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An Examination of the Insights and Support of Self-Advocacy by Academic Advisors when Working with Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE INSIGHTS AND SUPPORT OF SELF-ADVOCACY
BY ACADEMIC ADVISORS WHEN WORKING WITH STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Self-advocacy for students with disabilities was noted throughout the literature as a necessary element for student success (Brinckerhoff, 1996; Daly-Cano, Vaccaro, & Newman, 2015; Gould, 1986; Williams & Shoultz, 1982). The literature also found that self-advocacy was particular crucial as students entered higher education (English, 1997; Stodden, Conway, and Chang, 2003; Vaccaro, Daly-Cano & Newman, 2015). In regard to student persistence, academic advising was the most cited student service (Hossler & Bean, 1990). Academic advisors assist students through their academic journeys and are tasked with assisting students to navigate college life (Kuh, 2008). However, there was a lack of research regarding the relationship between advisors, students with disabilities, and self-advocacy. Therefore, this research study was conducted to explore the insights and support of self-advocacy among academic advisors when working with students with disabilities. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to explore these experiences.

From the data analysis, seven themes emerged after the interviews and a focus group, which represented the needs of academic advisors for their specific roles and interactions. The themes were lack of knowledge, accommodations, transition, academics, fear of being labeled, relationships and interactions, and self-awareness. The information gathered through this study may lead to professional development programs to improve relationships between academic advisors and students with disabilities and to prepare students with disabilities to become strong self-advocates.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

The field of academic advising has grown tremendously over the years in the United

States and has become a highly valued aspect of higher education (Hunter & Kendall, 2008).

Academic advising is one of the most effective elements of student growth and development

(Kuh, 2008), and academic advisors have come to play an integral role in assisting students in

the transition from high school to higher education (Steele & McDonald, 2008).

Advising students with disabilities can be a challenging task for academic advisors.

According to Harding (2008), many advisors have found advising this student population

difficult, given that many disabilities are invisible and unknown to the advisor. In a study

investigating the experiences of academic advisors of students with disabilities, 83% of

participating academic advisors worked with students with disabilities, and over 90% of them

noted that nondisclosure of a student's disability delayed their work (Preece, Beecher, Martinelli,

& Roberts, 2005). Surprisingly, only about half of the advisors surveyed received training on the

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 56.7 million people in the United States were

living with a disability in 2012, and students with disabilities have been entering higher

education institutions in increasing numbers (Daly-Cano, Vaccaro, & Newman, 2015; Gould,

1986; Jarrow, 1996; Kimball, Moore, Vaccaro, Troiano, & Newman, 2016; Preece et al., 2005).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016a), from 2011 to 2012, 11% of

undergraduate students in higher education had a disability.

The rise in students with disabilities in higher education is credited to the passing of the

Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. The ADA prohibits discrimination based on disability

concerning employment, accommodations, and public services (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). When students enter the higher education system, they are protected under the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Section 504 specifically covered federally funded programs and prohibited the exclusion of any individuals based only on their disabilities from participating in a federal program (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Though Section 504 existed prior to the ADA, the national publicity surrounding the ADA increased the number of students entering higher education institutions (Jarrow, 1996), and in turn modified the role of the academic advisor.

Before entering the higher education system, students in secondary education are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), legislation which has ensured free and appropriate education for individuals with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016b), during 2013 and 2014, 13% of individuals with disabilities were being aided under the IDEA.

Brinckerhoff (1996) found that as students with disabilities progressed from high school to college, they faced additional challenges; and that as they prepared to enter higher education, their options for assistance were limited. The source of these challenges stems from the changes from IDEA to ADA and Section 504 and how they apply to students with disabilities (Brinckerhoff, 1993, 1996; Stodden, Conway & Chang, 2003). Stodden et al. wrote that the legal mandates for higher education only protected students with disabilities in terms of access, but were lacking in regard to support services. They also noted that the differences between support in high school and college had a harmful impact on students with disabilities.

Under ADA regulations, students with disabilities are required to disclose their disability through documentation to receive aid and support by a higher education institution (Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Stodden et al., 2003); however, this may be a difficult task for students with disabilities (Goldhammer & Brinckerhoff, 1993). Daly-Cano et al. (2015) found that many students with disabilities were unprepared to self-advocate due to their previous dependency on IDEA in high school and that self-advocacy was an essential aspect of academic success.

The success of students with disabilities in higher education is important as they mature into the work force. In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 41% of individuals, between ages 21 to 64 with a disability were employed, compared to 79% of individuals with no disabilities. According to Stodden et al. (2003), opportunities for employment improve for individuals with disabilities after they complete some form of higher education.

Statement of the Problem

As the number of students with disabilities continues to rise in higher education (Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Gould, 1986; Jarrow, 1996; Kimball et al., 2016; Preece et al., 2005), academic advisors need to be prepared to work successfully with this student population. Brinckerhoff (1996) and Stodden et al. (2003) focused on the challenges that students with disabilities experience as they transition from high school to college. Other researchers (Hunter & Kendall, 2008; Kramer, 2000; Leanna, 2006; Steele & McDonald, 2008) have observed that though academic advisors play an integral part of this transition, many have not been trained to work with students with disabilities (Preece et al., 2005).

In the review of the literature conducted for this study, the researcher found evidence that demonstrated significant changes experienced by students with disabilities as they transitioned from high school to college and the need for self-advocacy to overcome those changes (English,

1997; Stodden et al., 2003; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Self-advocacy was cited as a key component of success for students with disabilities in higher education (English, 1997; Stodden et al., 2003; Vaccaro et al., 2015); however, there has been a lack of research regarding the relationship between advisors, students with disabilities, and self-advocacy. Vaccaro et al. conducted eight semi-structured interviews with college students with disabilities, and all participants cited that self-advocacy played a role in their self-awareness of their disabilities and their needs. Specifically, self-advocacy was noted as a requirement for students with disabilities to master their role in the higher education setting (Vaccaro et al., 2015). Additionally, through a research project at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Stodden et al. (2003) elaborated on the importance of higher education for students with disabilities. To increase success and persistence of students with disabilities within higher education, this area needed to be investigated further.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the insights and support of self-advocacy among academic advisors when working with students with disabilities. The study focused on the relationship between academic advisors and students. Specifically, the researcher explores (a) advisors' perceptions of professional development and training needed for working with this student population; (b) academic advisors' interactions with students with disabilities; and (c) advisors' insights and support of students' abilities to self-advocate. The study was initiated to investigate the perception of self-advocacy among students with disabilities and their relationships with academic advisors, as this viewpoint had not been explored in the literature. Furthermore, the study was intended to identify factors that may improve academic advisors' abilities to advise students with disabilities and to increase student success and persistence.

Research Questions

      The following overarching research question and two sub-questions guided this study:

1. Recognizing higher education's growing need to better serve undergraduate students with disabilities, what information, areas, and types of training do advisors recommend as needed for their specific roles and interactions?

   a. Do advisors recognize the academic advising needs of undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university? If so, how? If not, why not?

   b. What evidence of self-advocacy components, if any, do academic advisors see among undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university?

Conceptual Framework

      The conceptual framework developed by Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) was used to guide this study. After reviewing the literature regarding individuals with disabilities, the researcher identified Test et al.'s four components of self-advocacy as being particularly relevant to the study: (a) knowledge of self; (b) knowledge of rights; (c) communication; and (d) leadership. According to Test, knowledge of self and rights are the foundation of self-advocacy. Communication is significant in negotiation and working with others, and leadership is necessary to advocate for others but not required to achieve self-advocacy. Self-advocacy can occur at various times through individuals' lives, but an individual is not required to master each of the four components to achieve self-advocacy (Test et al., 2005). Test et al. highlighted that environments promoting self-advocacy were a crucial aspect of the self-advocacy development model.

Significance of Study

The literature stated that obtaining a higher education degree increased the likelihood of students obtaining meaningful employment (Stodden et al., 2003). Specifically, the United States Census Bureau in 2012, found that less than half of individuals between ages 21 to 64 with a disability were employed. Furthermore, self-advocacy was noted throughout the literature as an essential element of student success for students with disabilities in higher education (Brinckerhoff, 1996; Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Gould, 1986; Williams & Shoultz, 1982).

Academic advisors assist students through their academic journeys and are tasked with assisting them navigate college life (Kuh, 2008). To understand students with disabilities' perceptions of self-advocacy, the researcher interviewed academic advisors who work directly with them. The results of this qualitative study may assist in identifying additional challenges or gaps in services for this student population. Specifically, these results could aid in improving services and eliminating barriers for students with disabilities, and in turn, benefit the collegiate experience and increase academic success among students with disabilities.

Delimitations and Assumptions

According to Creswell (1994), a delimitation addresses "how a study will be narrowed in scope" (p. 110). For this qualitative, phenomenological study, one delimitation is that the researcher only retrieved data from academic advisors from a single, large southern four-year, public university in the United States. The results may have reflected the culture of this specific institution and may not be applicable to other types of colleges or universities. Creswell (2007) also viewed one site as being appropriate for conducting a phenomenological study.

Additionally, the study was specifically focused on the experiences of undergraduate advisors. Therefore, another delimitation of the study was the exclusion of graduate or

professional program advisors. This decision was made because graduate and professional

programs differ significantly in terms of student demographics and advisor responsibilities.

Lastly, the number of participants of this study was a delimitation. Eight participating

advisors may be viewed as a small number of participants given the vast size of the institution.

However, according to the literature, Creswell (2007) cited Dukes (1984) and recommended

obtaining three to 10 participants for a phenomenological study.

Definition of Terms

Academic advisor**. "**Advisors serve as adult role models and mentors" (Winston, Enders

& Miller, 1982, p. 7). Academic advisors assist students with career exploration, course

selection, institution navigation, and serve as liaisons between the student and other campus

offices and resources.

Academic advising**.**

…both stimulates and supports students in their quest for an enriched quality of life; it is
systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students
in achieving educational and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of
institutional and community resources (Winston et al., 1982, p. 8).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A civil rights law that prohibits discrimination

based on disability.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Legislation that ensures students

with disabilities are provided Free Appropriate Public Education that meets their individual

needs.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Plans created in secondary education institutions that

assist with student's education needs (Stodden et al., 2003).

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). A non-profit organization that is composed of individuals engaged in the work of academic advising (NACADA, 2017).

Self-Advocacy. The ability to speak on one's own behalf and take an active role in making decisions that effect one's life.

Student with Disability. A student who had "one or more of the following conditions: a specific learning disability, a visual impairment, hard of hearing, deafness, a speech impairment, an orthopedic impairment, or a health impairment" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b, para. 4).

Transfer shock. A tendency for students who transfer from one higher education institution to another to experience a decline in grades during their first semester of enrollment (Hills, 1965).

Undergraduate student. A student enrolled in a post-secondary institution completing coursework toward a bachelor's degree.

Organization of the Study

The report of this research will be presented in six chapters, appendices, and references. Chapter 2 highlights the literature regarding academic advising, disability in the United States, students with disabilities in higher education, and self-advocacy. Chapter 3 discusses the research design, participants, sample, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 reviews the profiles of the participants. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of data and findings of the study. Chapter 6 provides the discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter contains a review of literature focused on the evolution of academic advising in higher education and, more specifically, advising students with disabilities. Included in the chapter is a discussion of disability models in higher education and information regarding self-advocacy among students with disabilities. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the conceptual framework that guided the researcher in her investigation.

Foundations of Academic Advising

When higher education was first initiated in the United States with the establishment of Harvard College in 1636, the role of the academic advisor did not exist (Kuhn, 2008). With the introduction of the elective system in the 1870s, students were able to select their courses, and as a result, academic advising was created (Kuhn, 2008). It was not until 1889 that academic advising took place for the first time at Johns Hopkins University, and advising relationships were developed between students and faculty (Hunter & Kendall, 2008). Beginning in the 1970s, academic advising became an organized activity (Kuhn, 2008). Later, in October 1977, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was created (Beatty, 2009; Cook, 2001; Habley, 2009; Kuhn, 2008).

When NACADA was established in 1979, it gained 429 members in its first year (Cook 2001; Habley, 2009). At the time of the study, that number had grown to include more than 10,000 professional advisors, faculty, administrators, and students interested in the field of academic advising (NACADA, 2017). Esteem, honesty, and ethical behavior were listed as the foundations of an academic advising relationship (NACADA, 2006). NACADA's website

specifically stated, "Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students' educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes" (NACADA, 2006, para. 11).

Academic advising continued to grow as a profession. According to Cook (2001) and Kuhn (2008), advising was further defined and examined through notable publications by Crookston (1972), O'Banion (1972) and Habley (1983) whose writings are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Crookston, in 1972, conceptualized what it meant to be an advisor and explained prescriptive and descriptive advising (Kuhn, 2008). When academic advising emerged, the intent was centered on assisting students to select a major or career based on a prescriptive advising model (Crookston, 1972). Prescriptive advising was utilized at that time based on authority, (i.e., the advisor instructed the student), unlike developmental advising that was based on the advisor and student relationship (Crookston, 1972; Hagen & Jordan, 2008).

During the same year as Crookston's critical work, O'Banion (1972) published "An Academic Advising Model" which also encouraged a relationship that fostered a climate of freedom for students to make well informed decisions. O'Banion stated, "The purpose of academic advising is to help the student choose a program of study which will serve him in the development of total potential" (p. 62). He further explained that there were five aspects to the academic advising process: "(1) exploration of life goals, (2) exploration of vocational goals, (3) program choice, (4) course choice, and (5) scheduling courses" (p. 62).

In 1983, Habley's work was focused on the organizational structure of academic advising, a topic previously excluded from many studies. There had been a lack of research regarding advising structures, given that each institution was seen as unique and one model could

not apply to all (Habley, 1983). Additionally, Habley (1983) observed that organizational structure and delivery system were often confused. An organizational structure was the environment in which advising took place, but a delivery system included those individuals who delivered academic advising. Habley's (1983) work highlighted the importance of organizational context, people, policies, and organizational structure. Specifically, he introduced seven academic organizational models: faculty-only, supplementary advising, split advising, dual advising, total intake, satellite, and the self-contained model.

Building upon the works of Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972), Winston et al. (1982) developed the following definition for developmental academic advising. It is this definition that was used in the present study.

> [Academic advising] . . . both stimulates and supports students in their quest for an enriched quality of life; it is a systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources. (p. 8)

The common themes found in academic advising were student-centered, assisting with educational goals, developing career goals, and evaluating progress (Kuhn, Gordon & Webber, 2006). Since the publications of Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972), the relationship between advisor and student has remained a strong emphasis in the literature (Magolda & King, 2004). Additionally, Magolda and King (2004) emphasized that it is imperative that academic advisors work in alignment with each student's development of maturity, identity, and relationships to assist in the development of effective and successful students.

As the field of academic advising has continued to grow, so has research in this field. Hunter and Kendall (2008) explained that academic advisors provide one of the first interactions

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students have when they enter an institution and often maintain frequent communication throughout the higher education experience. When advising is properly integrated into the academic support services of an institution, academic advising is one of the most effective elements contributing to student growth and success (Kuh, 2008).

As of the 21st Century, academic advising had evolved as a highly-valued aspect of higher education (Hunter & Kendall, 2008). According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2007), students who met with an academic advisor were more likely to report gains in personal and social development (as cited in Kuh, 2008) because, according to Kuh (2008), academic advisors help students become independent thinkers and problem solvers who are able to navigate the culture and experiences of their college life.

The role of the academic advisor in higher education. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) explained that academic advising aims to encourage students to think critically about their roles as students and citizens of society (NACADA, 2006). Furthermore, academic advising examines students' principles and motivations during their academic careers (NACADA, 2006). The profession of academic advising is constantly evolving (Darling, 2015; Jordan, 2000); however, the foundations of academic advising remain the same: curriculum, pedagogy, and learning outcomes (NACADA, 2006).

"The advisor is arguably the most important person in the student's education world" (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 72). When describing the role of the academic advisor, Tuttle (2000) explained that academic advising plays a role in retention, motivation, and student involvement. Additionally, Tuttle (2000) cited the following responsibilities of academic advisors: course-scheduling, liaison between students and campus programs, organizing and maintaining academic records, coordinating orientation, graduation, communicating campus policies, and

developing life goals. Academic advisors are required to offer students information while also understanding a student's life goals and maintaining knowledge regarding advising theories, technical advances, and maintaining relationships (Jordan, 2000).

The research highlighted that although advisors do much regarding course selection for students, the principle responsibility of this role are to help students developmentally (Tuttle, 2000). The field of academic advising has been described as an intersection between academic affairs and student affairs (Tuttle, 2000). Darling (2015) further observed that there is added responsibility for academic advisors to assist with increasing retention and exploring career and life options with students. Specifically, Houman and Stapley (2013) noted that academic advisors are required to build relationships with individuals that facilitate academic and personal growth. According to the National Academic Advising Association (2003), academic advisors need to assist students to prepare for the anticipated stages of life. Additionally, Kurland and Siegel (2013) explained that understanding the factors of student success is critical for students as they experience the major life transition of entering college. The literature reviewed for this study demonstrated that self-advocacy is a one of these major life transitions for students with disabilities as they navigate college and conquer various obstacles to be successful.

Academic advisors and guiding student transition. Supporting students through their transition from high school to college is the nature of academic advising (Steele & McDonald, 2008). Hunter and Kendall (2008) explained that the first semester of college was the most significant and important time for students to meet with an academic advisor; therefore, advisors should be knowledgeable about incoming students with disabilities. Kramer (2000) noted several important themes when working with students during the pre-enrollment phase including entry into an academic major, becoming familiar with the college requirements and terminology,

registering for courses, understanding financial aid, and understanding how to adjust students'

course schedules to make accommodations.

As students enter college for the first time, they experience new freedoms and routines

that may require them to reassess their priorities (Hunter & Kendall, 2008). Additionally,

students may experience an increased anxiety and stress as they leave high school and become

more independent (Hunter & Kendall, 2008; Laanan, 2006). During this time, academic advisors

could engage with the students to create a positive advising program that guides them toward

success (Hunter & Kendall, 2008). Laanan (2006) described the scope and essential role of

understanding undergraduate students in transition,

> Understanding students in transition is not an easy task. It requires that we have an
> understanding of what students bring to the college experience; that is, prior academic
> preparation or training, life experiences, and cultural experiences. Holistically, these
> experiences serve as a set of characteristics and events that will influence not only how
> these students perceive college but also what their ability is to navigate the college
> environment. (p. 2)

Advising students with disabilities. Although effective academic advising is imperative

for all students, it is even more important for underrepresented and diverse students (King &

Kerr, 2005). The diversity of students with disabilities requires innovative approaches from

academic advisors (Harding, 2008). Kennedy and Ishler (2008) highlighted that academic

advisors need to be knowledgeable of student demographics, characteristics, and experiences as

the college student progresses. Harding (2008) also added that advisors should be aware of

various cultures, theories of integration, identity development theories, and relationship building

while maintaining skills and respect.

As the profiles of students grow in higher education (Kennedy & Ishler, 2008), academic

advisors must be properly trained to have the ability and sensitivity that will enable to them to

build relationships with students and partnerships across campus (Harding, 2008). Harding

suggested that academic advisors partake in a self-assessment of their individual cultural competency to have an honest evaluation of where they fit in their level of comfort. Self-assessment of cultural competency is applicable to advisors working with students with disabilities.

As the number of students with disabilities entering higher education has continued to rise, academic advisors became concerned about their roles of engagement with them (Jarrow, 1996). Harding (2008) described students with disabilities as an "invisible minority," as many advisors may find it difficult to identify with students in this population. Disabilities may vary from health-related issues to learning disabilities or physical disabilities (Harding, 2008). According to a national survey of advisors' experiences, 91% of advisors reported that they were unaware of students with invisible disabilities until there were academic concerns (Preece et al., 2005).

Hemphill (2002) explained,

To effectively advise a student with a disability, it requires a thorough understanding of the student's goals as well as the student's disability, the barriers the institution may have inadvertently created and the resources the college provides that can be used to assist the student in pursuing his or her educational aspirations. (para. 1)

Among the various student profiles, students with disabilities bring an additional set of questions and challenges to the advising experience (Hemphill, 2002; Hunter & Kendall, 2008). To work with and understand students with disabilities, academic advisors need to be knowledgeable of the diverse types of disabilities and the limitations this student population faces (Harding, 2008; Hunter & Kendall, 2008). Hemphill further explained that to understand the limitations of students with disabilities, advisors must become familiar with structural, educational, and bureaucratic barriers, various instructional modes, campus partners, and the institution's policies and procedures. Additionally, academic advisors should be knowledgeable

of the ADA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and legally required reasonable accommodations (Hemphill, 2002; Kennedy & Ishler, 2008). Under the ADA, campus disability officers may not disclose disability information to academic advisors (Kennedy & Ishler, 2008), and this lack of knowledge may create unique challenges for them. Due to these challenges, Hemphill encouraged advisors to work closely with the unit on campus responsible for establishing accommodations.

Though many recommendations and guidelines for working with students with disabilities can be found throughout the disability literature, Preece et al. (2005) indicated that many advisors are not properly trained to work with this student population. Preece et al. surveyed the NACADA membership and 1,498 advisors to learn about the perceptions of academic advisors and their experiences working with students with disabilities. Of the advisors surveyed, 83% indicated they met with students with disabilities; however, 47% indicated they had not received training on the ADA (Preece et al., 2005). Regarding students' nondisclosure of their disability, 90.8% cited this limitation as an interference with their ability to advice. The lack of knowledge and training available to advisors illustrates the need for more exploration in this field, as academic advisors will likely continue to see a rise in students with disabilities. Preece et al. also recognized that there was a growing need for research regarding students with disabilities.

Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

The number of students entering higher education has risen over the years (Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Gould, 1986; Jarrow, 1996; Kimball et al., 2016; Preece et al., 2005); and according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016b), in 2011 and 2012, 11% of undergraduate students reported having a disability. There is, however, tremendous diversity among students

with disabilities, particular regarding the type of disability (Leake & Stodden, 2014). Students may have a visible disability (such as using a wheel chair or blindness); however, there are also hidden disabilities, such as learning disabilities (Leake & Stodden, 2014). For the purposes of this study, the following definition was used. A student with a disability is defined as having "one or more of the following conditions: a specific learning disability, a visual impairment, hard of hearing, deafness, a speech impairment, an orthopedic impairment, or a health impairment" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b, para. 4).

It is necessary to look at the evolution of legal mandates in the United States regarding disabilities to understand the experiences of students with disabilities in educational settings. While in the secondary education system, students are protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Act [IDEA] (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). The IDEA was enacted in 1975, and required that individuals between the ages of 3 and 21, who identified as having a disability, receive free and appropriate public education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). The legislation also required transition programs be provided at the age of 16 to prepare for adulthood (Leake & Stodden, 2014). Between 2013 and 2014, 13% of all students were served under the IDEA (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a).

As students progress to higher education, their legal protection changes. During this phase, students are no longer protected under the IDEA, and instead rely on the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1976, both of which prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 1990, 2018). The ADA extended the regulations to include institutions that did not obtain federal funding (Leake & Stodden, 2014) and focused on employment, accommodations, and public services (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). Section 504 specifically covered secondary schools, postsecondary schools,

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and employment for programs under federal assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act specifically stated:

> No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States . . . shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance . . . (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, para. 3).

Though the legal mandates of the ADA and Section 504 are similar, Jarrow (1996) explained that the biggest difference in higher education was not the proposed requirements, but the number of individuals who were protected under the new ADA law.

> As a result of the national publicity surrounding the passage and implementation of the ADA, the postsecondary community has seen large numbers of individuals come forward, identify themselves as persons with disabilities, and ask for assistance because this new law – the ADA – says they are entitled to protection from discrimination (Jarrow, 1996, p. 6).

The higher education system in the United States has evolved over the years, as the country responded to demands for equal access and treatment for underrepresented populations (Leake & Stodden, 2014). However, under these legal mandates, students enrolled at an institution of higher education were required to give notice of their disabilities and identify the auxiliary aids that they would need. The institution had the right to determine the necessity of auxiliary aids requested (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In light of this, Leake and Stodden (2014) noted as a concern that "…institutions may be content with only meeting the letter of the law by providing accommodations and supports for equal access in the physical plant and to academic instruction, while neglecting the social sphere" (p. 399).

Disability Models

Disabilities are often seen predominately through either a medical model or social model (Beaudry, 2016; Leake & Stodden, 2014; LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). The medical

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model primarily focuses on interventions and providing tools for student success and the social model highlights the importance of social inclusion for students with disabilities (Leake & Stodden, 2014).

The medical model views disability as a problem that requires medical attention (Beaudry, 2016), with the goal being to find a cure for the disability (LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). Disability services offices are often criticized for focusing mainly on the medical model without addressing social barriers (Leake & Stodden, 2014). Haegele and Hodge (2016) explained that for students to receive aid in school they must have a documented diagnosis, illustrating the reliance from education systems on both the medical model and medical professionals.

The social model was formed as a response to the medical model (LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). In this model, the problem is seen as being rooted in society (Barney 2012; LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007), specifically as it relates to the exclusion of those with disabilities (LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). The notion of this model is that disabilities would not exist if there were no environmental barriers and that a disability is a social phenomenon (LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). Barney (2012) explained that in the social model, individuals' disabilities are viewed as problems, and problems can be overcome. Therefore, the social model focuses on human relations that eliminate stereotypes and stigmas (Barney, 2012). The goal of this model is to promote social inclusion for individuals with disabilities (LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007).

Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy

This study utilized the conceptual framework of self-advocacy for students with disabilities developed by Test et al. (2005) as a construct for understanding. Test et al. reviewed

articles promoting self-advocacy published between 1972 and 2003, with participants in the studies classified as having a disability. After reviewing the literature and information from the seven stakeholders, the conceptual framework that was selected for this study was one based on the self-advocacy components of knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership (Kimball et al., 2016; Test et al., 2005; Vaccaro et al., 2015).

Knowledge of self and knowledge of rights are viewed as the foundations of self-advocacy, as both require individuals to understand themselves before they can verbalize what they need to others (Test et al., 2005). Pursuing self-advocacy means being aware of one's individual rights and taking responsibility for addressing any infringement of those rights (Williams & Shoultz, 1982). Students must obtain a realistic knowledge of self and use the knowledge properly (Schreiner, 2007), leading to communication of their knowledge of self and their rights to others (Stodden et al., 2003; Test et al., 2005). Communication skills are mandatory for effective negotiating, assertiveness, and problem-solving, all of which are critical to self-advocacy (Test et al., 2005). The final component is leadership which allows an individual to move from self-advocacy to advocating for others (Test et al., 2005).

Of the articles reviewed by Test et al. (2005), 75% described the importance of self-knowledge; 40% discussed the requirement of individuals' knowledge of rights, including rights as an individual, as a member of society, and as a student under federal law; 20% of the articles measured skills associated with leadership (Test et al., 2005). Williams and Shoultz (1982) agreed that self-advocacy incorporated speaking on behalf of an individual or a group, with communication skills being a requirement of self-advocacy (Test et al., 2005).

Self-advocacy can occur at various stages in one's life; however, Test et al. (2005) recognized that as each level of an individual's life, complexity increased. This pattern was

particularly true for students with disabilities trying to navigate their educational journeys. Test et al. viewed environments and student interactions as crucial for promoting self-advocacy, and recognized that students were not required to master each component of the framework to obtain self-advocacy.

The specific self-advocacy conceptual framework developed by Test et al. (2005) may serve as a guide for higher education personnel, as many definitions of self-advocacy exist. It may be used as a tool for administrators, teachers, students, families, and researchers as they develop effective instructional and evaluation methods for student with disabilities (Test et al., 2005). Additionally, the framework aims to facilitate discussions regarding the benefits of self-advocacy and empowerment that accompany the gaining of knowledge of one's disabilities and strengths (Test et al., 2005).

This self-advocacy conceptual framework was used in the development of the research questions, research tools, and the analysis. The components of knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership served as guides in the development of the interview questions. Additionally, advisors' perceptions of how students with disabilities understood knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership facilitated the analysis of how advisors perceive and support self-advocacy among students with disabilities.

Understanding Self-Advocacy

Within the literature, several definitions of self-advocacy exist. For individuals with disabilities, the notion of individuals speaking on their own behalf was a common theme among the definitions. Though not comprehensive, Table 1 lists the definitions of self-advocacy that influenced this specific study.

Table 1: *Definitions of Self-advocacy*

Reference	Definition
Williams and Shoultz (1982)	"…. they speak or act on behalf of themselves, or on behalf of other mentally handicapped people, or on behalf of issues that affect mentally handicapped people" (p. 87-88)
Brinckerhoff (1993)	"the ability to recognize and meet the needs that are specific to ones LD [learning disability] without compromising the dignity of oneself or others" (p. 24)
Browning (1997)	…efforts made by individuals to speak for and to take action on their own behalf, to make decisions and influence situations that effect their lives, and to reach their highest possible level of independence. Quite simply, it is a matter of one's stating their own preferences and interests, setting one's own goals, mapping out one's own plans, and acquiring resources for one's own cause (p. 334).
Cunconan-Lahr and Brotherson (1996)	". . . occurring any time people speak or act on their own behalf to improve their quality of life, effect personal change, or correct inequities" (pp. 352).
Schreiner (2007)	"the ability to speak up for what we want and need" (p. 300).
Stodden et al. (2003)	Ability to communicate needs and obtain support
Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, and Deshler (1994) (as cited in Van Reusen, 1996)	"…refers to an individual's ability to effectively." communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert his or her interests, desires, needs, and rights. It assumes the ability to make informed decisions. It also means taking responsibility for those decisions."

Source. Adapted from Test et al. (2005)

Self-determination and self-advocacy are often used interchangeably. Ryan and Griffiths (2015) clarified that self-determination and self-advocacy are both independent of and interdependent on one another. Self-determination is a critical component of self-advocacy because it provides individuals, particularly adults with disabilities, with the ability and skills that are required to self-advocate and meet their goals (Ryan & Griffiths, 2015). Furthermore, self-determination is required for individuals to make decisions, to obtain self-awareness, and to possess self-knowledge. Ryan and Griffiths encouraged community members to provide opportunities and development for self-determination as this leads to successful self-advocacy for individuals with disabilities. This, in turn, impacts community engagement and may improve the lives of individuals with disabilities. These researchers further explained that for self-advocacy to be successful, one must understand its definition and qualities.

Students with disabilities transitioning into higher education. As students' progress from high school to higher education, they experience many changes not only in the environment and curriculum but also about their legal rights and protections. Transitioning from high school may be a difficult experience for many students; however, students with disabilities face additional challenges beyond those of other students (Brinckerhoff, 1996). Secondary school students with disabilities are protected under the IDEA, which requires secondary schools to require free and appropriate education including programs and services (Hadley, 2011). As students enter higher education, however, they are no longer protected under the IDEA (English, 1997; Hadley 2011; Stodden et al., 2003). Instead, the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act are the principal protection of civil rights for people with disabilities employment and post-secondary education (Hadley, 2011; Stodden et al., 2003). These legal mandates only require access to higher education and do not guarantee support of the needs of

students (Stodden et al., 2003). As students progress to the higher education environment, the responsibility for success lies within themselves.

> In their high school experiences, students receiving special education services are supported by multidisciplinary teams available for planning and interventions related to their disabilities. Teams typically include the student, parents of the student, teachers of the student, a counselor or school psychologist, and a school administrator, who implement Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and specialized instruction. (Hadley, 2011, p. 77)

Secondary education institutions are responsible for addressing the disabilities of students and developing IEPs that are plans to assist students with their individual educational needs (Stodden et al., 2003). Though the IEP process requires the involvement of parents and service providers, it has not necessarily adequately prepared students for life after secondary school (Stodden et al., 2003). Brinckerhoff (1993) found that high school systems created a false sense of reliance on others among the student population. In the secondary school environment, students were provided with technical and structural supports to support their educational goals (English, 1997) and could rely on the support of their parents (Goldhammer & Brinckerhoff, 1993).

Unfortunately, compared to the high school setting, postsecondary education students with disabilities have often not had many options for assistance (Brinckerhoff, 1993). Stodden et al. (2003) discussed the barriers rooted in the differences between secondary and postsecondary education systems that may negatively influence individuals with disabilities, (e.g., legal mandates, lack of support and services, personal responsibility, and focus on the legality and costs versus the individual).

Gould (1986) explained that negative experiences after high school caused many students with disabilities to stay at home and not contribute to their communities. Through an analysis of self-advocacy, Gould found that many high school students with disabilities spent years looking

for a job due to the lack of preparation in self-advocacy. He also found that one of the problems in being a successful self-advocate was that other individuals tended to make assumptions regarding the needs of students with disabilities. Gould encouraged those who work with students with disabilities to ensure that their students were actively participating in the process to avoid dependent relationships.

The need for self-advocacy among students with disabilities in higher education. As previously demonstrated, students with disabilities experience many changes and challenges as they enter higher education. The adjustment in educational settings has required students with disabilities to advocate for their specialized needs to receive support (English, 1997; Stodden et al., 2003; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Goldhammer and Brinckerhoff (1993), in their analysis of potential self-advocacy misconceptions, explained that when entering college or university, a student must be independent to be successful.

Under the ADA, students are expected to provide appropriate documentation and to work with the institution's disability office to receive the proper support for their disabilities (Stodden et al., 2003). Additionally, students must take responsibility for evaluating courses, planning their studying time, interacting with faculty and staff, and becoming self-advocates for their own lives (Brinckerhoff, 1993). This process may require that students not only understand the course content and teaching methods (Stodden et al., 2003), but that they understand and communicate their disability effectively (Goldhammer & Brinckerhoff, 1993) to several constituencies.

Goldhammer and Brinckerhoff (1993) explained that communicating about their disabilities, and needed accommodations can be a daunting and difficult task for students. Additionally, the limited opportunity for communication with professors in the post-secondary education setting is one of the biggest differences students experience in their transition from

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secondary to post-secondary education (Brinckerhoff, 1996). Gaining the appropriate

accommodations through a college or university (Daly-Cano et al., 2015) requires not only that

students self-advocate and disclose their disabilities. The combined efforts of higher education

professionals are needed to assist students in need (Goldhammer & Brinckerhoff, 1993).

However, there are varieties of reasons students choose not to disclose their disabilities. These

include: (a) embarrassment due to their fear of being labeled, or (b) their belief that they do not

need the accommodations that can be provided to them (Daly-Cano et al., 2015).

In the K-12 education system, it was found that parents had negative views regarding

labeling their child as having a disability (Lalvani, 2015). Lalvani interviewed 32 parents of

children who were receiving special education services and found that most parents felt a greater

stigma when their child was removed from the general classroom setting. However, Lalvani also

found that most teachers did not cite stigma in association with disability. Further research

demonstrated that stigma continued to exist in the higher education setting as well (Fleming &

Wated, 2016; Trammell, 2009). Due to stereotypes of individuals with disabilities, faculty and

peers have often viewed students with disabilities in a negative light (Fleming & Wated, 2016).

Stigma was cited by Trammell (2009) as one of the most significant barriers for students with

disabilities to achieve success. Students with disabilities, according to Trammel, are often less

likely to self-disclose their disability for accommodations due to the stigma and perceived

negative reactions of peers and professors.

Vaccaro et al. (2015) found, in their study, that self-advocacy, mastery of the student

role, and social relationships related directly to a student's sense of belonging within a

university. Unfortunately, they also found that many students were unprepared to self-advocate

because of their past reliance on the secondary system and their parents. According to Gould's

(1986) self-advocacy analysis, self-advocacy needs to start in high school. Williams and Shoultz (1982) had earlier noted that academic advisors were challenged by the need of students to rely on others, further demonstrating a growing need for self-advocacy training (Gould, 1986).

According to Goldhammer and Brinckerhoff (1993), self-advocacy reaches beyond academics and focuses on confidence, relationships with others, social aspects, and seeking advice or help. Students should be encouraged to take opportunities to demonstrate independence, the essence of self-advocacy (Brinckerhoff, 1996; Goldhammer & Brinckerhoff, 1993). Brinckerhoff (1993) explained that this is particularly true for students with disabilities because they need to be able to take risks, identify their strengths and limitations, be aware of the resources that are available to them, and understand academic adjustments that may be required. Through narratives of students with disabilities, Vaccaro et al. (2015) found that developing self-advocacy is a key component to academic success and persistence. To develop self-advocacy, one must make autonomous decisions, possess self-determination, and express one's needs effectively (Brinckerhoff, 1993).

Importance of students with disabilities in higher education. Throughout the literature, the importance of higher education for students with disabilities has been noted. Based on a five-year research project at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, it was found that students with disabilities were likely to have lower levels of academic achievement, less likely to obtain a high school degree (or equivalent), and less likely to progress to the college level (Stodden et al., 2003). Additionally, through a research project, Stodden et al. found that when students with disabilities complete some form of postsecondary education, they have an improved chance of securing meaningful employment. These researchers stressed the importance of obtaining a post-secondary degree due to changes in the nation's labor market, stressing that individuals who

attend a higher education institution learned higher order thinking and technical skills that may give them an advantage in the job market (Stodden et al., 2003).

Self-Advocacy and Student Development

As higher education continues to increase in enrollment, so does the complexity of society (Chickering, 1969, 1972). As students exit high school, developmental changes occur (Chickering, 1969, 1972) and it is imperative that higher education institutions are prepared to handle this developmental phase of college students. Student development specifically examines student's growth, progress, and development capacity (Rodgers, 1980).

Strayhorne (2015) explained that academic advisors are tasked with assisting student navigate the college world during this critical developmental time. Chickering (1969, 1972) specifically stated that college and universities are required to assist their students as they grow, "To do so requires more than preparing them to pass final exams and to score high on test for graduate school admission, and it requires more than preparing them become skilled workers" (p. 3).

With this idea, Chickering (1969, 1972) developed seven vectors of student development that were found as the common areas during the adolescent and early adulthood developmental phase. The seven vectors outlined by Chickering (1969, 1972) for student development include: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. These seven vectors connect to the four components outlined by Test et al. (2005) in the self-advocacy conceptual framework: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership.

According to Test et al. (2005), knowledge of self includes a student's understanding their strengths, goals, interests, needs, and responsibilities. Managing emotions connects to knowledge of self as it requires a student to become aware of their emotions and build self-regulation (Chickering, 1969, 1972; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Additionally, moving through autonomy toward interdependence requires students to understand their goals and diminish the need for support (Chickering, 1969. 1972; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). Develop mature interpersonal relationships describes developing healthy and lasting longing relationships and "contribute[s] significantly to the development of a sense of self" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 68). Also, establishing identity relates to knowledge of self, as it involves students being comfortable in their roles and life styles (Chickering, 1969, 1972; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). Self-acceptance and self-esteem are key components of the establishing identity vector (Chickering, 1969, 1972; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). Finally, the vector of developing purpose consists of establishing goals and making interpersonal commitments (Chickering, 1969, 1972; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010) which ties directly to the objective of knowledge of self.

Test et al. (2005), described knowledge of rights as understanding personal rights, community rights, advocating for others, and knowledge of resources. Developing integrity was defined as students developing values, actions, and a sense of social responsibility. This vector relates to knowledge of rights as it demonstrates students becoming aware of their values and the implications of their actions (Chickering, 1969, 1972; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010).

Test et al. (2005), described communication as assertiveness, negotiation, listening, and compromise. In the vector of developing competence, three aspects were discussed: intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. In regard to intellectual competence, communication was specifically noted as a requirement for effectively working with others (Chickering, 1969, 1972; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). Communication was also cited as a requirement for students to acknowledge that relationships contribute to their self-identity under the developing mature and interpersonal relationships vector.

Finally, leadership was described by Test et al. (2005) as the knowledge of group's rights, advocating for others, and knowledge of resources. Under the developing competence vector, leadership was required to work effectively with others (Chickering, 1969, 1972; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, et al., 2010). Given the role academic advisors take in assisting students through their personal and career development, it is imperative that they understand the importance of self-advocacy for students with disabilities as these concepts directly relate to a student's development (Darling, 2015; Houman & Stapley; 2013; National Academic Advising Association, 2003; Tuttle, 2000).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine the insights and support provided for self-advocacy among academic advisors when working with higher education students with disabilities. The review of literature in Chapter 2 illustrated that as students enter a higher education setting, they are no longer protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and may experience the need for self-advocacy for the first time in their lives. Chapter 2 also highlighted the role of the academic advisor and the need for self-advocacy skills as students with disabilities enter higher education. However, there was a gap in the literature regarding the perceptions of and support for self-advocacy among academic advisors. The researcher addressed this gap in her study.

Focusing on the role of the academic advisor was particularly important, as advisor contacts are among the first interactions that students have with higher education professionals when they enter higher education (Kuh, 2008), and students must advocate for themselves as they pursue their academic goals. The conceptual framework of self-advocacy put forth by Test et al. (2005) guided this study for students with disabilities. Test et al.'s (2005) four components of self-advocacy are: (a) knowledge of self; (b) knowledge of rights; (c) communication; and (d) leadership.

This chapter contains an explanation of the methods and procedures used to respond to the research questions that guided the study. It focuses on the qualitative research design, research method, research design, population, sampling methodology, instrument, data collection process, and data analysis.

Research Questions

1. Recognizing higher education's growing need to better serve undergraduate students with disabilities, what information, areas, and types of training do advisors recommend as needed for their specific roles and interactions?

    a. Do advisors recognize the academic advising needs of undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university? If so, how? If not, why not?

    b. What evidence of self-advocacy components, if any, do academic advisors see among undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university?

Rationale of Qualitative Study

I explored academic advisors' perceptions of and support for self-advocacy among undergraduate students with disabilities through a qualitative inquiry to understand their professional experiences with this subject matter. In my qualitative design, I utilized a phenomenological multiple-case study approach because I was specifically interested in understanding the meaning of a specific human problem (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research design, according to Merriam (2009), allows questions to form due to an interest in people's lives and improving practice. Merriam elaborated, "In fact I believe that research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people's live" (p. 1).

To understand the perception of higher education academic advisors, the researcher sought to explore their views regarding the issues related to self-advocacy among students with disabilities. Qualitative research explicitly relies on the participants and their views to find the common themes using questions, words, and text from participants (Creswell, 2005). Either verbally or written, what participants say is a key source for qualitative research (Patton, 2002).

Phenomenology, my choice of methodology, is best used when the variables are

unknown and exploration is required to understand a phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). This

qualitative research design allowed for flexibility as it did not have to be extensively pre-

arranged, and changes may have occurred as data were collected (Creswell, 2014). As Johnson

and Christensen (2012) stated, "Qualitative researchers view human behavior as dynamic and

changing, they advocate studying phenomena in depth and over an extended period of time" (p.

377). As a higher education professional, this design allowed me to reflect on my own role and

background as I collected data in a way suggested by Creswell (2014).

Research Design

    Phenomenology. Over the years, phenomenology has increased in popularity as a

research design, and this has resulted in confusion as to its definition (Patton, 2002). Patton

viewed the focus of the phenomenological study as being able to transform experiences into

meaning. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), "The phenomenologist is committed to

understanding social phenomena from the actor's own perspective." (pp. 1-2).

    The phenomenological approach focuses on human beings and their experiences of a

phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Patton,

2002). Phenomenological studies analyze the perceptions, description, feelings, judgment,

memory, senses, and conversations with others as humans experience various incidents (Patton,

2002). Moustakas (1994) wrote that the phenomenological approach focuses on experience to

obtain comprehensive descriptions and reflective analysis, stating, "Any phenomenon represents

a suitable starting point for an investigation" (p. 26).

    Given that the present research was focused on the perceptions of academic advisors as to

self-advocacy among students with disabilities, a phenomenological approach was appropriate as

it provided insight from the experiences of the academic advisors working directly with this student population. The objective of this type of research is to enter the world of the participant and to recognize their perceptions (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Patton (2002) further clarified that a phenomenon may focus on emotion, relationship, or an organization.

An implication of the phenomenological approach is that it relies on the perceptions and interpretations of an individual (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002), where interpretation is a critical aspect of understanding the experience. Another implication is the methodology. To understand the experience, researchers must fully involve themselves in the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). A challenge all researchers face in phenomenological research is that of incorporating the real and ideal perceptions of the subjects (Moustakas, 1994).

Multiple case study approach. This study utilized a multiple case study approach. A case study consists of analyzing data for thorough examination and comparison by cases (Patton, 2002), allowing for comparisons and contrasts to be made among the various subjects (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The purpose of the case study approach is "to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 447). Cases may be people, organizations, neighborhoods, cultures, regions, or stages in an individual's life (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2006). In this study, the subjects of the cases were the academic advisors selected.

Stake (2006) defined case studies as "by interest in individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used" (p. 443). Yin (2014) argued that this definition was insufficient and did not explain case studies as a research methodology. When utilizing a case study research approach, the researcher desires an understanding of a real-world case (Yin & Davis, 2007). Yin (2014) described case study research as "an all-encompassing method that covers the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis" (p. 17). Merriam (2009) and

Stake (2010) have identified case studies as being particularly useful and important when evaluating programs (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010).

Based on this information, the researcher utilized a multiple-case study approach. Multiple-case studies involve investigating information from various cases that may be viewed separately from the sole case study (Merriam, 2009). The common dominator in a study is the phenomenon that connects the cases (Stake, 2010). In this study, academic advisors within a single institution represented the cases. Merriam believed that allowing more cases to be studied can lead to greater distinction among cases and the probability of developing a more captivating understanding.

Setting and Participants

The study employed a purposeful, homogenous sampling strategy to select participants and sites. The study took place at a single study site. According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study may take place at one site. All participants in the study were academic advisors employed at a large, southern, four-year public university in the United States. The sample institution consisted of more than 10 colleges and offered degrees including a wide range of bachelor, master, and doctoral degree programs. At the time of the study, the enrollment of the undergraduate population was over 50,000 students. The university also had a student affairs division, which housed several specialized student support services. The researcher selected the institution because of its large and growing student population.

Specialized student support. The university had several units which offered specialized student support, including the students with disabilities and student athletes. The student disability office primarily served students with disabilities. All colleges and universities are required to have support for students with disabilities; however, their services may vary

(Komives, Woodward, & Associates, 2003). These offices aim to eliminate or reduce barriers and to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. Typically, staff who work with disabilities services assist in providing accommodations for students, address physical barriers on campus, help students to understand their rights, and provide outreach for faculty and staff on campus (Komives et al., 2003).

At the university where this research took place, the student disability office focused on environment design to create an exclusive atmosphere for students. The staff of 22 professionals worked specifically with physical layouts of buildings and offices, office policies and procedures, course teaching methods, TV and online videos, and personal attitudes and awareness of disabilities. The office also included a wide variety of accommodations including alternative testing, note takers, accessible technology, captioning, interpreters, and other accommodations as needed. The disability office also had resources for students that included scholarships and workforce recruitment. Students were able to report grievances, discrimination, or physical barriers they identified on campus. The disability office worked with approximately 2,600 students, and 70% of professors each semester had at least one student registered with the office (Director of Student Disability Office, personal communication, October 29, 2018)

The office worked exclusively with students with disabilities and had very little interaction with academic advising units across campus. Most colleges within the university have their own advising units, and the student disability office had no academic advisors employed in its unit. Therefore, the student disability office often referred students to the college's assigned academic advisors.

In addition to the student disability office, the target institution had a unique program regarding inclusive education. This program provided individuals with disabilities a post-

secondary educational experience and sought to cultivate skills for long-term employment. The individuals in the program could audit for-credit classes and live on-campus in student housing. However, the program's students were not degree seeking and were not included in the study.

Another specialized group of students at the target institution were student athletes. These students had specialized academic advisors that only served assigned student athletes. Student athletes with disabilities were assigned to a specific academic advisor who was specially trained to work with student athletes with disabilities. According to Gruber (2003), academic advisors face particular challenges. Specifically, when working with student athletes, advisors are required to uphold the traditional responsibilities of their roles and understand the campus climate in regards to athletics. They must be knowledgeable about the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) rules and regulations and identify the specific needs of this special student population (Gruber, 2003). Given the specialized nature of the advisor's role, the unique attributes of the student athlete population, and the specific nature of the unit due to extra funding, student athlete advisors were excluded from the study.

Interacting in a natural setting allows the researcher to collect data in an area where participants face the issue or problem at hand (Creswell 2014; Patton 2002). Therefore, I conducted one-on-one interviews and a focus group interview with academic advisors at their place of employment.

Patton (2002) described qualitative designs as naturalistic because (a) they take place in the real world and (b) the researcher does not manipulate the phenomenon. Unlike experimental research, qualitative research enables the researcher to study an incident as it occurs naturally, without manipulation. The results of this research design allow for detailed writing and narrative rather than statistical reporting (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Sampling. In this study, purposeful sampling, common in qualitative research, was used (Creswell, 2007). This strategy requires the researcher to select participants and sites to understand a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The sample of this study was homogenous, as the participants shared similar characteristics (Creswell, 2005). A homogenous sampling is also required for the implementation of focus groups (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Patton, 2002). During the homogenous sampling procedure, "The researcher purposefully samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics" (Creswell, 2005, p. 206). At the target institution, academic advisors provided academic advising to current and prospective students for various undergraduate units across campus. For the purposes of this study, the subgroup consisted of academic advisors (or similar titles).

Two levels of sampling are required in qualitative case studies (Merriam, 2009). The first level of sampling is to identify the population of the study (Merriam, 2009). For this study, the first sampling level consisted of all academic advisors employed at the target institution. The lead advising committee at the institution determined the population size. The lead advising committee was able to provide the email addresses for all academic advisors employed at the institution, so the researcher could send a recruitment participation email (Appendix C).

A second level of criteria is to select participants from the sample population to interview and participate in the study (Merriam, 2009). To select academic advisors for the interview and focus group, the researcher used the following criteria:

1. Job titles – academic advisor (or similar title).
2. Job descriptions – providing advising/guidance to undergraduate students.
3. Experience in the field – a minimum of two years' experience was required to participate.
4. Educational attainment – all participants should maintain a bachelor's degree.
5. Student assignment – all participants should exclusively advise undergraduate students.

6. Experience advising students with disabilities – all participants must have advised a minimum of one student with a disability within the last two years.

It is important for participants to share common characteristics because "the more diverse the characteristics of the individuals, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to find common experiences, themes, and the overall essence of the experience for all participants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 122). Providing guidelines for sample selection allows for high-quality case descriptions and identifying patterns among participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990).

Merriam (2009) argued that there is no specific number of individuals required for a qualitative study. What is required is enough participants to answer the research questions. Creswell (2007) explained that for qualitative research, the researcher should investigate detailed information about each participant and not generalize. Creswell (2007) agreed with Dukes (1984) who recommended utilizing three to 10 participants for a phenomenological study. For the present study, eight advisors participated in individual interviews, and four of those individuals subsequently participated in the focus group.

Communication with participants. Once I secured approval from the University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), I requested and received permission to use the Campus Listserve (Appendix B), distributed the initial email announcement (Appendix C), followed by an invitation to participate in the study via email to all academic advisors at the target institution (Appendix D). Seidman (2013) explained the importance of the researcher initiating the contact without the use of a third party; explaining that the interview process relies on the relationship built which begins with the first contact. Two weeks following the distribution of the invitation email, I sent a reminder email to all advisors who did not respond (Appendix E). Once the final interview participants were determined, I sent them additional

emails (Appendices F & G) requesting to schedule the interviews. As needed, I shared the IRB Summary Explanation for Exempt Research (Appendix H).

I scheduled one-on-one interviews in locations selected by the participants. The focus groups took place in a classroom at the target institution. Initially upon meeting, I reviewed the interview guide (Appendix I) with each participant. Protecting the identities and confidentiality of the participants is crucial (Baez, 2002; Kaiser, 2009). Therefore, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant to ensure anonymity during the research and publication process. Corbin and Strauss (2015) and Creswell (2014) encouraged the use of pseudonyms for identity protection.

Data Collection Procedures

In many qualitative studies, interviewing is required to gather accurate data, as researchers are unable to observe feelings, behaviors, intentions, and thoughts (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). As Patton so aptly stated, "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe" (p. 340). Interviewing is a common approach to qualitative research where participants can share experiences, motives, and opinions through the interview process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2014). By interviewing multiple individuals, a researcher develops multiple descriptions to create a collective image of a process or experience, allowing researchers to assess programs and policies and shed light on potentially ineffective policies (Rubin & Rubin, 2014).

Interviews. According to Seidman (2013), the core purpose of interviews is to understand the experiences and meaning of those experiences for the participants. Marshall and Rossman (2006) indicated that interviewing may be the only strategy employed, or it may be used in conjunction with another method. In-depth interviews, as an example, are portrayed as

conversations with predetermined categories. Though researchers guide conversations, they also respect how participants structure their answers (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

There are three types of interviews: highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Merriam, 2009). Highly structured interviews consist of predetermined questions in a specific order; semi-structured interviews include an interview guide that includes a combination of questions and allows flexibility with predetermined order; and unstructured interviews are organized as a conversation with open-ended questions (Merriam, 2009). According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), a degree of systemization is required when interviewing as a part of a multi-case study. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to allow flexibility in the order of questions and follow-up questions.

A semi-structured approach to interviewing allows participants to approach answers in a unique manner (Merriam, 2009). In a semi-structured interview, there is specific information that the researcher needs to obtain from each participant; however, the order and wording of the questions are flexible (Merriam, 2009), and a combination of open-ended and theoretically driven questions are incorporated (Galletta, 2013). According to Merriam (2009), "This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 90). Though the questions are open-ended to allow participants to describe their individual experiences, the focus of the questions must connect to the research topic (Galletta, 2013).

I conducted interviews using the Interview Protocol (Appendix J) with eight academic advisors at the target institution. The interviews were one-on-one and took place at the location of the participants' choosing. The interviews were audio recorded, saved on the researcher's

password protected computer, and sent to a professional transcription service to transcribe all the recordings.

Strengths and weaknesses. Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted several strengths of interviews. First, interviews allow data to be obtained quickly. They also allow researchers to follow up and clarify immediately and to gain an understanding of people's daily experiences. Rubin and Rubin (2014) stated that interviews allow researchers to understand and recreate events they have not experienced personally and to examine complex issues through numerous viewpoints.

As with many methodologies, interviews are not without weaknesses. Participants may be uncomfortable or unwilling to share components of their lives; however, it is crucial that participants cooperate (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The interviewer also may lack the communication skills to induce long narratives from their participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Focus group. A focus group is a data collection procedure, a type of interview that thrives on the interactions of members of a group (Asbury, 1995; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Patton, 2002) Focus groups are used when a researcher is interested in understanding issues from a precise population's viewpoint (Asbury, 1995).

This data collection tool allows a moderator to lead a group discussion through open-ended questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Additionally, a focus group allows a group of individuals to hear the responses of one another and provide additional feedback (Patton, 2002). The intention of a focus group is to allow participants to "consider their own views in the context of others" (Patton, 2002, p. 386), and this requires a homogenous sample to promote discussion (Asbury, 1995; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The design and use

of focus groups allows the researcher to obtain detailed perspectives of individuals through interaction with others in similar roles (Asbury, 1995). Following are best practices for focus group research.

First, the researcher must gather participants with common experiences in a location that is comfortable and accessible to the participants of the study (Asbury, 1995; Edmunds, 1999). It is beneficial for the researcher to utilize a semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix G) that includes questions regarding common interests of the group (Asbury, 1995). Next, the researcher serves as the moderator to ask questions and guide the discussion (Edmunds, 1999) with the assistance of another individual (co-facilitator) experienced in research. According to Asbury (1995), a co-facilitator may take notes and observe behavior. Additionally, as recommended by Merriam (2009), a co-facilitator should be familiar with the focus group process. The focus group approach allows for relaxed conversations, and the moderator ensures participants stay on topic (Edmunds, 1999).

According to Asbury (1995) and Johnson and Christensen (2004), focus groups are useful when used in conjunction with another data collection method. In this study, the data obtained in the individual interviews were used in the focus group, allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions and gain greater clarity regarding the data initially gathered in the interviews.

Four of the advisors participated in the focus group in a classroom at the site institution. The focus group allowed for rich connection and interactions among the academic advisors. Although the researcher expected the discussion to center around advising issues, the focus became more about resource sharing and developing solutions. The participants desired to continue to meet for professional dialogues and further resources sharing.

All focus group discussions were audio recorded, saved on the researcher's password protected computer, and sent to a professional transcription service to transcribe all recordings. The Focus Group Protocol appears in Appendix K. The researcher analyzed the transcriptions using the same procedures as used in the analysis of interview data.

Strengths and weaknesses. Patton (2002) noted several strengths of focus groups including cost-efficiency, increased data quality, multiple perspectives that may be assessed in a short period of time, and that participants tend to enjoy the interaction. Among the weaknesses are the limitations of the questions, the limited time frame, the requirement and skill of the moderator to manage the group discussion, potential negative reactions by participants, and that confidentiality is not guaranteed during the process (Patton, 2002). Although the focus group was a greater time investment, this methodology allowed participants to gain additional self-understanding and build professional relationships through the experience. Moreover, the researcher had the opportunity to gain greater understanding of the participants' experiences and accounts and to triangulate the data.

Data Collection Tools

Interview and focus group questions were developed to respond to the research questions. Table 2 displays the alignment of the research questions with the interview questions asked of participants in individual interviews. Table 3 demonstrates the alignment of the research questions and focus group questions. Table 4 reveals the rationale for the research questions, the intended focus of each, and the literature base linkage regarding the transition for students with disabilities entering higher education institutions and the need for self-advocacy.

As encouraged by Merriam (2009), the interview questions were pilot tested by a small group of academic advisors who did not participate in the actual study to ensure the questions

were clear and that they would yield useful data. Per Merriam, pilot interviews are a crucial

component of the interviewing process to ensure the posed questions are understandable. Prior to

data collection, recommendations for changes based on the results of the pilot study were

incorporated into the final interview questions.

Table 2

Interview Questions Aligned with Research Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions (IQ)
Research Question 1 Recognizing higher education's growing need to better serve undergraduate students with disabilities, what information, areas, and types of training do advisors recommend as needed for their specific roles and interactions?	IQ15A. To support your work as an advisor, what areas of professional development for advising students with disabilities do you believe are needed? IQ15B. Why do you believe these are needed? IQ16A. If professional development opportunities regarding advising students with disabilities were offered, would you attend? If so, why? If not, why not? IQ16B. What do you think might motivate or make it more possible for other academic advisors to attend such professional development?
Research Question 1A Do advisors recognize the academic advising needs of undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university? If so, how? If not, why not?	IQ1: How did you enter the academic advising field? IQ2: How long have you been an academic advisor? IQ3. What is your academic background? What degree(s) have you earned? IQ4: What college or department do you advise for? IQ5: What are your goals in advising undergraduate students? IQ6A: How many undergraduate students do you believe you have served in the last two years? IQ6B: How many undergraduate students with disabilities do you believe you have you served in the last two years? IQ7A: What academic advising needs have you recognized among students with disabilities? IQ7B: Luis is a sophomore and comes to you for his advising appointment. Please describe how you handle this process. IQ7C: Four weeks later you receive an email and Luis tells you he has ADHD and wants to meet with you regarding his upcoming class schedule. What is your response? IQ8A. Please recall a situation when working with a student with a disability. How did you learn of the students' disabilities? IQ8B. When did you learn of the students' disabilities?

Research Questions	Interview Questions (IQ)
	IQ9. What type of disabilities have students described to you (specific learning disability, visual impairment, hearing loss, deafness, speech impairment, orthopedic impairment or health impairment)? (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).
	IQ10. In what way(s) have you confirmed they are working with the student disability office on campus?
Research Question 1B What evidence of self-advocacy components, if any, do academic advisors see among undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university?	IQ11A. What was your perception of how students with disabilities understood themselves?
	IQ11B. What examples can you provide to illustrate your perceptions?
	IQ12A. What was your perception of how students with disabilities understood their rights?
	IQ12B. Can you share examples to illustrate these perceptions?
	IQ13A. What was your perception of how students with disabilities were able to communicate their needs?
	IQ13B. Can you share examples to illustrate these perceptions?
	IQ14A. What was your perception of leadership ability of students with disabilities?
	IQ14B. Can you share examples to illustrate these perceptions?

Table 3

Focus Group Questions Aligned with Research Questions

Research Questions	Focus Group Questions
Research Question 1 Recognizing higher education's growing need to better serve undergraduate students with disabilities, what information, areas, and types of training do advisors recommend as needed for their specific roles and interactions?	FQ6. As an academic advisor working with students with disabilities, can you discuss the type of training(s) you received? FQ7A. What types of training and/or information would you recommend to academic advisors as they prepare to work with students with disabilities? FQ7B: Finally, what types of training and/or information would you recommend to existing academic advisors?
Research Question 1A Do advisors recognize the academic advising needs of undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university? If so, how? If not, why not?	FQ1. Let's start by discussing your roles as advisors. What are your responsibilities as an academic advisor for college students? FQ2. Let's know focus on experiences when working with a student with disabilities. Who would like to describe an advising experience with a student with disabilities? FQ3A. Could you describe any challenges you encounter when advising students with disabilities? FQ3B. What advising approaches have you taken to address these challenges? FQ3C. If you answered no to challenges you encounter when advising students with disabilities, have you experienced communication challenges with other offices on campus as you work with students with disabilities?
Research Question 1B What evidence of self-advocacy components, if any, do academic advisors see among undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university?	FQ4A. Let's move on to discussing the role of self-advocacy. How would you define self-advocacy for students? FQ4B: How would you define self-advocacy for students with disabilities? FQ5A. Can you describe how the role of self-advocacy influences your advising students with disabilities? FQ5B. Please describe some examples of self-advocacy you have seen among students with disabilities.

Table 4

Research Questions: Focus and Linkage to Literature

Research Questions	Focus	Source
Research Question 1 Recognizing higher education's growing need to better serve undergraduate students with disabilities, what information, areas, and types of training do advisors recommend as needed for their specific roles and interactions?	Professional Development	Hemphill, 2002; Hunter & Kendall, 2008; Preece et al., 2005
Research Question 1A Do advisors recognize the academic advising needs of undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university? If so, how? If not, why not?	Advising Students with Disabilities	Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Gould, 1986; Harding, 2008; Hemphill, 2002; Hunter & Kendall, 2008; Leake & Stodden, 2014; Jarrow, 1996; Kennedy & Ishler, 2008; Kimball et al., 2016; Preece et al., 2005 National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b
Research Question 1B What evidence of self-advocacy components, if any, do academic advisors see among undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university?	Self-Advocacy	English, 1997; Goldhammer & Brinckerhoff, 1993; Stodden et al., 2003; Test et al., 2005; Vaccaro et al., 2015; Williams & Shoultz, 1982

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2007), the task of analyzing multiple sets of data is a challenge for qualitative researchers. Merriam (2009) explained that the analysis process may begin while collecting data, in between interviews, and/or after interviews. Therefore, the analysis process is viewed as a cyclical act (Saldaña, 2013).

Marshall and Rossman (2006) explained that there are seven procedures that occur when analyzing qualitative data:

(a) organizing the data; (b) immersion in the data; (c) generating categories and themes; (d) coding the data; (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos; (f) searching for alternative understandings; and (g) writing the report or other format for presenting the study (p. 156).

These procedures were used in this study.

Yin (2014) further explained that to analyze the data, researchers must use the conceptual framework, (in this study, self-advocacy) that is guiding the study, and work to create case descriptions, and test plausible rival explanations. These strategies can be used in any combination; however, it is important for the researcher to be aware of these strategies before the analysis begins (Yin, 2014). For this study, the researcher used the components of knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership from the self-advocacy conceptual framework to develop the interview questions and facilitate the analysis.

To analyze the data, the researcher utilized the constant comparative approach (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This approach allowed the researcher to look at an incident and compare it with another incident in the data set, leading to the creation of categories (Merriam, 2009). Though the constant comparative method approach is often discussed in connection with grounded theory, Merriam (2009) indicated that this approach may be used by a researcher who is not seeking to build a theory.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), Patton (2002) and Yin (2014), the researcher needs to begin the analysis by identifying recurring regularities or patterns. When analyzing the data, I divided the information into codes and categories after the interviews were transcribed. Developing codes or classifications is the first step of analysis process (Patton, 2002). According to Merriam (2009), "Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (p. 175). Additionally, Marshall and Rossman (2006) explained that analytical thinking is

represented by coding data. This process is known as coding analysis and is useful when developing descriptions for case studies (Creswell, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is recommended for qualitative research to ensure accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) explained that the researcher should identify one or more trustworthiness procedures when conducting a study. Additionally, Johnson and Christensen (2004) argued that it is important for researchers to examine multiple strategies used for trustworthiness to maximize legitimacy in their studies. Therefore, for this study I used four trustworthiness procedures: member checking, inter-rater reliability, a researcher's journal, and triangulation.

Member checking. Johnson and Christensen (2004) discussed interpretive validity as a method of trustworthiness by having participants check for accuracy. Part of the qualitative research process is to understand the perceptions of the participants. This type of validity process allows the participants to ensure that their perceptions are accurately portrayed (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The most important strategy for accomplishing interpretive validity is through member checking (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). With the use of member checking, all participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts and provide any feedback. Member checking allows the participants of the study to read through the major findings and check for accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010). This process also protects the participants from harm (Stake, 2010) and allows any miscommunications to be addressed and corrected (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In this study, all participants indicated that their transcripts were accurate and true to their advising experiences.

Inter-rater reliability. Creswell (2007) described obtaining trustworthiness in qualitative research by using multiple coders to analyze transcriptions. Specifically, inter-rater reliability was described by Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, and Marteau (1997) to occur when data are independently coded by skilled researchers and the coded passages are compared to find agreement between the raters. Stake (2010) also stressed the importance of having multiple individuals interpret qualitative data. When conducting inter-rater agreements, the issues include agreeing on code names, coded passages, or coding passages in the same manner (Creswell, 2007).

Reliability, the standard for judging qualitative research, calls for transparency of the analysis process (Armstrong et al., 1997). In this study, multiple researchers analyzed the interview and focus group responses and coded the responses into themes.

Researcher's journal. With the researcher's journal, I bracketed my preconceived ideas of the interactions academic advisors have with students with disabilities. This journal contained my results, insights and reflections on bracketing. Moustakas (1994) specifically explained that the researcher must remove prejudices, biases, and prejudgments and that removing these preconceived notions allows the researcher to be open to new knowledge. In this study, this step proved important as the participating advisors came from various disciplines, and their encounters with students varied significantly from my own.

Triangulation. Patton (2002) described triangulation as using varying methods or data to strengthen a study. Stake (2010) further explained that triangulation enables the researcher to be more confident about the results and improve the research. The purpose of triangulation is to test for consistency in results and reduce errors (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) stated, "It is in data analysis that the strategy of triangulation really pays off, not only in providing diverse ways of

looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn" (p. 556). For this study, triangulation was accomplished with member checking, multiple sources of data (interviews and focus groups), and the researcher's journal to confirm data from the participants' and researcher's perspectives.

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

To guard issues of researcher bias, Johnson and Christensen (2004) noted that researchers should engage in self-reflection and discuss any potential bias. Explaining any potential position bias the researcher brings to the study is another form of providing trustworthiness to the research (Creswell, 2014). Positionality of the researcher explains that the identity of the researcher may impact a study (Bourke, 2014). The identities of the researcher and participants shape the research process (Bourke, 2014). The ability of the researcher to address personal bias and understand the insight of participants is essential to the data collection process.

As the researcher of this study, I have a master's degree in higher education and student affairs and have worked for over three years as an academic advisor at a large, public university. As an academic advisor, I understand the perception of the participants in this study. However, I advise for a specific academic major; thus, my firsthand experiences may vary from those of other advisors. Additionally, although I serve as an academic advisor for over 2,000 students, my interactions with students with disabilities have been limited.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the research methods that were implemented to conduct this study. The rationale for a qualitative study, the research design, sample, data collection procedures, data collection tools, data analysis, establishing trustworthiness, and

limitations have been explained and discussed. The study took place at a large public university in the United States with academic advisors selected as participants through a purposeful homogenous sample. To understand the experiences of the participants, the researcher used interviews and a focus group. Additionally, the analysis process included a constant comparative approach. Finally, member checking, inter-rater reliability, a researcher's journal, and triangulation were used to ensure trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 4: PORTRAYAL OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to describe and tell the stories of the academic advisors who participated in the study. Participant profiles are presented along with my impressions of each of the participating advisors. Also presented are personal stories from the advisors themselves regarding their goals for their students.

Participant Profiles

Eight advisors participated in the individual interviews, and four of those individuals participated in the focus group. Table 5 provides an overview of the participants including their assigned pseudonym, the department for which they advise, years of relevant experience, educational background, number of students advised in the last two years, and the number of students with disabilities advised in the last two years. All of the participants were academic advisors at the target institution. Their educational experience in the field of academic advising was varied, and their professional experience ranged from two to 18 years. The number of students each participant advised over the past two years ranged from 144 to 6,000.

All participants met the study criteria of being an academic advisor, had a minimum of two years' experience in the field, a minimum of a bachelor's degree, exclusively advised undergraduate students, and advised at least one student with a disability in the last two years. I had only briefly been introduced to four of the study participants prior to the study, and four were completely new to me.

Table 5

Professional Demographics for Participating Advisors

Participant Pseudonym	Department	Years of Experience	Highest Degree	Students Advised Last Two Years	
				Total	With Disabilities
Betsy	Science	10	Master's in Non-Profit Management	6,000	100
Natalie	Science	18	Doctor of Dental Surgery	6,000	20
Andrea	Engineering	7	Master's in Higher Education	1,500-2,000	15
Tina	Veterans	3	Master's in Social Work	720-960	600
Zoe	First generation students	11	PhD in Education Policy Studies	144	10
Jonathon	Honors	13	Master's in Liberal Studies	1,200	30-40
Joe	Freshman	5	Bachelor's in Sociology	1,000	300
Stephanie	Transfer	15	Bachelor's in Marketing	2,000	50

Betsy. Betsy was an advisor with whom I communicated via email in the past. We had seen each other at campus meetings, yet this was our first one-on-one interaction. Betsy advised for a science major and had maintained that role for the past 10 years. Before that time, Betsy was an undergraduate who served as a peer advisor in the same department at the target

institution. Betsy had earned a bachelor's degree in business and a master's degree in non-profit management. While working as an advisor, Betsy also obtained a graduate certificate in career planning and was working on a doctorate in conflict analysis and resolution at the time of the study. She said:

> I even did a career planning certificate here at [the university] to get more involved in that field since my undergraduate degree had nothing to do with advising. (Interview)

When explaining her role, Betsy described her objectives as striving to help her students identify their goals:

> I like to see my students be able to graduate knowing what they are going to be able to do in the future whether it is going to a professional school, which I think, for the majority of them that is what their goals are. So, I like to help them graduate knowing which schools they're going to be attending or if their goals are unable to be met because of academics, to have options of things that they can do so that they can actually reach their goal, whether it is now they go into a Master's program, so that they can enhance it. They are going to excel. (Interview)

At the time of the interview, Betsy had advised approximately 6,000 students in the past two years, and 100 of those students identified themselves as having a disability. Betsy also participated in the focus group.

Natalie. Natalie was another advisor at the target institution whom I had previously encountered, but this was our first one-on-one interaction. For the past 18 years, Natalie had maintained the same role as a science advisor, working in the same department as Betsy.

Before becoming an advisor, Natalie was a faculty member and obtained a Doctor of Dental Surgery degree. After teaching in a dental program for many years, Natalie decided to change careers paths and entered the field of academic advising.

Natalie explained that her primary aim when advising students was to help them reach their goals:

My primary goal is to make sure that they achieve their goals. Once they finish their bachelor's degree here, that they can move to whatever it is that they desire whether it's grad school which is a Master's, PhD or professional school. That is my goal, to make sure that they can attain or achieve what they want to do. The real goal is to go higher. That's what it is. Not just to get a job but it's just to go higher than that. (Interview)

Natalie had the most years of experience among all the participants in the study. Like Betsy, Natalie advised approximately 6,000 students over the past 2 years. However, unlike her departmental counterpart, Natalie she had only advised 20 students with disabilities during the two-year time period. Natalie also participated in the focus group.

Andrea. Andrea was an academic advisor for engineering students. Though we did not know each other very well, we had been enrolled in a doctoral level class together recently. Andrea had been an advisor for the past seven years. She also had previous experience advising in health-related subjects.

Andrea had earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in higher education and was currently pursuing a doctorate in higher education at the time of this study. When asked about her goals as an advisor, Andrea explained that she strived to set a positive atmosphere and to be an advocate for her students. She stated:

And when working with students, I always want them to feel like they have an advocate, that they have somebody who is in their corner, if nothing else, just listening. Like, I can't always fix whatever it is that you have maybe done or haven't done. But just somebody that's going to be there and kind of help them work through. (Interview)

Andrea further explained that she believed it was important to be a resource for her students. She explained:

And, in some ways, a goal is so that my students know that they have someone who is there for them as a resource, both professionally and academically. But as a resource as, "Hey, I've been an undergraduate once. Like, let me talk to you about what the real world looks like when you're like done with this because it can be very daunting and challenging," especially when they're thinking "I've worked so hard for this degree. I've worked so hard to get a degree in engineering." Any degree, really. But that they're not

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thinking about, "In five years, are they going to regret something that they did or didn't do?" (Interview)

Within the last 2 years, Andrea had advised approximately 2,000 students, 15 of whom were students with disabilities. Andrea did not participate in the focus group.

Tina. Tina was an advisor who worked exclusively with veterans who were undergraduate students. Before her role as an advisor, Tina worked as a social worker for over ten years and had teaching experience. She had earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in social work. When asked what led her to her current role, Tina explained:

> My father was a veteran and some other family members, so that that population was dear to my heart. Then, I wasn't teaching but it was still in the world of academia. And so, when I got here I thought it was a great combination of the two things being teaching and social work because I do kind of more than just academic advising. (Interview)

At the time of the interview, Tina had been an advisor for three years. She explained that as an advisor she assisted students in navigating the campus, making connections, and understanding their individual needs. Given her unique role of working exclusively with veterans, Tina was notified when a student had a documented disability. She was specifically responsible for assisting student veterans with their transition to the university setting:

> So, I help to connect our student veterans with employers who are interested in hiring veterans, helping them get internships. And also, helping them to have activities for employment readiness and kind of that transition from military life to civilian work. (Interview)

Within the past two years, Tina advised approximately 960 students and stated that 600 of those students identified as having a disability. Tina did not participate in the focus group.

Zoe. Zoe had 11 years of advising experience at the time of the interview. She had earned both masters and doctoral degrees in higher education. She currently worked as an academic advisor for first generation students in a specialized student program. Zoe explained that her

goals as an academic advisor were to prepare students for their futures and to teach them how to self-advocate. Zoe stated:

> Well, my job says that we have to make our students get a routine from the moment they join our program up to graduation and that they graduate with a career or graduate school plan mapped out. My goals are very developmental based so making sure that they learn the processes of finding answers for themselves. They learn how to self-advocate. And they learn how to start anticipating some of the needs that they might have so that they can move forward with solving those problems in the future. (Interview)

Zoe explained that as an advisor her daily tasks were helping students plan their courses, identify career goals, and connect with resources. Zoe explained that she advised approximately 144 students in her program over the past two years. She specified that 10 of the students identified as having a disability. In her unique role, the disability office notified Zoe of students with disabilities in advance. She was one of two advisors in the study who were permitted to have this information in their advising roles. Zoe did not participate in the focus group.

Jonathon. Jonathon specifically advised honors students for the university. He had 13 years of experience in the field of academic advising. He had earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in liberal studies. Jonathon was first introduced to the field of academic advising while he was an undergraduate student. He explained how he had grown into his present position:

> Well, when I was an undergraduate student, I did some peer advising. And also, as a graduate student, I did some similar types of roles over the summer. So that's how I got introduced to it. As far as from a full-time role, I was kind of like a graduate assistant in grad school. And after I graduated, they kept me on full time. (Interview)

As he exclusively advised honors students, he explained that his goal as an advisor was to help his students graduate with honors, select a major, and help them find a career or graduate program. He stated:

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…, first and foremost, is to help all my students graduate with honors by the end of their-- hopefully about four years, that they can complete it. Certainly, six or less, ideally. It's also one my goals to help students make sure they're in the right major. I start with students when they're freshmen. Sometimes, even during the recruitment process when they're in high school. And so, I think my background lends itself well to helping students determine what their options are, based on their skills, interests and so on. A lot of my students also have interests in double majoring and that kind of a thing and I'm trying to help them determine whether that's worth the extra time that it'll take to do that.

And the other goal would just be that, by the time they leave, they know what the next steps are for themselves whether they've already applied to grad school, or med school or law school, or that they've already received a job offer - that kind of a thing. (Interview)

Jonathon had advised approximately 1,200 students in the past two years. He stated that approximately 40 of those students had a disability. Jonathon did not participate in the focus group.

Joe. Joe was a freshman advisor who had over five years of experience in the field. Joe had earned his bachelor's degree in sociology at the target institution before becoming a full-time advisor. He was currently planning to return to school to earn a master's degree in higher education. Joe explained that his interest in advising began when he was a student:

As I was undeclared/undecided, I connected with an advisor here right off the bat who I worked with throughout the semester and he provided me with an opportunity to volunteer for orientations. Basically, be a peer advisor. So, I volunteered for the summer, did that, enjoyed it. Came back throughout the year for advising, of course, through the advisors that I met with and they gave me the opportunity to, "Hey, if you really liked what you did in the summer, how would you like to start off, we'll you hire you on as a peer advisor." And it just kind of took off from there. (Interview)

Joe explained that when advising students his goals are to guide them and provide resources. He stated:

So, the number one goal that I have as far as meeting with my students is to help make them successful, the best that they can be. So, my goal is to guide them, provide them with any resource information, whatever they need, to give them that guidance. Like I said, when I started off, I had no clue whatsoever. And having somebody like that was just very key in me figuring out even me wanting to move in this direction. So, I'd say that's the number one goal that I have is meeting the student where they're at and then helping them get to where they want to go. (Interview)

In the past two years, Joe advised 1,000 students, and 300 of those students identified as having a disability. Joe did participate in the focus group.

Stephanie. Stephanie was an academic advisor for transfer students who had worked in the higher education field for 20 years, 15 of which were as an advisor, and five years in admissions. She had been in her current role for 13 years. Stephanie earned a bachelor's degree in marketing before entering the field of higher education. Given her unique role, her goals for advising were to help students transition into the university. She stated:

> But working with this very specific population of students that are transitioning into the university really just as to be able to help them best I can is really my goal. Just to continue in that role because I feel like they're under served and not necessarily given as much time and resources as the freshman population so I feel like this is kind of my niche, my calling, my population - these transitional students to the university. (Interview)

Stephanie explained that one of her biggest tasks when working with this student population was to connect them to different resources on campus. She explained:

> We try to get them connected to the resources on campus. We try to get them involved. And then do some outreach if they're struggling a little bit. Mostly, that's through the colleges but we try to get them connected to the resources. [We] figure if we're coming at them from the colleges [then] maybe we'll connect with them. (Interview)

Stephanie had advised approximately 2,000 students over the past two years, and 50 of those students had a disability. Stephanie also participated in the focus group.

Summary

The participant profiles provide information on the educational and professional backgrounds of the academic advisors and insight into their unique advising roles and their goals for their advisees. The following chapter contains reports of data gleaned through individual

interviews and the focus group that provide evidence regarding the advisors' experiences as they relate to the research questions which guided this study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the insights and support of self-advocacy among academic advisors when working with students with disabilities. The study also aimed to identify factors that may improve academic advisors' abilities to advise students with disabilities and to increase student success and persistence.

Participants were encouraged to provide their experiences and perceptions regarding their relationship as academic advisors working with students with disabilities. A total of 16 open-ended interview questions and seven open-ended focus group questions were used to gather data that could be used in responding to the following research question and sub-questions:

1. Recognizing higher education's growing need to better serve undergraduate students with disabilities, what information, areas, and types of training do advisors recommend as needed for their specific roles and interactions?

   a. Do advisors recognize the academic advising needs of undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university? If so, how? If not, why not?

   b. What evidence of self-advocacy components, if any, do academic advisors see among undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university?

As the researcher, I examined the data over a long period by reading the transcripts and journal notes multiples times. Additionally, I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews and focus group multiple times. This approach was used to understand the experiences of the individual academic advisors in depth. Through the methods and procedures used in analyzing the data which were previously discussed in Chapter 3, themes were identified that represented the experiences of the academic advisors when working with students with disabilities.

This chapter has been organized around the academic advisors' responses to the research question and sub-questions. The results presented in this chapter reflect the themes that emerged for each research question based on the individual interviews and focus group. Direct quotations from the participants were used to validate the presence of each theme. Any identifying names or words were removed to protect the identity of the academic advisors.

Through this data analysis, seven themes emerged: (a) lack of knowledge, (b) accommodations, (c) transition, (d) academics, (e) fear of being labeled, (f) relationships and interactions, and (g) understanding of self. Table 6 shows the relationship between the focus of the research questions and sub questions which guided the study and the emergent themes.

Table 6

Relationship between Research Question, Focus, and Themes

Research Question	Focus	Theme
1. Recognizing higher education's growing need to better serve undergraduate students with disabilities, what information, areas, and types of training do advisors recommend as needed for their specific roles and interactions?	Professional Development	Lack of Knowledge
1a. Do advisors recognize the academic advising needs of undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university? If so, how? If not, why not?	Advising Students with Disabilities	Accommodations Transition Academics
1b. What evidence of self-advocacy components, if any, do academic advisors see among undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university?	Self-Advocacy	Fear of Being Labeled Relationships and Interactions Self-awareness

Research Question 1 Focus: Professional Development

The over-arching research question in this study investigated what information, areas, and types of training the academic advisors believed were needed to better serve students with disabilities. From this research question, one dominant theme, lack of knowledge, emerged.

Lack of knowledge. Houman and Stapley (2013) have documented that as academic advisors have reflected on their responsibilities to build relationships with students and assist them in their academic and personal growth (Houman & Stapley, 2013), they have also become aware of the additional knowledge required regarding undergraduate students' disabilities. The fundamental need for resources and training to understanding this student population was also identified in the present study. Students with disabilities may bring additional questions and challenges to academic advisors (Hemphill, 2002; Hunter & Kendall, 2008). To perform their roles effectively, the academic advisors in the present study expressed a need to be knowledgeable of the diverse types of disabilities and the limitations of students with disabilities (Harding, 2008; Hunter & Kendall, 2008).

As one of the most experienced advisors in the study, Betsy explained that there was a lack of training for advisors when working with students with disabilities:

> … we don't get training or required training when it comes to advising students that have disabilities. And not all of us went through any undergraduate or graduate work where it was on higher education, to take classes on how to work with students that have disabilities. (Interview)

> I think we either need more training. That probably should be mandatory in professional advising on dealing with different disabilities. (Interview)

Natalie expressed the same sentiment, explaining that there was no available support for advisors when working with students with disabilities:

> But I kind of wonder why the university doesn't help us on this? Why is it that we're not having support? And why do we have to be the ones carrying that and we don't know how to deal with this? (Interview)

During the focus group, Natalie further elaborated on her thoughts regarding training. She

explained that there was no training available for advisors regarding working with students with

disabilities. She described her discomfort with working this population, given her lack of

knowledge in the area:

> But I think we're not equipped for that. I, in particular, don't believe that I'm equipped in that because I don't know the spectrum. I don't know anything. I don't have a degree in psychology. Therefore, it makes it very, very difficult. So, I'm not an expert. It would be nice if we can send [students] to an expert or have an expert that [we] could see that, that would be wonderful but yeah. (Focus Group)

Betsy also explained that she felt reservations when advising this student population,

given her lack of training and knowledge:

> I mean, I have a distant family member with Asperger's so I kind of have had some exposure but not enough to feel confident that I know how to react and act with children or adults with Asperger's or with autism. So, it makes me very nervous. I'm an anxious person myself so it would make me very nervous to say the wrong thing and upset someone. (Focus Group)

Zoe agreed with her peers regarding the need for training. However, she specifically

explained the need for more education for academic advisors regarding trends and diagnosis of

students with disabilities:

> I think we need a lot of education as advisors at the post-secondary level in terms of what accommodations could look like for a student just so that we can be more aware of helping the student ask the right questions and get the support that they need. So, for example, at advisor meetings, having the student disability office come in and talk about, "Hey, these are some possible accommodations that your students might have. These are some supports that might work." Just some knowledge in terms of research presentations those kinds of things about what are some of the trends and diagnoses that are enrolling in college. (Interview)

Andrea echoed similar concerns, encouraging the need for training regarding types of

disabilities:

I would say maybe having like even just a cheat sheet of what the university considers or what the student disability office considers different types of disabilities and how they might present themselves. (Interview)

To understand students with disabilities and assist them properly, Zoe cited a need to learn more about technology as a method for students with disabilities to self-advocate and feel more included:

I think that because we focus so much on access and inclusion for us to really be able to advocate and provide access and inclusion, we need to know what our students are experiencing so that we can help them learn to advocate for themselves. I think just knowing more about other people and the students on campus make us better advisors because it's not [over 50,000] as a statistic. These are actual people here. And the more you know about being inclusive in terms of something like technology, the better support you're providing to all students anyway. So, by helping students with disabilities by making web courses more inclusive, you're helping every student in your class, not necessarily just that student. (Interview)

Jonathon also explained the need for more training among advisors. However, he specifically cited the need for work with the disability resource office on campus:

Well, support that the office on campus that works with them gives updates to advisors on a regular basis, partly because things change a lot. They've even changed the name of their office several times, to what accommodations are out there for them has changed over the years and it's hard to keep up with it all really. The more that we know, the more likely it is, I think, that the students will get what they need to be successful. So, I think we need updates from that office and maybe just some sort of general overview knowledge of the types of things that they see most often and kind of what to look for if a student may not be knowledgeable about the visibility because there may be students out there that we've met with who didn't even occur to me that they had a disability, maybe never occurred to the student either. But if we knew of some things to look for then maybe that'd be helpful. (Interview)

Tina found that the disability office on campus did a good job of providing advisors with resources; however, she sought more training on rights and regulations. She particularly wanted to know more about legislation to protect the rights of students with disabilities after graduation:

To be honest with you, the main problem that I have had and the part that I'm still actually searching for is not necessarily the education component because I feel like the student disability office does a fairly decent job of letting us know what those supports are. The rights and regulations, they might do a little bit more to provide that to us, but I

think the part that I really struggle with is when you leave, and you go to get your job, what are those rights and responsibilities? And how do we help people be ready for that next step? So, with some companies, it'll be fine if you self-disclose your disability right up front. And they won't discriminate, and they have a long history of working with people with disabilities and it's not a problem. Some people will discriminate against you if disclose up front. So, what is your legal responsibility? Are you allowed to just-- you know, if you disclose up front, you know, and you know that they're discriminating because of that, what are your rights? It's hard to prove that so what do you need to do to show that, if you do think that that's what's going on. If you don't disclose it, what happens to you later? Are you allowed to then ask for accommodations if you haven't disclosed it up front when you first go for a job? Those are the areas that I struggle with and try to find resources for. (Interview)

Understanding the needs of the students was referenced throughout the interviews. Betsy suggested a professional development opportunity idea related to student needs:

Probably to have a forum where you hear what their experiences have been with working with students with disabilities and maybe have a best practices at some point so we can hear what they have done, what they have heard from other students, maybe even affirm with students to hear what they think have been the best practices or their best experiences from the university - not from the student disability resource office because they probably adore that place but from everybody else. (Interview)

The advisors agreed that more professional development was required. They cautioned, however, that time and motivation would make it difficult to recruit participation from advisors in these types of trainings. Natalie expressed the view that additional exposure to students with disabilities might motivate advisors:

I think being exposed to cases like we have. That's what it is. If you're not exposed, you're not going to go and seek out this development-- this workshop sort of thing. It's like that or training. You wouldn't. But if you are exposed, you have to. You have no choice. (Interview)

Andrea reported that, while serving as an advisor at the institution, she had never received training regarding students with disabilities. To motivate advisors to attend training, Andrea suggested:

And then I do think maybe trying to do something like the monthly advisor meetings or a majority of the advising members comes to meetings. And then maybe doing like a roving training either with the student disability office or in conjunction with the student

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disability office where your advising officer, your college can schedule it. And they may be offering like a session or two. So, they're coming to you versus you may be having to come to them which I get is taxing on somebody so I realize that that's not like an ideal solution but where maybe each of the colleges can schedule like an annual or an every other year like kind of update and training and information and these are some things that you might want to know, something like that. (Interview)

Jonathon also agreed that finding time within the busy schedules of advisors would

motivate advisors to attend professional development opportunities:

Assuming that there were at times that I could attend, then yeah, of course, I would as we're all super busy. But if they fit during times where they would allow me to go then certainly I would just because I'm not super knowledgeable about all the different disabilities that are out there so. So, if we're more knowledgeable then we can I think refer out better to the various services that the university offers. (Interview)

To accommodate advisor's schedules, Jonathon, in a response similar to Andrea's,

suggested that these trainings be scheduled during the monthly advisor meetings:

Well, first of all, I think, if it's planned in advance then that's something that helps. If it's something that's just, "Hey, tomorrow, there's this thing. You can learn about--", for most people, that's just not going to fly, I think. And then the other is if it's during a monthly advising enhancement program meeting that everyone's kind of used to going to on a regular basis then I think most folks would attend. (Interview)

Although time was certainly a factor, Stephanie described academic advisors as likely to

be agreeable to additional professional development opportunities, because of the inherent

helping aspects of the advisor role:

I think, in general, academic advisors will because they have to have some level of care to be in this field. The ones that are a little more rigid and just factual and not necessarily have more of that helping personality, I think. I think that what would motivate them is just so that they can understand how to better communicate with the students that they work with, to make their job easier. But in general, I think, given the opportunities, most would see that as beneficial. (Interview)

Joe described that the participating in these types of training should be expected, given the

changing nature of the advisor roles:

As far as that goes, making other advisors aware that this is the nature of our work that it's going to be ever changing. It's going to be ever evolving and moving and

shifting in these unique directions, so we need to be ready to handle those as they come along. (Interview)

Research Question 1a Focus: Advising Students with Disabilities

The first sub question of the study investigated if advisors recognized the academic advising needs of undergraduate students at a public research university. From this research question, three themes emerged: accommodations, transition, and academics.

Accommodations. When discussing the needs of students with disabilities, the theme of accommodations emerged throughout the data collection. The participants discussed disability disclosure and accommodations when reflecting on their experiences with students with disabilities. Hemphill (2002) encouraged a strong connection with the disability office, and the advisors discussed the realities of their relationships with the office and the resources available to their students.

Some of the advisors recalled how they directed students to the disability office. Zoe reported being able to guide students to the disability office for accommodations. When describing her appointment protocol, she explained:

> All of our students are able to walk in any day of the week to see someone on our team. If he wanted to schedule an appointment, I would make sure that that happens for him. If I did not previously know that he had a diagnosis, I would encourage him to reach out to the student disability office. I would send him the link for the "how to get connected" so he could start that process immediately because it can take some time to get the paperwork that students need. And then, when we schedule the appointment, I would check in and see how he was doing getting the paperwork. If he had been over to the student disability office to have his welcome meeting and then talk to him about how his ADHD, he felt like it was impacting his classes and how he wanted to structure his class schedule. (Interview)

Joe also described his approach to directing students to the disability resource office when appropriate:

> And one of the first things I would bring up is if he's got himself actually documented or not. That would be the main thing. If he's documented, then– has he received

accommodations? Does he know about accommodations? Look into those things. (Interview)

Stephanie described the referral process she used when she found it was needed. She also described discussing the options for accommodations to reduce students' possible intimidation or discomfort:

> Usually, I would give him a very brief synopsis that might include that he could get extended test-taking time, possibly note taking. It just really depends on what his disability [type] for the student disability office [accommodations]. And then I'll strongly encourage how nice and wonderful and helpful they are over there because I think that sometimes students are intimidated to go to them and hopefully the stressing it will make them feel less uncomfortable about it. (Interview)

When addressing whether students were receiving accommodations, many of the advisors stated the students were upfront about their registration with the disability office. For instance, Betsy shared examples:

> All the times, they tell me themselves that they're working with the student disability office. And they have been very upfront about it. So, they will tell me, "I'm working with the student disability office." For the students that have a learning disability, they have told me themselves, "Now, I'm going to be working with the student disability office." And then I mention to them about how they can do their MCAT. They can use what they're doing with the student disability office with the MCAT. So, I mentioned that to them so they're excited about being able to use a similar service for that so that they don't think that after they graduate, [that] they're not going to be able to use the same service so. (Interview)

Some of the advisors were aware of the accommodations available to the students and were able to provide guidance in that area. Andrea recalled one student who suffered from anxiety:

> And finally, one day, because I didn't know this, and all the conversations we had ever had, she just said that she gets nervous about tests. And so, I was like, "Okay." And, finally, I said, "You know, the student disability office will give you additional time allocation. You can take the exam in a different location. In a 200-person engineering class, if it takes the professor 15 minutes to pass out the exam, well, less you have those 15 minutes in a 50-minutes class. Whereas, if you go to the student disability office and you are the only person in there and they have your exam, it's like, "Okay. Now, you can

start." And so, we talked about this whole thing and she was just like, "Do you really think it will help?" And I'm like, "Uh, yeah. If nothing else, it gives you more time to take the exam so if you're cleared for that and the student disability office provides you with that accommodation, I would take it." (Interview)

The advisors acknowledged that they understood students with disabilities had unique needs; however, they lacked confidence in providing the necessary assistance to this student population because they lacked training. Betsy stated:

> And disabilities are such a big word. Some of us have heard about certain disabilities but not all of them so we don't even know how we make someone feel comfortable. We want to make them feel accepted and comfortable and a part of the group but how do you do that without them feeling or getting insulted. So, it's like you want them to feel comfortable but then they might be feeling like they're being targeted because they're the only ones who have someone there with them 24/7 kind of like making sure that they have someone with them all the time, so you're already putting them on the spot. So, it can be very challenging. (Interview)

Transition. When discussing the needs of students with disabilities, many advisors referenced students' transition into the university and the challenges they faced. The advisors described how guiding students through that transition was an integral component of their job obligations (Steele & McDonald, 2008).

As students move from high school to college, their legal protection changes. Students are no longer protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and instead rely on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1976 (U.S. Department of Education, 1990, 2018). Andrea recalled that students occasionally realized that a strategy for successfully dealing with their situation in high school was not effective in the higher education setting:

> But there have been a few cases where students have talked to me about that they have some type of diagnosis whether it's testing anxiety, performance anxiety – that's a good thing, ADHD or something of that nature. And they're now coming to the realization that it is affecting what they're doing in the classroom. That whatever they were doing in high school, that may or may not have been just fine, is not working so great in the university land. (Interview)

Zoe also discussed providing assistance to students in navigating the new setting and helping them understand the differences from high school:

> … just checking in with them and making sure they're aware of the resources, and getting them connected, and reminding them that they have to activate their accommodations. It's not the same as it was in high school, if they didn't know that. And making sure they have an idea of what paperwork they would need to have access to start that process. (Interview)

Jonathon commented on his awareness of the challenges that new experiences in a higher education setting presented to students with disabilities:

> Like, a group of students were honor students, so they're used to being extremely successful and maybe having some accommodations of some type, when they're in high school. Now, they're trying to navigate how they can get those accommodations while they're here. Once they're here, I mean, they may need additional tutoring. And they need to know like kind of what's available for them with regards to that, if it's a learning disability, for instance or math disability. (Interview)

Several advisors also discussed experiences during orientation sessions, as students with disabilities experienced college for the first time. Natalie recalled a difficult situation when a student realized he was in the wrong major for orientation:

> So, this kid had a cow and I looked at him and I said-- everybody was like petrified because we had about-- I don't know, 30 students there. And I just said, "Oh, no, no, no don't worry about it. Don't worry about it." So, I pull him to the side. I said, "Listen, let's do this so." To try to calm him down. So, he calmed down a little bit. And he was flustered. He was like, "Uh, that can't be possible." And he would get agitated. And I'm like, "Oh my God, he must have this." Here I am diagnosing people. And I'm like, "Oh, gosh." So, we try, and Betsy was trying. And we're trying to figure out, so he wouldn't disrupt the group because we had 30 people there. So, I went outside, and I said, "Is your mom with you here?" I don't know why. "Oh, yes. She's outside." And I'm like, "That's great. I'm going to go." "Just wait for me one second here." So, I went and talked to mom and she said, "You know," she goes, "He has Asperger's." And I said, "Well, I figured that." And so, you know this-- and so, I wanted to talk to her and relay to her what it was and where she needed to go. And I'm so sorry, she was so apologetic about it. We didn't mean to. "Oh, no, no, no that's not your fault. You did blah, blah, blah." So, they left because then he had to go to engineering. Then he comes back after engineering. He comes back again and I'm like, "Oh, my God, I thought that--" so that's an example of not having support of how you do handle-- we are advisors. We're not trained to handle cases like this. We're not. (Interview)

Joe recalled an incident as well that occurred during an orientation session. In the past, he

had never worked with a deaf student and an interpreter and had, in fact, had no training.

Unexpectedly, during an orientation group advising session, a student with an interpreter arrived.

Joe reflected on this unique interaction:

> This was a couple of years back. There was a student, I remember, that needed some help, but the thing was is one of the orientation leaders comes with, "Hey, the student, he needs some help to work with you, but he has an interpreter with him, so basically whatever question he has, you talk to the interpreter. I remember that being a unique experience because I've never done that before. So, it was kind of interesting to work with somebody who was kind of like a mediator for the student, in a way. I'll be honest, it was a little odd at first because you're not used to it. When I was talking, it was like-- and they kind of made me give some insight what it must be like for the student on the other side of the fence, as they're having to like to go through a filter, just to be able to get information. But as I was talking, I noticed, of course, the person was signing back to the student everything and there would be a moment that I'd see the signing and then I would stop talking because like I would get distracted. So, like my own distraction would come up and then I would have to be careful because the interpreter, they are literally interpreting everything that is said and not said. So, I was talking, and I would pause, the interpreter would pause too, and I'd realized, "Oh, wow, I paused" so I try talking back. So being very aware of situation. I mean, of course, after that moment, it's like, "Okay. I'll have to block that out and focus on meeting the needs of the student" in that case. But that was an interesting interaction. Of course, we got it figured out. It was something just simple with a schedule plan and everything but-- it is really cool to kind of see that. (Interview)

During the focus group session, the discussion of orientation was revisited. The advisors

discussed their desire to have advance notice when a student with a disability would be in their

group advising sessions and more interaction with disability resource office. Stephanie

explained:

> I just feel like maybe if the student disability office was a little more connected with orientation, helping us, like Natalie mentioned, giving us some warning and letting us know that these. (Focus Group)

Academics. When discussing advising with students, the importance of academics

naturally arises. The topic of academics covers a wide range of areas including schedule

planning, goals, careers, and student success. According to Tuttle (2000), navigating the

academic component of a student's life is one of the primary roles of an academic advisor.

When discussing their roles as advisors, all of the participants discussed their goals in

helping students earn their degrees and move on to their desired career or graduate program.

Natalie expressed:

> My primary goal is to make sure that they achieve their goals. Once they finish their
> bachelor's degree here, that they can move to whatever it is that they desire whether it's
> grad school which is a Master's, PhD or professional school. That is my goal, to make
> sure that they can attain or achieve what they want to do. The real goal is to go higher.
> That's what it is. Not just to get a job but it's just to go higher than that. (Interview)

When advising students with disabilities, the advisors also discussed academic concerns

or struggles. Natalie discussed working with students who struggled with test taking and

providing them academic support resources:

> We have had cases-- I actually have had cases where, if the student is having issues with
> addressing like tests – how to study for tests, because that might be part of something that
> they have, and they didn't know. I send them to tutoring for an appointment. (Interview)

Joe also referenced the importance of using the academic resources provided by the

university:

> And then we start looking at maybe meeting with tutoring or something, get some
> learning skills consultations or meeting with an academic coach, going to some of the
> tutoring on that side. Looking at some of those additional steps how we can basically
> tackle these academic challenges that come forward. One of the important things I do
> push is to meet with tutoring because they focus on time management and organization
> which is the bane of anybody with ADHD. (Interview)

The importance of a balanced schedule was highlighted by Stephanie:

> Well, I would ask him if he has connected with the student disability office to see what
> they could help him with. I'd be happy to talk about his schedule to see if there's things
> that we can do to help alleviate his issues, maybe take fewer classes, maybe timing wise
> are they all together and that's an issue? (Interview)

Betsy discussed the importance of schedule planning and referring students to the appropriate offices on campus. She recognized that a critical aspect of her role as an advisor was to be knowledgeable of the resources on campus:

> I work with students with schedule planning. We do work with career planning. We look at different equivalencies of credits if they're incoming from other colleges or universities or any credit earned as they we're high school students. If they're international students, we look at those credits as well. We also look at any courses that they may want to take at other schools as transient students. And we have other types of conversations where we refer them to different offices on campus. For example, the tutoring services. If they're having difficulties with their courses or if they need to learn some different learning strategies or study skills, if they're having any other issues, let's say, with financial difficulties – maybe financial aid. The health center if they're having other types of issues. So, there's a lot of referrals that go on within the department. (Focus Group)

Research Question 1b Focus: Self-Advocacy

The second sub-question focused on evidence of self-advocacy among undergraduate students at the target institution. Three themes emerged: fear of being labeled, relationships and interactions, and self-awareness.

Fear of being labeled. When discussing the role self-advocacy demonstrated by students with disabilities, advisors reported that fear often dominated their conversations. Daly-Cano et al. (2015) observed this also, writing that some students struggle to disclose their disabilities due to their fear of being labeled.

Natalie recalled a situation when she worked with a student who was unable to speak. The student refused accommodations and therefore had no interpreter. Natalie recalled the difficult advising session as she struggled to communicate with the student:

> I noticed that some of them don't want to go into that [accommodations] even though you know that they need it. Like, for instance, the one that I had – the last one that I had, that was deaf. All she had to do is ask for an interpreter. You know, that she will have two of them right there. Well, the advising appointment took about an hour and a half, I want to say, and you know we can't do that. Usually, its 20 minutes and we're done. Because she didn't communicate, she couldn't talk. (Interview)

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The advisor, Natalie, continued, expressing her concerns about other students who

avoided accommodations as well:

> Oh, I think some of them struggle with the fact that they have a disability, [and] that [the] disability impacts them academically. I have seen that. Some of them will say, "I know I have it and I need to have this because I need to get help to do this." But some of them don't seek that for some reason. I don't know why. They know for a fact that they have a system here that could help them, but they don't look for it. And they struggle with that. (Interview)

Andrea reflected on the fear of students living up to society's expectations as to

"normalcy," commenting:

> And I feel like there's still some like shame associated with not being whatever the rest of us consider normal. (Interview)

Working specifically with student veterans brought forth a unique perspective from

advisor Tina. She found that her students viewed the use of accommodations as a weakness:

> And using accommodations is not their favorite thing. They see that as a weakness or something you're not supposed to do. I think everybody has kind of [heard] "I don't want to be seen as different. I don't want to be seen as needing help." So that's not unusual to this group. But what I have found to be a little bit unusual to this group is they always think that the next guy needs it more. And so, it's like a limited amount of help to go around. (Interview)

Joe also reflected on a situation when he met with a student who disclosed his disability

but refused to use accommodations as he feared it was a sign of weakness. Joe attempted to

reassure the student that using accommodations did not mean he was weak and that it was

something he should consider:

> Going back to the student that I met with who mentioned that he had ADHD and that he was diagnosed. I said, "How come you haven't gone to the student disability office with this to get your accommodation. He's just like, "Well, I don't want to seem like I'm just taking advantage of the system or that I'm getting this and that I need these things." Basically, he was pointing out that he felt that he would be a lesser person or a weaker student if he had sought those accommodations. But the thing that I reminded him of this is that what it is you're leveling the playing field. You're already at a disadvantage. And what we're trying to do is make it even. So, you're not putting yourself at an advantage over anybody else. But rather, you're giving yourself the advantage that every else has.

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And one of the funny things, to really get that point across is when I was showing him something on my computer screen and he's like, "Oh, I can't see it. I need to move closer." I was like, "So you need glasses?" And he was like, "Oh yeah, I have them at home. I just don't wear them." I was like, "That's leveling the playing field right. That's the perfect example, taking your glasses -- putting them on, you know, having that - that thing that helps make things even. So, do you feel that you're putting yourself above everybody else if you're wearing glasses?" (Interview)

Relationships and interactions. When advisors explored self-advocacy among undergraduate students with disabilities, students' relationships and interactions were constant themes. The advisors discussed their advising interactions, the students' interactions with faculty members, parent involvement, community participation, communication skills and leadership. Though six of the eight advisors believed students with disabilities were able to communicate well, none of the advisors thought their students with disabilities possessed strong leadership skills.

Zoe described a student who communicated very well with her professors regarding health issues that affected her ability to attend class:

I have a young woman right now who's actually in a health major who has Crohn's disease. And she's having some issues with professors because she's had a lot of flares this semester so her attendance hasn't been great. And she's really, really good at calling me every time she gets sick and saying, "Hey, this is what happened. I'm in the hospital. I'm going to miss time. I've contacted my professors. I've contacted the student disability office but I just want you to know." (Interview)

When addressing communication, Stephanie explained that some students do not communicate due to a discomfort with sharing their disability:

I think there were definitely some people with disabilities that definitely like communicate their needs. But the ones that don't necessarily want those special services, I don't know if they're just not able to or they're just not putting it out there. But the ones that want the services, I think they definitely communicate their needs. I mean, I think they're capable of doing that. If they've gotten to the university, I think that they're capable of communicating their needs if they want the services. I think the ones that are either not aware that they have them available to them or the ones that are uncomfortable with using those kind of services definitely they don't communicate their needs but I don't know if it's as much a lack of ability. (Interview)

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When dealing with faculty members, Stephanie explained that she witnessed students struggle to communicate with faculty, given the large size of the institution:

> He did well at the community college because, I think, in such a small environment, the advisors/counselors were able to find professors that would understand and deal with his circumstances. There were a lot of professors that would get it right away and have no issue, but I don't know how it will always be so it's kind of an interesting. (Focus Group)

Given her field, Natalie discussed students enrolled in a cadaver course. She recalled an instance when a student with a disability interacted with her and a faculty member regarding accommodations. The student demanded the cadavers be moved to accommodate her. Natalie described how moving the cadavers was against policy and believed the student was unreasonable in her request. Natalie shared this example of poor communication:

> The student demanded that the professor had to accommodate her. You know, the tests are done on the cadaver. You cannot move the cadaver because they have to be in a particular place, refrigerated. We cover them and all that. Now, this [request by the student] I thought it was insane. That's beyond assertiveness. That's like too much. That's not even trying to negotiate. So, the recording for this particular class, the test, you have to be there. (Interview)

Natalie continued:

> You know what the student wanted? The student wanted the professor to move the cadaver to the student disability office. And the professor said, "Absolutely not because that is beyond the accommodation. You knew, the moment you got into that class that this is the only location. We can't transport dead people around," right? (Interview)

Natalie explained that the student sued the University for violating ADA. However, the student lost her case because her request was not a reasonable accommodation.

When addressing communication and interactions with others, Betsy explained this area needed improvement for students with disabilities. She discussed the lack of assertive behavior by most of her students with disabilities. She believed that given their past experiences in the high school setting, students relied too heavily on their parents:

Communication. I think that the clear majority of them, I think they could be more assertive, probably. They could seek out more assistance. I think some of them that don't have the more obvious disabilities could and that they probably have a disability, could be probably a little bit more self-conscious and maybe seek out help and find out if they do have one. I think sometimes they are afraid to seek out help or they knew they had it in high school because Mom and Dad were the ones that went to have them tested and they did that, then they came to college and they said, "Oh, I don't want to take my medicine. I don't want to do anything. And now they're not doing anything about it. (Interview)

Andrea also discussed the struggles students with disabilities had with negotiation and

compromise:

A few times, I've emailed. Sometimes through email chains, the faculty were asking me, "Is this testing accommodation or other accommodation that maybe the student is asking about? Is this okay?" And the student disability office is usually [added] on [to] something or they have their official letter that I think they provide to the student that goes to the faculty member every semester. (Interview)

All of the advisors in the study indicated that none of the students with whom they had

dealt possessed leadership skills. Betsy specifically stated:

Leadership from our students with disabilities, I don't know of any of them, at least from the science group that are leaders... (Interview)

Concerning leadership, Tina elaborated:

But I will say that when you're talking about the leadership, the organizational participation is probably lower with the students who have the disability ratings, the ones that are pretty recognized for me. (Interview)

In relation to expressing their needs, Jonathon explained that while he thought students

with disabilities did an excellent job with their own needs, they were not focused on the needs of

others. He connected this idea to the lack of leadership among students with disabilities:

My gut instinct is that at least for a good number of the students with disabilities is that they're a little more concerned about their own needs than about trying to lead anybody else. And that's no fault of their own. It's just where they are and just trying to keep their head above water. So, certainly, there's no reason why they couldn't have good leadership skill. I just don't think that that's something that they've tend to focus on, at least in my experience. (Interview)

Andrea elaborated regarding the leadership skills of students with disabilities:

> I would have to say, I think, at least with the students I've worked with, I feel like this is
> one of their maybe weaker categories. For a lot of the kids that I talk to, like I said, you
> know, are upfront after the first meeting and they've kind of gotten to know me a little bit
> better. But I kind of feel like, generally-- and this is terrible. Like, as a group of students,
> I generally feel like they're just-- like just wanting to fly under the radar, man. Like,
> they're just wanting to get in, get out, get the degree and like not try and make too many
> waves, so to speak. (Interview)

Self-awareness. Six of the advisors believed students with disabilities had a strong sense

of self. However, many the advisors noted that students struggled to understand how to advocate

for themselves and seek accommodations.

Betsy believed that most of her students with disabilities understood their interests and

goals. She also believed that students with disabilities were generally aware of their disabilities

and the accommodations available to them:

> Especially our students because I remember them very well. The two students that were
> hearing impaired. They knew exactly what they wanted to do, what their interests were,
> where they wanted to work after graduation. They knew what accommodations they
> needed. And I think it has happened with every student. That they know their strengths.
> They know what they're good at. They know what their goal is. (Interview)

Zoe echoed comments to those of Betsy regarding students with disabilities. She found

the students with whom she had worked understood their strengths and goals:

> I would say a lot of my current students are very aware of their strengths, their goals and
> their desires. A couple of them are really good at being able to identify their learning
> preferences and their preferred classroom and classroom environments. They all know
> their responsibility as a student with disabilities in terms of making sure paperwork is in
> with the student disability office so they can utilize their accommodations. And then, I
> also have some students who just have no idea what their interests are. (Interview)

Jonathon also found that the student with disabilities he advised also understood their

strengths:

> But with regards to preferences, goals, desires, things like that, I don't think that they are
> any different, at least in my experience, than a typical student without any disabilities.

Interests, responsibilities – they may feel like they have extra responsibilities because they have [to do] extra things to be successful. And I think that [students with disabilities], at least the students I have met with, their disabilities are already [known]...I feel like they know [their strengths].   (Interview)

Furthermore, Zoe provided an example of a specific student who had a learning disability

who clearly understood herself and her learning disability:

Sure. I'm working with a student now. He is a junior who is on the autism spectrum. And in his very first meeting-- all of our students have an interview in the admissions process. So, he came to me and he said, "This is who I am and I'm autistic. And this is what works for me. And this is what doesn't work for me. And this is the environment I like to be in. And I don't like to do anything online. And it can't have lots of colors. And how can you support me in that process?" And he's been really, really great at making sure that everyone that he works with knows what works well for him. He's also really great at giving feedback when we do workshops or presentations or anything online to say how it impacts him. (Interview)

Betsy specifically recalled two of her students who had physical disabilities. These two

women utilized the accommodations and had clear goals and strong self-awareness. They were

also able to successfully achieve those goals after graduation:

When we had these two students, they did well in all their coursework. Their classes are usually very rigid as far as their schedule so they're taking four sciences every semester. And they had good grades. And their goals, they both ended up working in a blood bank. So, they already knew what they wanted to do. Their director told us they were excellent at that kind of job because they are working independently because they don't have to be constantly interacting with anyone, so to struggle and having to have an interpreter with them 24/7. So, they were able to really just good at their tasks and be able to do their job. So, they're very independent and they are doing something that they were very interested in. And that the places where they got their jobs in, they were very willing to provide the accommodations for them, so I think that they were able to find a place where they could fit in. (Interview)

Because Tina worked specifically with student veterans, she was able to offer a unique

perspective for self-awareness of students with disabilities:

So, I would say that they are very clear. The veterans, overall, are very clear on their own preferences, their own goals, their desires, and their interests. Most of them [are] pretty clear [about] their own responsibilities, what they're responsible for. Sometimes, that starts to be part of where some of the conflict arises. Their own strengths seem to be part of what they aren't aware of. (Interview)

Andrea described a student who was paralyzed in a motorcycle accident. Due to this accident, he was no longer able to pursue his goal of becoming a marine fighter pilot. The student was knowledgeable of the accommodations available to him and how his goals had to change. Andrea further explained:

> So, his name is B. and he was previously attending the University for a Psychology degree. And he was wanting to join the Marines and become a Marine fighter pilot. I will stop here and say, I didn't know that was a thing. But he quickly corrected me. And so, prior to his motorcycle accident that left him paralyzed, I think from about the waist down, he was just kind of interested in like not the easiest degree out there. But, obviously, to get selected for a pilot spot, you have to have a pretty high GPA. And so, he was looking at something he could do well in that wasn't maybe as taxing. And then, after his accident, he had been in the reserves with the Marines at the time because there was an issue with his paperwork. And so, that unfortunately did not get corrected, so he was a member of the reserves at the time of his accident. And he completely, after his accident, changed like what he wanted to do. Discipline wise like major and discipline and completely changed and switched to engineering. And he is just very goal oriented, very responsible, very driven in terms of wanting to get done like with this degree program and to do well. And that isn't to say he wouldn't do necessarily well in Psychology but, obviously, kind of after that point, I think, he probably realized that plan A wasn't going to work out so he needed some new goals and some new objectives for plan B. And he is working very, very hard to make sure that he meets kind of everything that he's hoping to do so. (Interview)

Zoe shared a similar experience of working with a student who became physically disabled while in college. She described his strong sense of self-awareness:

> And because he had had such a monumental injury, he was really great at saying, "I know this works. I know I need a break. I know that online classes don't work well for me. I know that large class sizes don't necessarily work well. I know all about the plans and the tools." So, he was really able to tell me what he needed and we were able to match it. Because of his diagnosis, he got some exemptions from general education, so helping him through the process of submitting the paperwork for that, making sure he understood what that meant, making sure he didn't register for classes he didn't need. And then just making sure he knew that he always had folks on campus that were available to him. He actually graduated and had a 4.0. (Interview)

Stephanie explained that when students are able to advocate for themselves, it helps her provide direction as an advisor:

I think, when they self-advocate, it helps you to direct them appropriately. I think when they don't, when we have to be a little more of an investigative type when just like E has indicated that you have to listen and hear for things that maybe don't sound exactly right, then that requires our attention and then handing out those resources - the peer mentoring programs or the tutoring programs, making sure that they're going to the student disability office or trying to take advantage of those resources. But when they self-advocate for themselves that it gives you a direction. "Okay, this is an area you struggle, and these are the resources." When they don't, we're just seeing what we can figure out. I mean, sometimes we can figure it out, sometimes we can't. (Focus Group)

In summary, the participating advisors reported that they had not been trained to work with students with disabilities. Many of them had challenges when advising undergraduate students with disabilities and felt unprepared in their current roles. They were eager, however, to learn more about undergraduate students with disabilities and resources to help this student population. The following final chapter of this dissertation presents a summary of the findings along with implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This qualitative study was conducted to investigate the insights and support of self-advocacy among academic advisors when working with students with disabilities. All participants in the study were academic advisors employed at a large, Southern, four-year public university in the United States. The study focused on the relationships between academic advisors and students. Eight academic advisors were interviewed and four of those advisors participated in a focus group to gather data for the study. All participants shared the following characteristics: (a) were academic advisors, (b) provided advising to undergraduate students, (c) had a minimum of two years' advising experience, (d) had earned at minimum a bachelor's degree, (e) had exclusively advised undergraduate students, and (f) had advised a minimum of one student with a disability in the past two years.

The research study was aimed at identifying factors that may improve academic advisors' abilities to work with students with disabilities and to increase student success and persistence.

The following overarching research question and two sub-questions guided this study:

1. Recognizing higher education's growing need to better serve undergraduate students with disabilities, what information, areas, and types of training do advisors recommend as needed for their specific roles and interactions?

   a. Do advisors recognize the academic advising needs of undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university? If so, how? If not, why not?

   b. What evidence of self-advocacy components, if any, do academic advisors see among undergraduate students with disabilities at a public research university?

Method Summary

A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to explore the experience of the academic advisors in this study, and the researcher relied upon the conceptual framework of self-advocacy for students with disabilities developed by Test et al. (2005). Potential subjects were invited via email to participate in the research. A total of eight academic advisors agreed to be individually interviewed, and four of that group participated in a focus group. Once the data were collected, the researcher used a constant comparative approach to analyze the data.

Discussion

The discussion of findings in this chapter has been structured around three foci that were central to the research questions. Professional development, advising students with disabilities, and self-advocacy will be discussed as they relate to the respective research questions and the finding of this qualitative study. Following the discussion, limitations of the study, implications, recommendations for future research, and the researcher's reflection will be presented.

Professional development. The focus of professional development was consistent throughout the literature and in this qualitative study. When discussing professional development with the academic advisors during the data collection process, a lack of knowledge was discussed as an emerging theme.

The undergraduate advisors in the study had a wide variety of professional and educational backgrounds including non-profit management, dentistry, education, social work, sociology, and marketing. Half of the participants had no advising experience prior to their current roles. All participating advisors discussed the importance of professional development and their desire to further advance their knowledge and practice in the field of academic advising. They discussed professional development as an important aspect of being successful in

their roles and successfully performing their assigned tasks. Similarly, researchers supported the notion that it is crucial that all advisors receive training to perform all components of their jobs, regardless of experience (Petress, 1996; Satoko, 2012). Moreover, King (2008) explained that the field of academic advising is constantly evolving in complexity, thereby necessitating comprehensive and continuous training programs.

The undergraduate advisors explained that there were expectations from the university for advisors to see a large volume of students and interact with students with disabilities in a variety of settings, without any training or prior knowledge. All participants stated that they never received training to work with students with disabilities in relation to their roles as advisors at the institution. Similarly, the literature revealed that academic advisors were not typically trained to work with students with disabilities (Preece, et al., 2005). The 2011 National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) National Survey disclosed that many institutions do not provide training or professional development for their advisors (Voller, 2011). Specifically, in Voller's (2011) study it was determined that less than half of the institutions surveyed (47%) offered comprehensive training programs for their advisors. The literature demonstrated that the lack of training for advisors to successfully work with students with disabilities is a national trend.

Furthermore, when discussing the training of advisors, Brown (2008) explained:

Effective academic advising requires preservice and in-service development programs that define roles and responsibilities, set expectations (i.e., institutional, program, and students), and provide opportunities for the development and enhancement of attitudes, skills, and behaviors essential to creating effective advisor-advisee relationships (p. 309).

Though all eight of the participating advisors in the present study expressed their desire to support students with disabilities, the majority felt unprepared to do so. Six of the eight advisors specifically discussed their insecurities in advising students with disabilities due to their

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lack of training. The participating advisors discussed their needs to have more professional development experiences to perform their roles effectively and to feel competent in their roles. Brown concurred, observing that if higher education institutions seek competent advising, professional development programs must take place (Brown, 2008).

All of the participating advisors stated they would attend professional development opportunities if they were available. Petress (1996), in advocating for professional development for academic advisors, noted that not only is it imperative to the success of advisors in their roles, it is critical for students. The undergraduate advisors in the study stated the professional development training would strengthen the advising community for the students. Likewise, Brown (2008) demonstrated that lack of professional development weakens the quality of advising and creates misperceptions about advising services.

Advising students with disabilities. Advising students with disabilities was another focus investigated in this qualitative study. When discussing the topic of advising students with disabilities with the undergraduate advisors during the individual interviews and focus group, the themes of accommodations, transition, and academics developed.

Academic advising was the most cited student service when discussing student persistence (Hossler & Bean, 1990). However, advising students with disabilities presented a challenge for many of the participating advisors in the study. Some of these challenges included lack of knowledge of accommodations, guiding students as they transition into college, and addressing academic concerns. As access to higher education increases and enrollment continues to increase on college campuses, working with students with disabilities to provide essential assistance and support is crucial (Daly-Cano et al., 2015; Gould, 1986; Jarrow, 1996; Kimball et al., 2016; Preece et al., 2005).

In this study, though advisors acknowledged that students with disabilities have unique needs such as understanding their disabilities and available accommodations, their lack of training did not provide the foundation required to identify and assist with those needs. Researchers have long confirmed these findings. Students with disabilities have unique challenges which may affect the advising approach (Hemphill, 2002; Hunter & Kendall, 2008). Additionally, Varkula, Beauchemin, Facemire, and Bucher (2017) demonstrated that students with disabilities are more likely to leave college or be referred to other departments due to feeling lost, which means they may require more consideration by higher education professionals.

The participants expressed that when advising students, knowing of the different resources on campus to appropriately refer students was essential to successful to their ability to deliver needed advising services. The literature reviewed supported this finding (Brown, 2008). For advising to be effective, advisors are required to refer students to other campus and community resources. Many of the advisors explained that due to the large size of their institution, they had a difficult time connecting to various resources on campus.

All participants expressed an interest in learning more about and/or collaborating with the student disability resource office. Several of the participating advisors shared their lack of knowledge as to the staff or resources available in that office. Here, too, Brown (2008) advocated for advisors to be knowledgeable, when working with a specific populations, of the specific service units and resources designed to serve them. Additionally, Self (2008) reported that disability offices on college campuses aid students related to their specific disability and it is imperative that academic advisors collaborate with these offices.

Many of the advisors expressed concerns of not knowing the accommodations and legal requirements for students with disabilities, and yet Marshak, Van Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss and Dugan (2010) indicated that disability offices exist on college campuses in accordance with legislation to provide reasonable accommodations to students. This lack of knowledge was an obstacle which hindered the participating advisors' ability to successfully advise their students. Though it is imperative that students with disabilities are aware of these services (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003), advisors must be aware of campus and community resources to refer students appropriately (Petress, 1996). Furthermore, it is imperative that academic advisors are knowledgeable of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and accommodations (Hemphill, 2002; Kennedy & Ishler, 2008).

In addition to learning of the various accommodations, several of the participating advisors specifically stated they desired to learn more about the diverse types of disabilities to feel more prepared to successfully advise students with disabilities. Harding (2008) and Hunter and Kendall (2008) have posited that to be successful in working with and understanding students with disabilities, personnel are required to understand the types of disabilities and the limitations.

Another theme that many of the participating advisors discussed were the challenges of assisting students with disabilities as they transfer into the university. These challenges included meeting the needs of students with disabilities in understanding the new institution and the accommodations available to them. Several advisors in the study discussed their concerns with transfer students, as the target institution has had a large transfer student population. The literature demonstrates that transfer students are already at risk when they enter a new institution (Hunter & Kendall, 2008). Many students experience transfer shock, and their grades typically

drop during their first semester (Hills, 1965). Curriculum and grades are a key component of the transfer experience; however, it is also crucial that advisors help students understand the policies, structures, and resources (Grites, 2004; Hunter & Kendall, 2008).

In addition to dealing with transfer students from other colleges, the advisors in this study discussed the transition challenges of freshmen coming from high school. The challenge most noted by the participating advisors regarding students with disabilities coming from high school, was understanding the federal laws of the higher education setting. Madaus (2005) concurred with this finding, observing that, for students with disabilities, the transition from high school to college is particularly challenging.

At the center of these adjustment issues is the fact that as students transition from high school, they are no longer protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) but instead the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This change in rights and accommodation presents a unique set of obstacles for students with disabilities as they navigate college (Brinckerhoff, 1993, 1996; Stodden, et al., 2003). The advisors in this study expressed their desire to know more about the legislation regarding students with disabilities, particularly ADA. A further discussion of concern was mentioned in the literature by Eckes and Ochoa (2005). They stressed the importance of students understanding these federal laws and how they impact their rights.

During the interviews and focus group, while discussing the challenges of advising students navigating college, orientation was mentioned many times. The advisors discussed the concerns they had with students with disabilities during orientation sessions and outbursts from students with disabilities in group advising sessions. During orientation, the participants shared that they were expected by the university to advise in group sessions with anywhere from five to

40 students in a group. Therefore, the participants described incidents when outbursts from students caused disruption in the orientation session. Advising in group sessions is a popular method and is typically employed in orientation sessions. Group advising sessions allow the advisors to assist students' schedule planning and review the registration system (King, 2008). The personal accounts of the advisors further illustrated the need for more assistance with orientation and connection with the disability resource office. The participating advisors explained that knowing in advance that a student with a disability would be attending a session would allow the advisor to be more prepared.

Self-advocacy. Finally, the study focused on self-advocacy. When discussing self-advocacy with the participating advisors, the themes of fear of being labeled, relationships and interactions, and self-awareness were established.

This research study focused on the insights and support of self-advocacy among academic advisors when working with students with disabilities. The conceptual framework on which this study was based (Test et al., 2005) was comprised of the self-advocacy components of knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership. The findings of this study supported Test et al.'s findings regarding this framework and the four components. Academic advisors did recognize self-advocacy among students with disabilities based on these components.

Test et al. (2005) initially reviewed articles promoting self-advocacy published between 1972 and 2003, with participants in the studies classified as having a disability. Through this analysis four components of self-advocacy were identified in the literature: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership (Test et al., 2005). In their review, 75% of the articles referenced the importance of knowledge of self. Similarly, in the present research

study, 75% of the academic advisors interviewed reported that the students with disabilities that they advised possessed a powerful sense of knowledge of self. During the interviews, 62.5% of the advisors revealed that students understood their rights. Williams and Shoultz (1982) wrote that becoming a self-advocate requires students to understand their own rights and any potential violation of those rights. Additionally, 75% of the participating advisors believed that the students with disabilities that they advised were able to communicate effectively, but none of the advisors believed that their advisees with disabilities were able to lead effectively. According to Test et al. (2005) leadership was not a required component to be a successful self-advocate. Therefore, the findings of this qualitative study aligned with the Test et al.'s framework.

Consistent with the conceptual framework, the majority of academic advisors recognized the importance of students understanding themselves. Schreiner (2007) argued that having a realistic understanding of one's self is required for effective self-advocacy. All participating academic advisors were questioned about their specific experiences with students who displayed self-advocacy. This questioning allowed the advisors to examine their firsthand experiences and reflect on their roles as academic advisors of students with disabilities. Through this reflective process, the advisors recalled situations to support that they believed most of the students with disabilities did have strong knowledge of self.

Although the majority of the advisors agreed that students with disabilities had a strong sense of self, they also recognized that some of the students feared being labeled by their disabilities. Trammel (2009) addressed this issue when stating that this stigma may cause students with disabilities to be less likely to disclose their disability or use accommodations within the higher education institution. According to the literature, stigmas are created by the perception of disability and lack of knowledge (Smart, 2009). Advisors need knowledge about

the types of disabilities if they are to be advocates for their advisees and assist in eliminating any preconceived notions. Several of the advisors noted that this stigma caused some students to not seek accommodations. This refusal of accommodations impacted the roles of the advisors, as the students refused to utilize resources and struggled to communicate their needs.

Despite this obstacle, the majority of the advisors believed that these students were able to communicate efficiently. According to Varney (2013), communicating effectively is required for the student and advisor relationships to help the student grow and understand their strengths and weakness. The advisors acknowledged that students with disabilities were able to understand their personal strengths and weaknesses. This is important in the development of the students. As noted by researchers, communicating needs and desires is a vital component of self-advocacy (Eisenman & Tascione, 2002; Stodden, et al., 2003).

When discussing communication, the participating advisors discussed the importance of relationships and interactions. The advisors agreed that most students were able to establish strong relationships with higher education personnel. Similarly, Brown (2008) discussed the importance of establishing a relationship as an important aspect of advising, stating: "The quality of academic advising is often determined by the quality of relationships that exist between students and their advisors. The skills that enable the establishment of effective relationships can be taught, developed, and enhanced" (p. 315).

The undergraduate advisors in this study discussed the involvement of parents, particularly when addressing relationships and interactions. Some of the advisors shared accounts of parents of student with disabilities joining advising and/or orientation sessions. Kennedy and Ishler (2008) revealed that in higher education, it is not uncommon for some parents to want to be included in advising sessions. In these cases, specifically, the participants

discussed instances when parents were able to calm students and aid the advisor during the interaction. This collaboration was supported in the literature, Eckes and Ochoa (2005) found that parent involvement for students with disabilities can benefit a student's education. During the focus group, the advisors were open to the idea of parent programming as a method to assist students with disabilities as they navigated college life.

Conclusion

All of the advisors in the study recognized the need for focused training regarding working with students with disabilities. They acknowledged that students with disabilities had unique needs, but they also discussed their (the advisors') needs for additional education to better prepare them to identify those specific needs and how to successfully work with students with disabilities. All participants also recognized evidence of self-advocacy among the students with disabilities they advised. The academic advisors admitted that they were not adequately prepared to advise students with disabilities and needed additional professional development to support this specific student population. The participating advisors specifically sought more information and training regarding accommodations, types of disabilities, and campus resources. Self-advocacy may, therefore, serve as an effective framework for understanding the relationship between academic advisors and students with disabilities.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation of all qualitative research may be the personal bias of the researcher (Bourke, 2014; Creswell, 2014). The advising experience of researchers may predispose them to predetermined ideas. To minimize any potential researcher's bias, I included a description of her

role in the context of conducting this study and maintained a reflection and process journal that contained results and reflections on bracketing (Moustakas, 1994).

Another limitation may have been the participants' specific advising assignments. Four of the participants advised specialized groups of students: freshman, honors, first generation, and veterans. Given that these advisors were working with specialized student populations, their responses may not have been reflective of observations applicable to the general undergraduate student population.

A delimitation addresses how a study may be limited in scope (Creswell, 1994). A delimitation of the study was that the data collection occurred at a single institution and did not necessarily reflect the culture of other colleges or universities. Creswell (1994) argued that a single site was appropriate for a phenomenological study.

Another delimitation of the study is that only undergraduate advisors were examined. I made this decision, because the responsibilities and assignments relative to of graduate student advisement varied from the undergraduate advisors.

Finally, a delimitation of the study was the number of participants. One may perceive eight to be a small number of participants given the vast size of the institution. However, this phenomenological multi-case study approach produced an immense amount of data. Moreover, the quality of collected data was the focus for this research method (Merriam, 2009).

Implications and Recommendations

Further research is required to investigate whether the results of this study are representative of the perceptions of other academic advisors. This study may be replicated at other institutions to determine if the results vary based on type of institution, institution size, or type of advisor (including graduate level advisors and faculty advisors). As a result of this study

a deeper understanding of the support of self-advocacy by academic advisors when working with students with disabilities was achieved. Through the perceptions of the advisors, recommendations of the information, areas, and training recommended for their roles were explored.

The results revealed that though advisors indicated that students with disabilities had strong self-advocacy, the advisors lacked the knowledge and training to effectively work with students with disabilities. The advisors require training on the types of disabilities, the legislation regarding students with disabilities in higher education, the available resources on campus, and how to support them.

Recommendations to improve an advisor's role and interaction with students with disabilities include professional development programs and training. Continuous comprehensive professional development programs for new advisors need to commence from initial days of employment for new advisors and continue throughout theirs career to provide support at all stages (Voller, 2011). Additionally, these programs need to include partnerships with various offices on campus, particularly the student disability resource office. The results of the study will assist higher education leaders with creating professional development opportunities that bring these general campus offices closer together to strengthen the advising community.

Researchers Reflection

I chose this topic of research to gain insight into the academic advisors' perceptions of self-advocacy among students with disabilities. I received positive feedback regarding my research topic throughout the process. Numerous times, the participants commented on the need for this area to be discussed further. It made the process more meaningful as I was able to share the accounts of advisors that have been missing in the literature until now.

I was surprised at the lack of professional development and training regarding students with disabilities. Some of the participants had many years of experience and had never received training in this area. I had not known what to expect in conducting the focus group. This was the first time I participated in a focus group, and it was a positive experience. The group format provided the advisors with an opportunity to share their stories and relate to one another. After the focus group meeting concluded, several of the participants expressed their appreciation and informed me that they had enjoyed the experience.

Writing this dissertation was not an easy process. My family, friends, and peers supported me throughout this process. There were many times where I felt overwhelmed by the amount of work, but with the support of those around me, I was able to continue. I hope this study is just the beginning of the research that can take place regarding the advising experiences of students with disabilities and self-advocacy.

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

University of
Central
Florida

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Jennifer Rachael Farran**

Date: **October 09, 2017**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/09/2017, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination, Category 2
Project Title:	An Examination of the Insights and Support of Self-Advocacy by Academic Advisors When Working with Students with Disabilities in Higher Education
Investigator:	Jennifer Rachael Farran
IRB Number:	SBE-17-13390
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Renea Carver

Signature applied by Renea C Carver on 10/09/2017 11:17:08 AM EDT

Designated Reviewer

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APPENDIX B: EMAIL TO ACADEMIC ADVISING CAMPUS GROUP

Good afternoon,

My name is Jennifer Farran and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education and Human Performance and an academic advisor at UCF. I am writing to request if I would be able to send a few emails through the advisor Listserv. For my dissertation, I am conducting a research study to examine the perception of self-advocacy among academic advisors in regards to students with disabilities. This study is being conducted under the supervision of my major professor, Dr. Kathleen P. King.

The purpose of the study is to identify factors that may assist with academic advisor's ability to advise students with disabilities and to increase student success and persistence.
I am requesting to send out a few emails to academic advisors of the university to request for their participation in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants can withdraw or stop participation in the study at any time without any penalties. There are no major anticipated risks for this study.

All information that participants will provide will remain confidential and be used solely for this research study. No identifying information will be included in the study report. Once the study is complete, all recordings will be erased in accordance with the Institutional Review Board. Please let me know if this would be appropriate as soon as you are able. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Thank you for very much for your consideration.

Jennifer Farran
Doctoral Candidate
UCF College of Education and Human Performance

APPENDIX C: EMAIL ANNOUNCEMENT

Good afternoon,

Later this week you will receive a request to participate in a research study at UCF. This study will examine the insights of self-advocacy among students with disabilities by academic advisors. The purpose of the study is to identify factors that may assist with academic advisor's ability to advise students with disabilities and to increase student success and persistence.
The results of this qualitative study, will be able to assist in identifying additional challenges or gaps in services for this student population. Specifically, these results could aid in improving services and eliminating barriers for students with disabilities. These changes will, in turn, benefit the collegiate experiences and increase academic success of students with disabilities.
I hope you read my upcoming invitation and to choose to participate in this study if you are able.
Thank you for time and consideration.

Jennifer Farran
Doctoral Candidate
UCF College of Education and Human Performance

APPENDIX D: EMAIL INVITATION TO ACADEMIC ADVISORS

Good afternoon,

My name is Jennifer Farran and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education and Human Performance at UCF. For my dissertation, I am conducting a research study to examine the insights of self-advocacy among academic advisors in regards to students with disabilities. This study is being conducted under the supervision of my major professor, Dr. Kathleen P. King.

The purpose of the study is to identify factors that may assist with academic advisor's ability to advise students with disabilities and to increase student success and persistence.
You are invited to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria if you
- are a current academic advisor who exclusively advises undergraduate students,
- have been employed as an academic advisor for a minimum of 2 years, and
- have experience working with a least one student with a disability within the last 2 years
-
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked questions regarding your experiences working with students with disabilities.

You will be contacted via email if you are selected for both an interview and focus group. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The focus group will last approximately 2 hours. Both the interview and the focus group will take place at the site institution based on the availability of participants. The interview and focus group will be two different meetings for the same participants. You do not have to answer every question or complete every task. You will not lose any benefits if you skip questions or tasks. You may not receive any benefits from participating in the study; however, your responses will help us to understand any self-advocacy issues that students with disabilities may face.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw or stop participation in the study at any time without any penalties. There are no major anticipated risks for this study.
All information that you will provide will remain confidential and be used solely for this research study. No identifying information will be included in the study report. Once the study is complete, all recordings will be erased in accordance with the Institutional Review Board.
If you have any questions about this study please contact me at jennifer.farran@ucf.edu. This research has been approved the UCF Institutional Review Board (IRB SBE-17-13390).
Thank you for time and consideration.

Jennifer Farran
Doctoral Candidate, UCF College of Education and Human Performance

APPENDIX E: REMINDER EMAIL

Good afternoon,

Recently I sent you an email asking for your participation to complete an interview and focus group about the insights of self-advocacy among academic advisors regarding students with disabilities. I am currently still in need of academic advisors to participate in this study.

The purpose of the study is to identify factors that may assist with academic advisor's ability to advise students with disabilities and to increase student success and persistence.

I am reaching out to you once again because your participation is important and will assist in understanding students with disabilities. If you qualify, I hope you will choose to participate.

You will be contacted via email if you are selected for both an interview and focus group. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The focus group will last approximately 2 hours. Both the interview and the focus group will take place at the site institution based on the availability of participants. The interview and focus group will be two different meetings for the same participants. You do not have to answer every question or complete every task. You will not lose any benefits if you skip questions or tasks.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions you may contact me at
jennifer.farran@ucf.edu.

Jennifer Farran
Doctoral Candidate
UCF College of Education and Human Performance

APPENDIX F: EMAIL INVITATION TO SELECTED INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Good afternoon,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study on the insights from academic advisors on self-advocacy among students with disabilities. You have been selected to participate in the interview portion of this study.

As a participant you will take part in both an individual interview and focus group. First, you are invited in participate in an individual, face-to-face interview for approximately 60 to 90 minutes with me to discuss your perceptions of self-advocacy among students with disabilities and your interactions with this student population.

Please use the link below to indicate your availability so we may schedule your appointment: [Doodle poll link]

You will receive a confirmation email with the date, time and location.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw or stop participation in the study at any time without any penalties. There are no major anticipated risks for this study.

All interviews will be audio recorded and recordings will be deleted after completion of the study in accordance with the Institutional Review Board. All information that you provide will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about this study please contact me at jennifer.farran@ucf.edu. This research has been approved the UCF Institutional Review Board (IRB SBE-17-13390).

Thank you for time and consideration.

Jennifer Farran
Doctoral Candidate

UCF College of Education and Human Performance

APPENDIX G: EMAIL INVITATION TO SELECTED FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Good afternoon,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study on the insights from academic advisors on self-advocacy among students with disabilities. I appreciate your participation in the individual interviews. You have also been selected to participate in the focus group portion of this study. You are now invited in participate in an approximately 2 hours long focus group with me and other academic advisors to discuss your insights of self-advocacy among students with disabilities and your interactions with this student population.

Please use the link below to indicate your availability so we may schedule your appointment: [Doodle poll link]

You will receive a confirmation email with the date, time and location.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw or stop participation in the study at any time without any penalties. There are no major anticipated risks for this study.

All focus groups will be recorded and recordings will be deleted after completion of the study in accordance with the Institutional Review Board. All information that you provide will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about this study please contact me at jennifer.farran@ucf.edu. This research has been approved the UCF Institutional Review Board (IRB SBE-17-13390).

Thank you for time and consideration.

Jennifer Farran
Doctoral Candidate
UCF College of Education and Human Performance

APPENDIX H: IRB SUMMARY EXPLANATION FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH

University of
**Central
Florida**

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: An Examination of the Insights and Support of Self-Advocacy by Academic Advisors When Working with Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Jennifer R. Farran, M.S.

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Kathleen P. King, Ed.D., Professor & Program Coordinator, Higher Education and Policy Studies

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you and you may withdraw participation at any time. If you withdraw participation, your information will not be used within the research study. This research study has been approved by the University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the perception of self-advocacy among students with disabilities and their relationships with academic advisors, as this viewpoint has yet to be explored in the literature. The study will focus on the relationship between academic advisors and students. Specifically, the researcher will explore (a) advisors' perceptions of professional development and training needed for working with this student population; (b) academic advisors' interactions with students with disabilities; and (c) advisors' insights and support of students' abilities to self-advocate.

All participants will be asked to partake in an individual interview and a focus group. Semi-structured, in person interviews will last approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Interviews will take place at the convenience of each participant regarding time at the site institution. Following the interviews, participants will then join a focus group that will last approximately two hours. The focus group will take place at the site institution based on the availability of participants. The interview and focus group will be two different meetings for the same participants based on availability.

Each participant will be audio recorded during the study. Only I will have access to the audio recordings. All audio recordings will be kept in a locked and safe place. Each recording will be destroyed after the transcription process is completed. Data will be maintained for 5 years after closing out the Human Research.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact Jennifer R. Farran, Doctoral Student, Higher Education and Policy Studies, at (407) 823-1447 or jennifer.farran@ucf.edu, or contact Dr. Kathleen P. King, Faculty Supervisor and Professor & Program Coordinator, Higher Education and Policy Studies at (407) 823-4751, or kathleen.king@ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for participating in the study, An Examination of the Insights and Support of Self-Advocacy by Academic Advisors When Working with Students with Disabilities.

The following list of definitions of self-advocacy and interview question guide are provided prior to the interview to allow time for self-reflection.

Definitions of Self-Advocacy

Reference	Definition
Williams and Shoultz (1982)	"….they speak or act on behalf of themselves, or on behalf of other mentally handicapped people, or on behalf of issues that affect mentally handicapped people" (p. 87-88)
Brinckerhoff (1993)	"the ability to recognize and meet the needs that are specific to ones LD [learning disability] without compromising the dignity of oneself or others" (p. 24)
Browning (1997)	…efforts made by individuals to speak for and to take action on their own behalf, to make decisions and influence situations that effect their lives, and to reach their highest possible level of independence. Quite simply, it is a matter of one's stating their own preferences and interests, setting one's own goals, mapping out one's own plans, and acquiring resources for one's own cause (p. 334).
Cunconan-Lahr and Brotherson (1996)	". . . occurring any time people speak or act on their own behalf to improve their quality of life, effect personal change, or correct inequities" (pp. 352).
Schreiner (2007)	"the ability to speak up for what we want and need" (p. 300).
Stodden, et al. (2003)	Ability to communicate needs and obtain support
Van Reusen et al. (1994) (as cited in Van Reusen, 1996)	"…refers to an individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert his or her interests, desires, needs, and rights. It assumes the ability to make informed decisions. It also means taking responsibility for those decisions."

Source. Adapted from Test et al., (2005)

The following is a list of interview questions for guidance:

IQ1: How did you enter the academic advising field?

IQ2: How long have you been an academic advisor?

IQ3. What is your academic background? What degree(s) have you earned?

IQ4: What college or department do you advise for?

IQ5: What are your goals in advising undergraduate students?

IQ6A: How many undergraduate students do you believe you have served in the last two years?

IQ6B: How many undergraduate students with disabilities do you believe you have you served in the last two years?

IQ7A: What academic advising needs have you recognized among students with disabilities?

IQ7B: Luis is a sophomore and comes to you for his advising appointment. Please describe how you handle this process.

IQ7C: Four weeks later you receive an email and Luis tells you he has ADHD and wants to meet with you regarding his upcoming class schedule. What is your response?

IQ8A. Please recall a situation when working with a student with a disability. How did you learn of the students' disabilities?

      IQ8B. When did you learn of the students' disabilities?

IQ9. What type of disabilities have students described to you (specific learning disability, visual impairment, hearing loss, deafness, speech impairment, orthopedic impairment or health impairment)? (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

IQ10. In what way(s) have you confirmed they are working with the student disability office on campus?

IQ11A. What was your perception of how students with disabilities understood themselves? (See list of subcomponents on *Self-Advocacy Component and Subcomponents* table below).

      IQ11B. What examples can you provide to illustrate your perceptions?

IQ12A. What was your perception of how students with disabilities understood their rights? (See list of subcomponents on *Self-Advocacy Component and Subcomponents* table below).

      IQ12B. Can you share examples to illustrate these perceptions?

IQ13A. What was your perception of how students with disabilities were able to communicate their needs? (See list of subcomponents on *Self-Advocacy Component and Subcomponents* table below).

      IQ13B. Can you share examples to illustrate these perceptions?

IQ14A. What was your perception of leadership ability of students with disabilities? (See list of subcomponents on *Self-Advocacy Component and Subcomponents* table below).

      IQ14B. Can you share examples to illustrate these perceptions?

IQ15A. To support your work as an advisor, what areas of professional development for advising students with disabilities do you believe are needed?

      IQ15B. Why do you believe these are needed?

IQ16A. If professional development opportunities regarding advising students with disabilities were offered, would you attend? If so, why? If not, why not?

IQ16B. What do you think might motivate or make it more possible for other academic advisors to attend such professional development?

APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction: It is good to meet you; my name is Jennifer Farran and I am an academic advisor and doctoral student in the Higher Education and Policy Studies program at the University of Central Florida.

Thank you for participating in this research study regarding the insights from academic advisors on self-advocacy among students with disabilities. This interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes and will be digitally recorded. The recording will be kept until the study is complete. Your information and identity will anonymous and confidential.

Further details are provided on the informed consent form. Please take your time to review this form and sign if you are willing to participate. Before we begin, do you have any questions regarding the consent form? Please indicate your permission of consent for this interview by stating "yes."

The questions are designed to explore your experiences as an academic advisor working with students with disabilities. The questions will primarily focus on your perception of the student's ability to self-advocate. Additionally, we will review challenges that you may face as an academic advisor working with this student population. If you have any questions or need clarification during the interview, please let me know.

If you do not feel comfortable answering a question we may skip it. You may also stop this interview at any time. Please let me know if you have any questions before we begin. I will start the recorder when you are ready.

IQ1: How did you enter the academic advising field?

IQ2: How long have you been an academic advisor?

IQ3. What is your academic background? What degree(s) have you earned?

IQ4: What college or department do you advise for?

IQ5: What are your goals in advising undergraduate students?

IQ6A: How many undergraduate students do you believe you have served in the last two years?

IQ6B: How many undergraduate students with disabilities do you believe you have you served in the last two years?

IQ7A: What academic advising needs have you recognized among students with disabilities?

IQ7B: Luis is a sophomore and comes to you for his advising appointment. Please describe how you handle this process.

IQ7C: Four weeks later you receive an email and Luis tells you he has ADHD and wants to meet with you regarding his upcoming class schedule. What is your response?

IQ8A. Please recall a situation when working with a student with a disability. How did you learn of the students' disabilities?

IQ8B. When did you learn of the students' disabilities?

IQ9. What type of disabilities have students described to you (specific learning disability, visual impairment, hearing loss, deafness, speech impairment, orthopedic impairment or health impairment)? (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

IQ10. In what way(s) have you confirmed they are working with the student disability office on campus?

IQ11A. What was your perception of how students with disabilities understood themselves? (See list of subcomponents on *Self-Advocacy Component and Subcomponents* table below).

IQ11B. What examples can you provide to illustrate your perceptions?

IQ12A. What was your perception of how students with disabilities understood their rights? (See list of subcomponents on *Self-Advocacy Component and Subcomponents* table below).

IQ12B. Can you share examples to illustrate these perceptions?

IQ13A. What was your perception of how students with disabilities were able to communicate their needs? (See list of subcomponents on *Self-Advocacy Component and Subcomponents* table below).

IQ13B. Can you share examples to illustrate these perceptions?

IQ14A. What was your perception of leadership ability of students with disabilities? (See list of subcomponents on *Self-Advocacy Component and Subcomponents* table below).

IQ14B. Can you share examples to illustrate these perceptions?

IQ15A. To support your work as an advisor, what areas of professional development for advising students with disabilities do you believe are needed?

IQ15B. Why do you believe these are needed?

IQ16A. If professional development opportunities regarding advising students with disabilities were offered, would you attend? If so, why? If not, why not?

IQ16B. What do you think might motivate or make it more possible for other academic advisors to attend such professional development?

Self-Advocacy Component and Subcomponents

Knowledge of Self	Knowledge of Rights	Communication	Leadership
Strengths	Personal rights	Assertiveness	Knowledge of group's rights
Preferences	Community rights	Negotiation	Advocating for others
Goals	Educational rights	Listening	Political action
Desires	Steps to advocate for change	Compromise	Organizational participation
Interests	Knowledge of resources	Persuasion	
Responsibilities			
Accommodations			

Source. Adapted from Test et al., (2005)

Conclusion: This concludes our interview. Thank you for your participation and willingness to share your experiences. I will follow up with you via email in the next couple of months for you to confirm that I accurately interpreted and described your experiences. If you have any questions, please let me know. Thank you again.

APPENDIX K: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction: Thank you for coming to this event. My name is Jennifer Farran and I am an academic advisor and doctoral student in the Higher Education and Policy Studies program at the University of Central Florida. I am joined by Dr. Carolyn Hopp who is assisting me with the group and note taking.

Thank you for participating in this research study regarding the insights from academic advisors on self-advocacy among students with disabilities. This focus group will take approximately two hours and will be audio recorded. The recording will be kept until the study is complete. Your information and identity will anonymous and confidential.

Further details are provided on the informed consent form. Please take your time to review this form and sign if you are willing to participate. Before we begin, do you have any questions regarding the consent form? Please indicate your permission of consent by signing the informed consent form.

During our focus group, the questions are designed to explore your experiences as an academic advisor working with students with disabilities. Additionally, we will review challenges that you may face as an academic advisor working with this student population and training experiences. If you have any questions or need clarification during the focus group, please let me know.

I encourage each of you to be honest and consider this as an opportunity to share your experiences with others who work in this field. Previously, each of you was assigned a pseudonym in our previous interaction. Today, each of your will be provided with a card with that name. Please state that name before you speak during this focus group. Please let me know if you have any questions before we begin. I will start the recorder when you are ready.

FQ1. Let's start by discussing your roles as advisors. What are your responsibilities as an academic advisor for college students?

FQ2. Let's know focus on experiences when working with a student with disabilities. Who would like to describe an advising experience with a student with disabilities?

FQ3a. Could you describe any challenges you encounter when advising students with disabilities?

FQ3b. What advising approaches have you taken to address these challenges?

FQ3c. If you answered no to challenges you encounter when advising students with disabilities, have you experienced communication challenges with other offices on campus as you work with students with disabilities?

FQ4a. Let's move on to discussing the role of self-advocacy. How would you define self-advocacy for students?

FQ4b: How would you define self-advocacy for students with disabilities?

FQ5a. Can you describe how the role of self-advocacy influences your advising students with disabilities?

FQ5b. Please describe some examples of self-advocacy you have seen among students with disabilities.

FQ6. As an academic advisor working with students with disabilities, can you discuss the type of training(s) you received?

FQ7a. What types of training and/or information would you recommend to academic advisors as they prepare to work with students with disabilities?

FQ7b: Finally, what types of training and/or information would you recommend to existing academic advisors?

Conclusion: This concludes our focus group. Thank you for your participation and willingness to share your experiences. I will follow up with you via email in the next couple of months for you to confirm that I accurately interpreted and described your experiences. If you have any questions, please let me know. Thank you again.

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