisee interactions created an awareness of each other through questioning, observation, and general discussion. Student participant Bonnie indicates the appreciation of professional sharing stating:

Being able to have, like, that professional person to bounce things off and also know me and my personal experiences . . . I’ve really looked forward to setting up appointments with her and going in . . . she will share things with me about the work she is doing outside the classroom which is really cool so I see her as more of a rounded person rather than a person who is a professor, an advisor, so it feels like a good, strong professional relationship.

Bonnie indicates that the conversations she shares with her advisor Cecilia highlight the personal understanding of their relationship. The likability that Cecilia feels towards her student is evident as she reflects on their match and what she values most in their relationship. Cecilia supports her sense of likability towards Bonnie:

I know she has lots of interests and she’s very serious now about her degree and her learning. She has always been serious about her learning but I know that is not all she is or wants, so we talk about that stuff too. How you balance. How you combine lots of
things into one whole life. I like her, I just like her. She’s funny and she’s nice and she’s smart . . . so I also just like seeing her and saying hi and having a conversation.

The comments of this advising pair demonstrate that professional sharing that includes conversations related to interests and the student’s learning increases the pair’s knowledge of each other. The knowledge that was gained through their advising experience created a sense of likability for one another.

Other advising pairs affirmed their sense of likability. Faculty advisor Richard stated, “there’s something about her I really like . . . she has a certain sparkle” and advisee Kathryn indicated what she valued about her relationship with her advisor when she stated, “Richard just kind of understands, and just finds ways to make it enjoyable and get the most out of it.” This advising pair viewed liking each other as an important aspect of their relationship. The likability that they shared made their relationship enjoyable.

Similarly, advisor Ellie expressed, “I really like her if you can’t tell. I can’t say that about all my advisees. I like Megan.” Ellie was very direct about her likability toward her advisee. However, this faculty member hesitated after expressing her thoughts implying a sense of reservation about sharing student likability. Megan, Ellie’s advisee shared her sense of likability when she met her advisor for the first time, “I can’t put my finger on it. There is something about when you meet a person you just know . . . I just got that vibe.” Although Megan struggled to find the words to describe why she likes her advisor, it was her intuitive feelings that created a sense of likability toward Ellie. Each of these advising pairs view liking one another as an important part of their relationship.

Although each participant freely stated the ease in the relationship and their likability for one another, participants were quick to point out the importance of professional boundaries.
Advisors stressed the importance of boundaries while students acknowledged that they existed. Advisor Richard stated, “I don’t have any problem managing any boundary issues.” And advisor Casper shared that he learned how not to “break that wall between being an advisor/mentor and being a friend.” Faculty advisor Casey stated that her relationship with Rachel is “not personal but it’s just a stronger professional relationship than a lot of my other students.” While another advisor Cecilia distinguishes between friend and advisor stating “I’m not going to be the friend, I am going to be the friendly advisor.” These distinctions stress the advisor’s need for the development of relational boundaries and a level of professionalism within the advising relationship.

Students cited the balance between a personal and professional relationship. Sue, a student participant shared “We don’t just talk about school all the time but it’s always on a professional level . . . . it is a friendship but at the same time it’s still professional.” Bonnie supports the balance in the relationship when she answers the question about the appropriateness of her advisor match. Bonnie stated, “I think the level was always a very appropriate level of professionalism and personal connection so I felt supported but it wasn’t a chummy and unprofessional la de da thing. It was like, we have an agenda and we’re going to do it and I actually care about you as a person.” The student participants revealed an appreciation for the professional relationship that was focused on their educational experience.

The participants appreciated the ease of the relationship made possible by a better understanding of each other. The majority of the pairs indicated that although many of their initial advising interactions were focused on course and scheduling needs, their conversations expanded to focus on more meaningful topics. As the pairs conversed about topics outside of course planning their awareness of each other developed, reinforcing a professional relationship
and likability of one another. Therefore the ease of the relationship existed but did not diminish the depth of the connection. The connection influenced likability and appreciation for one another within a professional construct. The sense of ease and likability the paired participants had for one another also developed a level of comfort within the shared advising experience.

**Comfort**

The participant responses revealed that a relational and environmental comfort within the advising relationship is important to students and faculty advisors. Students emphasized the importance of feeling comfortable with their advisor while the advisor wanted to create an environment both personally and physically that promoted comfort. Melissa, a student participant, related her comfort level to family personality traits. She shared: “I feel so comfortable, it’s so easy, it feels natural . . . he has a lot of the same personality traits that I live around and constantly surrounded by. It just makes it comfortable and easy and natural to talk to him.” Her advisor Gary highlighted the environment that his office snack corner creates for conversation, “Melissa, she likes snacks, so she eats, we are talking…not really advising in a formal sense. I think it develops a relationship if they run into difficulties with navigation through [site], they feel really comfortable coming in and letting me know.” The importance of a comfortable environment is evident in the quotes from this advising pair. These comments indicate that the ability to approach a faculty advisor is supported by a comfortable environment. Each individual discussed a level of comfortable conversation as a cornerstone in their relationship.

Similarly, Kathryn and Richard illustrated the importance of comfort in their relationship. Kathryn highlighted her comfort with talking with her advisor when she stated: “I just feel like I could ask him anything. Richard is just very friendly and easy to talk to and has very positive
energy.” Richard creates a working office environment that showcases expectations in his field as well as an open, supportive relationship. His office has an open concept and is filled with resources that students can utilize. The professional field in which he works depends on a team concept that is promoted in his office environment through a student and faculty collaborative work space. Richard’s comment captured his openness within the relationship and the creation of a collaborative environment:

Ultimately it is a very individual experience and students need to know there is at least one person they can go to and talk. In my case if I have to do something real private I will close the door but [points to the open office concept] they will stand and I will talk to them. There’s a table in the center area that’s for them. I think having that personal connection is important because that relationship that advisors have is an ongoing thing . . . I am trying to cement that ongoing relationship, professional relationship, with the student so that they have someone to go to.”

Similar to the previous pair, Kathryn’s desire for a comfortable advising relationship was met by Richard’s desire to create a comfortable advising environment. The comments from both of these advising pairs show that a comfortable environment created by the advisor sends a message of available support to their student advisees.

The comfort level is not always immediately felt within the advising relationship. Bonnie talked about her comfort with her advisor Cecilia after their relationship blossomed because of a particular conversation. Bonnie stated, “I kind of got to talk to her about my experiences there [international exchange] and that was when we really blossomed as a relationship. I wouldn’t consider her my main confidant by any means, but I definitely feel comfortable going to her.” Bonnie’s comment shows that comfort in an advisor does not correlate to being a personal
confidant but it does however provide an opportunity to converse. The conversation between this advising pair influenced the growth in their advising relationship.

Cecilia shared how she created an office environment free of barriers and her own comfort level with Bonnie: “I have very deliberately arranged the office so there’s no place they can sit that’s not either next to me or face to face with me without something in between us.” This comment is an additional example of the advisor consciously creating the comfortable environment. Cecilia went on to describe their mutual comfort level: “She is comfortable coming in and checking in and I think I’m pretty comfortable with her sort of asking questions. . . . I am comfortable pushing her to clarify her own ideas about things.” This quote demonstrates how comfort between the advising pair aids the advisor in investing energy in helping the student to think critically about her ideas.

Each of the participants in this study who described feeling comfortable with their relational partner demonstrated that developing a comfort level between a faculty advisor and student advisee was an important element in their relationship. The faculty also illustrated that they consciously promoted a level of relational comfort by creating an open environment. There was no consistency found among the pairs regarding the exact time within the relational continuum that the pair felt comfortable with one another. However, it was evident that as the paired participants met and shared conversations, they each became more comfortable with each other highlighting a sense of realness and natural rapport.

**Authenticity**

Relying on individuals to be their natural self is the essence of being authentic. Participant responses suggest that within the advising relationship an authentic approach highlights an honest, trusting, straightforward relationship that has a sense of realness and natural
rapport. Kathryn captured the authenticity of her advisor Richard by stating: “He doesn’t put up a front because he doesn’t have to, he is just very real all the time,” while Melissa described her relational interactions with her advisor as “easy and natural.” These comments showcase the natural rapport that a student advisee experiences in an authentic relationship. However, Hazel elicited an image of authenticity of both individuals in the advising relationship when she stated:

But you know, she’s laid back, doesn’t stand on a lot of ceremony which is nice….I can be, just be animated, I feel like I can say what I need to say, I don’t feel like I need to censor myself, or be too standoffish. It’s that certain people project an openness that is something that engenders trust with me. So when I click with someone, it’s because I kind of sense that openness and I sense their genuine ability to want to know or want to help. It’s not just a job to her.

The authenticity within the relationship supports the student in being her natural self. The rapport that Hazel described built trust and drew out her true self within the relationship giving support to the positive influence advisor authenticity has on the advisor-advisee connection.

Bonnie expressed her level of trust in Cecilia when she stated, “I trust her completely. She has myself and my best interest at heart. This sounds cheesy but I am so grateful that this is the experience I have had. I do trust her completely.” Cecilia commented on her advisee’s trust:

A relationship works best when there is trust. The student needs to trust that I have her interests in mind and that I have accurate information for her or will seek it out or direct her where to find it. She has to trust me at some level and I have to trust her to tell me the truth, to be honest about what are her goals and priorities.

The student expressed gratefulness for the trusted advisor while the advisor identified trust as a main ingredient in the advising relationship. These quotes from Bonnie and Cecilia demonstrate
the integral role trust plays in their relationship. The shared trust experienced by this pair implies a validation of the integrity of their relationship.

A level of trust was also found to assist students with receiving feedback. Bonnie stated that Cecilia is “honest in her feedback . . . she doesn’t hold back.” Another student Jennifer, shared that her advisor “shoots straight with people” and that she depended on her honest straightforward feedback when she questioned her ability to be successful in the major. Jennifer reported, “I knew that if I told her that I wasn’t sure, I knew she was going to give me honest advice. I think that if she honestly didn’t think I could do it she would find a way to say it.” The participants’ responses revealed that trust, honesty, and straightforwardness are depended upon within the advising relationship. The students shared that the trusted feedback they received allowed them to move forward confidently in their decision-making process.

Advising pair Sue and Casper shared the trait of straightforwardness. Sue shared that she has learned how to practice assertiveness in regards to her needs from her advisor. Sue acknowledged this when she stated, “He’s pretty straightforward with, ‘okay tell me what you want to do.’ He still leaves it up to you while he is still guiding you and it’s been beneficial . . . a little gentle push.” Although Sue credits Casper for learning and practicing this skill, Casper believes that Sue was “very, um, open and straightforward about what she wanted to do.” When discussing what he values most about his advising relationship with Sue, Casper identifies her ability to be “honest with me” and “that she is straightforward.” These comments indicate that mutual straightforwardness influences a relationship grounded in honesty. This relational pair found that their shared straightforward approach assisted in understanding where each other was coming from, making it an honest relationship.
Each of the participant pairs in this study identified a level of connectedness with their relationship partner. The connectedness with each other promoted a sense of ease between the relational pair. The ease within the relationship linked directly to the likability of their partner along with relational comfort. Although their relationships were found to be friendly in nature, participants were quick to note that their relationship was based on professionalism, highlighting the balance between relational comfort and the purposeful professional nature of academic advising. Authenticity of each individual within the pair was also found to create a natural rapport that influenced a sense of trusted openness, laying a foundation for a supportive advising relationship grounded in integrity.

**Supportive Actions**

Students reach out to advisors to attain help, information, and additional support throughout their college experience. Availability and the provision of a timely response are expectations students have for their advisor. Reliance on gaining information or assistance makes actions from advisors critical elements of creating supportive relationships focused on student success. Student potential is often recognized when the advisor gains knowledge about the student through advising interactions. Knowledge of one another builds confidence between the pair. The confidence advisors have for particular students allows them full assurance in the student’s abilities. Understanding and confidence in the student supports the advisor’s ability to provide him/her with opportunities that increase their learning through educational experiences in their field of interest. The three sub-themes that converged across the paired participants were availability and responsiveness, confidence in each other, and learning opportunities.
Availability and Responsiveness

Students are encouraged to engage in interactions with their faculty advisors. Whether the students are new to the institutional environment or are seasoned institutional community members, they at times have questions or are in need of support from their advisor. Being available and responsive to inquiries promotes communication between the advisor-advisee and helps advisors identify ways to support students while providing information and educational opportunities to students. The knowledge that students gain from the information and educational experiences provided by their advisor increases their independence.

The participants in this study expressed that when they needed assistance and reached out, their faculty advisor was available and responsive. Sue noted an experience with her advisor regarding a conflict with one of her classes. Sue shared, “He was right on top of it and that’s been really awesome . . . he called someone else and he had them walk me through which one [class] would fit . . . he’s always available and ready to help, which is really nice.” When Sue reached out for help, her advisor utilized campus resources to assist her in solving the issue. While her advisor did not correct the issue himself, his ability to connect Sue to an appropriate resource to resolve the situation gave Sue the sense that Casper was available and responsive to her needs.

Availability and responsiveness are also important to Casper, Sue’s advisor. Casper shared his belief in meeting the expectations of the need for immediacy when he indicated, “I try to just be available, I guess is the biggest thing . . . I typically reply to emails as soon as I get it on my phone . . . they live in this immediate world and I don’t mind being a part of that.” Casper acknowledges the need to communicate in a way that meets his student’s need, requiring an openness to the use of technology and the expectation of responsiveness. This advising pair
offer an example of how the available and responsive actions of the advisor support the student’s needs and promote communication between the two individuals.

Similarly, student participant Jennifer and faculty advisor Deborah both identified availability and responsiveness as important aspects of their relationship. Jennifer highlighted that the quick response from Deborah alleviated stress when she stated, “I’ve heard a lot of stories about people whose advisors are really hard to get a hold of, emailing back, stuff like that. I think that would be so stressful for me. I feel really lucky that she always gets back to me immediately cause that is really important.” When sharing important qualities in an academic advisor, Jennifer reported responsiveness and reliability along with experience, knowledge, organization, flexibility, and investment in the student. Deborah supported Jennifer’s need for responsiveness when answering the question pertaining to the important aspects within an advising relationship by stating, “I would say responsiveness is the most important thing . . . they are happy I am responsive. They care more about that than ‘hey how are you doing?’” The responses of this pair highlight the value students and advisors attach to responsiveness. Jennifer related responsiveness as the reason her stress level is not elevated and Deborah’s response implies that responsiveness is appreciated more than getting to know each other. Although the responsiveness is appreciated more, it supports communication within the advising pair.

Peter experienced similar availability of his advisor Daniel. When responding to the question regarding important qualities of an academic advisor Peter responded, “The open line of communication is necessary. He like, frequently checks his email. He is often in his office not hiding away in some lab . . . he is available.” Faculty advisor Daniel satisfies Peter’s need for availability and also shares his expectation that students take advantage of him as a resource. Daniel shared, “I will meet with him/them as much as they want. I am a resource that if they
understand the possibility that it’s a valuable resource, they can take advantage of it. Peter has
done a pretty good job of that.” Peter met David’s expectation by taking advantage of his
advisor’s availability as a valuable resource. Peter’s actions demonstrated how he valued his
advisor’s availability and advisement. The connection between availability and communication
is evident in the comments of this advising pair. The availability promotes communication and
conversation, positively influencing the advising experience.

Additional student participants in this study highlighted the value in their advisors’
availability and responsiveness in regards to decreasing stress. Rachel shared that it was
important that her advisor be available to meet with her and have the time management skills to
“respond to me as quickly as possible so I’m not freaking out.” Megan noted that her advisor
was not one to respond immediately but decreased stress when she did respond. Megan stated,
“she’s not going to respond to you in an hour but she will respond to you in twenty-four hours so
you don’t have to worry. If you need to go to her, her door is always open . . . I don’t expect her
to reply on a Saturday but it’s nice because it alleviates my stress level.” Stress can be a negative
aspect of a student’s college experience that increases with unanswered questions. Advisor
responsiveness helps to clarify the unknown and decreases stress. The participants’ responses
illustrate how the timely responses of their advisors positively affect their personal state, making
their advising experience more valuable.

The faculty advisors’ responsiveness decreased the stress the unknown answer created for
students. In addition to relieving stress, students experienced the advisor as an educator and
resource person who is focused on the student’s success. An advisor’s availability and
responsiveness encourages the ongoing interactions between the advising pair, supporting an
increase in understanding of the institution and the student’s educational experience. In addition, confidence in both the relationship as a whole as well as the individuals involved is developed.

**Confidence in Each Other**

The student participants expressed that the advisor’s confidence in the student was an important factor in the relationship. Confidence in the student enhanced the support and connection the students felt within the advising relationship. Sue noted her advisor’s confidence in her when they discussed dropping a calculus class. Sue shared Casper’s comments when she repeated, “It’s not the end of the world. You will see a tutor, we will get through it. Don’t drop it. You can do it.” This comment revealed Casper’s confidence in his student advisee. Although the course remained difficult for Sue, knowing her advisor believed in her abilities created a supportive atmosphere.

Kathryn talked about being challenged by a processing disorder and the importance of being self-confident in her abilities. Kathryn shared, “just being confident in my abilities is important . . . he has confidence in me, that’s important to me.” Richard, Kathryn’s advisor, linked his confidence with knowing the student outside of test scores. Richard shared, “I’ve gotten to know her and I know what she can do so she’s not just those test scores.” Richard’s comment indicates that his knowledge of Kathryn and his ability to empower her was important to him. Richard discussed what he tells students, “I tell them, you are here, I looked at your SATs. You are capable of doing this. You’ve got the raw intellectual processing power to do this. Maybe we need to talk about study skills cause that is not going to show up on [the SAT]. I think that is empowering.” Richard’s approach builds student confidence through his empowering tactics as well as his ability to provide opportunities to discuss ways he can support
the student. The comments of this participant pair highlight how students’ confidence positively influences their belief in their ability to succeed.

Similarly, Jennifer was not at all confident in her ability to succeed: “I didn’t know if I could do it. If I could continue in the major because like, I just don’t know . . . I did not have any reason to feel that way, she had confidence in me . . . . for her to have confidence in me makes me feel like I can actually do it.” Deborah also reflected on the meeting when Jennifer questioned her abilities. Deborah noted that in addition to her confidence in Jennifer, the members of the department also had confidence in her. This interaction between this pair illustrates how an advisor’s confidence in a student’s abilities and the student’s awareness of the confidence supports the individual’s success as a student.

Furthermore, Jennifer thought about the possibilities if confidence in her as an individual had come prior to college. Jennifer shared, “In high school I never really had someone like be really confident in me, so it was like, made me think, wow! If I had someone like that before, like a long time ago, who knows, maybe I would have [long pause] you know, it’s crazy!” This comment indicates the student’s recognition of the powerful influence advisor confidence has had on her college experience.

Advisors’ high expectations of the student relate to the building of faculty advisor confidence in the student advisee. Richard indicated this connection when he shared, “She knows me enough to know I have high standards and high expectations so I think she knows what I think she is capable of, so I think she lets me help her get more out of herself.” Richard reveals the connection between confidence in the student and realistic expectations of the individual. Referring to how high expectations support confidence in student abilities, student advisee Rachel explained, “She expects a high level from you. The same goes for advising. If
she knows you can do something she will recommend that you do it by taking the extra course for example, or taking [name of course] when I didn’t have to take it. If she knows you can do it, she will push you to do it, which is a good thing.” The student recognizes the balance between the high expectation of her advisor and her advisor’s confidence in her abilities.

The students’ confidence is influenced by their understanding of the advisor’s professional knowledge. Several student participants provided evidence of a link between confidence in one’s advisor and the advisor’s professional knowledge. Melissa stated, “He knows what he’s doing . . . which impresses me and just reassures me . . . makes me feel better as a student who is going to him for help and advice.” Rachel indicated that her advisor’s “knowledge is mind-blowing . . . she is very well known in [professional field] world and she has a lot of experience . . . she knows her stuff about [major] and advising. She has helped me a lot during this whole college experience.” Each of these student participants’ comments indicates that they hold there advisor’s professional knowledge in high regard and understand that their advisor’s knowledge and experience support their advising relationship.

Megan viewed her advisor’s knowledge as going in-depth into the subject matter when she stated, “she really knows what she’s doing . . . Ellie really goes into depth and really knows what she is talking about.” Bonnie balanced her advisor’s expertise in her field and her expertise in advising by stating, “She is a really intellectual, bright person and I respect her . . . she has a lot of experience. I believe Cecilia brought to the table, like some wisdom and finesse with lining up classes that not just shaped my advising but my undergraduate path.” The advisor confidence that these participants describe highlights the personal interest in the field that they share with their advisor as well as their advisor’s intellectual integrity in the profession. The professional knowledge and connections advisors have also open up doors of opportunity for their students.
Learning Opportunities

Faculty advisors are key contributors to their professional field and have access to potential student learning opportunities on and off campus. These learning opportunities can be critical to the development of skills and for the students’ ability to take responsibility for their educational experiences. Providing these opportunities becomes a turning point in the advising relationship where the advisor is not only an avenue for information but a resource for professional and educational opportunities to enhance the growth of the student.

Educational opportunities could be directly linked to the classroom, campus community, or professional experience. Faculty advisor Cecilia had high expectations for Bonnie to challenge herself and looked for ways to help her compliment her requirements with additional courses. Cecilia stated, “I have a pretty good sense of what the goals are and give her options along the way.” Bonnie acknowledged the importance of Cecilia’s advice:

So I take these classes with these awesome professors and get involved in the student group to an extent and they bring this really cool speaker to campus and all of a sudden I am networking with all these other people. That wouldn’t have happened unless Cecilia had said ‘hey this would pair really well and this professor is really great.’ This is a very tangible string of connections which would not have been made if I hadn’t had an advisor who was proactive that way.

Bonnie’s comment highlights how an advising conversation can lead to the expansion of the student’s learning experiences. Bonnie held her advisor, the advice given, and her learning opportunity and experience in high regard. Likewise, Sue credited Casper’s influence when she stated “He’s gotten me into some pretty good programs and he’s given me opportunities.” Casper assisted Sue in getting a substantial scholarship as well as identifying useful seminars and
potential internships for her. The interaction within this advising relationship allowed the student to recognize that her advisor provided opportunities that supported her learning experiences.

Several student participants highlighted internships as the educational opportunity made available to them through their advising relationship. Through advising conversations Daniel made Peter aware of internships through a website search process. When responding to a question regarding learning from his advising interactions, Peter’s sole response was “[Daniel] has shown me some good internship websites.” Daniel highlighted Peter’s independence as well as the importance of expanding student learning outside of the classroom when he responded to a question regarding key topics covered in advising conversations “well a big thing is opportunities beyond coursework . . . we have talked about that a fair amount and he has done a great job on his own independently. Opportunities and the constant networking.” The comments from this advising pair highlight the importance of student action after the advisor’s introduction to the opportunity. Daniel provided opportunities through advice and resources, and Peter took advantage of the opportunity through independent action.

Tracy supported independent actions on the part of the student when she indicated the importance of Joseph assisting her with her internship, “He helped me with the whole internship thing which is important cause, I mean, that was the first and only real world business I’ve had through college.” Joseph had discussed how an internship can broaden a student’s portfolio and referred her to a departmental resource, helping Tracy secure an internship during her final semester. Tracy’s internship became a critical aspect of her college learning and professional experience, making her interaction with Joseph a key contribution to goal attainment.
Advisors credit the understanding of the individual as important when referring students to internship opportunities while the students credit their advisor’s connection with their professional field and the communication of opportunities. Student participant Rachel stated, “Having the [advisor’s professional field title] at [site institution] opened up more opportunities for me, she let me know.” Casey, Rachel’s advisor shared:

I feel I know her a little bit better. I also helped her get a job at a [professional field] clinic that she just loved. It’s not personal but it’s just a stronger professional relationship than a lot of my students. We’ve had this kind of interaction where I’ve been able to give her a recommendation, which I don’t often do for my advisees until much, much later.

Casey’s knowledge of Rachel made her feel confident in providing a recommendation for an educational experience in Rachel’s intended professional field. The comments from this advising pair illustrate the student’s understanding that her advisor is an influential link to opportunities and that advisor-student knowledge has a strong connection to an advisor confidently recommending a student.

Advisee Kathryn was also appreciative of her advisor’s communication and understanding of her as an individual:

He’s like ‘you should look at this’ and sends email links for internships or for networking things. He’s like, ‘hey I know this person who is looking for someone to do this, you might be interested.’ I mean, Richard knows me well enough to say ‘you would really like this internship. This is something you will enjoy and get a lot out of.’ So I feel like that’s really important.
Richard explained the importance of knowing Rachel: “We have a pretty positive relationship. We kid around. I respect her, she respects me. She’s a good amateur photographer and these are the illustrations for it [book he is writing] . . . I am open to posting her pictures . . . you have to get to know students as people, cause it affects how they learn and who they are and how you enhance their learning.” The comments from this advising pair demonstrate that knowing students assists faculty advisors in helping students build toward their future by offering learning opportunities that match their interests and goals. Without knowing their student’s abilities, skills, interests and goals, faculty advisors may lack the confidence to strongly recommend opportunities.

Educational opportunities available to the student through the advising relationship also include teaching, tutoring, and research assistantships, and coaching for their graduate school application process. Gary strongly advised his student Melissa to become integrated in the departmental community. Referring to what is important in the advising relationship, Gary stated: “Getting enmeshed into the department in such a way that will end up with experiences, interacting with faculty as people not just as teachers.” Gary reflected on his impression of Melissa who he provided a teaching assistant opportunity, “I thought of her as a potentially good psychology major who probably had a lot of potential. I immediately began to focus energy and try to make sure she had some opportunities that are more than just the typical opportunities of going to class.” Gary’s comments highlight the importance of advisors knowing the student’s potential. Knowledge of the student creates confidence to provide a level of commitment of energy and expertise to advance the student’s educational experiences.

Similarly, Deborah and Jennifer highlighted the importance of the faculty advisor in providing educational opportunities. The student participant Jennifer, acknowledged the
importance of her tutoring experience and research assistantship that Deborah recommended when she stated, “This is a huge resume builder so it’s a really big deal for me.” Deborah also stated the importance of the experience and the integration with faculty:

I just think doing all those things with faculty is really beneficial to the student…seeing the research from a lot of different angles, she has been a subject. In classes, instead of talking about research she is actually doing research. The tutoring, we talk about pedagogy, stuff like that, so I just think she’s getting a very big picture of everything and I just think it’s really beneficial to her.

Deborah’s comment points out how the experiences that Jennifer has in the field directly relates to her classroom discussions. Deborah’s and Jennifer’s words illustrate that the educational opportunities made available by the faculty advisor enhance the student’s educational and professional experiences. These educational experiences also enmeshed Jennifer into the academic department, allowing her the opportunity to integrate with faculty and other students outside of the classroom.

The advising relationship can also provide opportunities for strengthening graduate school applications, opening doors of opportunity for furthering the student’s educational experience. Leeann explained her responsibility as an advisor: “You need to know what pathways are available, um, and help them to get their ducks aligned to make them, you know, competitive as they can be for that application for grad school.” Daniel concurred stating, “I anticipate writing him a letter of recommendation . . . advising, um, what grad schools are like, specifically what grad programs are good.” Deborah adds how an advisor can give feedback and perspective on the student application to graduate school: “Those essays about how great you are and how the grad school should accept you is one of the hardest things to write so I feel we ought
to help with that.” These comments imply a sense of responsibility of the faculty members in their students’ preparation for navigating and understanding graduate school.

Several faculty participants highlight graduate school application assistance as an opportunity that arises for their student from their relationship. Although this was apparent from the faculty advisor responses, no student highlighted graduate school assistance as important or as a result of their interaction with their advisor. The lack of mention of graduate school assistance in the student responses could be due to the mere fact that no student participant was currently involved in the application process, and therefore did not see the correlation between the relationship and the learning opportunity.

The majority of the student participants and several faculty advisors identified availability and responsiveness as key contributors to a sense of support within the advising relationship. The confidence the paired participants had in one another assisted in the development of a stronger relationship through the acknowledgement of the knowledge, skills, and abilities of their relational partner. In addition, the support and confidence faculty advisors had for their student partners supports the provision of educational opportunities along a continuum of relational development.

**Relational Development**

The advising relationship develops over a period of time. As the relationship begins, the advisor and student create a relational foundation for working together. As the relationship progresses, the student grows more independent while pursuing his/her educational goals. The relationship is grounded in the student meaning-making of self and learning through the different opportunities provided and the interactions with the faculty advisor. The three sub-themes that
converged across participants were acceptance of the individual, student growth, and advancement of the relationship.

**Acceptance of the Individual**

Students and advisors enter the advising relationship not knowing each other as individuals. As the relationship progresses all participants begin to understand their relationship partner and begin to make meaning from their interactions. The connectedness between the individuals is influenced by each relationship partner’s understanding of the other. The advisor has the opportunity to create an environment that balances a power differential between the faculty member and student with a level of comfort. The balance decreases the intimidation felt by students and promotes relational development.

Several students, but not all, shared a level of intimidation upon first meeting their faculty advisor. The feeling of intimidation came from not knowing the individual, lack of understanding of the practice of advising, and respect towards an individual with a terminal degree. Faculty advisor Gary shared that his advisee Melissa did not come to the relationship with an intimidation, making possible a quicker connection between them. Gary explained, “A lot of students come to [site] with intimidation. This translates into a fear of interacting in a way that would let them discover that we’re human beings.” Gary’s comment defines the intimidation as a level of fear that some students bring to their advising relationship creating an immediate disconnect between the advising pair. Shifting the intimidation factor to create a safe environment of interaction involves both the student and advisor.

When reflecting about how her feeling of intimidation shifted, student participant Jennifer shared:
I started out [pause] I was intimidated, but as the meeting progressed, not only did I not have any reason to feel that way, but she had confidence in me . . . you don’t feel like she’s up here [raises hand]. You should because she has her Ph.D. and has written in scientific journals . . . talking just feels like people. It doesn’t feel like she’s above us at all, even though she is . . . she doesn’t make you call her doctor, we just call her Deborah.

An acknowledgement of a difference in the advisor and student’s education level and professional experience is made by Jennifer while she shares her appreciation for the personal and relational comfort and respect for her faculty advisor. Jennifer’s response indicates that the advisor can create an environment of conversation absent of intimidation.

Sue captured the initial intimidation she felt when she reflected on her first meeting with Casper, “I was a little intimidated because I didn’t know him at first. It went well, he’s pretty laid back and easy going. Made me feel very comfortable.” Bonnie and Hazel shared that a level of intimidation remains even after knowing their advisors for three and a half years. Bonnie explained, “I’m still a bit intimidated but in a healthy way. She is really intellectual, bright person and I respect her.” Hazel, a non-traditional student, shared, “There is still a level of formality. I think it is a generational thing . . . she is the Ph.D.” Each of these students holds a deep respect for the advisor’s intellect and terminal degree while feeling a level of comfort within the relationship, identifying the possibility that there can be a balance between intimidation and comfort.

Kathryn introduced how her advisor decreased the intimidation factor when she stated “He doesn’t talk down to me ever. He has a doctorate degree . . . a lot of professors are like I’m doctor so and so, refer to me as doctor so and so. Richard is like ‘I’m Richard’ it makes it less intimidating. . . . He talks to me like I’m an equal.” Richard explained the power differential with
his student Kathryn along with the human factor when he stated, “It’s an unequal power relationship . . . I need to be a certain safety zone for them but that requires a certain amount of sharing to build that relationship . . . it’s an unequal relationship but they are equal because they are humans.” Kathryn’s comment suggests the reality of the power differential with professors and the need for the balance between intimidation and comfort while Richard captures the need for balance of power and acceptance of the individual in the advising relationship.

Acceptance of the individual promotes connectedness in the advising relationship. When asked about how his relationship with Melissa compared with other students he advises, Gary shared, “I don’t do a good job sort of doing half way stuff. I either get to know them well and they really respond to my treating them as, you know, people rather than students or, you know, we sort of pass in the night.” Gary’s comment illustrates the importance of accepting students as individual people. The importance of appreciating the uniqueness of each student was evident when Daniel stated, “I have no problem seeing that [uniqueness] in each of these students. You know, that’s the most important thing I can contribute.” Each of these faculty advisors indicates that the acceptance of the individual within the advising relationship promotes an environment for the relationship to develop. As the advising relationship evolves over time it also promotes the personal growth of the student.

Student Growth

As students enter the advising relationship they begin a process of development. During their interactions with their faculty advisor, students have the opportunity to ask questions, become informed, and make meaning through self-reflection. Initially students do not have a full understanding of the college environment and its processes. This situation creates a dependent advising relationship. Students begin to change as their knowledge of the institution, degree
program, and self grows. Rachel demonstrated this change when she described the shift in her role as an advisee, “I don’t feel like the same advisee that I was that first semester . . . I didn’t know anything. Now I know stuff and I know exactly what I need to graduate. It is partly because of Casey and more confidence in my degree.” The student illustrated the distinct difference between not knowing, but then gaining knowledge, understanding, and confidence.

Casey, Rachel’s advisor, responded to a question related to her advisee’s growth, “She still is a 19 year old college student and uncertain about things even though she is even more self-assured . . . I think she is still trying to figure out exactly what she wants to do.” This faculty advisor comment indicates the existence of student maturation while also highlighting the opportunity for additional growth.

Cecilia illustrated the growth of her student advisee when she shared how her impressions of Bonnie have changed over time. In this relationship Cecilia expressed her appreciation of being involved in observing the development of her student advisee. Cecilia acknowledged Bonnie’s growth as well as her own shift in her belief regarding the student’s engagement in her learning. Cecilia stated:

I knew she was really smart and really capable, um, and I thought she was not living up to her [pause], not fulfilling her potential. Sounds kind of cheesy . . . the impression that she is not fulfilling, that is long gone. She did an awful lot of growing to make sure that the concerns weren’t valid any longer. That’s actually one of the cool things about working with Bonnie, seeing that growth. That kind of immature student becoming a grownup who is really pretty self-confident and poised, and adventurous, and very smart.
Although Cecilia had high expectations of her student advisee, she never credited herself or the advising relationship with influencing the growth of Bonnie. However, Bonnie emphasized Cecilia’s influence in her development:

“I’ve kind of like metamorphosed through college because there’s this adult. I am one too, still getting there, who sort of has been like a mirror or like a reflecting board, to say ‘you are so very different from a year ago and even though you may not see that you are showing up to class very differently with different energy. You are. Where can we go from here?’ She has been able to reflect some of my own growth back to me.

The reflective thoughts of the student on her growth highlight the critical importance the advising relationship and the actions of her advisor have had on her growth as an individual and her success as a student. In addition to the understanding of self, the student also begins to learn more about the institution and becomes more independent.

In response to a question regarding how their roles had changed over time both Tracy and Joseph immediately highlighted the independence of the student. Tracy described herself as a student who had gained the knowledge to be independent of her advisor. Tracy stated, “I’ve been more clear on what I need to do, so I can, you know, do it for myself a little more instead of relying on just him. So I guess I have just gotten more independent as a student. Relying on myself than just having to rely on an advisor.” Referring to Tracy’s independence, Joseph stated, “She didn’t feel the need to come and see me. So by default or by force of actions rather than words, my role changed. I became a person who supplied answers via email.” The comments from this advising pair support the influence of time within the advising relationship and the student’s increase in institutional knowledge and experience. Over time the students gain more
information and confidence in their actions and decisions, decreasing their reliance on the faculty advisor.

Learning through advising takes time and effort from both the advisor and the student. Deborah provided learning opportunities to Jennifer because she identified a need to build her confidence as a student. Deborah identified Jennifer’s growth and her own involvement in the student’s development when she stated, “I think I am a good mentor for her. I think she’s getting a lot, well certainly I am seeing her confidence. It has definitely changed.” Deborah’s identification of herself as a good mentor and her indication that Jennifer has benefited from her educational opportunities implies a sense of responsibility and ownership for the student’s experience. Jennifer further indicated how she had become more confident and independent:

When I first started I wasn’t sure, really nervous about it [advising relationship]. I feel like, as her advisee, I feel a lot more confident. I am a lot more organized and I am a lot more aware of what I need to get done and what I need to be doing to graduate on time. When I first started she had to like spell it out for me and now I’m more like, if I need to figure out a class I can do it by myself.

This student comment highlights her growth toward independence within the advising relationship. The student’s level of confidence and independence grew simultaneously influencing the student to be proactive towards her decision-making.

As students become integrated into the institution they become more aware of how to navigate through the myriad of systems. Peter reflected upon the difference between college and high school. Peter shared, “In here it’s a lot more open and I need a little bit of direction but once I figured the system out I started to settle in and became more self-directed. I suppose Daniel did a pretty good job.” Peter credited Daniel in helping him understand and gain
knowledge that provided him the ability to eventually guide himself. Daniel complemented what Peter stated, “I do a really good job guiding them to understand and that it’s a valuable relationship.” This comment indicates Daniel’s expectation of himself as an advisor to guide students and assist them in understanding. Daniel’s description elicits an image of the advisor as teacher and an advising relationship that focuses on student learning. The relationships across the pairs focused on assisting the students in learning about themselves, the institution, their academic program, and their future. In addition, the relationships shared by the students and the advisors developed over time.

**Advancement of the Relationship**

Similar to the growth of the student, the advising relationship as a whole transitions over time. This transition is the result of the culmination of the goal-directed work shared by the student and advisor. The development of the relationship requires the participation of both individuals within the dyad. Faculty advisor Leeann described the need for both individuals to be involved to assist the relational development when she stated, “It takes two to tango. So she’s influenced the development of our relationship as have I. So you know, we’ve both contributed.” Joseph reinforced Leeann’s comment when he reflected on his relationship with Tracy as a “proactive interaction” that had “contributions on both sides.” These faculty advisor comments point out that the contribution of both individuals within the pair advances the relationship from information-giving to focusing on the student’s future.

In describing her high expectations for her student advisee, Cecilia captured how the relationship shifts to building towards the student’s future by setting expectations and offering appropriate support. Cecilia stated, “I start from the premise that all of our students are grownups. If I put the bar up here [raises hand] they will all work to get to the bar and my job is
to make sure there is enough scaffolding to get to that bar.” Bonnie, Cecilia’s advisee, shared that she always felt “supported and encouraged” and that their relationship grew once she contributed an “emotional investment.” Although not specifically stating the high expectations of her advisor, Bonnie noted that her own personal investment contributed to the advancement of their relationship. The comments from this advising pair show that the contributions of both relationship partners promoted relational growth.

Early on in each relationship in this study there was a focus on navigating the institution and understanding the academic program. This information-giving aspect of the advising interaction provided an avenue for conversation. Leeann described the degree checklist she uses in her advising sessions as a “good foundational medium for which to engage in your advising sessions.” Hazel, Leann’s student confirmed that their relationship developed over time when she stated, “I would like to think we got a little closer over time as we got to know each other better and got to work with each other more over time.” Jennifer outlined her relational development with Deborah: “When I first declared my major it was more like a typical relationship where I would go in and talk about classes and over time we, just like, now that I know her pretty well and she knows me pretty well when it comes to our advising relationship … I don't really need her to help me specifically like picking out classes.” Each of these participants referenced the relational partner’s ability to know each other through their advising relationship. The relationships began with a focus on course selection and as their relationship developed, they gained knowledge of each other and the institution. Over time, the purpose of their interactions changed due to the development of their relationship.

Advisors and students recognized the change from information-giving to future planning. Gary discussed the advising relationship progression by outlining his initial advising
responsibility of providing correct information about graduation requirements and any appropriate observations for student decision-making. Gary described how advising interactions will shift to a futuristic focus, “If the student spends any time with me, and that’s up to them obviously, then it turns more into an advising-career kind of thing.” Faculty advisor Casey supported Gary’s comments regarding the change to a futuristic focus when she stated, “Because I had been working with her as long as I have, I understood her, I knew her. So in that sense my role went from just helping them pick out courses to helping them get a job. So, in that sense the role has changed a lot.” These faculty participants indicate the progression of an information-based relationship to a future-focused relationship. Their comments also highlight a key component of relational development within academic advising – time.

It takes time for an advising relationship to develop. Student participants shared the importance of developing their advising relationship over a period of time. When responding to a question regarding qualities in an advising relationship, Bonnie shared that it was important for her advisor to know her enough to give her honest feedback. Bonnie also stated, “It takes time to build up that kind of relationship.” In addition, Megan described the relationship with her advisor as cumulative, “It's cumulative - I don't have to start over again each time I go to see her.” Hazel added, “She knows my history - she has walked this path with me the whole time and it’s important to get input from someone who knows where I've been not just where I'm going.” Each of these student comments supports the significance of the element of time in developing the advising relationship. In addition to time, the student participants reveal the importance of their advisor’s knowledge and understanding of them and their background as positively influencing the development of their relationship.
Faculty advisor Gary suggests that the combination of time and advisor self-disclosure promotes a stronger relationship. Gary stated, “It’s like the longer you know somebody the more self-disclosure occurs. The more self-disclosure occurs the closer you are because you know them better, so it changes. It gets more, oh I don’t know if intense is the word.” Richard discussed how he self-discloses by sharing the process of writing a book. Richard explained, “That [self-disclosure] builds trust and shows accountability and shows that vulnerability and sharing of stuff. So they get to know me too.” Cecilia describes the knowledge her students have about her:

They know that I have things outside of class and advising. They know I have chickens, they know I have kids, they know I have hobbies, and um, they know I have research and teaching and service. Even if I don’t always think about it I am aware at some level that in some ways I am a role model for, that you can make this stuff work.

Each of these faculty members illustrates the importance of advancing the relationship by being an authentic member of their partnership through self-disclosure. By sharing their authentic selves, the advisors make it possible for their students to understand them as individuals. Understanding the person along with the professional position creates a foundation of comfort and trust that the relationship can be built upon.

Student participant Hazel captured how self-disclosure affects the advising relationship, “The fact that she is willing to divulge certain information in a conversational manner kind of invokes a trust bond. It’s a typical social sharing . . . that’s the way that I make connections, when I have people I can share with.” This comment highlights the connectedness Hazel shares with her advisor Leeann. Their connectedness is grounded in trust and is initiated by her advisor’s self-disclosure.
Trust between the relationship pair assists in the advancement of the relationship. Trust also becomes a factor as the relationship grows and becomes more focused on the student’s professional future. Faculty advisor Richard discussed trusting Kathryn to share her professional interests and meeting his expectations to “build toward the overall goal.” Richard treated Kathryn as a professional when he stated, “I expect that if I say you should be working on this, that you are working on it. Cause I know her, I expect her to tell me what she needs.” The faculty participant’s comment also highlights the balance between knowing the student and trusting that she will meet his expectation.

The majority of faculty advisors in this study expressed the importance of knowing and trusting the students enough to be able to recommend them. All mentioned their role in either recommending the student during the undergraduate career for a professional experience, or recommending the student for employment opportunities or graduate school. Faculty advisor Casey indicated the importance of knowing students and trusting their abilities. Casey shared her thoughts when she recommended her relationship partner along with another student, “We had a relationship where I knew where their career aspirations were but also knew the students and I wasn’t afraid to make that recommendation. They were mature and they wouldn’t embarrass us in the role.” In this instance, Casey was able to confidently recommend her student partner for a professional experience because the balance between trust and knowledge existed.

Ellie shared her trust in and knowledge of her student advisee Megan: “They are moving to become our colleagues. . . If I am the patient in the bed and I look up at [her] face, I will be fine. I feel that way about Megan.” Ellie knows her student relationship partner and has personal and professional trust in Megan’s professional abilities. Ellie’s words illustrate the growth and depth of how their advising relationship will expand into a professional collegial relationship.
Each of the relational pairs in this study indicated that their relationship experienced a developmental transition. The majority of the participants credited knowledge through self-disclosure, acceptance of their relational partner, and the element of time as influencing the development of their relationships. As the undergraduate students near the completion of their degree, trust in their abilities becomes a factor in whether the advisor recommends them for employment or graduate work after graduation.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how the advisor-advisee relational fit influences the student and advisor academic advising experience. The context of academic advising at the research site was revealed through the review and analysis of the institutional documentation. The analysis of the interview data illustrated the development of the individual student and the development of the relationship shared by the advising pair. The journey of the developmental transition involved a building of the academic advising relationship over time – in essence, a scaffolding of dyad experiences that influenced the connectedness between two individuals (See figure 3).

Figure 3. Model of Academic Advising Relational Fit
The interviews allowed the participants to reflect and make meaning of their academic advising experience with their paired advising partner. At the beginning of the relationship the student was dependent upon the faculty advisor. The student was reliant on the faculty advisor for information and assistance. As the advising experience persisted, the independence of the student became theculminating result of their advising relationship.

The commonality of each of these advising pairs is the authenticity the advisor brings to the relationship. The realness and natural rapport creates a foundation for the growth of the relationship through a connection of support and nonjudgmental recognition of the relational partner. Authenticity builds trust while drawing out the true self of the relational partner. Trust and the authentic self create an open and comfortable environment that makes it easier for the two individuals to get to know each other. As the pair gains knowledge of each other they also begin to understand their relationship.

Comfort, knowledge and understanding of each other increase the likability, appreciation, and trust within the pair. Questions, conversations, and self-disclosure create engaged interaction that informs the pair’s meaning-making through reflection. These interactive experiences increase the student’s knowledge, understanding, and self-confidence leading toward independence. The faculty member becomes the provider of information and opportunities supported by increased knowledge, trust, and confidence in the student.

Time is the key element in the cumulative advising relationship. The two individuals within the pair experience the development of knowledge, trust, comfort, understanding, likability, and confidence in one another. All of these areas of growth increase the connectedness felt between the individuals, defining their relational fit and influencing their academic advising experience.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this research study was to explore how college students and advisors within academic advising relationships perceive their relational fit. The interpretive paradigm guided this in-depth exploration of the advising relationship by focusing on the lived social interactions of the individuals in dyadic advising pairs. A qualitative approach created an interactive inquiry to gather the subjective perceptions of the participants. Employing the collective case study approach allowed for the examination of the relational nature of bounded pairs in the advising context. Investigating the advising pair rather than individual students or advisors provided an in-depth understanding of the paired entity.

The relational nature of academic advising and its focus on personal growth and meaning-making gained through the interactive process makes Peplau’s interpersonal relations paradigm an appropriate lens for investigating the relational fit of the advising relationship. Superordinate themes were found in the analysis of institutional documentation and interview data. The three superordinate themes found through the document analysis include: institutional priority, unevenness, and connections. The analysis of the interview data from each bounded advising pair provided three superordinate themes: connection, supportive actions, and relational development.

The first section of this chapter is a discussion of the findings related to each superordinate theme identified through the analysis of the interview data and validated by the interconnectedness of the institutional documentation analysis. These findings are then followed by a discussion focused on the improvement of the conceptual and relational components within the practice of academic advising in the higher education setting. Following the implication of practice are particular recommendations for future research on how the academic advising
relationship might be examined through different perspectives and experienced by different student, advisor, and institutional types.

**Connection**

Throughout this study participants within the relational pairs experienced a level of connectedness with each other. Initially each individual within the pair did not know each other, but as interactions continued, their knowledge of each other as individuals grew, promoting relational development. This growth demonstrates the shift from strangers to knowledgeable relational partners in a relationship focused on promoting personal growth.

The transition in the advising relationship involves a shift that promotes learning and development of the student through a professional relationship grounded in authenticity and trust. In her work on interpersonal relationships within a professional practice of helping and caring, Peplau (1991/1952) views the development of the professional relationship as a building process focused on purposeful interactions and connections between people. The relational fit that exists between the advising pairs in this study is defined by the connection each dyad experienced.

According to Brown (2010) a relational connection is created when an individual gains strength by being seen, heard, and valued in a non-judgmental way. The participants in this study experienced the relational connection but had difficulty defining their feelings with exact words. The participants described the relational connection as a sense of likability, experiencing authenticity and trust within the relationship, and feeling comfortable with one another. This finding is supported by Rogers’ (1962) assertion that the quality, including authenticity, trust, likability, and comfort, is the most important element in an interpersonal relationship.
Research has shown that relationships with faculty support the student’s college experience (Light, 2001; Metzner, 1989). Participants in the current study perceived a connection within their relationship because they liked and felt at ease with their relational partner. Faculty advisors and their students shared information about themselves, allowing their relational partner to get to know them as individuals. This finding supports Lederman’s (2012) notion that likability is the key component to developing meaningful relationships. Literature has supported the strength of a relational bond created through a shared experience centered on liking, caring and trusting each other (Bordin, 1979, 1983; Horvath & Luborsky, 1993).

According to Bordin (1979), the model of working alliance supports the relational bond as an important aspect of the strength within the relationship.

In the advising relationship, the student is dependent on the advisor for information and assistance. Creating an early connection or bond between relational partners is important for the development of the working relationship (Bordin, 1979). In this study, participant pair conversations outside of the course selection process created the opportunity for the faculty advisor and the advisee to get to know each other. Participant pairs appreciated that the topics of their discussions broadened over time as each individual gained knowledge about the other. The knowledge participant pairs developed informed the advising conversation along with forming a connection. This finding supports the existing literature that reports the development of an emotional connection or bond when dyadic pairs converse and learn about each other (Bordin, 1979, 1980; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001).

Trust was also found to be essential during the initial stages of the relationship (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993). The ongoing advising interactions and experiences that influence the development of trust support student success (Allen & Smith, 2008). Several participant pairs in
this study had a shared trust experience that supported their decision-making process throughout their relationship. Specific to trust, the pairs depended on their relational partner to be honest and straightforward. This honest, straightforward aspect of their relationship allowed both partners to trust the information and feedback they received along with trusting each other to accomplish their agreed upon actions items. This finding is similar to past research which has indicated the importance of a shared responsibility within the advising relationship (Allen & Smith, 2008; Crockett, 1985; Frost, 1991). In addition, this finding supports Ender and Wilkie’s (2000) notion that trust within the advising relationship must be maintained to support the existence of a meaningful, long-term advising relationship. The trust found within the relational pairs in this study was built from the development of rapport through authentic interactions between the faculty advisor and student.

Bordin (1962) indicated that individuals who work within the helping professions can be effective regardless of their personality or approach as long as they are empathic, have positive and unconditional regard, and are a genuine or authentic partner. Specific to advising, authenticity is found to be an important element that supports advisors being genuine and sharing the real self with their student advisees (Harrison, 2009; Schreiner, et al., 2011). Several student participant perceptions regarding specific interactions with faculty partners illuminated authenticity as positively affecting their academic advising experience. The authenticity of the faculty members in this study created a natural rapport within the relationship. In addition, faculty advisor authenticity was found to support the students’ in being their natural selves within the relationship. These findings support Harrison’s (2009) research that found genuineness and authenticity within relational connections positively affect academic advising in the higher education setting.
Participants in this study emphasized the importance of authentic partners. While the participants’ honest, trusting, straightforward interactions with their relational partner contributed to drawing out the true self of the faculty and student, the authentic approach to advising was found to be the foundational aspect of an increased connectedness of the advising relationship. In her research, Brown (2010) reports that choosing to disclose the true self promotes a relational connection. However, a lack of authenticity within a dyadic interaction creates an ineffectiveness at connecting (Brown, 2010). Overall, the participants reported that a sense of realness and natural rapport within the relationship was mutually depended upon in the academic advising relationship. This finding supports the importance of a shared responsibility within the advising relationship (Allen & Smith, 2008; Crockett, 1985; Frost, 1991).

The academic advising relationship can positively influence a student’s experience by creating a supportive environment and a personal link to the institution (Nutt, 2000; Metzner, 1989). Meaningful dialog and interactions within an advising relationship are shaped by an advisor’s ability to communicate and build a relational connection (Hughey, 2011). For the participants in this study, the phenomenon of relational and environmental comfort within the advising relationship was emphasized as important. In terms of differences between faculty and student participants, student participants desired comfort approaching and communicating with their advisors while faculty partners emphasized their responsibility in creating comfort both personally and physically. This finding supports Huber, Saucer, Mrdjenovich, and Gugiu’s (2010) research that states that it is the responsibility of the advisor to create a safe and pleasant environment for students.

According to Chism and Bickford (2002), the physical environment supports student learning and relationship, building with faculty. The faculty participants sought to be perceived
as welcoming in their physical environment. Many had items in their offices that conveyed information about their personal lives or professional achievements making the faculty more accessible and welcoming to their student partners. This finding supports Rawlins and Rawlins (2005) notion that personal office items create an interweaving of the private and public persona of the advisor that welcomes students into their office space.

Similar to the classroom environment, offices are the faculty’s environment for teaching within the advising construct (Ramos, 1994). The faculty in this study purposefully created an office environment free from physical barriers, promoting a collaborative relationship. The intentionality of creating an open, collaborative environment was evident in each workplace observation. Faculty participants in this current study expressed the importance of creating a friendly, professional relationship influenced by their built environment. This supports Dittoe’s (2002) finding that open and barrier-free environments built by faculty promote a more equal, freer relationship that is absent of a negative power differential.

A comfortable, personal environment in an advising relationship is supported by the advisor’s soft skills (Barnett, Roach, & Smith, 2006; Thornhill & Yoder, 2010). The soft skills of listening, receptive body language, and appropriate questioning assist in building rapport within the advising relationship (Thornhill & Yoder, 2010). Student participants in this study expressed high value in their faculty advisors’ ability to relate in a comfortable manner. Each pair depended on their relational comfort to create a communicative atmosphere that was safe and focused on goals. Several pair responses indicated that a comfortable environment created by the advisor demonstrated that they were available and supportive. The findings of this study support Hughey’s (2011) assertion that creating an advising environment where the student feels supported and comfortable is critical for a successful advising experience.
Several student participants understood the divergence of their comfortable relationship from the norm of their peers’ advising relationships. The students’ felt fortunate that their relationships were positive and rewarding compared to their peers’ advising experiences. Several faculty also expressed a distinct difference between the relationship with their relational partner in this study and the relationships they have with other student advisees. This finding is supported by the institutional data analysis that shows an unevenness in students’ advising experiences and a disconnect between students and faculty advisors. Further, student survey responses indicated a student desire for faculty to listen, supporting Hughey’s (2011) notion that the soft skill of listening is directly linked to relational trust. In addition, literature has supported the development of soft skills to create a more effective relational environment (Barnett, Roach, and Smith, 2006; Gordon, 1994; Simpson, 1991).

Advising requires the advisor to engage students in conversation and listen to their stories. Comfortable environments can be created by utilizing the soft skills of listening and questioning (Thornhill & Yoder, 2010; Simpson, 1991; Fox, 2008). Student participants in this study viewed their relationships as positive when their faculty partner listened to them and showed interest in them by asking questions. Advising interactions that include listening and questioning support the creation of a supportive, comfortable environment where students share information and stories, ask questions, and experience self-exploration (Hughey, 2011). While students found their relationships as positive due to their advisor’s ability to utilize soft skills, advisors benefited from gaining knowledge about their student through their social sharing. Advisors who listen to student stories gain valuable knowledge that provides information regarding student issues and needs (Jordan, 2000).
Overall the participants in this study report valuing the connectedness they experienced with their relational partner. A significant finding of this study was that authenticity of the individuals in the dyadic pairs is the foundational element influencing the development of an interpersonal connection. This finding adds to the existing literature of Peplau (1991/1952), Rogers (1962), Huber et al. (2010) and Brown (2010) by identifying authenticity as the critical foundational component of interpersonal relationships within the undergraduate academic advising construct. The foundation of authenticity allowed for the relationships to progress. As the relationships in this study progressed, the pairs experienced a sense of likability, trust, and honesty that was supported by the relational comfort created by advisor soft skills and an effort to build a safe, pleasant environment.

**Supportive Actions**

The literature acknowledges the need for a supportive environment in order to develop a strong academic advising relationship (Nutt, 2000; Metzner, 1989). The participants in this current study expressed value in either receiving or giving support to their relational partner. The participant pairs experienced a shift in their relationship when supportive actions transpired. For student participants, availability and responsiveness of their faculty partner was one of the initial indications that their advisors were supportive individuals. Their faculty partners also acknowledged that the responsive nature of their communication was important to their student. This finding supports the current literature which states availability as an important characteristic of effective academic advisors (Appleby, 2008; Harrison, 2009).

The student participants in the current study expressed that they felt a level of stress due to not understanding aspects of their educational experience. Although the literature states that a level of stress in a higher educational environment is normal for students, student participants did
not express awareness of the normalization of stress (Bean, 2012; Tinto, 1988). The students’ stress was alleviated when their expectation of responsiveness was met by a quick reply from their faculty partner. The responsiveness of the faculty partner, coupled with the clarification of the unknown, decreased the stress and increased the students’ perceived value of academic advising and their relational partner. Availability and responsiveness of the faculty partners in this study allowed for a balance between a healthy amount of stress and the clarification of information which is highlighted in the literature (Simpson, 1991; Bean, 2012).

High expectations and support are noted to be institutional characteristics that positively influence student success (Tinto, 2012). Each participant in this study viewed high expectations as a component of their relationship. Student participants shared that their faculty advisor had high expectations of them while faculty confirmed that belief. Due to the faculty expectations of their student partners, students perceived a level of confidence from their faculty partner, increasing their sense of self-efficacy for college success. This finding supports the research of Schreiner, et al., (2011) that identified being challenging and having high expectations as advisor behaviors that positively influence college student success and persistence.

Participant partners in this study perceived a mutual sense of confidence in one another in the academic advising context. While half of the student participants felt a lack of self-efficacy, their faculty partners shared the belief in their student partner’s ability to succeed. The student participants experienced a growth in their self-efficacy by conversing with their faculty partner and reflecting on their experiences. The faculty freely expressed confidence in their student partners, providing a sense of empowerment and confidence in the student’s ability. This finding supports the research of Schreiner, et al. (2011) that showed a positive correlation between student persistence and their experience of being believed in and understood by faculty and staff.
In addition, the finding is similar to the past research on learning partnerships that indicated the importance of advisors, providing challenge and support while assisting with the student’s self-reflection process (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009; Simmons, 2008).

According to Peplau (1991/1952), the role of resource person is a natural component of an interpersonal relationship. In this study, student participants depended on their faculty relational partner to provide information and advice. The faculty advisor in turn acted as an educator by providing information and thoughts regarding institutional navigation and futuristic planning. Student participant perceptions about receiving helpful information from their faculty partners illuminated the role of advisor as a resource person. Student participants sought the advice of their faculty partner and used it to inform their decision-making. This finding also supports the notion that the resource person in an interpersonal relationship informs the thinking and actions of the relational partner (Simpson, 1991).

Faculty advisors bring their professional knowledge and expertise to the academic advising experience. In her work on interpersonal relationships in the helping profession, Peplau (1991/1952) posits that the practitioner is a resource for individuals in a new environment who are experiencing new processes, procedures, and unknown people. Student participants experienced a transition into a new environment that included their faculty partner, assisting them in integrating into an academic field of knowledge and experiences. This interpersonal experience demonstrated the faculty partner’s role of providing a combination of institutional information and professional knowledge within the academic advising construct. This finding links Peplau’s (1991/1952) resource role in an interpersonal relationship with existing advising
literature that highlights the academic advisor as a student resource (Harrison, 2009; Young-Jones, et al., 2013).

The extant literature has shown that faculty-student interpersonal relations have a positive influence on the student’s academic and social integration in the college setting (Creamer, 1980; Bean & Kuh, 1984; Bean, 1985; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). The student participants in this study expressed a deeper confidence in their relational partner due to the faculty advisor’s role in integrating them into their academic and professional field of study. Student participants perceived their faculty partner as possessing professional knowledge and expertise that related directly to their own academic and career goals. The personal and professional interests that the advising pair shared, coupled with the advisor’s intellectual integrity in the professional field, created students’ confidence in their faculty partner. This finding builds upon Bozeman and Feeney’s (2008) mentor-mentee research that found dyadic pair relational engagement depended on potential perceived benefit individuals would receive due to the knowledge, support, and career connection of the relational partner.

Faculty participants also gained confidence in their relational partner through understanding their student’s skills, abilities, and interests made clear during advising conversations. This level of individual knowledge assisted the faculty advisors in providing educational opportunities that increased their relational partner’s learning. Participant pairs expressed a level of committed energy and expertise put forth by the faculty advisor to help the student enhance their educational experiences. Interestingly, this finding challenges Allen and Smith’s (2008) study that states that although an in-depth student-advisor relationship is important, faculty would prefer to spend their time connecting academic, major and life goals to each other and to the major. However, in addition to connecting their relational partner’s goals
to each other and the major, faculty participants in this study dedicated time and energy
identifying additional career oriented learning opportunities in order to expand their student’s
professional experience. Although the responses of relational partners in this study support this
finding, the document analysis points to a deficit in the provision of career related advising and
experiential learning opportunities.

The faculty participant responses demonstrated a foundational value of additional
learning experiences and opportunities for student development. Conversely, the institutional
documentation analysis identified career advising and the provision of learning opportunities
linked to the student’s major as a disconnect within the advising experience. Although advisors
have varying levels of knowledge regarding career-related learning opportunities, integrating the
responsibility into the advising role assists in fostering the student’s understanding and
participation in career-related learning opportunities (Ryan, 1988).

Young-Jones, et al. (2013) describe the advising process as a constant connection to
information, learning opportunities, and the personal investigation of goals, strengths, and
interests. The participants in this study came to prioritize the learning opportunities that were
gleaned from the advising experience. Faculty participants acknowledged the importance of
linking the understanding of their student partner to a learning opportunity that matched the
student’s educational and career interests. Further, students identified their faculty partner’s
connection to opportunities available in their professional field as valuable. In addition, the
value of the learning opportunities was not fully appreciated by the student participants until they
had fully participated in the experience. Once reflecting on the experience, the student
participants acknowledged their faculty partner’s role in providing the opportunity. Previous
research has found that connecting student academic, career, and life goals to learning
opportunities is an important aspect of the advising experience (Allen & Smith, 2008; Smith & Allen, 2006).

The student participants in this study linked the opportunities provided by their faculty partner to career interests, noting that they were critical aspects of their college learning that enhanced their educational and professional experience. These perceptions of the participant pairs were a turning point in the relationship. The students began to understand their need for help while beginning to view themselves as professionals in their field. The faculty partner also began to show confidence in the student’s ability and skill level. This finding is similar to past interpersonal relationship research which indicated the individual’s recognition of a need for help, utilization of the relational partner’s professional expertise, and a shift towards self-confidence and independence as a turning point in the relationship (Peplau, 1991/1952).

Overall the student participants in this study realized the positive influence their faculty relational partner had on their college experience. Faculty participant expertise was utilized as a resource to provide information and advice. The student participants’ perceived value of the advising relationship was initially triggered by their faculty advisor’s availability and responsiveness. Over time, the faculty partners’ professional knowledge and intellectual integrity within their professional field increased the student partners’ perceived confidence in their faculty partners. Faculty increased their confidence in their student partners by gaining knowledge regarding their students’ skills, interest, and abilities. The faculty’s confidence in the student positively influenced the action of providing additional opportunities to enhance the student learning experience. Once the student partners perceived the critical relevance the learning opportunities provided, a relational turning point was experienced by the pairs.
Relational Development

For the participant pairs in this study, the academic advising relationship developed from an information sharing experience to one that was focused on the student’s future. Initially the pairs experienced a power differential because of the student’s lack of institutional knowledge, the advisor’s terminal degree, and the limited understanding that the partners had of each other. Over time, each participant’s contribution to the relationship influenced the shift to a future-focused experience, demonstrating the growth in the dyad’s connectedness as a continuum of learning.

Participants initially lacked knowledge of their relational partner creating a power differential between the faculty advisor and the student. Upon meeting their faculty advisors, student participants felt a level of intimidation that was directly related to not knowing their relational partner and to the faculty’s terminal degree and status. This finding supports Beasley-Fielstein’s (1986) research that identified an advisor’s intimidating demeanor as a contributor to uneasiness within the advising relationship. As the pairs gained knowledge of each other, the power differential decreased, which in turn decreased the intimidation perceived by students. The participant pair interactions created an opportunity for the dyads to work and relate together. Further, student participants expressed a sense of respect for their faculty partner’s intellect and terminal degree because of the pairs’ interactions. This supports researchers’ findings that student advisees develop an admiration for their faculty advisor because of their working relationship (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001).

According to Peplau (1969), it is critically important that a practitioner in a helping profession accept the individuals seeking assistance as they present themselves. Full acceptance of the individual promotes an environment for individual and relational growth. The participant
pairs in this study perceived this acceptance as a vital component to their relational experience. Faculty highlighted the appreciation of the uniqueness of their students while students perceived acceptance as a confidence builder. Overall, much of what the participant pairs shared relates directly to a non-judgmental approach to relationships which is congruent with Jordan’s (2000) assertion that when advising, advisors should approach students without assumptions.

Advisors and students share the responsibilities in the advising process that includes information sharing, self-reflection, collaborative problem-solving, and decision-making (Crookston, 1972). The faculty participant responses in this study demonstrated a level of ownership and responsibility for the advising experience. Their perceptions regarding specific interactions illuminated the role of advisors as teachers. Faculty partners focused on teaching students about the institution, program of study, career and educational opportunities, as well as themselves through a self-reflection process. Student participants viewed interactions with their faculty partners as opportunities to gain knowledge, confidence, and independence. Due to the learning achieved through these advising interactions, the advising relationship began to shift from a dependent to an independent relationship. This finding supports the construction of meaningful learning experience in interpersonal relationships that lead to independence highlighted in Peplau’s (1991/1952) research.

The fact that student partners experienced growth and maturation that led to independence appeared to influence a change in the faculty partners’ perception. Faculty perceived their student partners as informed individuals, engaged in a learning process. Faculty partners began to trust the abilities of their student partners and perceived their readiness for professional learning experiences. The majority of the faculty in this study recommended their student for specific learning opportunities that directly related to their professional aspirations.
The recommendation demonstrated the professional confidence and trust faculty advisors had in their relational partners. This finding supports the research of Huber, et al. (2010) that related a secure interpersonal relational attachment to confidence and trust found in interpersonal relationships and the expectation that the pair would be responsive to each other’s needs.

The confidence and trust between participants in this study were gained by the faculty knowing the student, understanding his/her abilities, and by the student meeting the expectations of his/her faculty advisor. Self-disclosure of the faculty partners also promoted the fact that these individuals are humans who have personal lives. This social sharing showcased the faculty partner as an authentic member of the relationship and initiated trust. These findings support Bordin’s (1979) research that indicates shared trust, acceptance, and confidence as elements in a positive interpersonal attachment.

The relational partners in this study appreciated the shift in their relationship where their interpersonal interactions were equal and professional rather than dependent. However, it is interesting to note that while students gained knowledge to be independent, they remained reliant on the confidence and support of their faculty partner. Whether or not the student participants are fully independent, both current findings and previous research support the interpersonal relationship as a learning process of development that promotes independence by shifting the power away from the practitioner to the relational partner (Senn, 2013; Peplau, 1991/1952). In addition, it is important to highlight that although student participants relied on their faculty partner in this study, the institutional documentation showed an unevenness in the site institution’s student advising experience. The documentation that provided insight on senior student needs indicated a desire to have more continuity with faculty. This finding supports the need for reliance on the faculty advisor for support regardless of student independence.
The contributions of both members of the dyad assisted in the advancement of the advising relationship. Bordin (1979) asserts that the strength of the collaboration of the relational pair influences the effectiveness of the working relationship. The shift from an informational relationship to a future planning relationship resulted from both individuals contributing to the interpersonal interaction in this current study. The faculty partners made their expectations clear and offered appropriate support to students, while their student partners proactively worked to meet the expectations. Some of the student participants expressed appreciation for the positive influence their relational partner’s high expectations had on their learning experience. These findings support existing research showing that high expectations act as stimuli to change relational partner behavior (Peplau, 1992).

The element of time was highlighted as a key component in fostering interpersonal relationships in this study. Huber, et al. (2010) posits that frequent contact of an advising pair strengthens the interpersonal relationship. Participants in this study, experienced a growth in their relationship that was facilitated by conversations shared within the dyad over time. Participants perceived their advising relationship as cumulative, growing through the scaffolding of knowledge and the development of trust, comfort, understanding, likability, and confidence. This finding supports Lowenstein’s (2009) work describing advising as the sequence of learning experiences that constructs meaning-making and the scaffolding of knowledge and skills.

Overall, the participants perceived a shared connection with their relational partner that assisted in integrating the student partner into the institutional ecology, increased their interest in their major, and linked their education to career opportunities. According to Bordin (1983), the time individuals spend together, along with the work that they focus upon, allows for a level of liking, caring, and trust to be shared (Bordin, 1983). Participants felt a connectedness from the
authenticity, trust, knowledge, confidence, comfort, and understanding that the dyad shared. Participants in this study expressed that the interpersonal connectedness that they shared with their relational partner positively influenced their academic advising experience. Previous research has described this connectedness as the professional closeness (Peplau, 1969), emotional energy (Lawler, 2001), synergy (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993) and emotional bond (Schlosser & Gelso, 2001) found in interpersonal relationships. This finding supports the work of Pascarella (1980) and Tinto (1988) that asserted that the personal bond students develop with individuals within an institution of higher education binds their membership in the community, and in turn, positively influences student success and persistence to graduation.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Kupo (2014) stressed the importance of student affairs scholar-practitioner involvement in improving the effectiveness of practice by integrating doing with knowing. The actions of research-informed practice is critical in influencing student development and learning in higher education (Kupo, 2014). The goal of this research was to inform practice by increasing the understanding of the advising relationship and how dyadic relational fit influences the advising experience. The connectedness an advisor and advisee experience defines their advisor-advisee fit. Developing an understanding of what creates connectedness within the advising relationship informs students, advisors, and administrators on the characteristics of relational fit, the key components of relational development, and the overall practice of academic advising.

Participant pairs in this study expressed that the advising relationship that they share is not a common phenomenon of the academic advising experience across the research site. Although the participants appreciated their advising relationship, this research provides an understanding of where practitioners could improve practice that positively influences the
advisor-advisee academic advising experience. The conceptual and relational components of academic advising are the two primary areas of attention that will assist practitioners in advancing the academic advising experience at their institutions.

The institutional documentation in this study lacked clarity of advisor responsibilities, and the value of advising, as well as the relationship academic advising has to the research site’s mission and student learning. In addition, the research site employed uneven, multiple approaches of academic advising. Institutional leadership may want to consider developing a unified approach to academic advising to create a cohesive advising program across the institution. A unified approach would include an institutional advising mission statement, consistent student learning outcomes, and an outline of advisor responsibilities. This approach would provide guidance for relational development, a consistent experience for all students, and an understanding of institutional expectations of the faculty role in advising.

Faculty advisors would benefit from having clear expectations of their advising responsibilities and an understanding of their accountability in their practice of advising. The findings of this study showed an unevenness in the weight of advising in the promotion and tenure review process. Faculty governance bodies should consider making academic advising a consistent criterion in the promotion and tenure documents. Academic advising as a consistent evaluative criterion would indicate the priority advising has in the teaching and learning experience throughout the institution.

Participant pairs in this study valued the high expectations faculty had for their student partners. The combination of students working toward meeting these expectations and their faculty partners’ understanding of, and confidence in, their student partners’ abilities, positively influenced the advising experience. The findings suggest that student advisees would benefit
from having their faculty advisor’s clearly define their expectations. As a common institutional practice, faculty advisors should share their expectations with their advisees at the beginning of their relationship. This information would allow students to have a clear understanding of their role in the advising relationship as well as their advisor’s expectation of them as college students.

Faculty participants expressed a surprised appreciation for their students’ independence in the course registration process, indicating that these faculty partners perceived their primary advising responsibility as assistance with the registration process. This finding suggests college administrators may want to consider implementing an advisor professional development program to educate faculty regarding their role in preparing students for independence. A professional development program that highlights advising as a teaching and learning experience could shift the advisors’ and students’ approach to their relationship. Peplau (1991/1952) discovered that when interpersonal relationships in a helping profession were focused on teaching and learning, the individuals receiving assistance recognized their need for help. In addition to the recognition for help, the individual utilized the expertise of the practitioner, building self-confidence and shifting the relationship toward independence.

The relationships in this study experienced the shift Peplau (1991/1952) describes when the students recognized their need for help and appropriately utilized their faculty partners’ expertise. It is also important to note that student partner’s confidence in, and respect for, his/her relational partner increased when the faculty’s professional knowledge and intellectual integrity was realized through advising interactions. Academic advisors should consider increasing the number of shared interactions they have with their advisees. These opportunities for interaction would increase the pair’s perceived value of the academic advising experience while influencing
the student partner’s growth toward independence. In addition, the perceived increase in value will strengthen an individual and institutional commitment to academic advising.

There are two overarching relational components that inform the development of relational connectedness in the advising construct: creation of comfort and communication. The participant pairs viewed the creation of a comfortable physical and relational environment as important in developing successful advising relationships. Faculty advisors should consider building a comfortable physical environment in their offices by insuring that their space is free from barriers that separate the dyad from each other. In addition, advisors should consider personalizing their space by adding pictures, symbols of professional accomplishments, and decorations to promote a comfortable, collaborative atmosphere. Making these few adjustments to an advisor’s space can create a safe, pleasant environment for advising interactions.

Brown (2012) posits that it is the true self that creates the relational connection in an interpersonal relationship. The findings of this current study indicate authenticity as the foundational element of the academic advising relationship. Relational trust was found to be developed through ongoing authentic interactions. In addition, it was the faculty partner’s authenticity that supported the student’s ability to share his/her real self. This study revealed that when faculty advisors initiate authentic behavior, natural rapport will be shared by both members of the dyad. Advising administrators should consider offering professional development opportunities to empower faculty advisors to employ authentic behavior. Educating faculty regarding their vital role in being genuine and sharing their real self with their students would increase authenticity and trust. The increase in authenticity and trust through the development of soft skills is found to be a contributing factor in productive advising relationships and student success (Hughey, 2011).
The development of soft skills creates a more effective relational development grounded in trust (Barnett, Roach, & Smith, 2006; Thornhill & Yoder, 2010). The findings of this study show that student participants appreciated their faculty partners’ ability to listen, question, and respond in a timely fashion, sending a message of availability and support while increasing their perceived value in academic advising. Institutions must be prepared to provide soft skill training to highlight the importance of the relational component of academic advising and to support advisor development.

The participant pairs in this study perceived an increase in connectedness and a greater value of the relationship when they shared purposeful conversations and interactions outside of course registration. Administrators should consider increasing faculty awareness of topics to be covered in the advising conversations. This awareness would assist in setting clear expectations and boundaries for advising interactions. In addition, advisors should consider broadening the topics of advising conversations to increase the knowledge the dyad members have about one another. An increase in knowledge would decrease the faculty intimidation factor and power differential, creating an environment for authentic interactions and connectedness. The awareness of the negative influence intimidation has on the advising relationship would also inform faculty advisors on how they can influence positive change.

Building academic advising relationships that promote interpersonal connectedness takes time. Connecting on a regular basis is a critical component of developing a dyadic relationship (Gordon, 1994; Nick, et al., 2012). Frequent contact that is focused on purposeful, authentic interactions allows the pair to get to know each other and develop a level of trust, likability, and comfort. This researcher suggests that institutional professional standards of advising are established cooperatively by students and faculty/professional advisors to realign advising with
institutional values, mission, and goals. Professional development opportunities are suggested to educate advisors and reshape their understanding, beliefs, skills, and actions. It is critical that the advising standards are accepted and supported by senior institutional leadership to insure that advising becomes an integral component of student learning and success.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The academic advising literature stresses the importance of a good advising relationship but leaves a gap in understanding the nature of advisor-advisee fit. The current study begins to fill the gap in the literature by examining the academic advising experience of dyadic pairs within the undergraduate academic advising context. Additional research should be done to better understand the advising experiences of different student, advisor, and institutional types.

The student participants in the current study were in good academic standing and had continuous enrollment. A study that includes students who have been on academic probation and utilized their advisor would provide insight on how the advisor-advisee fit influences academically at-risk students. In addition, students who have stopped out from school for a period of time and reenrolled would provide data on the relational fit’s influence on students returning to school after departure.

The current study did not focus on the age of the student participants. A study that includes only adult student participants would provide insight on potential differences within an advising population with an older demographic. It would be interesting to explore how faculty advisors perceive their student partners’ abilities and independence due to the life experiences they bring to the higher education setting. Further, the findings in the current study show that faculty wait until they have developed confidence in the student partner’s ability before offering
additional learning opportunities. An additional study focused on adults would examine the role of age in the development of confidence.

Replicating this study at community, private, and for-profit colleges would add to the literature. The exploration of dyadic advising pair experiences at community colleges would specifically examine the need for time in developing the advising relationship. The current study highlights the need for frequent, purposeful interactions over time. Accumulated credit hour amounts are substantially different when comparing community and 4-year college graduation requirements. This discrepancy decreases the amount of time students spend on community college campuses. A replicated study would explore how a decrease in time to graduation influences the academic advising experience of dyadic pairs. Further, institutional missions can be different depending on institutional type. Additional research at community, private, and for-profit colleges could explore how the institutional mission influences the dyadic pair’s advising experience.

Previous research focusing on the bounded dyadic advising pair is scant. Additional studies exploring advisor and student perceptions within the bounded pair is warranted. It would be valuable to explore undergraduate dyadic advising pairs from different perspectives. Schlosser and Gelso (2001) explored the working alliance of graduate student advising relationships; it would be particularly interesting to gain insight into the undergraduate advising experience of the advisor-advisee working together as a pair. Although Bozeman and Feeney (2008) did not examine dyadic pairs as bounded entities, the researchers investigated mentor matching as it relates to dyadic pair knowledge, support, and social capital. Additional research in the area of matching advising pairs would be beneficial to gain further insight on how similar interests and other matching protocol influence the advising relationship.
Thornhill and Yoder (2010) state that developing advisor soft skills through training programs can be difficult to implement successfully. Understanding how soft skill development influences the advising relationship informs changes in the current practice. Additional research on the effects of soft skill professional development would add to the literature that currently points to its importance rather than its proven influence on the academic advising relationship (Barnett, Roach, and Smith, 2006; Gordon, 1994; Simpson, 1991).

Future research should further explore the foundational element of authenticity within the academic advising relationship. Brown (2012) found that authenticity requires the courage to be vulnerable. Investigating the influence vulnerability has on the disclosure of self and the development of trust between paired participants would be another interesting addition to the current literature. The current study found that student participants felt intimidated when initially meeting with their faculty partner, providing a glimpse into the student’s vulnerable state. It would be valuable to explore faculty and student vulnerability in the advising relationship and vulnerability’s influence on the sharing of the genuine, real-self in the context of advising.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the academic advising relationship and explore how relational fit within the academic advising context influences the student and advisor experience. In this study, the participant voices, institutional documentation, and observations showed the lived social experience of relational pairs in academic advising relationships. The researcher found that the academic advising relationship is a scaffolding experience that cumulates over time. Relational growth of the advising dyad was influenced by the pair’s understanding of one another. The development of trust, likability, comfort, support,
knowledge, confidence, and meaning-making also contributed to the growth of the relationship. The culminating result of the relational learning experience was the independence of the student partner. The growth of the relationship that the dyad experienced increased the connectedness between the pair, defining the relational fit within the academic advising context.

A significant contribution to the literature is the exploration of the advising relationship through dyadic pairs. An investigation of the bounded pair provides a unique view into the relational connectedness not found in previous literature. In addition, the turning point in the advising relationship was identified as the provision of career related learning opportunities, linking career opportunities to the development of advising relationships. Further, the most significant contribution to the literature is the identification of the academic advisor’s authenticity as the foundational component of the advising relationship. The faculty partners’ authentic sharing of self influenced the student partner’s to express their true selves. The advising relationship grew through the support and full acceptance of individuals within the dyad. The action of authentic sharing created the trusted, comfortable learning environment that assisted the development of a relationship grounded in connectedness, underscoring the definition of advisor-advisee relational fit.
References


Chism, N. V. & Bickford, D. J. (2002). Improving the environment for learning: An expanded agenda. In N. V. Chism & D. J. Bickford (Eds.), *The Importance of Physical Space in*


Appendix A: Faculty Recruitment Email

Dear Dr. [faculty name]:

My name is Beth Higgins and I am a doctoral student with Northeastern University in Boston Massachusetts. I am also the Executive Director for Student Success at the [site institution]. Currently I am in the process of recruiting faculty and student participants for my doctoral research study titled:

A case study examining the influence of advisor-advisee relational fit on the college academic advising experience

I am recruiting faculty members who advise undergraduate students who meet the following criteria:

a) have accumulated 24 or more credits
b) are in good institutional academic standing
c) have had continuous enrollment
d) have transferred no more than 30 credit hours
e) have met with their advisor 3 or more times

Faculty who agree to participate will be asked to do the following:

a) Review a list of students they advise who meet the student criteria and identify who they have met with 3 or more times. Recommend student/s who they would like to be matched with for the study.
b) Participate in a telephone conversation with me to confirm their interest in being a participant and coordinate a time for an in-person interview in their office.
c) Meet with me in their office to sign a consent form and participate in a 60 minute interview about their academic advising experience.
d) Review an electronic copy of the interview transcription and inform me of any clarifications.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point in time. Individuals who participate in the interviews will receive a $25 pre-paid Visa gift card.

If you are interested in participating in this study please contact me by replying to this e-mail or calling me at 207.780.4632.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely-

Beth Higgins
Appendix B: Student Recruitment Email

Dear [student name]:

My name is Beth Higgins and I am a doctoral student with Northeastern University in Boston Massachusetts. I am also the Executive Director for Student Success at [site institution]. Currently I am in the process of recruiting student and faculty participants for my doctoral research study titled:

**A case study examining the influence of advisor-advisee relational fit on the college academic advising experience**

You are receiving this e-mail because your faculty advisor [advisor name] nominated you to be interviewed along with [him or her] for this research study. Undergraduate students who have been identified as possible participants meet the following criteria:

a) have accumulated 24 or more credits  
b) are in good institutional academic standing  
c) have had continuous enrollment  
d) have transferred no more than 30 credit hours  
e) have met with their advisor 3 or more times  
f) have been nominated by their advisor to be the student participant

Students who agree to participate will be asked to do the following: 

a) Participate in a telephone conversation or meet in person to confirm their interest in being a participant and coordinate a time for an in-person interview.  
b) Meet with me one-on-one at [site institution] to sign a consent form and participate in a 60 minute interview about their academic advising experience.  
c) Agree to allow the researcher to review their academic advising file found in their department or online in [name of student information system]  
d) Review an electronic copy of the interview transcription and inform me of any clarifications.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point in time. Individuals who participate in the interviews will receive a $25 pre-paid Visa gift card.

If you are interested in participating in this study please contact me by replying to this e-mail or calling me at 207.780.4632.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely-

Beth Higgins
Appendix C: Informed Consent

Northeastern University: College of Professional Studies, Department of Education

Investigators: Dr. Kimberly Nolan, Principal Investigator
Elizabeth Higgins, Doctoral Candidate

Title of Project: A case study examining the influence of advisor-advisee relational fit on the college academic advising experience

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study:
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to participate in this study because you are a faculty member who advises undergraduate students who meet the following criteria or an undergraduate student who meets the following criteria:
   a) have accumulate 24 or more credits
   b) are in good institutional academic standing
   c) have had continuous enrollment
   d) have transferred no more than 30 credit hours
   e) have met with your student or your advisor 3 or more times

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the academic advising relationship and explore how relational fit within the academic advising context influences the student and advisor experience.

What will I be asked to do?
Faculty who participate in this study will be asked to:
   a) Review a list of students they advise who meet the student criteria and recommend student/s who they would like to be matched with for the study.
   b) Participate in a telephone conversation with the researcher to confirm your interest in being a participant and coordinate a time for an in-person interview in their office.
   c) Meet with the researcher in the faculty’s office to sign a consent form and participate in a 60 minute interview about their academic advising experience.
   d) Review an electronic copy of the interview transcription and inform me of any clarifications.
Students who participate in this study will be asked to:
a) Participate in a telephone conversation or meet in person to confirm their interest in being a participant and coordinate a time for an in-person interview.

b) Meet with the researcher one-on-one at [site institution] to sign a consent form and participate in a 60 minute interview about their academic advising experience.

c) Agree to allow the researcher to review their academic advising file found in their department or online in [name of student information system]

d) Review an electronic copy of the interview transcription and inform me of any clarifications.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The interviews will take place on [site institution] campus. The initial telephone conversation or meeting to gain information about the study and coordinate the interview will be approximately 10-15 minutes. The interview will be approximately 60 minutes in length. Within two weeks of the interview an electronic copy of the interview transcription will be sent for review. Any necessary clarifications will be sent to the researcher.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort to you for being a participant in this study. There is no impact on your school status for being part of this research.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. However, an understanding of the advising relationship may help to enhance the learning experiences of students. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will provide the advising profession with an understanding of relational fit in the advising context.

Who will see the information about me?
Information about you will be confidential. The only individuals who will have access to information about you related to this study are the researchers. Your name and the name of your institution will not be shared and pseudonyms will be used to keep them confidential. A professional transcriptionist with experience working with confidentiality will transcribe the interview recordings. All electronic and hard copies of any data from this study will be secured in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s home office. The researcher will be the only person able to retrieve the electronic data that will also be stored on a password protected computer.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
Participation in this study is voluntary. The decision to participate is yours. You may withdraw from this study at any point in time.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
There is minimal risk of harm for you in this research study. However, talking about relationships can be emotional. The researcher will refer you to appropriate campus supports should you share information during the interview that warrants such a referral.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your involvement in this research study is voluntary. You can stop your participation in this study at any point in time. Stopping your involvement will have no effect on your standing at [site institution].

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
Should you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me, Beth Higgins at Higgins.eliz@husky.neu.edu or 207.780.4632 or Dr. Kimberly Nolan at k.nolan@neu.edu or 617.390.3622, Principal Investigator.

**Whom can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Kate Skophammer, Coordinator, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617.390.3450, Email: k.skophammer@neu.edu. You may also call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
Individuals will receive a $25 pre-paid Visa gift card immediately following the completion of the one-on-one interview.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There is no anticipated cost to participate in this research study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
n/a

I agree to take part in this research.

______________________________________________________  __________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part                      Date

______________________________________________________
Printed name of person above

______________________________________________________  __________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent                      Date

______________________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Student Questions

1. How were you assigned to [advisor] for academic advising? If chosen, why did you choose this person?
2. What is important to you in an academic advising relationship?
3. Thinking back to your first meeting with [advisor] what were your impressions about the interaction? In what ways, if any, are your current impressions different?
4. Describe your advising relationship with [advisor]. What do you value most about your advising relationship?
5. What are the topics you cover in the conversations you have with your academic advisor? What types of things do you specifically seek advice on from [advisor]?
6. Thinking about you're your advising appointments with [advisor]. Describe your comfortable level when you approach him/her? How do you feel when you meet [advisor] for an advising appointment?
7. Do you have confidence in your advisor? Explain why you have/do not have confidence in your advisor. For example: How confident are you that you have/don’t have a solid graduation plan because of his/her advice? How confident are you in the overall advice you receive?
8. In what ways does your academic advisor assist you in achieving your goals? What have you learned through your experience with your advisor? In what ways have you benefitted from the interaction?
9. How would you compare your relationship with [advisor] to other student’s advising relationships?
10. What are the most important qualities of your academic advisor? Why are these qualities important to you?
11. How would you describe the change in your role within the academic advising relationship over time? How has your advising relationship changed over time?
12. Do you think you are an appropriate match? Why?
13. How has this appropriate/inappropriate match with [advisor] influenced your advising experience? Overall college experience?
Faculty Questions

1. How were you assigned to [student] for academic advising? If chosen, why did you choose this person?
2. What is important to you in an academic advising relationship?
3. Thinking back to your first meeting with [student] what were your impressions about the interaction? In what ways, if any, are your current impressions different?
4. Describe your advising relationship with [student]. What do you value most about this particular advising relationship?
5. What type of environment (physical and/or interpersonal) do you try to establish during your advising appointments?
6. What topics are important for you to cover in the conversations you have with [student]? Do these change over time?
7. How actively involved are you in assisting [student] in achieving his/her goals? Are there other areas of assistance you provide [student]?
8. What expectations do you have of [student] in your advising relationship? Are they being met?
9. Do you have confidence in [student]? Explain why you have/do not have confidence in [student]. For example: How confident are you that [student] will follow through on your advice? How confident are you that [student] is providing you with all the information about a particular situation?
10. What are the most important qualities of [student]? Why are these qualities important to you?
11. What have you learned through your interactions with [student]? In what ways have you benefitted from the interaction?
12. How would you compare your relationship with [student] to other advising relationships?
13. In what ways has your academic advising relationship changed over time? How would you describe the change in your role within the academic advising relationship over time?
14. Do you think you are an appropriate match? Why?
15. How has this appropriate/inappropriate match with [student] influenced your advising experience?
Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

Transcription Services

I, ________________, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Elizabeth Higgins related to her doctoral study examining the influence of advisor-advisee relational fit on the college academic advising experience. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audiotaped interviews, or in any associated documents.

2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Elizabeth Higgins.

3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.

4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Elizabeth Higgins in a complete and timely manner.

5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber’s Name: ____________________________________________

Transcriber’s Signature: ________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________