

PERCEPTIONS OF ADVISORS AND STUDENTS IN AN ADVISING CASELOAD MODEL: A CASE STUDY

A Dissertation By

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Abstract:

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine an advising caseload model at University Hills for first-year and second-year students, and how the model facilitated student-advisor interactions and relationships that can contribute to sense of belonging and persistence for historically underrepresented students. This study provided insights about the advising caseload model's processes, features, and structures that enabled proactive, consistent, continuous, validating, and personalized advising practices. This study contributes to the limited research and literature on advising caseload models for entire undergraduate student populations at large, urban, public higher education institutions with persistent attrition issues and equity gaps for historically underrepresented students.

Findings confirmed that validating interactions and practices are notably meaningful and so powerful that they can contribute to historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and motivation to persist. Additionally, when historically underrepresented students do not feel a strong sense of belonging, positive aspects of the caseload model including structures and beneficial practices can contribute to student persistence. The caseload model was less positively impactful when there was a lack of (a) clear expectations for the role of the advisor, (b) a mandatory training program, and (c) enough accountability and centralized authority to ensure the model operated as intended. Recommendations are provided for improvement of campuswide advising caseload model structures and practices to benefit historically underrepresented students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Skilled and educated workers are increasingly in demand in California's economy, and projections indicate a shortage in the next 10 years (Public Policy Institute of California [PPIC], 2017, 2019). The state's population demographics are diverse, with Latinx residents surpassing White residents as the largest ethnic group in 2014 (PPIC, 2021). To meet California's skilled workforce demands, the state needs to increase the number of college degrees (PPIC, 2017, 2019) among historically underrepresented populations including, first-generation students, low-income students, and students of African American, Native American, Hispanics/Latinx, and Asian American racial and ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately, college persistence and degree attainment are lower among historically underrepresented, low-income, and first-generation college students, compared to students whose parents' completed college, White students, and economically privileged students (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Institute of Education Sciences, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Radunzel, 2018; U.S Department of Education, 2016). This equity gap in college degree completion diminishes social mobility and exacerbates intergenerational socioeconomic disparities in historically underrepresented communities (U.S Department of Education, 2016).

Higher education institutions have sought to enhance academic advising as a strategy to improve persistence, retention, and graduation rates for historically underrepresented students to close the equity gap (CSU Legislative Report, 2020; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Moore et al., 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; U.S Department of Education, 2016). In 2015, the California State University (CSU) system launched the Graduation Initiative 2025 (GI 2025) to increase retention and graduation rates, eliminate equity gaps, and help meet California's skilled workforce needs (CSU Legislative Report, 2020). To meet GI 2025's ambitious goals, the 23 CSU campuses hired additional professional advisors to increase access to advising with a focus on improving the quality of advising interactions and services (CSU Legislative Report, 2020).

CSU advising organizations are increasingly centrally coordinated (CSU Legislative Report, 2020; Moore et al., 2018); however, many campuses are still operating in fragmented decentralized advising structures across multiple divisions and offices. Fragmented advising structures can lead to poor communication among advising centers and inconsistencies in information, quality of student-advisor interactions, and support (Joslin, 2018; Moore et al., 2018, 2019). Various e-advising tools and technology have been implemented on CSU campuses as a strategy to improve advising organization coordination, communication, alignment, and proactive outreach to students (CSU Legislative Report, 2020; Moore et al., 2018, 2019). Despite these initial efforts, the CSU graduation equity gap for students who receive federal financial aid, and students who identify as African American, Native American, or Latinx, has widened to 11 percentage points compared to graduation rates for White students and students of higher socioeconomic status (CSU Legislative Report, 2020).

Research demonstrated that CSU campuses are often without a clear plan for redesigning their advising organization to improve outcomes for historically underrepresented students (Moore et al., 2018, 2019). Many CSU campuses lack a systematic, consistent, and coherent advising strategy that specifically focuses on reducing equity gaps (Moore et al., 2018, 2019). Specialized programs that provide access and support for historically underrepresented students, such as Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), are identified by CSU campuses as their strategy to reduce the equity gap (Moore et al., 2018). However, only a portion of eligible students have access to participate in the EOP program (Moore et al., 2018). The CSU's historically underrepresented student population, meeting GI 2025 goals, and closing equity gaps are intertwined and systemic (CSU Legislative Report, 2020), and therefore a specialized program alone cannot solve the problem.

CSU campuses are making efforts to develop and strengthen their initiatives and programs focused on creating sense of belonging among historically underrepresented students to help close the equity gap (CSU Legislative Report, 2020). Studies have shown that validating practices, relationships with institutional agents, and personalized and proactive advising approaches can contribute to a students' sense of belonging and intent to persist on a college campus (Barnett, 2011;

Deil-Amen, 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lee, 2018; Means & Pyne, 2017; Museus & Neville 2012, Museus & Ravello, 2010; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Strayhorn, 2019; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). Means and Pyne (2017) examined institutional support structures that enhanced low-income, first-generation college students' sense of belonging and identified academic support services, supportive institutional agents, and identity-based student organizations as some of the beneficial institutional structures. However, Means and Pyne (2017) study emphasized that sense of belonging was also not a static experience and students can have simultaneously negative and positive experiences, and interactions. According to Strayhorn (2019), sense of belonging is "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness" (p. 4) and is generated from experiences of feeling cared for, accepted, and respected by institutional agents such as advisors and faculty. Hurtado and Carter's (1997) seminal longitudinal study supported the importance of relationships and determined that frequent interactions between Latino students, faculty, and peers contributed to a higher sense of belonging. Barnett (2011) sought to understand validating student interactions with faculty and how those experiences influenced a group of diverse community college students' intent to persist. When validating interactions were present, such as mentoring, caring instruction, and appreciation for diversity, Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American students were more academically integrated and produced stronger expressions of their desire to return to college the following term (Barnett, 2011).

Background of the Problem

Limitations of Traditional Advising Practices

Lack of Access to Advising

Traditional advising practices are dependent on students seeking out advising assistance or intently focused on outreaching to students already in academic distress, such as students on academic probation (Klempin et al., 2019). Entire groups of students are often without access to an academic advisor and the advising center operates similarly to an emergency room for students in a critical situation (Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013). In traditional advising practices,

students rarely meet with an advisor, and when they do, it is usually a different advisor every advising session, which can lead to repeating their stories and conflicting information (Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klempin et al., 2019; Lawton, 2018). Advisors who infrequently meet with historically underrepresented students inhibit opportunities to develop relationships, which may lead to distrust (Orozco et al., 2010). Lack of access to advising is especially problematic for first-generation college students who may be unfamiliar with strategies for overcoming procedural hurdles (Deil-Amen, 2011; Orozco et al., 2010). Historically underrepresented students who do not have access to advising to overcome procedural hurdles may choose to depart the college (Deil-Amen, 2011).

Lack of Personalized and Holistic Advising

When CSU students had access to advising it was mostly due to their own initiative; however, the advising focused on academic course planning and often lacked a personalized and holistic approach (Moore et al., 2019). Providing academic assistance to historically underrepresented students alone without consistent, personalized, and holistic interactions does not sufficiently produce successful educational outcomes (Tovar, 2015). Even membership in a specialized program that provides increased access to advising is insufficient for historically underrepresented student success, if the contact does not involve validating interactions, relationships, and a holistic approach (Tovar, 2015). Traditional advising practices that lack a personalized approach can be invalidating and harmful for historically underrepresented students (Rendón, 2002). Failing to ask students personal questions and only focusing on the student's major or class schedule discourages a human connection and is a negative advising practice that Rendón (2002) terms "cooling students out" (p. 658).

Lack of Assigned Advisors and Proactive Outreach

Within traditional advising practices at many institutions, students are not assigned advisors, they wait in long lines for advising appointments, and interactions are often rushed and short (Education Advisory Board [EAB], 2014; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klempin, 2019). Because of the infrequent interactions, students often self-advise and potentially find themselves taking courses that

do not lead to transfer or graduation (Klempin, 2019). An 18-year-old African American male student hoping to transfer to a 4-year institution revealed that he expected to have an assigned advisor or counselor. Instead, the student was self-advising and disclosed, “I haven’t talked to a counselor yet . . . I didn’t know you just go in there and make an appointment. I don’t really know which classes I need” (Orozco et al., 2010, p. 729). Not assigning students to an advisor creates an institutional culture where no one is designated responsible for (a) tracking students’ academic progress, (b) engaging in proactive outreach, and (c) facilitating connections to resources and support (EAB, 2014; Klempin, 2019).

Scaling-up a Specialized Program’s Features

Specialized programs designed to provide access and student support services for historically underrepresented student populations have been more successful than general advising on college campuses because they have smaller student-advisor ratios that allow for increased opportunities for beneficial interactions and meaningful relationships (Moore et al., 2019; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 2002; Ryan, 2013; Tovar, 2015). Programs such as Puente in the California Community College system are models for historically underrepresented student success because of their deployment of various proactive and validating practices by the counselors and faculty who coordinate the program. Similarly, historically underrepresented students attending CSU campuses who participate in EOP benefit from frequent, holistic, and personalized advising (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Moore et al., 2019). Unfortunately, EOP and Puente programs were not designed to serve entire campus populations of historically underrepresented students (Moore et al., 2018). In fact, EOP programs have at least four times more applicants than the program can admit (California State University, n.d.).

Validating Practices, Personalized Advising, and Proactive Approaches

The seminal study that produced the theory of validation (Rendón, 1994) provided a framework for understanding how validation is an ongoing experience that needs to be present for students to feel a sense of belonging. Validation is an on-going process of supportive interactions by institutional

agents like faculty, counselors, and advisors that produces a feeling of being capable of learning in students and that their contributions to the learning environment are valued (Rendón, 1994).

Validation is an ongoing process of supportive interactions by institutional agents like faculty, counselors, and advisors that produces in students (a) a feeling of being capable of learning and (b) a sense that their contributions to the learning environment are valued (Rendón, 1994). Historically underrepresented students can benefit from interactions with a caring advisor or counselor who sets high expectations, encourages students' aspirations, and validates the students' capabilities of achieving (Rendón, 2002). Rendón's (2002) study highlighted the impact of academic and interpersonal validation from counselors resulting in historically underrepresented students feeling cared for after receiving critical information, advice, individual attention, and emotional support. Historically underrepresented students can benefit from institutional agents who practice validating approaches in and out of the classroom (Deil-Amen, 2011; Lee, 2018; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). Advisors who practice validating approaches use encouraging words (Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2002), and acknowledge the racialized experiences of minoritized students on college campuses (Museus & Ravello, 2010; Brown & Rivas, 1993; Lee, 2018; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). Validating interactions can lead to trust and the development of meaningful relationships between students and advisors (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Lee, 2018; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). Advisors who develop authentic and trusting relationships with historically underrepresented students can improve students' college experience, motivation, sense of belonging, and persistence (Deil-Amen, 2011; Lee, 2018; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018).

Personalized Advising Approach

Studies observed that historically underrepresented students desired and benefited from personalized interactions and relationships with institutional agents such as advisors and faculty

(Deil-Amen, 2011; Moore et al., 2019; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Ryan, 2013). For example, Deil-Amen (2011) determined that African American students were more likely to explicitly express a desire for a cultural or personal connection with a group or individual institutional agent. Advisors who shared their personal experiences with students and care about racially minoritized students' personal stories and experiences were perceived as helpful, approachable, and accessible (Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010). In a qualitative study, Museus and Neville (2012) emphasized that Asian American, Black, and Latino students can feel encouraged, confident, and comfortable when institutional agents provide individual attention and ask students how they are doing and feeling. A Latina student in Museus and Ravello's (2010) qualitative study was mentored by her academic advisor and appreciated being asked "Is everything okay? How are you feeling? Are you not homesick anymore? How are your classes going?" (p. 53). Ryan (2013) demonstrated that an advising model that provided a personalized approach for first-time community college students resulted in higher grade point averages (GPAs) and increased levels of persistence than achieved by students with similar characteristics who did not participate in the model.

Proactive Outreach Approach

Proactive outreach approaches by institutional agents led to historically underrepresented students feeling cared for while receiving essential information, resources, and support (Deil-Amen, 2011; Donaldson et al., 2016; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Rendón, 2002). Proactive or intrusive approach is an "intentional institutional contact with students such that personnel and students develop a caring relationship that leads to increased academic motivation and persistence" (Varney, 2013, p. 137). Rendón (2002) stressed counselors/advisors who promote access to education for historically underrepresented students understand that they need to take on the responsibility to provide proactive, intentional, and sustained interventions to motivate students along their academic pathways.

Providing proactive information, resources, and support for historically underrepresented students facilitates their ability to navigate procedure obstacles on college campuses (Deil-Amen,

2011; Donaldson et al., 2016; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Rendón, 2002). Deil-Amen (2011) emphasized in their study how historically underrepresented students can feel overwhelmed and uninformed about procedural obstacles, such as financial aid or degree requirements; however, institutional agents who provided proactive information and inspiration help to create “procedural agency” in students. Taking an active role to reach out to students early to provide information and support was confirmed as a validating experience especially for Latino and Korean students (Deil-Amen, 2011). The act of intentionally reaching out to provide information and support before it was requested can be perceived by historically underrepresented students as a demonstration of advisors’ personal investment in students’ academic, personal, and professional success (Deil-Amen, 2011; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010). Proactive approaches and the perception of being cared for can contribute to historically underrepresented students’ sense of belonging, motivation, confidence, and persistence (Deil-Amen, 2011; Donaldson et al., 2016; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010).

Consistent and Continuous Outreach

In addition to proactive outreach, the number of consistent and continuous interactions with institutional agents such as advisors or counselors and faculty was shown to have a positive effect on GPA for Latinx (Tovar, 2015). Swecker et al. (2013) used regression analysis and found a significant relationship between the number of advising meetings and the retention of first-generation college students. A theme emerged in interviews with historically underrepresented students in participants’ expression of the positive impact institutional agents made by “always checking-in” with them (Museus & Neville, 2012, p. 446). Ensuring students have access to advising and benefit from consistent and continuous interactions can be made possible by intentionally assigning an advisor for each student on a college campus.

Assigned Advisor and Case Management Approach

Academic advising can reach every student enrolled at an institution (White, 2015) and is one of the few institutional support structures that can consistently connect students to the university in

meaningful ways (Swecker et al., 2013). Making advising accessible is especially important for historically underrepresented students who may also be low-income and the first in their families to attend college, because advisors can provide critical information about educational pathways that can prevent students from wasting time and money (Deil-Amen, 2011; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Orozco et al., 2010; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Assigning a caseload of students to an advisor is an effective way to ensure that an entire student population, predominantly comprised of historically underrepresented students, has access to advising and can develop relationships with advisors due to consistent and continuous interactions (Joslin, 2018; Lawton, 2018; Richardson, 2008).

First-time community college students are more likely to be retained if students know their academic advisors and meet with them regularly (Ryan, 2013). The benefits of having an assigned advisor in an advising model that utilizes a proactive approach is that students can build a consistent relationship with a single person at the college (Donaldson et al., 2016; Pierce, 2016; Richardson, 2008). If historically underrepresented students are unable to connect with a person at the college to help them navigate procedural hurdles, build social capital, and find a sense of belonging, attrition rates may increase (Soria & Stebleton, 2013).

In summary, student demographics at California 4-year public institutions are increasing in diversity (PPIC, 2019, 2017). Organizational structures should be improved to better support the entire campus, instead of tinkering with specialized programs that can only serve a segment of the student population (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2014; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Lawton, 2018; Moore et al., 2018; Tovar, 2015). Rather than pouring time and resources into often detached or specialized programs, higher education institutions should examine their academic advising organizations, structures, and models and consider redesign to enhance every student's advising experience (CCRC, 2014; Lawton, 2018; Tovar, 2015). Scaling-up specialized programs by expanding beneficial features such as assigned advisors, proactive and personalized approaches, meaningful relationships, and consistent interactions demonstrates an institutional commitment to serving historically underrepresented students, improving persistence and

graduation rates, and closing the equity gap (CCCSE, 2014; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Lawton, 2018; Tovar, 2015).

An Advising Caseload Model

Restructuring advising to scale up beneficial features of specialized programs for historically underrepresented students can be achieved by implementing a cohort-wide advising caseload model (Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Joslin, 2018; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klempin et al., 2019). The components of an advising caseload model are: (a) establish reasonable student-to-advisor ratios of less than 300 to allow for advisor-student relationships to develop; (b) assign each student to an academic advisor; (c) provide proactive, personalized, and consistent interactions; (d) leverage e-advising technology to record meetings, create standard approaches for communication and proactive outreach, and prioritize advising interventions based on students' needs; (e) create clear advisor expectations about the frequency and effectiveness of advising interactions and types of interventions for each term; and (f) develop a uniform approach to implementing the caseload model across all academic advising centers, regardless of central or decentral reporting lines (EAB, 2014; Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Joslin, 2018; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klempin et al., 2019; Miars, 2019). An advising caseload model is an organizational structure to enable consistent interactions and proactive and personalized approaches that can lead to meaningful relationships and students' sense of belonging (Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Joslin, 2018; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klempin et al., 2019).

Problem Statement

Studies show that traditional advising practices at 4-year public universities are limited because they do not provide beneficial approaches such as proactive, personalized, and consistent student-advisor interactions that contribute to historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging (Deil-Amen, 2011; Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klempin et al., 2019; Lawton, 2018; Moore et al., 2018, 2019; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 2002; Tovar, 2015).

Specialized programs that use a caseload model approach to provide personalized and holistic support for historically underrepresented students are not designed to support an entire university's

student population (CCCSE, 2014; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Lawton, 2018; Tovar, 2015). CSU institutions lack a cohesive plan to scale up specialized programs' beneficial features and improve the advising organization model to enhance the advising experience and sense of belonging for their entire historically underrepresented student population (Moore et al., 2018, 2019).

University Hills (pseudonym) is one CSU institution implementing a caseload model for all first-year and second-year students as one of many targeted solutions to address student attrition issues, the equity gap, lack of personalized and proactive advising, and students' sense of belonging. Few studies have been conducted on higher education institutions' implementation of a caseload model as a mechanism to provide proactive and personalized advising, and whether the model has improved student-advisor interactions for historically underrepresented students that contribute to sense of belonging and intent to persist.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine an advising caseload model at University Hills for first-year and second-year students, and how the model improved student-advisor interactions and built relationships that contribute to sense of belonging and intent to persist for historically underrepresented students. This study provided insights about the advising caseload model and its processes and structure in facilitation of outcomes such as students' sense of belonging, validation, and intent to persist. This study elicited feedback from advisors and students about their interactions and benefits of the caseload model.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative case study:

1. In what ways is an advising caseload model that centers on building proactive, personalized, and continuous student-advisor relationships beneficial for historically underrepresented students?
 - a. What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contributes to students' sense of belonging?
 - b. What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' intent to persist?

Significance of the Study

Large, urban, public higher education institutions with attrition issues and persistent equity gaps for historically underrepresented students will benefit from a study that seeks to understand how an advising caseload model for first-year and second-year students enhances student-advisor interactions and relationships that promote students' sense of belonging and intent to persist. The results of this study may help academic advising administrators and higher education leaders understand the benefits of a practical model that can be deployed at their institutions. This research can benefit advisors by describing how students perceive their advising interactions and the kinds of advisor behaviors and attributes that either contribute to or hinder their sense of belonging and intent to persist. Understanding these behaviors and attributes that contribute to or hinder students' sense of belonging and intent to persist can facilitate advisor self-reflection and evaluation of their practices. Ultimately, this research may benefit historically underrepresented, low-income, first-generation college students who attend large, urban, public institutions. Finally, this study aimed to contribute to the limited research and literature on advising caseload models, especially those that utilize proactive and personalized approaches and their impact on historically underrepresented student populations.

Scope of the Study

This qualitative case study examined professional academic advisors' and students' experiences and interactions within the context of an advising caseload model for first-year and second-year students at a large, urban, public, 4-year Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). The following assumptions, delimitations, and limitations were considered and analyzed in studying students' and professional academic advisors' perceptions of their interactions.

Assumptions of the Study

Four assumptions were made in conducting this study:

- Student participants' responses in the focus group sessions were not affected by the online Zoom format and were accurate reflections of their experiences.
- Students understood they had assigned advisors.

- Advisor participants answered survey questions honestly and openly about their experiences and perceptions.
- Advisors understood and were aware they managed a caseload model for first-year and second-year students.

Study Delimitations

This study did not include students who had recently withdrawn from the university because the focus of the study was on persistence and sense of belonging behaviors among students enrolled at the time of the study. The first-year cohort was not included because there was not enough time in the study period for them to experience three advising appointments within the caseload model. The study did not include third-year and fourth-year students because the advising caseload model was focused on first-year and second-year cohorts. The student sample was limited to first-year and second-year students who experienced at least three advising appointments with their assigned professional academic advisor. To compare students' experiences with professional academic advisors, the advisor sample was limited to professional academic advisors who managed a caseload for at least 1 year. The student and advisor participants were required to have experienced the phenomenon of interest to better illuminate themes and patterns in the findings (Patton, 2015). The delimiting decisions intentionally increased the strength and richness of the in-depth study (Patton, 2015) of the student-advisor experience within an advising caseload model for first-year and second-year students.

Study Limitations

This case study used data retrieved from the EAB Navigate platform to indicate the number of advising appointments that occurred with the assigned advisor. Quality of data depended on advisors' accurate recording of advising appointments in EAB Navigate. Student and professional academic advisor participants were chosen from different advising centers across the university, which may have contributed to unforeseen variations in experiences. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity for health and safety precautions, all focus groups were conducted using the online Zoom meeting format. Use of the online Zoom meeting format decreased my ability to examine facial and

body expressions in recording experiences and perceptions, especially when students chose to turn off their cameras. Finally, the advising caseload model for first-year and second-year students was fully implemented at University Hills in Fall 2021 at the same time this study was conducted. The staggered implementation of the caseload model across the campus in advising centers may have created inconsistencies in student and advisor experiences and responses.

Definitions of Key Terms

Key terms are defined in the context they were used in this study:

Attrition. Attrition is “the unit of measurement used to determine the rate of dropout of students who do not return for or during their first and second year of college” (Stein, 2018, para. 2).

Caseload Model. A caseload model assigns academic advisors a reasonably sized group of students and leverages e-advising technology to provide developmental, holistic, and proactive advising approaches and support (EAB, 2019).

Campaign. A campaign is a feature in EAB Navigate that allows advisors to communicate to specific student populations and encourage them to schedule appointments (EAB, n.d.).

Dual Advisor. A dual advisor is additional to the primary major advisor and provides specialized advising for specific academic or student success programs.

Equity Gap. Significant and persistent disparity in educational attainment between different groups of students has been described as an equity gap (Higher Learning Advocates, 2020).

Faculty Advisor. A faculty advisor provides advising for their discipline or school and has additional teaching and research responsibilities.

First-Generation College Student. A first-generation college student is a student whose parents did not complete a college degree.

Historically Underrepresented Students. Historically underrepresented students’ identities were not considered when the system and institutions of higher education in the United States were originally designed (Lawton, 2018). Examples include first-generation status, low-income status, nonbinary gender identification, adult students, undocumented students; and students from ethnic

and racial backgrounds who have been historically denied access and have experienced institutional discrimination including African American students, Native American students, Hispanic/Latinx students, and Asian American students (Lawton, 2018).

Holistic Advising. Holistic advising is a developmental process that focuses on the “whole student” and considers personal, professional, and academic well-being.

Intent to Persist. Intent to persist is a student’s motivation and desire to complete the academic goal of earning their college degree.

Latinx. The term Latinx is an inclusive, gender-neutral alternative to Latino or Latina.

Persistence. Persistence represents students’ continuous reenrollment from term to term at any higher education institution.

Proactive Advising. Proactive advising is the act of reaching out to students before they express a need for assistance.

Professional Academic Advisor. A professional academic advisor is a staff member whose primary professional role is to provide academic advising.

Retention. Retention, as officially reported by the institution, is the percentage of students who return and re-enroll at the same institution each year.

Sense of Belonging. “Students’ sense of belonging is a perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, and valued by the campus community or practitioners” (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 4).

Strategic. The term strategic in advising management refers to intentional deployment of advising resources to create systems that differentiate support for students depending on their needs and interests (Klempin et al., 2019).

Validation. Validation is an “enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development” (Rendón, 1994, p. 44).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provided a context regarding the racial and economic disparities in retention and graduation rates in higher education and specifically in the CSU system. Historically underrepresented students benefit from proactive, personalized, validating, continuous, and consistent advising approaches and interactions (Barnett, 2011; Brown & Rivas, 1993; Deil-Amen, 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Lee, 2018; Means & Pyne, 2017; Museus & Neville, 2012; Strayhorn, 2019; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). Proactive, personalized, continuous, and consistent advising approaches can improve historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and intent to persist (Barnett, 2011; Strayhorn, 2019). I conducted a case study to understand and demonstrate how a caseload model serving a majority historically underrepresented student population may help academic advising administrators and higher education leaders establish a beneficial, practical model at their institutions. Chapter 2 provides a critical review of the literature regarding the history of advising, advising organizations and models, student-advisor interactions, sense of belonging, validation, and advising efforts that leverage proactive advising approaches, technology, and caseload management strategies. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative case study research design, including data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings, and in Chapter 5, I discuss conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine an advising caseload model at University Hills for first-year and second-year students and investigate how the model improved student-advisor interactions and relationships that contributed to sense of belonging and intent to persist for historically underrepresented students. This study provided insights about how the advising caseload model, its processes, and structure, facilitated outcomes such as students' sense of belonging, validation, and intent to persist. This study elicited feedback from advisors and students about their interactions and benefits of the caseload model.

Knowing more about student and advisor interactions within an advising caseload model, and specific behaviors and attributes that contribute to students' sense of belonging and intent to persist, is useful for making future decisions related to advisor professional development programs and campus resources. Practical outcomes from this study can lead to pragmatic decisions to improve the model and adoption of the model by other comparable universities.

This chapter reviews the research literature about student-advisor interactions, advisor behaviors and approaches, and advising organization models related to student success outcomes. This chapter includes pragmatism as the philosophical framework to understand student and advisor interactions. The historical foundation of academic advising includes the evolution of the profession and approaches and an analysis of developmental advising. Symbolic interactionism, validation theory, and sense of belonging ground this study as the theoretical foundations. I provide a review of the empirical research related to the advising caseload model and conclude with the conceptual framework that guided this study and a chapter summary.

Philosophical, Historical, and Theoretical Foundations

Philosophical Foundation

Pragmatism guided this case study as a framework to examine an advising caseload model and the student-advisor interactions that take place within this model. Pragmatism is a uniquely

American philosophy focused on how thinking and ideas emerge from a process that leads to practical adaptations, coping, and adjustments (Hewitt, 2003; Ozmon, 2012). The process of thought, adjustment, and adapting enables humans to alter their environment (Dewey, 1920; Turner et al., 1989). All living creatures strive to persist in their environments and actively seek to alter and conform simultaneously (Dewey, 1920). Dewey contributed to the practical application of the philosophy and maintained that the human experience is unique and can be investigated by studying the consequences of acting in particular ways (Ozmon, 2012). Pragmatism supports this study's focus on investigating the student and advisor experience. From studying student and advisor experiences, I learned about validation, sense of belonging, and intent to persist as consequences of student-advisor interactions within an advising caseload model.

Pragmatism was developed in response to Darwinian theory of evolution and incorporated the principle that humans adapt and adjust to their environment through the process of thinking and interacting (Turner et al., 1989). Humans' ability to leverage language and capacity to reason make humans unique, and human behaviors are more complex than instinctual reactions (Hewitt, 2003; Turner et al., 1989). The philosophy of pragmatism emphasizes practical consequences and benefits (Allan, 2007; Hewitt, 2003; Ozmon, 2012). Pragmatists reject universal or fundamental truths; instead, truth can be found in ideas and actions if they result in practical benefits (Allan, 2005, 2007; Hewitt, 2003). Essentially, the idea or meaning is true if it works to solve real problems (Hewitt, 2003; Patton, 2015). Truth is also relative to the specific needs and interest of humans (Hewitt, 2003). As our environments and problems change, so do our truths (Allan, 2005).

Pragmatism is concerned with how symbols, language, meaning, interactions, and thinking are used as methods of self-control for human behavior (Turner et al., 1989). Humans consciously reflect on their ideas and choose behaviors to adapt to their social environments (Allan, 2005). Because the individual cannot be extracted separately from society or their culture, the language we use to articulate our ideas and meaning is social (Allan, 2005). There is a constant interaction between thoughts, behaviors, and society or culture (Allan, 2005). Pragmatism as a philosophical foundation

for this study is helpful to understand (a) how historically underrepresented students develop intentions to persist and (b) aspects of the caseload model that contribute to decisions and feelings.

Historical Foundation

The history of American higher education parallels the evolution of advising. Cate and Miller's (2015) four distinct chronological eras are used in this chapter to review the historical evolution of academic advising. The first advising era is from 1636 to 1870, the second era spans 1871-1971, the third era is from 1972 to 2002, and the fourth and current era begins in 2003 (Cate & Miller, 2015). In addition, I examine research conducted on advising structures, organization, and program models, including the transition from faculty advisors to professional academic advisors in the third and fourth advising eras.

First Advising Era 1636-1870

Academic advising began in colonial colleges, first with college presidents who assumed entire responsibility for the student and later with clerical faculty advisors (Gordon, 1992; Hinton et al., 2016). Colonial colleges were established to develop clergy and civic leaders to save students' souls through paternalistic control (Gordon, 1992; Hinton et al., 2016). The paternalistic clergy faculty advisors conducted daily visits to their students' dormitory rooms and ate and prayed with the White Protestant boys and young men (Hinton et al., 2016). This practice of parental oversight of students was termed *in loco parentis*. Education was focused more on Puritan piety than on completing degrees (Hinton et al., 2016). This level of control for the students' mind, body, and soul did not reoccur in advising over the next three eras.

Second Advising Era 1871-1970

Introduction of a more diverse curriculum and electives in the 1870s created a need to guide and advise students through their options (Kuhn, 2008). Practical vocational programs and the elective education system were designed to create well-rounded students (Cate & Miller, 2015). This change did not come without some controversy and debate. Higher education leaders debated whether colleges should be practical or liberal, secular or religious (Hinton et al., 2016). The diversity

of the institutions' objectives and the proliferation of new colleges and universities led to various advising systems to meet the institutions' unique needs (Gordon, 1992). The faculty advisor role became more defined and specialized as the curriculum became more complex. Out of fear that students could make a wrong decision for their curricular pathway or become lost in the complexity, institutions including Harvard University and Johns Hopkins University created advising processes implemented by faculty advisors (Kuhn, 2008).

By the early 1900s, faculty in positions such as Dean of Men and Dean of Women assumed more responsibility for advising, discipline, academic issues, and cocurricular activities (Gordon, 1992; White & Steel, 2016). According to Rudolph (1990), "by the 1920s most colleges and universities were busy perfecting various systems of freshmen counseling, freshmen week, [and] faculty advisers" (p. 460). College campuses were increasingly staffed by various student personnel practitioners who came together in professional organizations to discuss their evolving professions (Hinton et al., 2016; Rudolph, 1990). A statement of values and guiding principles called the Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV) was developed from these gatherings in 1937 and expanded in 1949 (Hinton et al., 2016). The statement focused on the importance of the students' holistic development; however, without the same level of control as *in loco parentis*.

The influx of WWII veterans into colleges and universities was supported by direct funding from the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill; Geiger et al., 2011). Because the GI Bill made college more affordable and possible, student populations became more diverse. Academic programs were expanded and developed. Colleges and universities, including the university setting for this study, were established to meet veterans' educational demand. This expansion in higher education required the hiring of trained academic advisors to guide students through the vast array of opportunities and pathways (White & Steele, 2016).

Third Advising Era 1971-2002

Several pivotal articles and books on advising approaches and theories were published in the third era. Several authors, including Crookston (1972), Hardee (1970), O'Banion (1972), and Winston

et al. (1982), contributed to developmental advising as a practical theoretical approach that focused on the totality of students' personal, academic, social, and professional growth. At this point, academic advising became an "examined activity" (Frost, 2000) in literature seeking to define quality advising as much more than assisting students with course enrollment.

Developmental Advising

O'Banion's (1972) seminal article contributed to the concept of developmental advising as an advising approach and framework. O'Banion provided the foundation for the process of advising based on students' need to explore their life goals. The process comprises five dimensions: exploration of life goals, exploration of vocational goals, program choices, course choice, and scheduling courses. Advisors facilitate student development and decision making through these five stages. An academic advisor requires specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes to successfully facilitate student development (O'Banion, 1972). An advisor should have knowledge of students' characteristics and development, understanding of decision-making process, counseling skills and techniques, appreciation for student diversity, sensitivity to social and interpersonal environment, and belief that all students have potential (O'Banion, 1972). In addition, advisors should be fully aware of the programs and courses available, academic policies and processes, and course scheduling systems. O'Banion argued that professionally educated and trained counselors or advisors most appropriately meet the requirements for the role of advising. Faculty advisors can fulfill requirements and faculty advising is more cost effective for the college. However, if faculty are forced to advise or are unprepared to meet students' needs, both advising and instruction may suffer.

Organization and staffing of advising systems promote either transactional or developmental student-advisor interactions (O'Banion, 1972). O'Banion described the risk of advisors being perceived as clerical course programmers when the college does not hire enough advisors to have developmental interactions with students. Poor coordination can also plague an advising system. A faculty advising system is especially vulnerable to poor coordination, as instructors are expected to operate in this role independently. O'Banion warned that without appropriate administrative support

and direction, students could be harmed in the advising process. O'Banion provided specific criteria for a faculty advising system to function effectively and efficiently to meet students' needs. The criteria included recognizing and rewarding faculty advising, sensible student caseload and reduced teaching assignments, professional development focused on counseling skills, policies and processes, clerical support for faculty advisors, and coordination between academic and student life deans. If these conditions can be achieved, facilitating student development is possible and advising may be provided effectively by faculty or professional advisors (O'Banion, 1972).

Advising Organizational Models

Advisors interested in defining and improving the practice of advising gathered at the first National Conference on Academic Advising in 1977, which later led to the formal establishment of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) organization in 1979 (NACADA, 2006). From the 1970s to the early 2000s, there was a steady increase on college and university campuses in hiring professional academic advisors, advising administrators, and advising center clerical staff to provide advising services for students (Habley et al., 2012). The progression of professional advisors and administrators led Habley (1983, 2004) to define models of advising delivery. Habley (1983, 2004) examined the administrative structure of advising identified seven advising models practiced in higher education:

Faculty-Only Model. All students are assigned to an instructional faculty member for advising. There is no advising office.

Supplementary Model. All students are assigned to an instructional faculty member for advising. There is an advising office that provides general academic information and referrals for students, but all advising transactions must be approved by the student's faculty advisor.

Split Model. A specific group(s) of students (e.g., undecided, underprepared, etc.) are advised in an advising office. All other students are assigned to academic units or faculty advisors.

Dual Model. Each student has two advisors. A member of the instructional faculty advises the student on matters related to the major. An advisor in an advising office advises the student on general requirements, procedures, and policies.

Total Intake Model. Staff members of an administrative unit are responsible for advising all students for a specified period or until some specific requirements have been met. After meeting these requirements, students are assigned to an academic subunit or member of the instructional faculty for advising.

Satellite Model. Each school, college or division within the institution has established its own approach to advising.

Self-Contained Model. Advising for all students from the point of enrollment to the point of departure is done by staff in a centralized unit. (Habley, 1993, p. 34)

In the third advising era, the literature on advising organization models and structures primarily focused on delivery of advising and who provided the service—faculty or professional advisors (Tuttle, 2000). The debate about who should advise students creates a false dichotomy and it ultimately does not matter when the advisor is trained, acknowledged, evaluated, and focused on the importance of the position (White, 2015).

As higher education advising organizations became more complex, using multiple advising models to deliver services, there was an increased focus on identifying overall advising structures. Pardee (2000) outlined characteristics of centralized and decentralized advising structures. A decentralized organizational structure is comprised of various advising service models with faculty and professional advisors and multiple indirect reporting lines. A decentralized structure may have centralized coordination, but individual advisors and units are not held accountable by the central administrative coordinator (Pardee, 2000). In a centralized organizational structure, all advising units and advisors report directly to a central administrator. Advisors in a centralized structure can be physically located together or in multiple units across the campus (Pardee, 2000). Pardee (2000) examined studies to determine if Habley's seven advising models were associated more with centralized or decentralized structures. For example, the satellite model is often a characteristic of larger universities with decentralized advising structures. The satellite model describes advising in this study's setting of University Hills.

Institutional, student, and faculty characteristics influence types of advising organizational structures and models (Pardee, 2000, 2004). Availability of resources, such as having enough advisors and the physical space to house them, can determine whether an institution decides to

maintain its decentralized faculty advising model (Pardee, 2000, 2004). Regarding student characteristics, Pardee (2000) argued that highly diverse student populations with various needs require a centralized structure and models to provide effective support. Pardee's argument is based on advising organizational features found in centralized structures that benefit historically underrepresented student populations, such as easy access to trained advisors and cohesive services across the campus. Finally, Pardee (2000, 2004) acknowledged that there are strengths and weaknesses in all structures and models and recommended institutional assessment to ensure the advising organizational structure is aligned with the student success mission, goals, and outcomes.

Fourth Advising Era 2003–Present

The number of professional academic advisors and centralized advising organization models with administrator oversight and coordination has continued to grow in the fourth and current era (Self, 2008). NACADA sought to continue to legitimize, define, and professionalize the academic advisor profession. These efforts have been articulated through NACADA conferences and academic journals, the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education Core Advising Competencies, NACADA Concept of Advising, and Statement of Core Values (Cate & Miller, 2015).

A steady growth in advising technology, e-advising tools, and an emphasis on retention and graduation has coincided with an increase in professionally trained academic advisors on college campuses (Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Self, 2008). An advantage to adding staff academic advisors is that they are primarily focused and available to meet students' advising needs, whereas faculty's primary responsibilities are teaching and research (Self, 2008). Higher education institutions have implemented formalized training programs on advising technologies more systematically with staff advisors than with faculty advisors (Self, 2008). The introduction of e-advising tools and technology has significantly altered the delivery of advising services in the last 20 years and has further influenced the hiring of staff advisors (Leonard, 2008). Staff advisors are now expected to be conversant with advising technology tools.

Theoretical Foundation

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is helpful as a theoretical framework for understanding the process of human interactions (Munch, 1994). The theory is derived from pragmatism philosophy (Blumer, 1969). This qualitative case study centered on student-advisor interactions and whether an advising caseload model facilitates beneficial outcomes that contribute to historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and intent to persist. Symbolic interactionism is a practical theoretical lens that can be applied to understanding how people interact, perceive those interactions, and define their situations (Munch, 1994).

George Herbert Mead was a major pragmatist philosopher (Hewitt, 2003). Mead's most significant contribution was the conceptualization of the interaction between individuals and their social environment (Munch, 1994). Blumer, a former student of Mead, later coined the phrase "symbolic interactionism" for Mead's micro sociological theory (Munch, 1994). Symbolic interactionism maintains that human behavior can be understood through social interactions, and it is in these social interactions that meaning is developed through people's behavior in situations (Hewitt, 2003). Symbolic interactionists assert that people behave with purpose or goals and meaning can be found in their purpose (Hewitt, 2003). Meaning is both individual and social, and not static (Hewitt, 2003). It emerges and transforms through our interactions (Hewitt, 2003). Blumer (1969) outlined three premises of symbolic interactionism:

First premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.

Second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.

Third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.
(p. 2)

These three premises cement the role of meaning in the formation of behavior or acts (Blumer, 1969).

For symbolic interactionism, meaning emerges out of social interaction in response to issues,

problems and concerns encountered (Blumer, 1969). The sum of these social communicative acts is society (Blumer, 1969; Coser, 1977; Mead, 1934). Mead (1934) argued that the individual cannot be extracted from society:

The behavior of an individual can be understood only in terms of the behavior of the whole social group of which he is a member, since his individual acts are involved in larger, social acts which go beyond himself, and which implicate the other members of that group. (p. 6)

These social acts carried out by a collection of individuals are a combination of repeating and novel acts and experiences (Hewitt, 2003). Humans are constantly navigating situations that are familiar and unfamiliar, making new meanings and solutions to problems (Hewitt, 2003). Meaning emerges out of interaction and the interaction is a set of responses to significant gestures and symbols (Mead, 1934).

Validation Theory

Rendón's (1994) seminal work sought to establish a model of validation based on involvement theory (Astin, 1985); however, the aim was to improve academic and nonacademic experiences of historically underrepresented students. Because the curriculum predominantly excluded contributions of people of color and women, and student activities and organizations were developed and maintained for traditional students, higher education culture was alienating and intimidating for historically underrepresented students (Rendón, 1994). Rendón (1994) argued that the culture of the academy should evolve, improve, and adapt to meet the needs of growing diverse student populations enrolling in higher education. Rendón (1994) and others conducted a qualitative study to explore how students become active participants in the academic community and how interpersonal interactions outside the classroom reinforce or attenuate students' educational goals. The study took place at various institutions and 132 first-year students were intentionally chosen for diversity in personal and academic backgrounds. Focus groups were conducted, and themes were compared with involvement theory (Astin, 1985).

The study's interview revealed a theme of historically underrepresented students coming to college expecting to fail but then beginning to believe in their innate capacity to learn and be

successful students (Rendón, 1994). The researchers concluded that (a) many historically underrepresented students needed active intervention to help them navigate institutional life, (b) success in the first year depended on students getting involved on campus on their own or receiving academic and/or interpersonal validation, (c) the most vulnerable historically underrepresented students could become powerful learners with academic and/or interpersonal validation, and (d) validation may be a prerequisite for involvement to occur.

Rendón (1994) defined validation as an active, enabling, and supportive interaction that involves institutional agents such as faculty, counselors, advisors, coaches, and administrators to foster academic and interpersonal development. When students are validated, they feel capable of learning and their contributions to the college experience are accepted and recognized as valuable. Validation is a prerequisite to student development and is an ongoing process that enriches the students' academic and interpersonal college experiences. Validation should occur often and early in a students' college career, especially within the first weeks of the semester. Higher education institutions can foster validating practices through examination of demographic and student success data to better understand student populations and professional development focused on cultural awareness and sensitivity for staff and faculty (Rendón, 1994).

Sense of Belonging

In a quantitative survey study, Hurtado and Carter (1997) examined participation in student organizations and activities and how membership related to Latinx students' sense of belonging. Hurtado and Carter distinguished how a sense of belonging is theoretically and empirically different from other higher education integration measures. A sense of belonging is the combination of a psychological sense of identification and actual membership in campus life. Using psychological and behavioral measures allows researchers to understand the contributions of academic and social interaction to students' perceived bond to the campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Integration in campus life can mean something different for historically underrepresented students and women, so Hurtado and Carter recommended researchers study diverse students with various activities. A sense

of belonging for historically underrepresented students does not necessarily mean conforming to the majority campus community values (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) hypothesized that perceptions of a hostile campus climate directly affect Latino students' sense of belonging. The experience of transition into the first year of college was also hypothesized to have both direct and indirect effects on Latino students' sense of belonging. To test the relationship between ease of transition and sense of belonging, a transition-to-college construct was developed to examine this experience for a large group of students in their first year of college. Latino students' grades and participation or membership in a wide range of activities were examined to determine if these variables contributed to students' sense of belonging. The National Survey of Hispanic Students (NSHS) was completed by 287 students, and 272 students who had taken the Student Descriptive Questionnaire (SDQ) and NSHS survey instruments were chosen for the final sample. Hurtado and Carter (1997) chose to administer the NSHS survey to college sophomores because they were not too far removed from their first-year experience and could form an opinion about the campus climate. When the sample population had completed both survey instruments, they were in their third year of college and were able to report on those experiences.

The study found a strong relationship between sense of belonging and students who had frequent discussions about course content with other students and faculty outside the class, and students who tutored other students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Conversely, GPA was not significantly related to students' sense of belonging. Other activities considered high impact practices, such as undergraduate research with a faculty member, independent study, and being a guest at a professor's home were not significantly connected with a sense of belonging for Latino students. Student characteristics such as gender and academic self-concept were not significantly associated with ease of transition. Maintaining connection with family and community were essential for transition to college for Latino students. Contrary to Tinto's (2008) perspective that all student involvement can contribute to a sense of belonging to the campus community, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that religious and social-community organizations with a strong external campus affiliation contributed

significantly to students' sense of belonging, and more than ethnic student organization involvement. It was hypothesized that students may be drawn to ethnic student organizations because of shared feelings and experiences of being marginalized. This finding corresponded with students' characterizations of campus climate as having racial-ethnic tension and a lower sense of belonging. Institutions can assist the transition to college by facilitating relationship-building between diverse student groups. Hurtado and Carter (1997) recommended that additional research explore how students' memberships in various communities or subenvironments may have contributed to a students' sense of belonging.

A qualitative study explored the perceptions of 10 low-income, first-generation college students' sense of belonging in their first year at several colleges and universities (Means & Pyne, 2017). Means and Pyne (2017) were interested in identifying institutional support structures students perceived as increasing their sense of belonging. Institutional structures that increased students' sense of belonging were need-based scholarship programs, social identity-based student organizations, community-building in residence halls, supportive faculty, academic support services, and study abroad (Means & Pyne, 2017). Means and Pyne (2017) concluded that sense of belonging is not static and that some students experienced negative interactions with peers, staff, and faculty that affected their sense of belonging. Low-income and first-generation students experienced higher education as a privileged space. Means and Pyne recommended that colleges and universities should investigate their institutional structures to (a) determine whether they promote exclusion or inclusion and (b) develop equity-focused solutions to enhance sense of belonging for historically underrepresented students.

Review of the Scholarly Empirical Literature

Beneficial Advising Approaches, Practices, and Persistence

Quality academic advising is fundamental for student persistence. Academic advising is one of the only student support services intended to provide students continued interaction with institutional agents who care about students reaching graduation (Drake, 2011; Hunter & White, 2004; King,

1993). Drake (2011) illustrated that student persistence ultimately comes down to the powerful impact of positive interactions, a relationship with an advisor, and learning support. Positive interactions with an advisor who practices developmental advising can reinforce students' motivation and decisions to remain at the institution (King, 1993).

In a study of students attending a public research university, 17 senior-status student participants in three focus groups described (a) their experiences switching from a central advising center to a faculty advisor, (b) the relationships with each advisor, (c) their overall advising experiences, (d) how those experiences made them feel, and (e) whether advising affected their connection to the institution. The qualitative phenomenological research design utilized homogenous purposeful sampling to narrow the prospective participant pool to full-time enrolled students in the institution's College of Arts and Sciences who had been continuously advised in a centralized advising office for at least 1 year before transitioning to a decentralized advising model. Student participants had experienced the decentralized advising model with faculty advisors for at least 1 year, while the centralized advising office operated with professional staff advisors. Students' shared experiences with transitioning from centralized professional advising to a decentralized faculty advising model produced four themes: evaluation of advisor trustworthiness based on perceived professional responsibilities, preference for a personalized advising relationship, apprehension about the unknown, and reliance on previously developed advising expectations (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014).

Advisor trustworthiness was achieved when the student participant perceived the advisor to be an expert in the information the student was seeking (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014). For example, faculty advisors were perceived as experts in subject matter and major course work, whereas professional advisors were perceived as experts in general education courses and degree requirements for graduation (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014). Interestingly, trust was not associated with concern for students or a personal relationship. Trust developed when the advisor was able to deliver accurate information and the advisor's primary job was advising.

Although a personal relationship was not associated with trustworthiness, students consistently expressed preference for personalization in their advising relationships (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014). Participants wanted to be treated like unique individuals and their personal stories remembered by advisors. Students felt cared for when advisors took the time to get to know them. Participants who did not receive a personalized advising experience with their faculty advisors perceived their transition to the decentralized advising model as unsuccessful. If the transition from centralized advising to decentralized advising models was not fully explained to the student and the experience contrasted with what they were accustomed to in centralized advising, it also contributed to a perception that the transition was unsuccessful. Participants felt apprehension about the changing of advisors, location, and process, and previous experiences with professional advisors in the centralized advising center were used to judge the new faculty advisor. These previous experiences were both negative and positive, and resulted in the student wanting a replication of the positive experience or hoping for a positive interaction they did not previously receive. To resolve the negative advising experiences, Barker and Mamiseishvili (2014) recommended intentional planning and conversations with students about the split advising model to prepare them for the transition. Another recommendation promoted students' ability to choose assignment to a faculty advisor, a professional advisor, or both in a dual advising model, to improve overall experiences with advising.

Students who persisted at a research-intensive university in the southern region of the United States were more likely to have social connectedness and perceive staff and faculty as more approachable than students who left the university or changed majors (Roberts & Styron, 2010). This quantitative study sought to determine why students changed majors or stopped attending the institution, and students' perceptions, interactions, and experiences regarding various constructs such as academic advising and approachability of faculty and staff. A survey was administered to 172 students who had continuously enrolled and a group of students who had left the university. There was no significant difference in perceptions of academic advising between students who persisted and students who left college. However, there was a significant relationship between students who

did not persist and perceptions that staff and faculty were not approachable. Students who left college were less connected to staff and faculty. Instead of leaving the responsibility to students to approach faculty and staff, Roberts and Styron (2010) asserted that practitioners could initiate the outreach to students to develop meaningful relationships that help to engage and connect the student to the university. Furthermore, institutions can create additional opportunities to promote positive staff and faculty interactions with students to improve students' feelings of being cared for (Roberts & Styron, 2010).

There is no clear and direct evidence linking advising and retention. There is, however, a positive association between advising and variables more directly related to retention, such as student satisfaction with the college experience; effective educational, career planning, and decision making; student utilization of campus support services; student-faculty contact outside the classroom; and student mentoring (Cuseo, 2002, 2003). Cuseo reviewed research from the 1980s and 1990s by Astin (1993), Ender et al. (1984), Beal and Noel (1980), and Wyckoff (1999) indicating that college students have been largely unsatisfied with advising while expressing a strong desire for increased student-advisor interactions that are personalized. Throughout the last 30 years, institutional initiatives have emphasized improving satisfaction with advising to improve satisfaction with the college experience that could potentially lead to increased retention outcomes. In addition to reviewing the empirical literature, Cuseo provided definitions of quality advising that can guide improvements of advising organizations, processes, and services. These definitions highlight the student-advisor interactions, relationships, and the developmental approach of the advisor to collaborate and support student decision and goal making. From this, Cuseo developed a definition of a quality advisor:

The one institutional representative with whom each student can have continuous contact and an ongoing relationship that may endure throughout the college experience . . . is an experienced guide who helps students navigate the bureaucratic maze of institutional policies and administrative protocol, and a referral agent who directs and connects students to campus support services that best serve their needs. (p. 12)

To improve college student persistence factors that advising can impact or provide, the quality of advising services and advisors should be enhanced in a way to better offer developmental advising approach (Cuseo, 2002, 2003). Cuseo recommended systemic strategies to support the transition to a developmental advising approach. These strategies included (a) providing strong incentives and rewards for advisors who engage in quality advising; (b) strengthening advisor onboarding, training, and development; (c) assessing and evaluating the quality of academic advisement; (d) maintaining advisor-to-student ratios that promote the delivery of personalized advising; (e) providing incentives for students to meet consistently with their advisors; (f) front-loading highly effective and experienced advisors to work with first-year and second-year students; and (g) intentionally recruiting caring and effective advisors. Finally, Cuseo acknowledged the cost of these systemic strategies and encouraged institutions to devote resources and effort to impact college student retention.

Academic advising has been shown to positively impact student academic performance, improve student self-efficacy, study skills, and perceived sense of institutional support (Young et al., 2013). A quantitative study by Young et al. (2013) intentionally focused on more than student satisfaction with advising, rather it identified academic advising contributions to student development, constructs of retention, and academic success. This study examined the results of a survey taken by 611 predominantly White undergraduate students in a psychology department at a large midwestern public university. The survey instrument had a 7-point scale measuring students' self-assessment of their engagement, attitudes towards responsibility, decision making, future planning, perceived support, expectations for advising experiences, frequency of advising meetings, demographics, and first-generation college status (Young et al., 2013). Findings highlighted a relationship between higher academic performance, meeting with an advisor often, student self-efficacy, study skills, and perceived support and empowerment from the academic advisor. In their examination of the outcomes of meeting with an academic advisor for specific demographic groups, Young et al. (2013) found that first-generation college students had lower levels of self-efficacy. This finding informed their recommendation for advisors to provide extra attention to empowering and teaching students

about higher education requirements and resources available to them (Young et al., 2013). Although this study was unable to demonstrate positive impacts for historically underrepresented groups, it did provide a link between advising and student achievement.

California State University (CSU) campuses focused on improving retention, graduation, and equity gap rates have sought to enhance the coordination of academic advising services to better support students (Moore et al., 2018). In a qualitative exploratory study, Moore et al. (2018) investigated CSU campuses' response to retention, graduation, and equity goals set by the GI 2025 through improvement in academic advising organizations. Many CSU campus academic advising organizations and services are decentralized, and services distributed across multiple divisions and offices. In-depth interviews of 36 administrators at five CSU campuses revealed five strategies to coordinate efforts to leverage limited advising resources: (a) developing advising councils, committees, task forces, and summits to improve communication, align efforts, and integrate planning; (b) e-advising tools to support workflow, analytical functions, holistic and proactive approach to academic advising; (c) professional development trainings and events; (d) shared positions and cross-functional advising teams to encourage cross-unit collaboration; and (e) a designated single senior administrator with campus-wide advising oversight. The creation of a senior advising administrator did not always improve coordination and accountability because reporting lines to campus advising units were mostly indirect and the administrator lacked authority. All CSU campuses in the study were identified as needing a focus on specific evidence-based efforts in advising to address equity gaps and development of a plan to assess those interventions.

In a follow-up study, Moore (2019) highlighted the voices of students, faculty, and staff advisors to discuss challenges and perspectives on how to improve advising on their CSU campuses. The advisors and students came from five large CSU campuses with enrollments over 20,000 students. Despite having goals to provide holistic and personalized advising, the study revealed that the five CSU campuses had advising services still concentrated on course selection and program planning. In addition, 88 ethnically and racially diverse students in 14 student focus groups preferred

advising to be more personalized and holistic, and less prescriptive and routinized. When CSU students experienced personalized and holistic advising, it often occurred in specialized programs such as EOP. Staff advisors preferred to provide a holistic approach to advising; whereas faculty advisors were more in favor of program planning and viewed facilitating student development as less appropriate for their roles. Students confirmed the gap in advising approaches by describing how EOP counselors fulfilled their needs for holistic support and making appointments with the central advising center to get course enrollment information (Moore et al., 2019).

Fragmented advising organizational models created significant challenges to providing consistent messaging, information, training, and services (Moore et al., 2019). These fragmented advising organizations are characterized as lacking central authority and coordination and are highly siloed. Students reported that they were unsure of where to go for advising, especially when the CSU campuses had numerous advising organizational models consisting of variation between professional staff and faculty advisors. Students described being passed around campus from office to office, and when students did receive advising they found the information inconsistent and unreliable. Students also had difficulty with accessing advisors because of the limited number of advisors, inconvenient times advising was available, and long wait lines for rushed drop-in advising appointments. Students expressed a desire for virtual online advising appointments, however during the time of this study, most of the CSUs primarily offered in-person advising. The lack of access to advising created especially negative effects for historically underrepresented student populations who needed to work part- or full-time jobs, commute to campus, and care for family members (Moore et al., 2019).

Staff advisors were more encouraged by the introduction of e-advising tools to support student degree planning than faculty advisors; however, both groups indicated implementation challenges to these tools. Overall advisors felt they did not receive enough training on the e-advising tools and thought their campuses could do more to support student adoption of the tools. The disparity in training among staff and faculty advisors resulted in limited adoption of the tools and advisors still relying on paper copies of degree plans. Advisors even found the tools inaccurate and discouraged

students from using them. Students who did use the tool often taught themselves and valued the combination of in-person advising and e-advising technology (Moore et al., 2019).

The student and advisor participants came to similar solutions to improve accessibility and the quality of advising services and interactions (Moore et al., 2019). Both advisors and students thought advising should be mandatory for the first year of college, there should be more advising touchpoints throughout the students' college careers and meaningful and personalized interactions, advising services should be provided after "business hours" online or in-person, and additional advisors should be hired. Regarding centralizing advising organizations, advisors were less excited about modifications to reporting lines to improve coordination and cohesion across advising units. About 85% of staff advisors were enthusiastic about the hiring of additional advisors; whereas 48% of faculty advisors thought that solution would be effective. Staff advisors were more interested in creating consistent processes across units than faculty advisors, and faculty advisors were generally more unaware of strategies to improve advising than staff advisors (Moore et al., 2019). Moore et al. found the advisors' responses to be consistent with their specific roles and their feedback for areas of improvement important for CSU campuses to consider in development of advising strategies.

In their review of the research literature, Brown and Rivas (1993) outlined issues faced by multicultural student populations and the awareness and skills advisors need to facilitate academic achievement when working with diverse student populations. Advisors should adjust their advising strategies and have awareness of cultural differences to accommodate the immediate needs of students of color. More specifically, advisors should be aware of and understand critical issues and appropriate responses when working with multicultural populations, including (a) the racialized experience of diverse students, (b) their experiences with racism and discrimination, (c) cultural differences with sharing personal information, and (d) possible preference for family-centered and group orientations (Brown & Rivas, 1993).

This awareness produces sensitivity and concern, leading to a higher level of respect for diverse students' identity development (Brown & Rivas, 1993). To improve the advising experience

for historically underrepresented students, Brown and Rivas recommended that advisors should ask about students' previous advising experiences, maintain awareness of their identity development, and have high expectations for their advisees. An effective multicultural advisor is also aware of diversity within student populations and supportive of identity development for students of color. Brown and Rivas highlighted research on the Sacramento City College Puente Project (Lachica & Sherwood, 1989) as an example of how advisors utilized motivational and behavioral skills as a model to improve academic performance. An effective multicultural advisor does not need to share an ethnic or racial background with their students. Finally, an effective multicultural advisor for diverse students, regardless of the advisor's ethnic or racial background, is self-reflective of their biases and seeks to understand differences (Brown & Rivas, 1993).

Advisors who contribute to students of color success practice humanized, holistic, and proactive advising approaches (Museus & Ravello, 2010). A qualitative study by Museus and Ravello investigated academic advisors' attributes at three predominantly White institutions (PWI) to identify advisors' contributions to ethnic minority student success. Study site institutions were selected because they had higher graduation rates for historically underrepresented students than the national average and either a small equity gap or no equity gap. The sample included 14 advisors and 31 Asian American, Black, and Latinx students. Half of the advisors who participated in the study were from equal opportunity programs that provided targeted advising interventions and had smaller advisee caseloads. Advisors who cared about students' personal lives and shared their personal experiences created beneficial interactions with students. Both advisors and students interviewed saw the importance of advisors' intentionality providing multiple forms of support and resources for students, including financial aid information, emotional well-being and academic support, and referrals to other caring practitioners (Museus & Ravello, 2010).

Ethnically and racially underrepresented students felt cared for when their advisors intentionally reached out before the students expressed a need to be advised. Furthermore, advisors who consistently monitored students' grades, implemented mandatory advising appointments, and

established proactive advising efforts facilitated student retention (Museus & Ravello, 2010). The Museus and Ravello (2010) study is important for the literature because it focused on effective advising practices and their relation to student success outcomes for racially and ethnically underrepresented students, and not merely satisfaction with advising.

When academic advisors are culturally competent and critically aware of systemic racism and racialized experiences, they can improve the advising and college experiences for racially minoritized students (Lee, 2018; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). Advisors who are not knowledgeable about Black and African American student experiences, and do not desire to improve the advising interaction, fail to produce a positive relationship with this student population (Lee, 2018). Critical race theory (CRT) and other social justice theories can be used as lenses to improve advising interactions with students of color (Lee, 2018). Advisors can confront both Eurocentric and male-centric views and provide more inclusive advising using inclusive competencies (Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). Advisors can connect students of color to resources, other staff, faculty, and information to holistically support the students (Lee, 2018). When students share that they have experienced racism in the classroom or in another education setting, the advisor can listen, believe, and validate them (Lee, 2018; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). Lee (2018) encouraged advisor self-reflection on their own racialized identity and biases that could affect their advising practices with students of color.

Proactive Advising

Initially known as intrusive advising, the proactive advising approach is a strategic intervention to support students holistically before they request assistance (Varney, 2013). Proactive advising is not necessarily a singular occurrence, it is continuous and aims to cultivate a healthy academic and personal relationship with the student. By reaching out early and often, the academic advisor helps the student understand how advising works and what advisors can do to support students' college careers (Varney, 2013). To effectively deploy proactive strategies, advisors should be knowledgeable about campus resources and student success partners by name, continually develop their counseling and listening skills, and have an active concern for students' well-being. Proactive advising strategies

are most effective when implemented in the first weeks of college and at other critical times such as after grades are posted. Developing a calendar of outreach efforts is effective in ensuring that communications are organized and consistent. Finally, Varney (2013) suggested that a practical solution for advisors with large student caseloads is to be strategic in deciding, which students to contact. Proactive efforts should concentrate on students with the highest need.

As the focus shifted in higher education from access to retention, restructuring advising services and organizations to provide more sustainable proactive advising approaches has been acknowledged as a solution to increase graduation rates (Donaldson et al., 2016). Donaldson et al. pointed out issues with community college advising programs, including uncoordinated efforts across the college, high student-to-advisor ratios, lack of assigned advisors, and lack of continuity and support from orientation to the end of a 2-year degree. Many of these same problems plagued large public state universities' advising programs that serve students with similar demographic characteristics. In a qualitative single-case study, Donaldson et al. analyzed a large urban community college's first-year academic advising program that conducted mandatory advising appointments and assigned advising activities such as career and self-assessments and use of degree planning tools.

First-year community college students were asked about perceived benefits and experiences with the proactive advising program (Donaldson et al., 2016). There was a lack of accountability and follow-up from advisors to determine if students completed advising activities. However, students believed they benefited from being required to meet with an advisor, having an assigned advisor who remembered and understood their needs, and asking questions that were important to them. Ensuring students attended advising appointments conflicted with motivating students to schedule advising meetings on their own (Donaldson et al., 2016).

Proactive advising approaches could be more beneficial early in a student's career to demystify the college advising experience and develop a supportive relationship with the assigned advisor (Donaldson et al., 2016). Nevertheless, if advisors are not intentional with providing holistic advising and referring students to campus resources, their early outreach effort may do little to

enhance the students' social and academic integration. Donaldson et al. pointed to high student caseloads and less advisor availability as detractors from proactive advising strategies that should be mitigated. Unfortunately, a practical solution for reasonable student to advisor ratios was not offered. Future studies of proactive advising programs and services were encouraged to include assessments of student-advisor relationships and the viewpoints of advisors and administrators (Donaldson et al., 2016).

Institutional agents who take initiative to provide students with valuable information and guidance demonstrate a personal investment in students' success (Museus & Neville, 2012). Students of color who felt cared for and had shared experiences with their institutional agents developed trust and relationships (Museus & Neville, 2012). Museus and Neville conducted semistructured interviews with 60 Asian American, Black, and Latina(o) student participants at four PWIs. Participants described characteristics and behaviors of institutional agents that provided students more access to social capital. Social capital was examined in this qualitative study as the culmination of resources, information, and connection to social, professional, academic networks that can benefit students (Museus & Neville, 2012). Proactive outreach to provide social capital was one of four institutional agent characteristics reported by students of color as making a positive impact on their college experience. Students felt cared for, valued, and important when an institutional agent proactively engaged them (Museus & Neville, 2012). These positive emotions led to the cultivation of beneficial relationships with institutional agents. Proactive engagement became much more impactful when students engaged in personalized and holistic interactions with institutional agents. In fact, the early outreach and access to social capital was influenced by students' unique needs and ambitions shared in personalized interactions. Institutional agents' willingness and skill in providing holistic and personalized support and proactive engagement may be critical factors in historically underrepresented student success (Museus & Neville, 2012).

Consistent, Frequent, and Continuous Advising Interactions

Latinx community college student participation in support programs with positive and frequent interactions with institutional agents has a small, but significant impact on their academic success and intent to persist to earn a degree (Tovar, 2015). In a study consisting of 397 Latinx community college students, in at least their second semester of college, Tovar (2015) examined the relationship between institutional agents' influence on GPA and students' intent to persist. The student sample was 56% female to 44% male, 75% were first-generation college students, and 86% expressed a desire to pursue a bachelor's degree. The students in the sample participated in Extended Opportunities Program and Services (EOPS), Latino/a Center, or the Scholars Program at a large, urban, diverse community college in California. In the regression model, the highest predictor of academic success was the frequency of interactions between students and their instructors outside the class. Furthermore, instructors and counselors who had career-related conversations with students made a significant positive difference in students' GPA (Tovar, 2015).

Student support programs designed to have frequent interactions and beneficial relationships with faculty and counselors resulted in either academic success or intent to persist among Latinx students in the study (Tovar, 2015). Tovar asserted that providing frequent academic support was not enough for Latinx student success and counselors should address students' personal and career needs. More importantly, institutions should find a way to scale up these beneficial efforts by expanding advising and counseling services to reach more students. In addition to providing additional staff members, Tovar advised institutional agents receive appropriate training in cultural competency and advising approaches to support students' strengths to persist and succeed (Tovar, 2015).

Students are more satisfied with advisors who are available, spend time with them, are knowledgeable, and motivate them (Sheldon et al., 2015). Three studies were conducted at the University of Missouri, a large public, land-grant institution. A 15-item quantitative Missouri Advisor Quality Survey was developed to determine advising quality based on students' perceptions of

advisors as knowledgeable, available, and *autonomy supportive*. Autonomy supportive is the extent to which the advisor motivates the student and supports their self-determination and internal agency. The researchers deployed concepts of self-determination theory in the survey instrument to measure autonomy supportive. The Advisor Quality Survey was administered to 1,632 students at the University of Missouri in various colleges on the campus. Students who did not complete the survey were removed, and the final sample consisted of 818 students—305 men and 512 women. Sheldon et al. (2015) found that the instrument's subscales predicted student satisfaction with the advisor and that higher advisor autonomy support was the strongest predictor of academic achievement. Students in the sample were satisfied with advisors who took the time to mentor, motivate, and encourage student self-advocacy.

Most of the final sample respondents identified as White ($n = 678$) and 140 identified as students of color. The 140 racial and ethnic minority students in the sample expressed higher levels of dissatisfaction with their advising experiences. The researchers hypothesized that the dissatisfaction with advising could be due to racial bias toward the students from the advisors. The assessment of quality advising reveals how time spent mentoring and being available has been related to positive student academic outcomes and satisfaction of advising for White students (Sheldon et al., 2015). Although the researchers were able to measure elements of quality advising and not just satisfaction with advising, the perspectives of racially and ethnically underrepresented students were not included to explain the reasons for dissatisfaction with advising.

Frequency and quality of student faculty advisor interactions were statistically significant factors in academic advising at a private liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest (DeLaRosby, 2017). In a quantitative study, DeLaRosby (2017) concentrated on students' characteristics and experiences in advising that influenced their satisfaction to examine the academic advising relationship. The premise of this study was that higher levels of satisfaction of advising had an indirect influence on student retention. In a random sample, 372 students completed the survey with 76.4% respondents identifying as White, and 72.8% identifying as women. The hierarchical multiple

regression analysis showed that students who were satisfied with the quality of advising, and amount of time spent with their faculty advisors tended to have higher satisfaction with advising in general. Frequent interactions between faculty advisors and students led to higher levels of satisfaction. Faculty advisor-student relationships were also greater indicators of satisfaction than students' characteristics such as race and gender, which did not impact satisfaction with academic advising. This study did not connect satisfaction with advising to retention data, nor did the study explore the reasons that led to satisfaction with the faculty advisor experience (DeLaRosby, 2017).

Quantitative evaluations of advising have demonstrated a correlation between frequency of advising and satisfaction with advising; however, this was limited in investigating whether the advising interaction met the students' specific needs (Hester, 2008). Hester (2008) conducted a quantitative study of student advising evaluations for the department of Audiology, Speech-Language Pathology and Deaf Studies at Towson University. The study examined student advising evaluations over a 5-year period to look for relationships between frequency of advising appointments and satisfaction, GPA and increased advising appointments, and increased knowledge due to advising sessions. A significant positive correlation was evident between the frequency of advising appointments and satisfaction with advising. However, there was no significant relationship between GPA and frequency of advising appointments, and there was a significant negative correlation between the class level and knowledge received from advising sessions. The quantitative advising evaluations did not fully capture specific student needs; and therefore, did not fully measure the value of advising, the effectiveness of advising, and satisfaction with advising. A shortcoming of quantitative advising evaluation instruments is that a student may indicate not receiving a service from their advisor, not because the advisor performed poorly, but because the student did not need the service. Hester (2008) contended that more complex evaluations that gather qualitative and quantitative data are needed to better evaluate the effectiveness of advising in meeting students' needs.

First time, first-year students at a 2-year community/technical college who met consistently with their faculty advisor earned higher overall GPAs and reenrolled the following semester at a

higher rate than students who did not experience frequent student-faculty advisor interactions (Ryan, 2013). A quantitative study evaluated a pilot program designed to improve student retention by placing specially trained instructors into first-year seminar courses who also provided individual and group advising sessions to students enrolled in the course. A control group was made up of six first-year seminar courses with regularly trained instructors who did not provide academic advising was used to compare academic outcomes with the experimental group. Experimental group instructors were provided 3 hours of additional training and were incentivized with a \$500 voucher. Because the experimental instructors also served as the student's primary academic advisor, frequency of student-faculty interactions increased in and out of the classroom.

A quantitative survey was administered to 37 student participants who were asked questions that focused on students' perception of whether they had a positive relationship with their faculty advisor, felt cared for, how frequently they met, and if there were any learning outcomes from advising sessions (Ryan, 2013). Student participants mostly agreed that they had benefited from having an accessible faculty advisor who increased their knowledge about graduation requirements; however, they only somewhat agreed that their faculty advisor helped them choose a career path during the semester. The combination of personalized advising and frequent advisor-student interactions in the first semester led to higher retention rates throughout the first year in college for students in the experimental group (Ryan, 2013). Academic and retention outcomes demonstrated the importance of having a structured first-semester advising and college seminar program.

Assigned Advisor and Case Management Approach

Gilroy (2003) acknowledged a lack of research and literature on advising caseloads and whether they are an effective delivery model for advising services. Studies have typically focused on student caseload sizes. Furthermore, there is difficulty identifying the appropriate student-to-advisor ratio when the students' needs vary (Gilroy, 2003). Recent contributions to the research on advising caseloads and case management have focused on strategic management of student caseloads by leveraging technology, group advising, and focusing on student needs.

The 2011 NACADA National Survey of Academic Advising determined that the median caseload for large institutions was 600 advisees per advisor, and the median caseload for public master's degree institutions was 300 advisees per advisor regardless of institution size (Robbins, 2013). These national medians fail to provide information about effectiveness of the caseload size because of the differences in students' needs, programs, institutions, and advisor administrative or teaching duties (Robbins, 2013). The appropriate caseload size should be determined by the level of support essential to meet specific student population needs (Applegate & Hartleroad, 2011). There can be considerable differences in student populations needs, colleges, departments, and majors that make caseload ratios difficult to compare at a large public university.

Leveraging group advising and technology can be an effective solution for delivering advising services to large student caseloads (Applegate & Hartleroad, 2011; Richardson, 2008; Robbins, 2013). By disseminating transactional or prescriptive advising information using e-advising tools, the advisor can meet some student needs without meeting in person for student appointments (Robbins, 2013). To combat large and overwhelming caseloads, Applegate and Hartleroad (2011) recommended mandatory group advising sessions in a student's first semester to disseminate similar information about the major, requirements, and resources more efficiently than with individual appointments. Organizing the caseload into subpopulations based on academic progress and performance could help to manage large caseloads (Applegate & Hartleroad, 2011). The practices of tracking student data with extensive spreadsheets and managing student needs through an internal coding system are increasingly replaced by e-advising and analytics platforms (e.g., EAB Navigate) that do this work for the advisor.

The institution's advising mission statement and expectations related to how many times an advisor is expected to reach out to their student caseload also impact the variation of experiences for advisors and students in an advising caseload model (Robbins, 2013). However, if the advising caseload model is implemented, it should be assessed to determine if it facilitates the achievement of institutional student success objectives, advising mission statement, and student needs (Richardson,

2008; Robbins, 2013). White (2015) contended that advising is one of the few services that can be organized to reach all students and that students should have an assigned advisor. If a beneficial student-to-advisor relationship is an essential component to improving student engagement and persistence, then having an assigned advisor intentionally designs the opportunity for that relationship to be cultivated (Richardson, 2008). Because of the potential to reach all students, White (2015) supported a caseload model while leveraging multiple advising approaches such as using technology and group advising to support an entire student population effectively. When student-to-advisor ratios are unsustainable for delivering advising services using the caseload model, White's (2015) solution was to delegate advisor administrative assignments to someone else instead of hiring more advisors. Delegating work to limited staff may not be practical or sustainable for large under resourced public higher education institutions.

Community college students on nine campuses who had more positive and higher quality experiences with counseling services participated in a program with consistent and continuous interactions with their assigned counselor (Orozco et al., 2010). Students felt cared for and validated and built strong relationships with their assigned program counselors. Supportive counselors were described as practitioners who took time to listen to students' needs, provided basic educational planning and a holistic advising approach, and were understanding and sensitive to students' diverse backgrounds. Four themes emerged from this qualitative grounded theory research study: differences in the use of counseling and advising services, the importance of the relationship between counselor and student, knowing the system, and cultural understanding of racism (Orozco et al., 2010). Of 363 students interviewed, 46% participated in support programs such as EOPS, Puente, CalWORKs, and CARE. Majority of the participants were female, Latinx, received financial aid, and aspired to transfer to a 4-year university to earn a bachelor's degree (Orozco et al., 2010). White and Asian students were more likely to use counseling services and complained about their quality. Latinx, African American, and Native American students were less likely to seek out advising/counseling services. Researchers did not describe proactive outreach initiated by the counselor.

General counselors were perceived as less caring, relatable, and available than counselors in support programs (Orozco et al., 2010). Lack of access to general counselors due to high student to advisor ratios and short 30-minute appointments resulted in students feeling rushed and lacking appropriate and timely information. Lack of access to counseling and important information can lead to dropping out of community college for vulnerable historically underrepresented student populations. Students who had more positive and higher quality experiences with advising and counseling participated in a program with more opportunities to develop relationships with their program advisor or counselor. Participating in support programs also contributed to a sense of belonging to a community of peers and counselors with similar diverse backgrounds and identities. This shared community created a protective element for some students who experienced racism in the classroom and with other counselors and staff members. Orozco et al. (2010) recommended institutions find ways to improve access to counseling services and develop strategies to scale up the beneficial features of model student support programs.

Technology and Strategic Management of Advising

In the past 20 years, the use of technology in advising has increased to improve advising services' efficiency and effectiveness (Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Tuttle, 2000). To improve academic advising's positive effects, higher education institutions have made advising mandatory and more accessible by providing services in an online format (Gilroy, 2003). Tuttle (2000) projected a burden of training needs and expenses with the introduction of technology that could negate the benefits for managing high student caseload numbers. Conversely, Hunter and White (2004) claimed that a characteristic of a quality advising program was using technology to answer common advising questions to free the advisor's time to conduct more meaningful and developmental advising sessions. Teaching students how to self-advise, specifically for course selection, is a way to leverage e-advising tools for under-resourced community colleges with large student-to-advisor ratios (Hu, 2020; Jaggars & Karp, 2016). Technology can also facilitate enhanced advising efforts including

mandatory advising appointments and strategic proactive advising to specific student populations (Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013).

The ideal advising system is a combination of academic and career guidance delivered in a multiphase process (Karp & Stacey, 2013). This ideal advising deploys a developmental advising approach in a personalized student-advisor interaction sustained beyond the first semester or year in college (Karp & Stacey, 2013). Like large, urban, public 4-year institutions, community colleges often fail to implement this ideal advising system because of high student-to-advisor ratios, leading to infrequent and rushed advising appointments (Karp & Stacey, 2013). Other issues plague community college advising systems, such as advising for immediate needs instead of long-term planning and the absence of assigned advisors (Karp & Stacey, 2013). When students do not have an assigned advisor, it can lead to advising appointment scheduling difficulties and a different advisor for each meeting (Karp & Stacey, 2013).

Karp and Stacey (2013) advocated for enhanced advising as a solution, which “often consists of mandatory meetings and longer advising sessions with a single assigned advisor” (p. 2). For enhanced advising to be implemented at under-resourced institutions there must be a realization that not all students can or should receive the same level of enhanced advising (Karp & Stacey, 2013). Karp and Stacey (2013) recommended that enhanced advising should be implemented strategically, with scheduled outreach efforts at specific academic milestones, prolonged support beyond the first year, and focus on students with the highest need early in their college career. To be effective, enhanced advising should leverage technology such as e-advising tools to free up advisors’ time for developmental advising and identify students with high need (Karp & Stacey, 2013). Technology on its own is not the answer. Students still want and need to have in-person advising interactions, and technology should facilitate a well-designed strategic advising system (Karp & Stacey, 2013). Furthermore, if e-advising tools are confusing to use for students and advisors, that will negate their ability to be effective and efficient in advising (Karp & Stacey, 2013).

Joslin (2018) highlighted the importance of having strategic, cohesive, and coordinated advising organizations on college campuses. Higher education institutions are often plagued by disjointed efforts and irregularity in quality of advisors and services in the various models (Joslin, 2018). The growth of nonprofit organizations and their partnership with technology platforms focused on improving the dysfunctional aspects of student support services and graduation rates (Joslin, 2018). Joslin (2018) encouraged the adoption of technology and the implementation of strategic plans with clear missions and goals that encompass advisor training, early alerts, advising practices, processes, and policies that all emphasize improving the advising interaction. Implementing an e-advising tool without affecting the entire system of an advising organization has only short-term positive effects and often dissolves with leadership change (Joslin, 2018). Ultimately, it does not matter who does the advising—faculty or professional advisors—if they operate in a system that is cohesive, coordinated, mission driven, offers training, practices quality advising, and “maximizes the advisor-student relationship” (Joslin, 2018, p.14).

Steele (2018) discussed how technology could be used in advising to improve learning outcomes for students. Steele (2018) recommended using Learning Management Systems (LMS), such as Canvas, Moodle, or Blackboard to incorporate a curriculum that engages students to self-reflect on career and academic goals and plans. The advantage of these LMS platforms for pre-advising assignments is that students can come to advising appointments prepared and advisors can track the completion of assignments or self-assessments (Steele, 2018). Steele claimed that student caseloads could also be managed in LMS platforms; however, it is unclear how students would be motivated to complete advising assignments outside the first-year college success course.

Lack of access to resources like technology is a long-standing problem made worse for historically marginalized students by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hu, 2020). Academic advising can respond by increasing the accessibility and effectiveness of advising through relationship building in a remote and online environment (Hu, 2020). Hu maintained that the model of providing individual one-on-one advising appointments is not feasible for large community colleges with elevated student-to-

advisor ratios. Hu did not provide solutions for high student-to-advisor ratios directly, but instead highlighted the value of e-advising tools in providing campuses with the ability to conduct proactive early alert warnings, collaborate across divisions, and restructure the advising organization to meet student needs. Colleges that waited to implement e-advising tools have been jolted by the necessity to adopt online technology platforms and develop plans to improve “technology-mediated advising” (Hu, 2020, p. 3). The adoption of technology-mediated advising should not be a temporary trend and ought to be improved upon to increase access for historically marginalized students (Hu, 2020). Furthermore, advising technology tools or platforms coupled with positive interactions between advisor and student tend to be effective for historically marginalized students (Hu, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is guided by symbolic interactionism, validation theory, and sense of belonging (see Figure 1). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine a caseload model at University Hills and investigate effects of the model for first- and second-year historically underrepresented students in improving student-advisor interactions and relationships that contribute to sense of belonging. Symbolic interactionism is a practical theoretical lens that can be applied to understanding how people interact, perceive those interactions, and define their situations (Munch, 1994). The components of an advising caseload model at University Hills were assigned academic advisors for first-year and second-year students, personalized interactions, and proactive, consistent, and continuous outreach. The study investigated University Hills’ proposition that the caseload model components would come together to produce outcomes such as meaningful relationships and validating interactions.

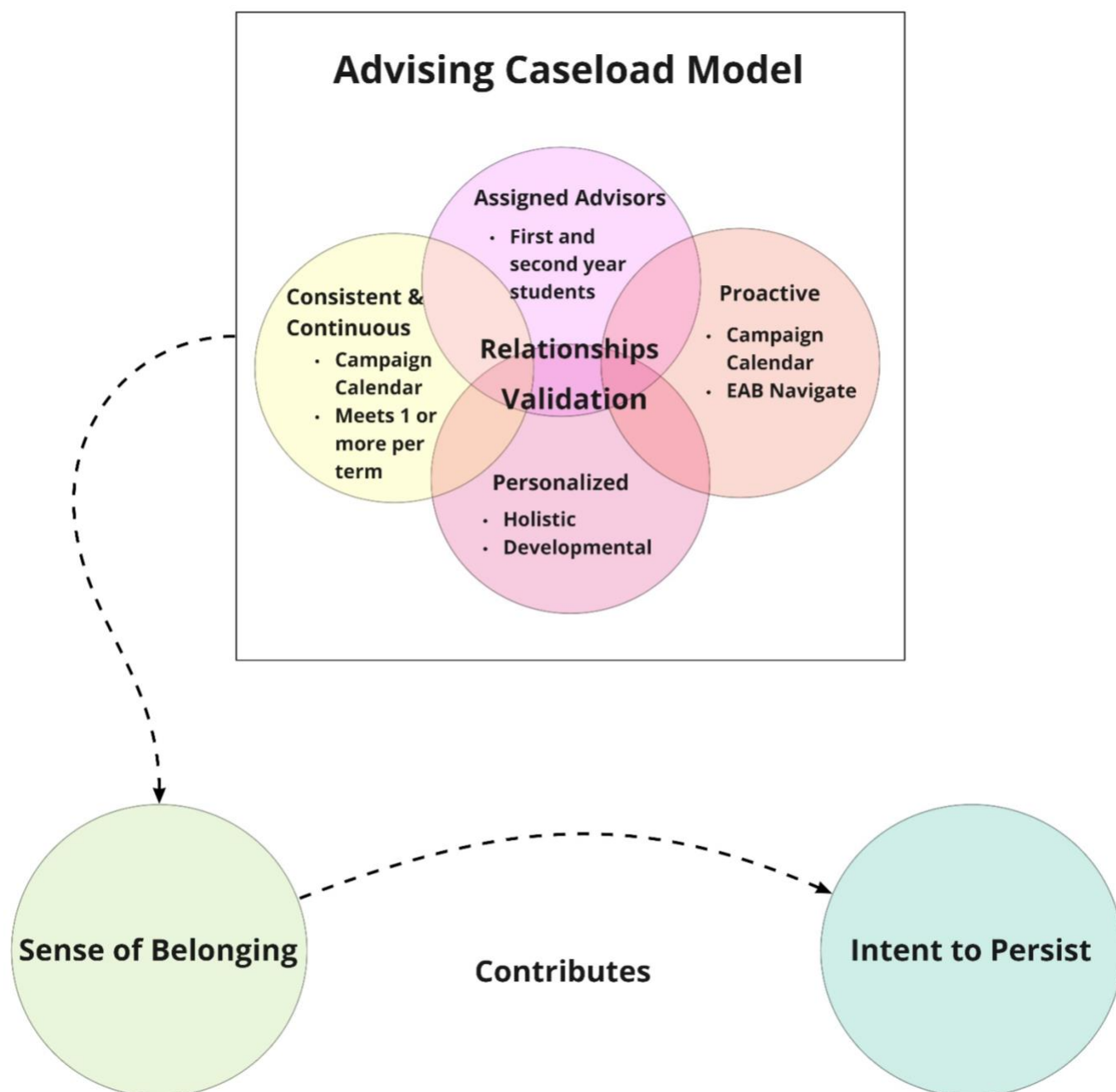


Figure 1. Conceptual framework diagram.

When validation is present, students benefit from ongoing, supportive advisor interactions that produce feelings in students of being valued, having self-worth, and being capable of succeeding and contributing to the learning environment (Rendón, 1994). Beginning the process of validation places responsibility on the advisor to initiate proactive outreach to students (Rendón, 2002). Sense of belonging is the psychological sense of feeling validated, respected, accepted as a member on campus, cared for, and supported socially on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2019).

Sense of belonging has been shown to influence intentions to persist and institutional commitment (Barnett, 2011; Hausmann et al., 2007), and symbolic interactionism provides a framework for analyzing interactions and experiences that result in feelings of validation and belonging. Using a case study research design, this study provided insights as to how the advising caseload model, in its processes and structures, facilitates outcomes such as students' sense of belonging, validation, and intent to persist. This study elicited feedback from advisors and students about their interactions and benefits of the caseload model as a structure to improve historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and intent to persist.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine an advising caseload model at University Hills for first-year and second-year students, and how the model improved student-advisor interactions and relationship-building that contribute to sense of belonging and intent to persist for historically underrepresented students. This chapter began with an overview of the philosophical, historical, and theoretical foundations of the study. I reviewed the research literature on student-advisor interactions, advisor behaviors and approaches, and advising organization models related to student success outcomes. Symbolic interactionism, validation theory, and sense of belonging provide the guiding theoretical framework to better understand (a) historically underrepresented students' and professional advisors' behaviors, feelings, and experiences, (b) student-advisor interactions, and (c) how students and advisors make meaning of their interactions.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD OF INQUIRY

Research has demonstrated that traditional advising practices are limited and do not provide beneficial approaches such as proactive, personalized, and consistent student-advisor interactions that contribute to students' sense of belonging (Deil-Amen, 2011; Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klemplin et al., 2019; Lawton, 2018; Moore et al., 2018, 2019; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 2002; Tovar, 2015). Specialized programs that offer beneficial advising approaches for historically underrepresented students are not designed to support an entire university's student population (CCCSE, 2014; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Lawton, 2018; Tovar, 2015). California State University campuses lack a cohesive plan to scale-up specialized programs' beneficial features to enhance the advising experience and improve sense of belonging for their entire historically underrepresented student population (Moore et al., 2018, 2019).

University Hills (pseudonym) is one case from the CSU system in which a caseload model for all first-year and second-year students has been implemented as one of the many solutions to address retention issues, the equity gap, and a lack of personalized and proactive advising, and improve students' sense of belonging. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine an advising caseload model at University Hills for first-year and second-year students, and how the model facilitated student-advisor interactions and relationships that contributed to sense of belonging and intent to persist for historically underrepresented students.

The following research questions guided this qualitative case study:

1. In what ways is an advising caseload model that centers on building proactive, personalized, and continuous student-advisor relationships beneficial for historically underrepresented students?
 - a. What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' sense of belonging?
 - b. What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' intent to persist?

This chapter outlines the methodology for this case study, including a discussion of the study's philosophical foundations. A description of the research design follows the description of the methodological approach. In addition, I detail specific research methods including information about the setting, sample, data collection, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness, and role of the researcher. I conclude the chapter with a summary.

Qualitative Research

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended using qualitative research methodology when the issue is not easily measured, such as the reasons for students' intent to persist in college. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) defined qualitative research as activities to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 10). Qualitative research was the most appropriate methodology to answer this study's research questions about how a caseload model facilitated student-advisor relationships and contributed to historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and intent to persist. This study used a qualitative research methodology approach to understand the meaning and complexity of students' and professional advisors' experiences, motivations, behaviors, and feelings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Analysis of data from semistructured group interviews with students, advisor surveys, and documents enabled me to interpret the meaning and complexity of the setting being studied (Patton, 2015).

Qualitative research methods and design allowed for better understanding of students' and advisors shared or diverse experiences within an advising caseload model. In addition, to develop practices and improve policies and processes that support the beneficial aspects of those interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A goal of the study was to find a connection between an intentional personal and proactive advising approach associated with the caseload model that helped historically underrepresented students feel they belonged on campus, and they mattered. A potential challenge in qualitative research is ensuring all individuals have experienced a similar phenomenon; however, this can be overcome with purposeful selection of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This case study employed pragmatism as the philosophical framework that guided the research design and methods. Pragmatism as a philosophical framework is concerned with the outcome of actions and is well suited for a qualitative research study that seeks to solve a practical problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2015). Pragmatism became a leading American philosophy at the University of Chicago, where sociologists and philosophers advanced microsocial empirical studies of immigrants in Chicago's urban environment using qualitative methods (Munch, 1994). The Chicago School Pragmatists concentrated on the microsocial perspective—the individual human experience—of the immigrants and how they symbolically defined their situations, themselves, and their social interactions (Munch, 1994). Pragmatism is an applied research philosophy focused on the consequences and meaning of an experience and supports multiple methods of social science inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The philosophy maintains that thinking, formulating ideas, and making meaning are behaviors or activities that can be observed by the researcher (Allan, 2005; Hewitt, 2003).

Pragmatism as a framework for qualitative research supports a case study design and multiple sources of data to effectively answer the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pragmatism guides the researcher in asking questions to obtain practical insights and actionable answers (Patton, 2015). For example, the practical outcomes from learning how an advising caseload model facilitates student-advisor relationships can contribute to a students' sense of belonging, which can lead to pragmatic decisions to improve the model and other universities adopting the model as a solution. Knowing how students describe their experiences with an assigned advisor and specific behaviors and attributes that contribute to their sense of belonging and intent to persist is useful for making future decisions related to advisor professional development programs and campus resources.

Research Design

Case study research derives from a need to better understand a specific complex social phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The specific complex social phenomena that will be analyzed and described is defined as the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, it is disputed as to what

constitutes a case among academic fields (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). A case can be an instance, incident, or a unit of something, such as person, programs, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, and international relations (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) described case study as “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context,” especially when it is difficult to separate the phenomenon from the context (p. 15).

A case study design is chosen when the researcher wants to understand a real-world case, such as student persistence and sense of belonging, and the contextual conditions of the university, its students, the student-advisor interactions, and organizational model are pertinent to the case (Yin, 2018). A limitation of qualitative case study designs is that it is difficult to apply findings to other settings because the contexts of cases differ (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Nevertheless, case study research design is more helpful than other traditional group designs when the researcher wants to study a situation in depth and determine how programmatic processes affect participant outcomes (Grinnell, 1997).

One defining feature of case studies is that the case is current and focused within specific boundaries of time, place, and people (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2015). Establishing a boundary for the case is important for clearly identifying the phenomena of interest and strengthening the connection between research questions and the purpose statement (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). However, deciding on how and what parameters will bound the case can be challenging especially when the timeline is not clear and multiple people are involved in a process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Going through the process of “bounding the case” (Yin, 2018) by making decisions about a program, model, or event detail to include, and having narrow research questions and purpose statement will help to determine the scope of the data collection in addition to overcoming any boundary challenges.

The advantage of case study design is the use of multiple forms of data to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I employed student focus groups,

advisor surveys, and document analysis to produce data triangulation (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018).

These multiple sources of data can strengthen construct validity of the study and produce multiple perspectives (Yin, 2018). In the research literature, students and professional advisors have different perspectives about their actions. I sought to learn if the caseload model as a structure facilitated enhancement of historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and intent to persist.

For this study, the case was an advising caseload model for first-year and second-year students intended to remedy lack of personalized and proactive advising for historically underrepresented students. Professional academic advisors, students, and documents were selected to illuminate the model facilitating student-advisor interactions that contributed to students' sense of belonging and intent to persist. Yin (2018) recommended using an embedded single-case design when the case involves more than one unit of analysis. In this study, the units of analysis were (a) the advising caseload model interactions between advisors and students and (b) the processes and structures that operationalized the interactions. The subunits of analysis, such as students and advisors, can be selected through purposeful sampling techniques (Yin, 2018). The advantage of having subunits of analysis embedded into a single case is that it can enhance insights into the advising caseload model (Yin, 2018).

Research Methods

In this section, I describe the specific research methods used to apply a case study research design in this study. Specifically, I discuss the setting, sample, data collection, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness. Lastly, I discuss my role as the researcher in this qualitative study.

Setting

University Hills (pseudonym) is a 4-year public, urban, Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in southern California. The campus is part of the State University system that comprises 23 campuses. The University Hills campus was established in 1940s alongside two other state campuses in metropolitan areas in preparation for the influx of WWII veterans (Douglass, 2000). At the time of the

study, University Hills was federally designated as an HSI with more than 70% of undergraduate students enrolled identifying as Latinx. According to Fall 2021 data, University Hills was a mid-sized campus with an undergraduate population of over 26,000 with 10% Asian American students, 5% White students, and 3% African American students. In Fall 2021, about 60% of undergraduate students identified as women, about 40% identified as men, and less than 1% identified as non-binary. First-generation students were in the majority at approximately 60%, and more than 70% of students were eligible for federal Pell grants. Federal Pell grant eligibility is based on the student's financial need, citizenship status, enrollment in an eligible degree or certificate program, and maintenance of satisfactory academic progress (Federal Student Aid, n.d.).

It is important to note that University Hills undocumented and DACAmented students were intentionally hidden within the small international student population and were among the non-Pell eligible student population. In Fall 2021, the 4-year graduation rate was one of the lowest in the CSU system. Total enrollment by the first fall semester census date for Fall 2020 and Fall 2021 first-year cohorts was approximately 4,000 students in each year. The combined cohorts, by Spring 2022 during the time of study, numbered approximately 6,000. This case study focused on the majority historically underrepresented student populations at University Hills and can be representative of other institutions that serve students with similar demographic characteristics and struggle to improve students' sense of belonging, retention, and graduation rates.

University Hills employed various faculty advisors and professional advisors who specialize in specific programs, certificates, credentials, and graduate programs. This case study concentrated on the approximately 45 professional academic advisors in the eight academic college advising centers that implemented the caseload advising model for first-year and second-year students for the first time in the 2020-2021 academic year. University Hills' advising organization model was decentralized with academic college advising center directors reporting to their deans in the respective colleges or to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) counselors were organized within Student Affairs and had a long history of using a caseload model to support their

students. EOP counselors and the professional advisors in academic affairs had a dual-advising model in which they shared a portion of the student population and provided services for specific reasons. Other dual-advising models at University Hills advised special student populations for specific requirements in concert with students' major advisors in the eight academic colleges. University Hills decreased the use of faculty advisors considerably over the past 10 years. Faculty advisors in some colleges provided advising for students in junior and senior standing, which was not the focus of this study. The advising caseload model was implemented only for first-year and second-year cohorts.

In March 2020, University Hills transitioned to remote and online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The University continued remote and online learning for the 2020-2021 academic year and provided a hybrid mode of instruction, such as combining in-person, online, and remote learning for the 2021-2022 academic year. In a remote learning environment, advising centers increasingly utilized communication platforms such as Zoom meetings and Microsoft Teams to provide services. EAB Navigate, a web-based student success management system, facilitated remote advising by providing text messaging and scheduling, and tracking advising appointments, emails, and phone calls with students.

University Hills is a majority commuter campus with large first-generation, low-income, and historically underrepresented student populations. At the time of the study, more than half the University Hills student population could have qualified and benefitted from a program such as EOP, which has limited enrollment and was not designed to meet an entire student population's advising needs on a college campus. University Hills was an ideal research site because of the student demographics, compounded by limited resources, and the need to find viable organizational solutions to improve retention and graduation without the benefit of increasing the number of professional advisors. I hoped that conducting a case study focused on historically underrepresented students would provide viable and replicable systemic solutions to improve college experiences, persistence, and graduation rates.

The objective of the University Hills caseload model was to provide proactive outreach, consistency, accountability, and continuous relationships among first-year and second-year students and their assigned advisors. Every professional advisor in the eight college advising centers was assigned a caseload of first-year and second-year students. When the eight advising centers were fully staffed, the average student-to-advisor ratio was 130 students per advisor. With a handful of vacancies in the advising centers, approximately 45 professional advisors staffed the eight centers during the Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 terms when data were collected. Advising directors determined how students would be divided and grouped per advisor and most directors chose to group caseloads by major and pre-major. Student caseloads were updated six times a year because students frequently changed declarations of pre-major and major. Student caseloads were uploaded into EAB Navigate, allowing advisors and directors to manage and track outreach, advising appointments, and academic progress. Students could change majors and colleges more frequently than assigned caseloads could be updated manually. The goal was to minimize unnecessary student and advisor assignment changes to develop relationships.

In collaboration with advising directors, the senior advising administrator and central advising staff created guiding documents to define objectives, organization, and processes of the caseload model. One new document was a calendar that provided structure and organization to ensure consistent and proactive interactions occurred between advisors and their assigned student caseloads. The objective of the calendar was to plan for specific proactive advising interventions to ensure that students met with their advisor at least once per academic term. In addition to proactive advising interventions, advisors could meet with students during regular scheduled advising appointments and brief drop-in advising appointments. Table 1 presents caseload model characteristics and roles, and responsibilities of the advising organization.

Table 1. University Hills Advising Caseload Model Characteristics and Responsibilities

Central Advising	Directors	Advisors
In consultation with Directors, develop and maintain Cohesive campaign calendar for Proactive Caseloads.	Assign caseloads.	Meet with designated caseload according to campaign calendar, concern level, and as needed.
Support Directors with updating Proactive Caseloads at 3 specific times during the academic year.	Combine college and Cohesive campaign calendars and plan campaign schedule.	Develop holistic and developmental relationships with students to promote their retention and academic success.
Meet with Directors monthly to discuss implementation of strategic caseloads, share, and improve on practices and processes, and provide support as needed.	Manage caseload changes (e.g., switch of majors).	Serve as an institutional agent that connects student caseloads to various resources and services.
Provide various reports of assessment of caseload implementation (e.g., advising appointments by caseload reports, communication touchpoints, student success outcomes).	Ensure advisors are meeting with their caseloads and are building developmental relationships that are sustained over time.	Manage and maintain caseload documentation (e.g., appointment records and summaries, updated caseload lists).
Offer professional development to advisors to promote and sustain caseload.	Provide guidance to advisors to support caseload adoption.	
Provide caseload tracking excels for Advising teams when needed.		

Source: University Hills Proactive Model

Sample

Purposeful sampling is the intentional selection of participants who can offer rich information about their experiences with the studied phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Patton, 2015). A researcher cannot generalize from a single case or small samples; however, lessons can be learned that go beyond the case being studied, for programmatic change or future studies (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). The Chicago School of Sociology's early case studies combined symbolic interactionism and

applied research techniques such as purposeful case sampling to gain an in-depth understanding of urban life (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018).

The study's sampling methods were used to facilitate data collection with details about professional academic advisor behaviors and attributes, students' and advisors' experiences, and perceptions of having an assigned advisor in the advising caseload model. I focused on small student and advisor samples to provide in-depth, rich information about how students and professional advisors perceive and describe their interactions as contributing to student belonging and intent to persist (Patton, 2015).

EAB Navigate

Prospective student and professional academic advisor participants were identified using reporting data from EAB Navigate. EAB Navigate uses historical institutional data about students' academic performance and progress and combines it with multiple data points from students' previous academic performance and demographic background to generate concern levels designed for proactive outreach advising efforts (EAB, n.d.). EAB Navigate is used to track and schedule advising appointments, collect advising summary reports and notes, assign advisors to students, conduct message and texting campaigns for outreach to students, and generate student success data reports (EAB, n.d.). I used EAB Navigate to determine which students were assigned to an advisor, how many advising appointments occurred with the assigned advisor and when they occurred, full-time enrollment, college center, cohort, and demographic information.

Student Sample

I used criterion sampling, a strategy within purposeful sampling, to narrow the participant pool to individuals who experienced advising interactions within a caseload model (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This sampling tactic enabled me to learn from students if they knew they had an assigned advisor, if they had a relationship with that person, and how various advising approaches and practices of their assigned advisor made them feel. The student sample was purposefully selected using five criteria: (a) 18 years or older, (b) first-generation college student, (c) enrolled in 12 units or

more, (d) first-year or second-year cohort student at University Hills, and (e) experienced at least three advising appointments with the same assigned advisor. I determined age, first-generation college student status, total enrolled units, cohort, number of advising appointments, and assigned advisor via the EAB Navigate software platform.

Using EAB Navigate, I ran an appointment report to find matches between assigned advisor in the college advising centers and assigned first- and second-year students. I created a pivot table to find the number of duplicate meetings to meet the criterion for three advising appointments with the same assigned advisor. The initial total for students meeting three or more advising appointments with the same assigned advisor was 2,369. I sent the list of 2,369 students to University Hills Institutional Effectiveness to determine parents' college attainment status for identification of first-generation students. The Institutional Effectiveness data report indicated four statuses: First Generation to Attend College, Parent Attended Some College, Parent Graduated College, and Unknown. Selecting only First Generation to Attend College brought the student participant pool down to 1,427. I uploaded the 1,427-student list into EAB Navigate to extract each students' name, email, and race/ethnicity to identify students that met the five criteria. The generated report also identified continuously enrolled and full-time enrolled students for Spring 2022, bringing the sample size down to 1,173.

Next, I filtered out White students and this removed 26 students from the sample. The other categories for race/ethnicity were American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Not Specified. I decided to retain students whose race/ethnicity was Not Specified in university records because students may have identified with more than one ethnicity or declined to identify with the available ethnic/racial options when data were originally collected. The student sample was reduced to 1,147 and the ethnic demographic breakdown of the sample closely reflected the total undergraduate student population of University Hills, however not exactly. For example, more Hispanic/Latino students were represented in the student sample and fewer Asian and Black/African American students were represented in the sample, compared to the general

undergraduate student population. It was interesting to me that the student sample had a larger proportion of men than the undergraduate student population. Table 2 compares the University Hills undergraduate student population and the 1,147-student sample.

Table 2. Comparison of University Hills Undergraduate Population and Participant Pool

Demographic	Estimated Undergraduate Population (N = 26,000)	Demographic	Participant Pool (N = 1,147)
American Indian /Alaska Native	1.9%	American Indian /Alaska Native	0.3%
Asian American	10%	Asian American	7.0%
Black/African American	3%	Black/African American	2.8%
Latinx	70%	Latinx	86%
Men	40%	Men	50.6%
Women	60%	Women	49.3%

I sent six rounds of student participant email invitations to 1,147 students throughout January and February 2022. Fourteen students responded and submitted consent forms. One student was unable to attend the focus group sessions. At the beginning of each focus group session, I confirmed with student participants that they met the study criteria. Twelve student participants identified as Latinx/Hispanic, and one identified as Black/African American and Pacific Islander (see Table 3). Among the 13 student participants, nine identified as female and four identified as male. Seven participants were first-year students and six were second-year students.

The final student participant sample of 13 students was small enough to conduct three focus group sessions of 4-5 people. It is essential to conduct focus groups with fewer than 10 participants to allow an opportunity for everyone to talk, especially in an online video conferencing format where accidental interruptions may occur (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Clear patterns in the data were evident by the third student focus group session, and no new information was produced. I determined that the data collection process had reached saturation. Saturation is reached when no new information is revealed in interviews or focus group sessions (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Patton, 2015).

Table 3. Student Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	University Hills Cohort	Classification	Race/Ethnicity	Gender
Maria	Freshmen Fall 20 Cohort	Second Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Female
Milly	Freshmen Fall 20 Cohort	Second Year	Black/African American/ Pacific Islander	Female
Cece	Freshmen Fall 20 Cohort	Second Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Female
Angie	Freshmen Fall 21 Cohort	First Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Female
Jenn	Freshmen Fall 21 Cohort	First Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Female
Ines	Freshmen Fall 20 Cohort	Second Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Female
Matt	Freshmen Fall 20 Cohort	Second Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Male
Brian	Freshmen Fall 21 Cohort	First Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Male
Shelby	Freshmen Fall 21 Cohort	First Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Female
Florencio	Freshmen Fall 21 Cohort	First Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Male
Naomi	Freshmen Fall 21 Cohort	First Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Female
Vane	Freshmen Fall 21 Cohort	First Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Female
Jayson	Freshmen Fall 20 Cohort	Second Year	Hispanic/Latinx	Male

Advisor Sample

Professional advisors were selected with a criterion-based, purposeful sampling approach. The criterion-based sampling approach ensured that professional advisors had experience and knowledge about advising caseloads (Palinkas et al., 2013). I sought professional advisor participants who met three criteria: (a) worked within the advising caseload model for first-year and second-year students at University Hills from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021, (b) met with 30% of assigned students, and (c) met with a portion of assigned students at least three times from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021. These criteria ensured that professional advisors had ample experience working with an advising caseload model for first-year and second-year students.

I identified advisors and number of appointments through EAB Navigate. Thirty-eight professional academic advisors met the criteria and were sent four invitation emails with the survey link. The final advisor sample consisted of eight advisors who completed the anonymous, open-ended survey. To protect anonymity of advisors, respondent demographic characteristics and college

advising center information were not recorded for this study. Purposeful sampling to select professional advisor participants was used to determine differences and similarities in advising experiences for the student sample (Palinkas et al., 2013).

Data Collection and Management

Prior to data collection, I sought and received Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Subjects approval from California State University, Fullerton, and University Hills. I confirmed that all human subjects were protected by adhering to IRB guidelines. Because high-quality case study research relies on multiple sources of data for comprehensive and in-depth understanding (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018), this study had three forms of data collection: (a) document analysis, (b) semistructured student focus groups, and (c) an advisor survey with open-ended questions.

Instrumentation

Documents. Documents are commonly used in case study research to augment other data sources, such as group interviews and surveys (Yin, 2018). Documents can be both public and private records including meeting minutes, mission statements, and program records that detail processes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Patton (2015) recommended using program documents when the researcher wants to fully understand the nature of interactions of program staff. Collecting and analyzing caseload model documents helped me to contextualize student-advisor interactions and the model's processes. Furthermore, caseload model documents were used to uncover the model's objectives and how those goals may conflict with or corroborate advising practices.

Advantages of using documents as a source of data are that documents (a) are stable and can be reviewed repeatedly, (b) do not require transcription, (c) can be analyzed immediately, (d) provide a collection process that is unobtrusive to participants, and (e) can provide specific details about the case (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Limitations of using documents are that documents are often difficult to locate or obtain (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) or potentially inaccurate and biased (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) addressed concerns regarding inaccurate or biased

documents by advising the researcher to focus on the specific purpose of documents and analyze them as a vicarious observer critically interpreting the contents. I had access to caseload model documents at University Hills so there were no access limitations.

I collected documents that detailed the caseload model's objectives, implementation process, and specific roles, benefits, and responsibilities of students and advisors. Documents that guided the process of student-advisor interactions provided understanding of the model's structure and how it facilitated proactive and personalized advising. Patton (2015) endorsed the use of client files in programs as a rich source of case data to supplement interviews and surveys. From analysis of the Advising Mission Statement, Caseload Advising Campaign Calendar, University Hills Proactive Caseload Model, and Caseload Advisor Introduction Email, I learned the extent of alignment between the caseload model's goals and advising practices, processes, and interactions.

Student Focus Group Protocol. The qualitative data collection approach uses “long interviews, open-ended comments, and questions . . . aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). Semistructured focus group sessions were chosen for this study to capture the range of perceptions, experiences, feelings, and behaviors of the student-advisor caseload model (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Krueger and Casey (2015) recommended the use of focus groups when the researcher wants “to understand differences in perspectives among groups” (p. 22). According to Patton (2015), conducting a focus group is advantageous when the researcher seeks a reaction to something, such as a program, process, or shared experience. Silence or avoidance of topics is as revealing as robust sharing within the group (Patton, 2015).

Interviewing University Hills first- and second-year students together, provided an opportunity for participants to build on others' responses and remind each other about aspects of the advising process. Group interviewing and sharing can be a collaborative and empowering approach for student participants who may feel intimidated by being interviewed individually, possibly for the first time in their lives (Madriz, 2000). Students may also feel safer behind a computer screen and less

anxious sharing experiences in an online video conferencing format (Patton, 2015). Student focus groups can contribute to a sense of safety as individuals participate among peers and collectively generate more responses than if they were interviewed individually (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Patton, 2015). Students may have been more willing to reveal problematic aspects of the caseload model and advisor interactions in a group.

Doctoral program faculty and peer advising administrators reviewed drafts of the focus group protocol and questions (see Appendix A). With the protocol and questions' design, I intentionally attempted to create a welcoming and safe environment for students. Moreover, I tried to deliver the questions with a warm and calm tone to make the student participants comfortable (Moustakas, 1994). I am an experienced counselor and advisor and have practiced gaining trust and transparency with students in facilitating individual and group advising sessions throughout my career. I asked students not to name their assigned advisor to encourage transparent sharing and protect both the student and the professional academic advisor. Participants were asked about advising approaches and practices of the caseload model. Questions were designed to reveal first-year and second-year student responses about their knowledge of having an assigned advisor, and how they became aware of their advisor. I was deliberate in asking questions focused on the experiences and perceptions of participants' interactions with their assigned advisor (Patton, 2015). I used Zoom, a web-based platform for video and audio conferencing, chat, and webinars. Conducting focus groups online via Zoom was a more convenient option for students' schedules than driving to campus, finding parking, and locating the room for an in-person session.

Advisor Survey. I used a Qualtrics survey with eight open-ended questions to gather professional advisors' perceptions about interactions with students in their assigned caseload (see Appendix B). Qualtrics is a web-based survey tool that allows the researcher to create surveys, distribute surveys, and analyze responses within the platform. Open-ended survey questions provided primary qualitative data as professional academic advisors typed descriptions of their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about their assignment of first-year and/or second-year students

(Patton, 2015). Although this type of data gathering is simple, it can yield detailed responses of the respondents' thoughts and feelings of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). I sought to learn from advisors if they viewed the caseload model as facilitating proactive and personalized student-advisor interactions and relationships with first-year and second-year students. The survey comprised eight clear, brief, and well-written questions that did not repeat or overlap, to encourage professional advisor participants to complete the survey instrument (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Draft questions were shared and reviewed with experts in the academic advising field, one professional advisor, and University Hills Institutional Effectiveness administrators. The open-ended survey questions were pilot-tested with a professional academic advisor who did not participate in the study. A survey was chosen to gather qualitative data about professional academic advisors' experiences and perceptions because my role as an advising administrator might have affected responses if data were gathered in person. To this end, I intentionally designed the survey to be anonymous to encourage honest disclosure.

Procedures

I received IRB approval at CSU, Fullerton, and University Hills before collecting data. In determining dates for data collection, I was mindful of the academic calendar and avoided peak times for students and advisors, such as course registration or final exam periods.

Student Procedures. I recruited students during Winter 2022 and into the first 2 weeks of the Spring 2022 term. I conducted the student focus group sessions after the last day to drop a class for Spring 2022 and prior to midterms and the Fall 2022 course registration period. This time was intentionally selected to minimize inconvenience for student participants. The student email letter of invitation (see Appendix C) contained the purpose of the study, gift card incentive amount, and information about maintaining confidentiality. To encourage participation, students were offered a \$25 gift card. To avoid conflict of interest or power dynamics, I used my doctoral student email address to recruit student and advisor participants. Students who responded with their interest were sent the study consent form (see Appendix D) to review and sign. Participants were able to choose focus

group sessions most convenient to their schedules and were sent email reminders before the sessions to increase attendance.

I conducted three 90-minute student focus groups at various times of the day in a 2-week period during early Spring 2022. The number of focus group sessions was decided based on saturation of data (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The student focus group data collection was completed when I no longer received new information from participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Participants confirmed permission to record the Zoom online focus group sessions on the consent form and at the time of the session. Participants were notified during the focus group session that they could choose a pseudonym or allow me to select a pseudonym for them. In addition to recording the online Zoom session, I used the Otter.ai application to create an additional audio recording with a text transcript for later data analysis. Otter is a web-based platform that allows the researcher to record, transcribe, and share conversations that take place with multiple people. Recording the audio and the Zoom session allowed me to observe in the moment, focus on moderating, and provide eye contact and gestures that indicated I was listening fully (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Advisor Procedures. The professional advisor email letter of invitation (see Appendix E) contained the advisor consent form (see Appendix F) and a link to the 8-question survey, with the study's purpose and a deadline for response. I created automatic email reminders to encourage the completion of the survey by the deadline. Professional advisors were given a month to complete the survey. To encourage honest and transparent reflection, professional advisors were notified that the survey was anonymous. The instrument did not include questions that identified demographic information, names, or email addresses. Results of the eight surveys obtained from professional advisors were downloaded from Qualtrics and exported into a Microsoft Word document for analysis.

Data Management

Each student participant chose a pseudonym to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. Professional academic advisors completed the survey anonymously and were not

identified in the study. Student consent forms were completed using the online DocuSign application and saved to my password-protected personal computer. Advisor consent was obtained by participants' response to the first question in Qualtrics that asked if the attached consent form had been read and if they agreed to participate in the project. Qualtrics and Otter are web-based password-protected software applications. Downloaded audio- and video-recording files and Qualtrics survey responses were stored on my password-protected personal computer.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data Analysis

Case study research can yield large volumes of data and having an analytic strategy ensures that all data collected will be attended to (Yin, 2018). Analyzing qualitative data is not a linear process, rather it is cyclical and repetitive and generates specific analytic outcomes throughout the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I moved back and forth between analysis steps and methods. I deployed five steps for data analysis in qualitative research recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018): (1) organize and prepare the data for analysis, (2) read through all data, (3) code all data, (4) generate a description and categories, and (5) represent the description and themes.

Organize and Prepare Data for Analysis. Data obtained from the Otter audio-recording transcript of the student focus groups was uploaded into Dedoose, a web-based, password-protected, qualitative research software application, to organize and determine initial themes. The audiovisual recordings obtained from Zoom focus group sessions were used to check accuracy of the Otter audio-recording transcripts. I corrected any errors in the text and stored the digital files for coding. I downloaded completed anonymous advisor survey responses into a Microsoft word document. I organized all digital files into a naming system that related to the specific data collected.

Handwritten notes taken during the focus group sessions were used to cross-reference the Otter transcripts and Zoom recordings. These notes became summarized memos about each student focus group session. Creswell and Poth (2018) described memos as “short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur to the researcher” that are an important process of the synthesizing and

analyzing phase (p. 188). Memos also create an audit trail that documents the researcher's thinking and can be retrieved and examined (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, I made initial handwritten notations for each advisor survey response on the word document.

Read Through All Data. The initial review of the audio transcripts and first read provided general ideas about what the student participants said (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I read the audio transcripts entirely several times to clean the text and immerse myself in the details before I began the process of breaking down the text (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process of uploading, cleaning, and reading through the student focus group data happened after each session and during the same week I was conducting other focus group sessions. Taking initial steps to analyze data while still collecting data helps to determine the saturation and redundancy of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Patton, 2015). Data obtained from the professional advisor survey responses were uploaded into a Microsoft Word document to organize for the purpose of determining codes and categories. I read through all responses and highlighted initial patterns. At this initial stage, I discovered patterns, similarities, and differences in the student participant responses.

Code All Data. The process of coding is key to qualitative research in that it synthesizes collected data into smaller categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After reviewing the transcript responses for both professional advisor and student participants, I began to apply initial structural coding to categorize patterns found in the statements (Saldana, 2016). Saldana (2016) advised using structural coding for qualitative studies that employ open-ended survey responses or semistructured data-gathering protocols like this study. Focused coding is the second cycle of coding applied to develop broad groupings into smaller categories and establish a hierarchy of frequent or significant concepts and codes (Saldana, 2016). I chose student and professional advisor participant quotations and document excerpts to represent the findings' narrowed categories.

Generate a Description and Categories. Writing a description of what I observed during the focus groups, and describing collected data, are central methods in case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These descriptions of insights and ideas about data were organized into written memos.

I described each of the codes and categories in Dedoose and exported the applied codes into a color-coded Microsoft Excel worksheet. A Microsoft Excel worksheet code application facilitates consistency and boundaries for each of the categories and themes and was shared with doctoral program faculty members for assessment of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As I generated descriptions and themes for data, I explored for connections (Yin, 2018) between advisor and student responses, and documents. I organized the themes into three categories: beneficial practices, beneficial structures, and structure and practice limitations. These three main categories were derived from the guiding research questions.

Represent the Description and Themes. After themes were identified, quotations were selected from the student focus group sessions, advisor survey responses, and documents to represent the descriptions and themes. In addition to quotations, data display of the categories and themes were conveyed in tables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process of pulling apart the data, analyzing it, and putting it back together to develop themes can be displayed in meaningful ways (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, student-advisor interactions, advising approaches, and practices that lead to historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and intent to persist may be displayed visually in a table. This data display can augment the communication of complex and varied data into lessons learned that can be applied to similar historically underrepresented student populations, college campuses, and advising organizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures to Ensure Trustworthiness

To ensure that data analysis was trustworthy, I deployed several strategies during data collection procedures and data analysis phases to establish confidence in understanding the phenomena and quality of findings. Saldana (2016) recommended assessing the trustworthiness of my account of the student participant focus groups with four strategies: (a) coding initial thematic patterns as I uploaded transcripts of audio recordings, (b) taking copious notes during and after sessions to gather the totality of emotions and expressions, (c) verbally summarizing student

participant responses during sessions to check my understanding, and (d) reviewing each Zoom focus group session recording to guarantee the confirmability of findings. I sent a copy of the study's findings to student participants for their review of my interpretations and presentation of quotations. One student responded and indicated that my presentation represented the participant's intent.

Peer Checking. Peer and academic scholar scrutiny was welcomed at various stages of this study to check my questions, arguments, assumptions, and methods to strengthen and improve the study, and ensure credibility (Shenton, 2004). I shared dissertation drafts, summarized memos, tables, charts, protocols, focus group and survey questions, and Microsoft Excel worksheet code applications. Academic scholars and professional researchers who provided peer review included institutional research administrators, a student success analyst at University Hills, my dissertation committee expert practitioner, and doctoral program faculty.

Triangulation. I used triangulation of data from multiple sources as another strategy to ensure credibility and confirmability (Patton, 2015; Shenton, 2004). According to Patton (2015), "triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods" (p. 316). I collected qualitative data from more than one source to confirm patterns and themes, including advising caseload model documents, three student focus group sessions, and surveys with eight open-ended questions from eight professional advisors (Patton, 2015). Collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data helps to establish the credibility and quality of the case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) encouraged data triangulation in case studies because multiple sources of evidence strengthen construct validity and multiple measures of the same phenomenon. The advising caseload documents, student focus groups, and professional academic advisor survey yielded both similar and unique results. Finding inconsistencies does not weaken the credibility of the study (Patton, 2015); rather, differences are important findings and can highlight multiple perceptions and meaning (Yin, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was the instrument of analysis in this case study, and it was essential to reflect on my biases, previous experiences, and professional and personal backgrounds to ensure

trustworthiness of study findings and interpretations (Patton, 2015). At the time of the study, I was an executive advising administrator responsible for supporting coordination and cohesion of advising services, initiatives, training, and professional development for multiple advising centers. Professional academic advisors did not have a direct reporting line to my position; however, I was aware that my role could be influential and there might be a real or perceived power dynamic. As an administrator, I was responsible for making decisions and advocating for academic advising policy appeals and exceptions for students. There was a power dynamic between the student participants and me. However, because I was not a professional academic advisor in the study setting, student participants may have been more willing to share about their experiences with advising (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

I was a professional academic advisor before taking on my role as an administrator. I came to this study with views from my professional and academic experiences regarding how professional academic advisors should behave and interact with their students. As an undergraduate student, I experienced benefits of having an assigned professional academic advisor because I was an NCAA Division I student-athlete. To counter biases engendered by these experiences, I recruited professional peers and advising and academic scholars to review and provide feedback on the focus group protocol, questions, and survey instrument.

Finally, I identify as a college-educated, Mexican American woman raised in a household with parents and siblings who earned college degrees. I grew up believing in, and witnessing, education as a vehicle for upward mobility. As an educator, I am motivated to provide the support and access to resources afforded me by my second-generation college student status. I share an ethnic background with some of my study participants, but I am aware of the extensive diversity of experiences and views within similar ethnic groups. I was mindful and reflective of my personal and professional views and experiences as I collected and analyzed data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the qualitative research methods used to examine an advising caseload model at University Hills for first-year and second-year students. A case study design was

applied to investigate how the advising caseload model's processes and structure influenced beneficial advising practices that facilitated outcomes such as students' sense of belonging, validation, and intent to persist. The theoretical underpinnings of validation theory, sense of belonging, and symbolic interactionism guided the construction of the research questions to inquire about interactions and perceptions between students and advisors. I described the setting and samples applied to this living laboratory to pragmatically assess the usefulness and benefits of this advising caseload model. This chapter detailed the qualitative case study data collection of three semistructured student focus groups, eight responses to an open-ended advisor survey, and four advising caseload guiding documents. EAB Navigate was used to identify student and advisor participants and Dedoose facilitated the coding process of student focus group transcripts. I outlined the procedures, data analysis, measures to ensure trustworthiness, and my role as an advising administrator. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of this study, including instances of beneficial advisor practices and caseload model features that supported historically underrepresented students' persistence and belongingness. I also present examples of discrepancies between the caseload model guiding documents, advisor and student perceptions, and participant experiences within the model.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

I used a qualitative research methodological approach to conduct a case study at University Hills to examine an advising caseload model for first-year and second-year students, and structures and practices within the model that were beneficial for historically underrepresented students. A case study design was used to provide student and advisor participants the opportunity to describe their interactions and experiences with processes and structures of the advising caseload model. University Hills Advising Caseload documents were used to contextualize student-advisor interactions and the model's organizational features. Document analysis, an anonymous advisor survey, and semistructured student focus groups comprised the qualitative data collection methods for this case study. This chapter presents findings from the three semistructured student focus groups, eight responses to the advisor survey, and four documents that were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

Research findings are organized into three categories. The first and second categories are practices and structures within the caseload model that contributed to building beneficial student-advisor relationships, sense of belonging, and persistence for historically underrepresented students. The third category includes limitations of the caseload model in contributing to beneficial practices and structures for historically underrepresented students. This chapter presents findings in these categories and corresponding salient themes. Quotations from student participants, advisor participants, and documents are utilized throughout this chapter as evidence for study findings. Each student participant chose a pseudonym used to identify participants in this study and maintain confidentiality. Advisors completed the open-ended survey anonymously and were not given any identifiable label in the study.

Research findings correspond to the research questions. The semistructured student focus group questions and advisor survey were developed to align with the research questions and their

specific constructs, such as structures, advisor practices, sense of belonging, and persistence (see Appendices A and B). A primary question and two focused secondary questions guided the study:

1. In what ways is an advising caseload model that centers on building proactive, personalized, and continuous student-advisor relationships beneficial for historically underrepresented students?
 - a. What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' sense of belonging?
 - b. What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' intent to persist?

Themes

This chapter conveys the most salient themes for this study. To facilitate the presentation of findings, the themes and their descriptions correspond to the three main categories (see Table 4).

Table 4. Data Analysis Categories and Themes

Category	Theme	Description
Beneficial Practices	Caring	Students felt cared for by their advisor, a genuine interest by the advisor for student's personal, career well-being and goals
	Trust	Confidence and reliance in advice given and, in the advisor, perceived accurate advising and extensive knowledge about subject matter and career options for degree program
	Validation	Students felt encouraged and motivated by their advisor
	Ideal Advising Experience	Student's ideas or conceptions of a preferred student-advisor interactions and relationship
	Advisor Connecting Student	Advisor communicated information about resources and events to support and connect student to campus
	Persistence Related to Advisor	Advisor encouraged, motivated, and supported assigned student's persistence and reenrollment
Beneficial Structures	Assigned Advisor	Benefits to assigning student to advisor, student was aware they had an assigned advisor
	Availability of Advising	Assigned advisor was available for appointments and responsive to student
	Student-Advisor Relationship	Some level of relationship existed between student and assigned advisor
	Professional Development/Trainings	Trainings, workshops, case studies, and advisor forums intended to prepare advisor for caseload advising
	Proactive Campaigns	Advisor intentionally reached out to students to schedule appointments for specific reasons

Structure and Practice Limitations	Limited Availability	Advisor was unresponsive or slow to respond; difficulty with scheduling an appointment with advisor
	Reactive Advising	Students most often initiated student-advisor interaction
	Lack of Caring and Personalized Advising	Students did not feel cared for by assigned academic advisor, did not experience sessions tailored to them, were not asked personal, career, or well-being questions
	Lack of Relationship	There was no sense of student-advisor relationship
	Lack of Trust	Students did not trust the advice or the advisor; perceived advisor lacked knowledge about major, subject matter, curriculum, and careers
	Inconsistent Connections from Advisor	Advisor rarely or never sent or communicated information about campus or college opportunities, events, resources
	Campaign Limitations	Advisor's perception that campaigns were less effective mechanism to outreach to historically underrepresented students
	Belonging Unrelated to Advisor	Student's sense of belongingness or lack of belongingness were unrelated to advisor's actions
	Persistence Unrelated to Advisor	Student's desire, intentions, and motivation to persist were unrelated to advisor's actions

First Research Question

This case study explored the ways an advising model that centers on building proactive, personalized, and continuous student-advisor relationships was beneficial for historically underrepresented students. This section presents student responses to focus group questions, advisor responses to the open-ended survey, and analysis of guiding documents for University Hills caseload model. Findings are organized by the three research questions and the specific advising practices and caseload model structures that contribute to beneficial interactions, building student-advisor relationships, students' sense of belonging, and intent to persist.

Beneficial Advisor Practices

Caring

Advisor and student participants felt cared for and caring in multiple ways. Being cared for was closely related to the practice of personalized advising for study participants. Personalized advising practices occur when an advisor is interested in a student's academic well-being and their personal and career well-being (Blane, 2008). This personalized, holistic support of the student is first approached by the advisor asking open-ended questions about the student's well-being, aspirations,

interests, and experiences at University Hills. For example, when asked about specific advisor behaviors that expressed caring, Cece reflected, “Oh, yeah, I really like how [my advisor] communicates with me. Even though it's not like educational-wise, they asked me how I am doing. I feel like they care about you.” After the advisor learns more about the student, the information is then acted upon in the form of resources, referrals, and advice. Advisors’ desire to help, sense of warmth, and eagerness to provide advisement were interpreted by students as acts of caring. After declaring a minor, Milly’s first experience with a college academic advisor demonstrated how the advisor’s desire to provide advice and help felt like caring:

I had a really good experience with that advisor. They’re really very helpful and answered all my questions. I felt like they cared. I just thought it was interesting, because that's an advisor that I've only met one time and no prior experience. [I] never even would have been talking to them unless I had chosen this minor.

Student participants shared moments when their assigned advisor displayed a genuine interest in what they had to say, and in their personal lives. However, the authenticity of the interaction for the student went beyond being asked routine open-ended questions. They remembered how the advisor listened and paid attention. Florencio felt the difference between an advisor who was performative in their interaction versus being attentive and present in the conversation:

The way my advisor [is] able to truly show engagement and legitimate engagement, is just actually being very attentive to what I say. She isn't just saying basic phrases, she is actually listening to what I tend to say about classes and things . . . That's what I like. I feel like she's very attentive.

Maria could tell when an advisor was focused on executing their duties performatively, and when they were authentic in their interactions with her. Like Florencio, Maria was able to perceive genuine engagement and presence from her advisor:

Let's say they have to do it, right, because it's part of their contract, and they have to sit through those assignments or interviews or whatever. But [when the advisor seems] interested and engaged in what you're saying and giving you feedback, it demonstrates, you know, that they care, and they're not there because they have to be [or] annoyed that . . . they have to be there. The fact that they actually show interest in what we're speaking about, and they're not just somewhere else . . . [And] the fact that they actually . . . interact with you, and point out things to you that maybe you don't see . . . [And] actually having communication with you in regard to what you like to do [with] all this stuff, and then actually showing that they care by taking the time to engage with you in

the conversation. [They're] not just like, "Okay, moving on to the next question." Right? It shows they care.

Another example of caring from the assigned advisor was students' perceptions that their advisors had their back and looked out for them. This practice came in the form of reminding the student about important deadlines or information and resources they needed to be a successful student at University Hills. Vane's advisor was always there for support:

Because sometimes I'm very [pause]. Well, I'm not forgetful. But sometimes I just forget certain things [and think] "What am I supposed to do then?" I always scheduled [an appointment] with my advisor and then she tells me, "Oh, you have to do this and this with me." And I was like, "Okay, I completely forgot." But yeah, it feels nice knowing that there's someone that understands me and has my back.

Maria appreciated how her assigned advisor kept her "in the loop" regarding constant changes in requirements for a specific state program. Maria felt taken care of by her assigned advisor who proactively scheduled appointments to inform her about changes in the program:

It was good knowing [why the advisor scheduled an appointment with Maria]. I was able to schedule early before [the change in requirements] was announced . . . And it was just good to know that . . . my advisor . . . they're on top of everything. And they know even . . . before me what's . . . going on. They keep me in the loop. Right, like sending out emails, "Hey, you know what, schedule an appointment before this date."

The act of caring was often practiced over time through multiple student-advisor interactions.

Matt felt cared for by his assigned advisor when his advisor remembered him and their previous conversations. He recalled a time when he disclosed to his advisor that taking five classes in each fall and spring semester was difficult to manage. Matt was not sure he would be able to handle a similar course load transitioning back to in-person classes. His advisor remembered this conversation and referred to it in another advising appointment. This action and offers of support and resources led to Matt feeling cared for by his advisor:

She was quick whenever I emailed her . . . I felt like she was on top of things, and she seemed like she actually knew who I was. I'd meet with her. Then she told me or asked me, "How's class? How are things going?" and if I want to pick up another class [or] drop another class. She seemed informative on my schedule, which I'm sure she could check a few minutes before, but it didn't really feel that way. It went well, honestly, and it was a good introduction to what an advisor should be, I feel like. [In] the next advising [appointment] to choose all my classes, she basically just asked me, "Hey, how are you feeling?" "Do you want to take five classes?" Just basically asking where I was on that topic, asking if time management was . . . something I was struggling with. I think she

asked me if I needed help. I guess that's just one way that she showed she cared about me and the whole process. So that was nice. And occasionally, if I need help or if I'll ask her something, she emailed me about scholarships. Last time we had a meeting about classes, I asked her something about FASFA [sic]. In the follow-up email, she messaged me or included something about FASFA [sic] as well, to help me for that. So, I feel like she does a lot for me.

Similarly, Brian's advisor went beyond academic progress and showed interest in Brian's social and personal well-being for a more well-rounded successful experience in college:

I remember this one particular check-in with [my advisor]. He went through the requirements of my major but in the end, he also told me, "Okay, I want you to set three goals for yourself this semester." And for the next check-in, he said, "I want you to set a time frame on those three goals." And I think [the first goal was] what GPA I was gonna score. The other one is . . . how to find a balance between school and your personal life. And the third one was trying to get involved in school activities. I completed, I think, two or three of them. So, I think I like it, because he seems not only interested in me completing my coursework but also in me trying to do good for myself.

Advisor self-disclosure created a safe space for student sharing and meaningful relatability with the student. The feeling of being alone as an immigrant first-generation college student was mitigated by the advisor sharing their similar experiences. Vane's meaningful connection with her advisor contributed to feelings of being cared for:

For me, what is [important] is having empathy and personal connection with me. For instance, my advisor is an immigrant and all her family's [immigrants] and she came here to study . . . Being first-generation, knowing that she's able to relate with concerns I'm currently having, it feels nice knowing that I'm not the only one who is facing this. It feels nice, knowing once again that I have backup and people who genuinely do care about my situation.

The relationship between Vane and her advisor contributed to Vane's comfort with being vulnerable.

Vane's advisor explicitly defined her role as much more than just academic support. The advisor was also an empathetic listener:

She reached out to me, telling me, "Oh, I've noticed you're not doing well in this class. Is there something I can help you with?" And from there . . . we just led on to other conversations [about] me of—I don't know how you would say it in English—*desahogarse*. Relieving yourself . . . talking it out. That's a lot of venting. That's what we tend to do . . . Being first generation [and] those type of subjects, telling her how I feel. [When] I feel confused or any of that, she tends to help me like, "Don't worry, I'm here for you [on this]. You know, being your counselor, not only am I here to guide you through your academics but be a lending ear to you so you don't feel alone on this journey." And I'm eternally grateful for that.

This example illustrates Vane's specific needs as an immigrant, first-generation college student, and how her advisor defined her role to students. Vane's advisor's personalized approach was not unique; other advisors valued these holistic interactions. Some advisors had positive experiences advising in a caseload model for first-year and second-year students indicating positive experiences providing personalized support beyond the students' academic needs:

I enjoy working with first- and second-year students at [University Hills] as I can relate to many of them on different levels. I've had an overall positive experience making connections on campus and virtually. Conversations have revolved around academics, personal struggles, successes, aspirations, support services, and the like.

This advisor's response reveals that relatability and engaging in conversations with students about their personal experiences is not only their role as an advisor, but that this is what they enjoyed most about having a caseload of first-year and second-year students. Advisors also provided evidence of intention to show students they cared and create a welcoming space for advising:

I have thoroughly enjoyed my experience advising a caseload of first- and second-year students. Having had the opportunity to introduce myself as their advisor, inviting them to attend a first-year transition workshop for an initial meet and greet, and reconnecting with them towards the end of the semester in preparation for the spring semester registration has helped me to build relationships with the students. I send weekly Monday Motivational emails to offer encouragement throughout the semester. Through the connections I have made, my students feel comfortable emailing me with questions or scheduling appointments to meet with me.

Engaging in personalized advising was embraced by another advisor who remarked, "My experiences have been positive, even when students are facing difficult situations." These advisors are not deterred by difficult personal student experiences and may be receiving personal and professional gratification by being caring listeners.

Trust

The theme of trust was evident in the student focus group data. Students trusted their advisor and the information they provided, because of their perception of advisor knowledge and shared experiences. These shared experiences could be related to academic issues, as when the advisor had subject-matter expertise and experience in the student's major. Personal shared experiences or similar demographic identities also influenced feelings of trust between the student and the advisor.

Having trust in the student-advisor interaction led to students believing they had the best possible advising experience and accurate information necessary for them to succeed at University Hills. For example, Maria appreciated her advisors' experience in her major and future career field:

The thing that I personally liked was that the advisors had experience within [major] so they could tell me how it was . . . "You should probably start looking at this internship or volunteer here or do hours here, right? To help you." So, I felt like I had that. And the advisors were super knowledgeable.

Jayson found his faculty advisors to be more trustworthy than his assigned major advisor because of his faculty's subject matter expertise and experience with the curriculum. Jayson compared his advising experiences at two different colleges and described how the advisor's knowledge contributed to Jayson's feeling of being understood:

I want to call out with my [subject] advisors. I have the feeling like I actually know them, and I feel like they know me, because of the fact that they're professors here, at the school. I think . . . it was last semester . . . I was asking them for advice, what class to take this semester. And I think, for my other [assigned] advisor, they would just say, "Take this class, take that class." And of course, they haven't taken those classes, so they don't understand the [course] difficulty. Whereas my faculty, my [subject] advisors, actually took these classes, and they actually teach these classes. So, I could tell them, "Hey, what is this class about?" "Should I take it with this class?" "What classes work best?" And I've gotten fantastic advice from my [subject] advisors. I feel like they actually know me . . . [and] there's a lot more trustworthiness. And right now, I'm taking [two courses] . . . I didn't feel ready to take three [courses]. And they understood that because, hey, they were students at one point, and they might have not felt prepared to take three classes. So, I'm taking two right now. I feel like they're very knowledgeable about the experience I'm going through.

For Vane and Maria, their assigned advisor's personal background and identity also generated feelings of trustworthiness. They felt they could trust an advisor's recommendations if the advisor had overcome similar challenges or had shared experiences. Maria described how shared experiences and credibility of the advisor were related:

Like their backgrounds, right? What they're willing to tell you, in a sense. You do learn about if they were first gen or they're the first in their family . . . They kind of know what it's like. They can guide me better than maybe a person that, you know, had all the help. Because it's a different understanding. It's a different sense of understanding, of what you're going through.

Like Maria, Vane could trust that her assigned advisor was guiding her on the best academic pathway because of their shared experiences being first-generation and immigrating with their families to the

United States. Vane was unsure of all her major options at University Hills and was grateful for receiving academic advice from someone who intimately knew her experiences:

Originally, I was wanting to be a pre-major in pre-veterinary. But [the advisor] told me that's only for those who are graduate students. That was my main goal going to [University Hills], but good thing I had a backup plan. "Would it be alright if I became a social worker with a minor in child development?" Because I have a love for kids as well. And she was very supportive of it. She's like, "Yes, of course. I recommend you finish your general education courses. And then, hopefully, by the second year you could be fully focused on your major." Honestly, it was very helpful. She's very open-minded, which is something I like, and I think that we [relate] she's also first generation and she comes from an immigrant family. . . . We were both having a connection, saying how she's more than happy to help me knowing that she's first generation as well, knowing that I have these much resources, and that she wants to give me all the information that she can. And I told her, "I'm very grateful for it."

Advisors instilled trust by taking the time to explain course roadmaps to students and providing additional context as to how the student would progress through their major degree program. For Brian, a positive advising interaction was his assigned advisor explaining all his academic options and how he could progress through the major:

It's been a really good experience with him. He's helped me kind of see how the roadmap will transcend as the as the years go by and what to focus on in the beginning years. Recently, I had a meeting with him to talk about if a minor with what I'm doing was also possible. He explained that it was but only it was gonna require a little bit more work. But overall, I've been having a great time with him in terms of progress in college.

Validation

Validation is an actively affirming and supportive process initiated by institutional agents such as academic advisors (Rendón, 1994, 2002). The process of validation results in experiences in which the student is encouraged by their academic advisor. Being encouraged promotes feelings in the student, including capability to learn, increased self-worth, and confidence in being a recognized and valued member of the college community (Rendón, 1994, 2002). The two types of validation, academic validation, and interpersonal validation were present in student focus group data. Academic validation entails encouraging and providing support for students' academic endeavors. Interpersonal validation fosters a students' personal development and acclimation to college life (Rendón, 1994). Student participants' interactions with their advisors validated students' academic capabilities and achievements, and students were encouraged to pursue goals for personal growth. Maria received

important information from her advisor about the various ways Maria could complete program requirements. The advisor's recommendation that Maria was academically capable of passing an exam instead of taking a series of courses to fulfill a requirement, and graduating in 4 years, was motivating:

You can take certain courses, so that you're waived to the test. And I remember, my advisor was, like, "I'm going to be totally honest with you, if you take those courses, it's probably gonna take you an extra year to finish." And he [said], "It's not worth the time and the money because I think you can easily pass that test. And I guess that extrinsic motivation that fuels your intrinsic motivation, it's like you're hearing from the outside you can do it, you know? Inside, you're like, okay, even if I don't feel like it, even if I don't see it. . . . Right, so internally, you're like, "Okay, if they said I could, if they've looked at my testing, they've looked at my grades for my courses, and they think [I] can do it." I guess that's support of being honest, you know what I mean? Honest with you, in the sense that even if you feel like, "No, I can't do that," they're like, "Yes you can." . . . Getting to know you enough to know [you can] go ahead and go for it. Or don't go for it and having that honesty. Listening to what the student would like to achieve, too. Because I did mention how I would like to finish my degree on time. And [they said], "Okay, this is what I would suggest for you." That honesty helps.

In moments when student participants were unsure, hesitant, or unaware of opportunities, advisors provided beneficial information and also displayed enthusiasm for the student. Vane described an interaction with her assigned advisor when she revealed her second academic interest of becoming a social worker, after learning that a pre-veterinary major was not an option. In this instance, Vane was vulnerable in sharing her second academic plan, and her assigned advisor's enthusiasm and support for her choice led to increased confidence:

My advisor had told me that they don't offer pre-veterinary course for incoming students. But afterwards she had told me when I was telling her my second plan of actually wanting to be a social worker, "Yah! Of course, we could do that, definitely!" It was encouraging knowing that. But in any actions, my advisor has shown me that I can succeed. And becoming a social worker is, for me, encouragement in disguise. Her saying words that add on to my inner thoughts—then I can do this. And then I shouldn't discourage myself, because of certain things that were being said about this subject. Then I can.

Jayson reflected on his transition from high school to his initial college assigned advisor. This advisor reviewed his academic records and enthusiastically celebrated Jayson's academic achievements and ability to transition into the major degree program early:

I took AP Calculus AB and AP Calculus BC in my high school years, so I entered taking Calc III. During the advice for [degree program], [I learned] you only need the calculus

series and the differential linear classes to that's all the math class you need to take. And I remember during the during the Zoom call, [my advisor] was getting really excited. "Oh my gosh, you're gonna be able to start!" She was getting excited for me. I think it's "become an actual major," so I won't be a pre-major anymore. And she was getting excited for me. I still remember how excited I felt then. I was really excited that I was not going to be pre-major anymore. Even though I left [the college advising center], I still remember the experience.

A key element in validation theory is the institutional agent, in this case the academic advisor, proactively reaching out to the student to provide information to demystify the college experience (Rendón, 1994, 2002). Cece recounted her assigned advisor encouraging her to apply for scholarships Cece was not aware were available:

I didn't know when I was a first-year [student], like last year. I didn't know there were specific types of scholarships I can apply to. My current advisor gave me information about it or told me, "Oh, you could apply for this. And you might get it." They're helping me, motivating me to sign up.

When I asked Cece how it felt to be motivated to apply for scholarships, she responded, "Good. Like I have somebody that would help me." Having an advisor who could be relied on for encouragement and support felt good for Brian, too. Brian's advisor's investment in his overall well-being and development as a college student reminded Brian of a previous positive interaction with a high school teacher:

[My advisor] helped me set some goals for myself. That encouraged me and also motivated me to do better. Not to prove or to brag to others, but just to prove that I can do the best that I can. And always having that mentality every year that I go into and never forgetting. It made me feel great. Having someone like that reminded me of a previous teacher I had. She was also very motivating to me. So, I really actually made the connection and really got comfortable with [my advisor] because he reminded myself of that. He's exactly like the teacher I used to have. She was really, really, really impactful in my decision to go to college, so I really value that.

Ideal Advising Experience

Student participants were asked to describe their ideal advising meeting with their assigned advisor. Students desired a personalized advising interaction and an advisor who was encouraging, communicated often, and cared about the student personally and academically. Some participants were experiencing their ideal advising interaction with their assigned advisor. Students having their ideal advising experience were asked to describe specific behaviors, attitudes, and interactions.

Jayson interacted with two advisors who provided the ideal advising experience. Jayson's ideal was having an assigned advisor who was (a) prepared to meet with him, (b) aware of his academic records, and (c) knowledgeable about the degree program:

I think I've gotten probably the most ideal with [my former college advisor] and my [other program] advisors. I think that one important thing is how knowledgeable they are about these classes. And they know everyone's needs might be a little bit different. I think one thing I see that they are doing is that 5 minutes before the Zoom meeting starts, they check on what students they have and see if they're behind, or if they're ahead, and what they need to do. Even before students enter the Zoom meeting. I remember with [former assigned advisor], she already knew that I had taken AP classes. And she already knew that before I even got into the class and into the Zoom meeting. Being knowledgeable about who I am. That really helps them be a little bit more experts in their field, knowing that I might be a little bit behind in my classes so I might need to need more help.

Jayson related several questions he liked his advisor to ask: "Hey, are you ready?" "Do you feel ready to take these classes?" "How are you feeling right now?" "Is there anything we should look out for?" "Any difficulties?" Maria echoed Jayson's desire to have an advisor who is very knowledgeable about the student's degree plan and goals. Maria was able to compare her advising experiences after switching majors. Her first advising experience was far from ideal, but at the time of the study, she was enjoying her ideal advising experience:

I think [my ideal is when advisors are] being welcoming and just genuinely caring about you. You can have a super knowledgeable advisor, but you [may] feel like you can't even go to them. It's like, there's no advisor there, right? Because you don't even want to go see them. Once you know that rapport is established, you feel like you're in a good, comfortable, safe environment with the advisor. They get to know what your goal is—what you want to do. They just talked to me, you know, when they knew that I'm trying to graduate and I'm trying to get into the field. They [said], "Okay, well, I'm gonna help you get out of here as fast as you can possibly. Okay, this is what you want to do? I'm gonna help you accomplish that." [They were] agreeing about graduating on time and everything. And it's important to be knowledgeable about they were doing since they were really fast. They didn't go off of the degree planner. They developed a customized degree plan for me and that was great.

Matt was also experiencing his ideal advising interaction, however added that personalized approach, celebratory motivating messages, and advisor recognition of major academic milestones would be beneficial:

I say my advisor is pretty good right now. But I think it'd be cool if she got to know me as a person as well. . . . I think there are benefits to having a personalized advisor, if it's a good one, of course. To be able to build a relationship with someone who can ultimately

see you grow, and see you work from where you were to where you are now—I feel like that's a big help. Along with just having someone on standby almost, like ready to assist you and just be there for you, really? I think it's beneficial. . . . but also, fun if they celebrate or email us when we complete all our GEs or something like that, just to make things seem a bit easier, or like a milestone to celebrate almost. I think that would be nice. Aside from that, I think mine's pretty ideal. In a previous meeting I'd had with her a few months ago, I'd said something, and then she brought it up again in the next meeting. So that just showed me that she really does listen and pay attention, I guess, and just care. I do feel like she's kind of ideal in that situation for just caring and being there, more than anything. And I thought that was important, because it wasn't anything important that I said, but just something small. Yeah. The fact that it's stuck with her I thought was cool.

Milly had a beneficial experience with a high school counselor that informed her ideal student-advisor experience. Milly hoped that in college she would receive personalized recommendations and interest in her academic career and personal well-being:

In high school, I really liked my counselor and I had him for like 3 years. Every time I went to him, he remembered where we left off last from when we were talking. He would always see me around campus and talk to me, say "Hi," you know, and ask how I'm doing. It felt like he genuinely cared. My expectation was that there would be more of a focus on students in college since that is completely different from high school. College is like a completely different world, especially with knowing what classes to take and how to move forward in your career path. It's a hard thing to do by yourself. I guess my ideal experience would just be like my high school counselor. I was expecting when I asked questions there would be suggestions, you know, because that's the field that they're supposed to know about. So, I ask, "What classes should I take?" and I just don't get any suggestions. [They] just look at the planner. I don't necessarily like that. I kind of feel like they're not invested, but there's some type of care. They want to actually help me get to the career path that I am looking for. So yeah, I really would prefer to feel like they want to get to know me. It doesn't have to be anything super, like a special relationship, but just to feel they know who I am, remember me from our meetings, and are actually enthusiastic about their job.

Angie, Jenn, Ines, and Naomi, like Milly, preferred an assigned advisor who was welcoming, caring, enthusiastic, and encouraging. Angie's ideal advisor was someone "energetic, encouraging, motivating, [and] she or he would communicate a lot." Naomi shared Angie's perspective that an ideal assigned advisor would proactively reach out to her: "Just encouraging, and actually reaching out. It would make me feel like there's someone actually looking after me." Jenn's ideal advising session would be with an advisor who first acknowledged her as a person:

I'd want them to be welcoming in the beginning, you know, maybe checking up on me as a person, instead of diving straight into questions and other stuff and then answering my questions, of course, in a thorough, very informational way. Ending it off with, "Feel free to reach out. I'll reach out." You know, like mutual care.

Several student participants wanted an advisor to pause and inquire how the student was feeling and offer recommendations and resources based on the student's unique needs. Shelby illustrated this ideal advising session:

[The session would] just feel welcoming at the beginning. And [the advisor would] ask how the student is doing. We just go onto the Zooms or on any type of appointment and they automatically go into the questions. It would be nice to kind of have at least a small little conversation on, say, how the student is doing. I guess also, as Matt stated before, how his advisor was able to give him additional information about scholarships, for example, I feel that would be very nice. I know I can go on the website and look for that information. But having an advisor who's willing to give you that information specifically would also be very helpful. You know, it's a way of showing that they actually do care. And besides the information that I may have already, or that they gave me, it'd be nice to have that extra information as well.

Ines preferred conversations around career advising and future planning, not just the courses she needed to take in that semester:

I think my ideal advisor would be like how Angie explained. Positive, you know, and encouraging. Not only just talking about the courses we need to take, but maybe the opportunities we may have with our major. I don't really know what I'm gonna do or what career I want to go into. Oh, that [conversation] would be nice.

Beneficial Structures of a Caseload Model

Assigned Advisor

According to the University Hills proactive caseload model document, the caseload model goal is to build in consistent student interactions with the same assigned advisor. Assigning an advisor prevents repetition of students' personal and academic backgrounds to various advisors and reduces likelihood of receiving conflicting information. Most advisor survey participants indicated they informed their students that they were their assigned advisor. Versions of the first introduction email template were used to introduce the student to the assigned advisor and inform students about methods of access to their advisor. Advisors recounted how they introduced themselves to their students:

Once assigned, I sent my caseload an introduction email. This email was already typed up by my Director and I had little input on the format or the verbiage. However, I also sent follow-up emails with my PALs link [personal availability link] to give my caseload an opportunity to schedule a one-on-one appointment with me via in-person or Zoom.

Another advisor referred to the same introduction email and how students were invited to contact them: "At the beginning of the semester, a welcome email was sent to them with information on how

to contact me, how to meet with me. There I informed them that I would be their assigned advisor for the year.” A third advisor made it clear to students how to schedule an advising appointment:

I emailed them about 3-4 times throughout the semester so that they are aware I am their assigned advisor. In the emails, I reminded them to meet with an advisor at least once a semester and described how to schedule an appointment or come to drop-ins.

Some advisor responses indicated varying levels of effort to inform students about advising.

For example, one advisor used multiple methods for outreach to their newly assigned caseload:

I established a connection with students by sending them a welcoming email and letting them know a little bit about myself and how to reach out to me and my center. I did a follow-up email inviting them to a campaign and did a couple more follow-up emails. Later for students who had not responded, I made personal phone calls to ensure that students were checking their emails or were still attending [University Hills].

The strategy of directly calling students was also deployed by this advisor: “I send a welcome letter to each of my students in my caseload introducing myself as well as providing PALs link, frequent email communication throughout the term, and in some situations, calling students directly.”

Student participants confirmed receiving the introduction email as the first communication that informed them about their assigned advisor. Maria remembered learning: “I think I learned of my adviser through an email that we received.” Milly understood that her assigned advisor was the same person sending her emails and leading the session, and the advisor could be found in the EAB

Navigate platform:

I think I learned about my advisor through. . . . email, but there was an orientation-type Zoom, I believe, when I first started. They were leading it so I just assumed that they're my advisor. And when I go to make appointments on Navigate, it just comes up next to their name, like that's my assigned advisor. So that's the only way I know. I have heard that I can like go to see other advisors as well, which I've done, but I thought that it was required to meet with that one advisor at least once for the semester. Because if it's getting close to the end of the semester and I don't meet with my advisor, then they'll email me to make an appointment with them.

Brian appreciated the consistency of seeing the same advisor and being able to find them in either advising appointments or virtual drop-in sessions:

Usually when I need something, I go directly to them. Usually for me it is kinda easier or I have been fortunate to be with the same advisor. I'm usually always trying to be the first one in the drop-in hours, so I don't have to wait [and can] always meet up with him.

Brian's experience illuminates the benefits of assigning an advisor in his ability to access the same person. The ability to access the assigned advisor produced the theme of availability of advising.

Availability of Advising

According to the University Hills proactive caseload model, if the caseload model operates as intended, the student should be able to access their assigned advisor and schedule at least one advising appointment per semester. However, the advising documents and advising mission statement do not explicitly state that an advisor should be responsive when a student reaches out to request assistance. Student participants were not asked directly if they could easily schedule advising appointments with their assigned advisor; however, a theme emerged from their responses around the ability to meet with their assigned advisor. Student participants remarked on whether their advisor was easy to contact and was responsive. The availability of their assigned advisor was as an indicator that their advisor cared about them, and that the advisor was proficient and helpful. Vane's ability to easily contact her assigned advisor and receive support reminded her of the kind of attention and assistance she received from her high school counselor:

My previous counselor from my high school, since I went to charter school, everyone's assigned by their last name. And I was able to contact my high school counselor easily, which is a reason why I like the advisor I have, because I'm able to contact her easily and it doesn't make me feel left out. Like, "Oh, she's meeting up with other students. And I'm still left behind." It doesn't make me feel that sort of way . . . I haven't had any problem with contacting my advisor.

Maria was surprised by the level of availability of her newly assigned advisor when she changed her major:

It was a major difference, and it was fairly easy to get ahold of anyone to schedule an appointment. . . . [My advisor said] "Oh, here's our emails or phone numbers. Text us or just call us whenever you need something. We'll try to get to it as soon as possible." That was super new to me, and I was shocked. I was like, "Are you serious?"

Florencio was also amazed by the responsiveness of his assigned advisor, and did not expect to be cared for by anyone at the University:

I will say [my advisor] reached out more to me. I believe I only reached out once because of a certain issue with my schedule. It was the only time I ever reached out myself. And even then, they responded quickly so it wasn't much of an issue. I just like how my advisor tends to be very prepared and how they want me to succeed. I was

always given the, I wouldn't say fear, just given the thought in high school that not many would really care for you [in college].

In several of Jayson's reflections on experiences with his previous assigned advisor, Jayson coupled availability of advising and knowledge about the curriculum as measures of advisor competency:

When I was starting off, I came here to [Advising Center]. And I think the college [Advising Center] was fantastic. I did not have problems with wait time. When I was with [my advisor] they were very knowledgeable everything. And I think it was probably a good example, or a good introduction for me, when I came in to [University Hills], of how prepared [they were] because I think the College [Advising Center] was fantastic. . . . I didn't really have to wait with them, and they were very knowledgeable.

Proactive Outreach and Campaigns

The proactive advising approach involves intentionally reaching out to the student before they have expressed a need for assistance (Varney, 2013). An advisor may contact a student for numerous reasons, such as to build rapport, ensure the student is making academic progress, or share timely information and resources. A key feature of the University Hills caseload model was to “provide continuous and consistent proactive outreach to student caseloads to ensure they are making academic progress.” This proactive outreach was implemented by prioritizing “student needs by conducting equity focused campaigns interventions.” University Hills advisors were informed by a Caseload Campaign Calendar to determine when they should provide proactive interventions and for which specific student populations:

The calendar provides the structure and organization to ensure consistent interactions occur between advisors and their assigned student caseloads. The goal of the calendar is to provide an early validating advising appointment for first- year cohort students as they transition into college and provide continued interactions into the second year. The Caseload Campaign calendar creates opportunities to ensure students meet with their advisor at least once per academic term. Advisors can monitor academic progress and track appointment attendance by using EAB Navigate and using internal tracking systems.

An advisor participant confirmed how the Caseload Campaign Calendar was used to produce proactive outreach:

I am assigned a caseload each semester of both first- and second-year students and have used the caseload to connect with the students in a structured campaign setting.

The campaigns are predetermined by the administration, and I just follow the guidelines that are set to connect with my assigned caseload.

The University Hills proactive caseload model document indicates that advisors could benefit from conducting proactive outreach:

Advisor Benefit: A caseload model allows for advisors to efficiently use their time to prioritize students' needs and provide early outreach to students before more complex issues occur. The model also empowers advisors to take initiative to proactively care for their student caseloads.

One advisor recognized the benefits of using campaigns to practice a proactive approach and mitigate potentially larger issues in the future: "[In] each campaign I know exactly what to focus on with the student so we can take care of any issues before it becomes a bigger thing." One advisor participant remarked on the University Hills caseload model student-to-advisor ratio, and proactive campaigns as a feature that facilitated consistent outreach for historically underrepresented students:

In my opinion, I find that the current structures and practices in the current advising caseload model do support historically underrepresented students at [University Hills]. It is the implementation of a variety of strategies to engage and communicate with students using campaigns that get the student's attention. The student-advisor ratios are ideal because keeping the pool of students relatively low makes it possible for consistent outreach and follow-up.

Student participants were asked if their assigned advisor consistently reached out to them independent of student requests first and how they felt about that contact. Students who had experienced proactive outreach from their assigned advisor identified benefits of having the same person consistently contact them to provide support and guide them through their degree programs. Vane's assigned advisor consistently communicated to her to address specific issues, such as planning a course schedule for the next semester or exploring degree options. Vane described her assigned advisor and how she felt about consistent proactive outreach:

I found an email of her presenting herself, saying to meet one another and greet one another and schedule a meeting with her so we can know what's my major, what's the plan, and the different ways to contact her. . . . She contacted me first, in order to plan my second semester or first semester. . . . Honestly, [it was] nice knowing that I have someone that's always [has] my back.

Maria clearly outlined the benefits of getting an assigned advisor who consistently acted proactively and ensured Maria was on track to graduate:

My assigned advisor is always the first one to reach out, even if it's nonacademic Before the [requirement] was even announced he was reaching out to me to schedule [an advising appointment], which was great, since I could get the information faster than the deadline. One of the biggest benefits of having an advisor, I mean, an assigned advisor, is that they're constantly reaching out to you, right? Even if you're not [reaching out], they're reaching out to you. When that time comes, "You have to register for classes. Meet with me, so we can go over that." So that's a benefit, right? They're kind of ensuring that you're doing what you're supposed to do.

Jayson appreciated the number of proactive communications he received from a former assigned advisor. Although Jayson was aware that his currently assigned advisor would be reaching-out, it was still surprising to Jayson that someone was looking out for him in college:

I think in any moment, they should probably be reaching out to me because I know they reached out to me last year. And they reached out to me last semester for Zoom meetings on how I'm doing. And I'm pretty sure they should be emailing me a couple weeks from now to start applying for the [academic program] classes. When I was in [former college advising center], they were bombarding me with emails and I just want to emphasize how good [that advising center] is, even though I'm not there anymore. I just want to say those guys were awesome. Yeah. And with the [other college advising center] they send emails, too. Yeah, so it's all good. When my [Academic Program] advisor started emailing me a year ago, I felt surprised. I didn't really expect them to email me, because I don't think I've even told my [major college] advisors that I wanted to be a [career role]. So, to have them reach out to me was a very emotional surprise.

Like Jayson and Vane, the act of an advisor proactively outreaching provoked powerful positive emotions in Matt. Matt felt noticed when his assigned advisor proactively communicated to provide support:

When she reaches out to me first, it actually helps me because I'll usually sign up for classes late. So, her constantly reminding me, "Don't forget to register" and "Let's meet to register" and stuff like that helps me just getting my stuff together and like actually registering. Those emails that she sends help out a lot, for me at least. I think it's good that she does reach out because if not for her, I feel like most of the things I wouldn't actually do myself. Having her there does help . . . Yeah, it makes me feel noticed, I guess. Yeah. Noticed, I like that.

Brian highlighted a sense of relief from not having to figure out when to find time to meet with his assigned advisor:

He reaches out to me. It makes me feel relieved because I don't have to keep stressing out about finding time in the day to think about an appointment. [When] he reaches out to me, [than] I declare everything for that specific time to talk about with him or to listen to what he has to talk to me about.

Interestingly, some students felt that proactive contact meant less if the student did not receive personalized advising communications or interactions. Proactive outreach did not indicate to Shelby that she had the best assigned advisor:

I mean, personally, I guess [I appreciated] the few times that he would say, “Okay, we need to have a meeting,” for example. And I guess the information he would give me in those meetings that we would have was helpful. Besides that, I don't think there's necessarily anything else he did where I'd [think], “Wow, he's such a great advisor,” but based on what he gave me I would say that it was helpful.

Student-Advisor Relationship

Student-advisor relationships were emphasized in the University Hills proactive caseload model document. The document outlined practices that ultimately led to the goal of sustained relationships with first-year and second-year students:

The goal of caseloads is to provide proactive outreach, consistency, accountability, and sustained relationships among students and their assigned advisors for first- and second-year students to ultimately improve retention and graduation rates and close equity gaps.

Student-advisor relationship was a strategy to improve retention and graduation rates, especially for historically underrepresented students. The theme of cultivating positive student-advisor relationships could also be found in the key components section of the document, which stated, “Promote positive student-advisor relationships through a developmental and holistic advising approach and develop and sustain relationships with assigned student caseloads.” Because positive student-advisor relationships were classified as an approach for closing the equity gap, the document instructed advisors on the required minimum contact with assigned students. “To develop personalized relationships with their assigned students, advisors should reach out and meet with each student at least one time per semester. Interactions can take place through advising campaigns or regular advising appointments.”

A few advisors' survey responses demonstrated alignment between their goal and the caseload model's document objective of establishing positive student-advisor relationships. One advisor who expressed mixed feelings about the caseload model voiced enthusiasm for creating relationships with their students, “I am however very excited when I establish connections with

students and some of these become long-lasting.” Another advisor believed they were able to achieve positive relationships with most of their student caseload because of consistent interactions:

I have a pretty good relationship and level of rapport with the majority of my first- and second-year students given that I am the primary advisor of the First Year Experience Program in my college. Many of the campaigns run throughout the semester also allow me to get to know my students.

Another advisor thought the caseload model should not be limited to first-year and second-year students and should expand the student’s college career to sufficiently develop meaningful relationships:

I would like to see it evolve beyond just the first and second years. It should be for the duration of the student’s academic study until degree completion. The goal is to empower students to be independent and utilize the technological tools to stay on track with degree progression but there are some that need additional support. The idea that they build a relationship with an advisor and that person will be there to witness their growth, support them through their journey and help them to the finish line is critical.

In contrast, half the student participants also believed they had positive relationships with their assigned advisors. Some of the reasons students perceived having a relationship with their assigned advisor came from (a) a sense of being cared for as a person, (b) assigned advisor interest in the student’s academic and non-academic achievements, and (c) getting to know their assigned advisor as a person. Cece described a connection between her advisor asking her to develop three goals and their concern for Cece’s well-being, leading to a sense of having a positive relationship with her advisor:

I feel like in the times that I’m able to meet with like my advisor, we do kind of have a relationship because they asked for three goals that I have for that semester. And they make sure that they answer every question. Also, my advisor asked, “How am I doing” and do I feel I need help with something. Yeah, I feel like I have a relationship when I meet with them.

In Jayson’s interactions with his previous assigned advisor, he felt he knew the advisor. Because his assigned advisor engaged in personalized advising, Jayson felt they had an opportunity to get to know his advisor despite the remote advising environment during the pandemic. This experience was especially impactful for Jayson as a first-generation college student:

With my experience with the [advisor], I feel like I really knew them. I actually know them, and I feel like they know me, because of how [our meetings] went. I just

remember, I feel like I knew them. Sadly, it was through Zoom, so they probably don't remember me, but I felt like I really got to know them. And even though it was just for a semester, I knew it was such a positive experience for me, starting school through a pandemic through my first semester. I'm the oldest one [in my family] so I have no idea what to do. So that [having the relationship] was really good.

Brian's advisor's focus on his personal well-being in addition to his academic progress was seen as evidence of a relationship:

I would say that there's maybe somewhat of a relationship because I remember this one particular check in with him. For starting, he mostly asked how I'm doing. And not just academically, but rather, physically, and emotionally. Am I doing good? Taking advantages of the career center in school or the school services that they have, if I have any problems? And then we get into the details of the major. I really liked that about him because he doesn't really focus on one thing. He's able to focus on more than one thing. That's what I've always liked about having someone that advises me.

Feeling cared for and a sense of student-advisor relationship was a pattern for Vane as well. Vane was grateful for the level of rapport she had with her assigned advisor:

So far in my experience, I've been grateful for [the relationship]. My advisor is a woman. I'm very blessed with her. I'm very happy with her. When she noticed that I was failing the class, she was telling me, "Is everything okay?". . . . I do feel quite comfortable around her. I could say I have someone. I do have a good relationship with my advisor.

Despite not having personal conversations with his assigned advisor, Matt felt he had somewhat of a positive relationship because of the advisor's willingness to provide helpful resources and information:

I see the relationship with my advisor is a mutual one. We're not like best friends or anything, of course, but I feel like we're also not really strangers. Yeah, I feel it's just mutual. She helps me when I need help and stuff like that. The topics we discuss, it's usually just classes, registering for classes, and occasionally if I need help or if I'll ask her something. She emailed me about scholarships. Last time we had a meeting about classes, I asked her something about [FAFSA]. In the follow-up email, she messaged me or included something about [FAFSA] as well, to help me for that. So, I feel like she does a lot for, me in that sense.

Practice and Structure Limitations – Research Question 1

Limited Availability

Some student participants had not experienced beneficial advising practices and structures within the University Hills caseload model. I identified a theme of limited availability from students who experienced challenges with scheduling advising appointments, waited for considerable time in Zoom drop-in waiting rooms, and found assigned advisors unresponsive to email communications. Some

students were also rushed in advising appointments, directed to Zoom drop-ins to meet with advisors on duty, and desired to meet with their assigned advisor longer than the structured 30-minute appointment period. Some student participants who had changed their majors had experiences with more than one assigned advisor. These student participants noted a difference in advising availability between larger and smaller academic colleges. Maria described her experiences trying to meet with an advisor in her previous larger college:

I think it has to do with the fact that the college is huge. I think it has to do with how large it was when I tried to schedule a meeting through our EAB. It was months ahead. It was impossible for me to get an appointment. And then when they had their office drop-in hours for advising, it was kind of the same thing. "Oh, you have to wait in this waitlist," since that was a lot of people they were seeing. It was hard to get hold of anyone.

Jayson preferred to meet with his dual advisor for his program concentration, then to try and meet with his assigned major advisor in a larger college because of the wait time. Jayson has stopped trying to meet with his current assigned advisor:

With [College Advising Center], I felt like the wait times are incredibly long. I no longer get advice from them. But when I did for that one semester, there was a long wait time, and a long wait time for questions that could have been answered very quickly.

Jayson's experience of having to wait for answers he believed could be responded to quickly was a pattern among some student participants. Shelby shared how difficult it was to communicate with her assigned advisor and felt it did not matter that she had one. Shelby's desperation to get answers to advising questions led her to seek out anyone in the advising center who could help. The experience of not receiving advising support was stressful for Shelby as a first-generation college student:

At first, I used to send him a few emails, but he wouldn't respond. I was assuming that he was really busy, which is why I started joining those virtual drop-in Zoom meetings. If I had a quick question or something I can get any advisor in general in the [College Advising Center], to ask them that quick question instead of necessarily making an appointment specifically with him. I feel like at first it was a bit stressful. Luckily, I did have the help from my sister. If I had any small questions, she may have known the answer. But if she didn't, and I wasn't getting any specific response from him, it did make me a bit stressed and I guess, eager. Sometimes it was the smallest questions, and I could have gotten a quick answer, for example. But yeah, that wasn't the case. Sometimes. I would say that I'm concerned as well, because if I had a bigger issue, I wouldn't know the answer to it either. And who knows how long?

Like Shelby, Jenn's email advising questions were typically not answered by her assigned advisor. Jenn's older brother dropped out of college in his first year, and as a first-generation college student, she did not have anyone at home to go to for advice. When Jenn reached out directly to her assigned advisor, she was redirected to make an appointment on the EAB Navigate platform or join Zoom meeting drop-in sessions. This consistent redirection made Jenn feel distressed and led her to stop trying to email the assigned advisor:

I had reached out to my advisor. It was just a simple question. She was so quick to just say, "Hi, Jen, please schedule an appointment at" and then she gave me the website. When I went on the website, I was like, "Okay, let me schedule a meeting with her." The closest meeting that was available was 2 1/2 weeks away. And you know, it was just a quick question that I wanted answered. In 2 weeks, it wasn't gonna matter anymore and be too late. I'd say my advisor hasn't really reached out to me. And then ever since that time I reached out to her, I just stopped emailing her. [She said] no, I have to take care of it through the website—scheduling a meeting. I mean, I guess it's pretty nerve-wracking. Because say, the day before, I want to meet with an advisor, it'll tell me I have to wait like 2-3 weeks. And I was like, "Whoa, I need help right now." Also, it's been pretty nerve-wracking for me, because coming in [to college] with my big brother was no help, you know, with college stuff and everything. I'm basically starting fresh and everything's new to me.

Cece felt stressed when her assigned advisor was not promptly responsive to emails asking for help:

I would email them [after an appointment] but I wouldn't get a response to like a week and a week and a half later. It was just kind of difficult because I needed help. . . . It's kind of stressful, because I'm trying to get the answer as soon as possible but it's so hard to get an answer or a response right away.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Advising Centers implemented virtual Zoom drop-in sessions. According to the University Hills website, virtual Zoom drop-in sessions are meant for quick advising questions. Because some student participants found it difficult to schedule an advising appointment when they needed one, the daily Zoom drop-in sessions became the primary place to find an advisor—any advisor. Naomi was aware of her assigned advisor but because appointments were difficult to make, she attended Zoom drop-ins to meet with anyone who could help:

I do know who mine is, but honestly, you could just log in and pop in for Zoom drop-in hours they have. That's what usually I do because when I try to make an appointment, I usually don't find any. So, I just pop in for whoever's available. . . . since I need quick answers. I just need to get the fastest help. I can't wait for stuff like that. I don't really remember. Maybe once I've met with my assigned advisor in the first year. The rest [of the time] I needed my answers then and there.

Angie similarly knew her assigned advisor yet found the Zoom drop-ins more reliable for receiving advising help. Angie said, “Most of the time I need help I go to the drop-ins, but I do know who my advisor is. . . . I typically meet with different advisors just in the drop-ins—whoever is available to help me, really.” Ines was aware that the EAB Navigate system was identifying her assigned advisor when she attempted to schedule appointments, but found meeting with any advisor in the Zoom drop-ins more helpful:

I do know who my advisor is and also like to make an appointment. [EAB Navigate] lets you know who's yours but it's really hard to get like an appointment. They're always a whole month after. . . . But if I have a question, I need an answer to then and there, I'd do the drop-ins.

Finding multiple advisors in Zoom drop-in sessions mitigated the benefits of consistently interacting with the same assigned advisor. Shelby did not believe there were any benefits to assigning an advisor if that advisor was constantly unavailable and she could receive standard information from all advisors in the center in Zoom drop-in sessions:

I wouldn't say [there was] necessarily something beneficial of having my specific advisor, because there's so many other advisors that were also helpful when I did those virtual drop-in meetings. I didn't necessarily need my specific advisor to tell me that information when there are other advisors that can be helpful.

Even Brian, who had positive rapport with his assigned advisor, found it difficult to schedule an advising appointment. Brian found a way to locate his assigned advisor in the drop-in queue, however this was not ideal. Brian had to ensure he was one of the first in the Zoom drop-in sessions to meet with his assigned advisor:

It is kind of hard to schedule an appointment with them because they're always so busy, so I usually attend the drop-in hours, which is not the best option. . . . Being the first one in the drop-ins is the thing that makes it difficult.

For Shelby, waiting a long time in the Zoom drop-in sessions for a quick question was a serious challenge. Shelby tried to rationalize the challenge of long wait times because of the number of students that needed help. She attempted to schedule an advising appointment as University Hills was transitioning back to in-person instruction in Fall 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Shelby

found that her college advising center's doors were closed and there was confusing signage on the door:

I am planning the day before. I'm going to join the Zoom. I usually do have to wait a while. I mean, it's understandable because a lot of people have questions. . . . [I may have] a short question and need to wait like 2 weeks, for example, and that has definitely been a challenge. There was one time last semester when I wanted to see if I can have an appointment with an advisor in person. It wasn't too clear about the whole COVID protocols, so I went to the college advising center on campus, but they were closed. The paper that they had on their door wasn't so clear either in regards to needing to make appointments or when they're open. . . so that was also another challenge.

Likewise, Milly's assigned advisor was unresponsive and unavailable for appointments for weeks.

When Milly was finally able to secure an appointment with her assigned advisor, she felt her questions were not answered and she was rushed off the Zoom session:

I think my challenge is getting feedback from them, like about the classes I should take, or any type of suggestions for what would work best for my 4-year plan. Whenever I try to make appointments, they're always usually booked up for at least 2 weeks. I'd have to go at least 3 weeks out to get any appointment. . . . I don't feel they are very helpful whenever I joined virtual drop-in hours or the virtual advising meeting. I've always felt like I was being rushed almost, and that everything was always referred to using the degree planner. I would [say], "Okay, but I have a list of classes that I'm thinking about taking" and they would just keep referring me to the degree planner. Our meeting would be over in 5 minutes when we have like a 30-minute time period.

Advisors are scheduled in 30-minute appointment increments, and Matt noticed when his advisor had an appointment immediately prior to his appointment. His advisor was a few minutes late because of the back-to-back scheduling of the appointments. For Matt, who could access his assigned advisor more easily, the 30-minute appointment period block felt limiting. Matt preferred the ability to schedule appointments for longer than 30 minutes when needed:

I know, for me, whenever I've met in Zoom, it's usually a meeting of 30 minutes. That's how it's labeled. I guess time increment would be an issue. . . . It's listed when you book the appointment, like 11:00 to 11:30. It does feel like a bit of a time constraint, especially since usually, I'm sure she has meetings that go over. It's only happened once where she's been a few minutes late, so it wasn't a big deal at all. But it's happened before. I'm just saying the time constraint, I feel, could probably be extended or adjusted.

Cece and Milly discovered their college advising center practiced block scheduling that made it difficult for them to find appointments in the afternoon. The lack of advising appointments in the afternoon was challenging for Cece because of her class schedule:

The timeframe was a challenge, like when you can meet up with an advisor, because most of them do it in the morning but I have classes in the morning. So, maybe have [advising appointments] in the afternoon, or mid-day. I look for my advisor [in EAB Navigate] and most of the meetings are in the in the morning. They fill up really quick and sometimes I don't have time in the morning.

Milly pointed out that her advising center's block scheduling created less availability, saying, "It's not even just my advisor. All of them have this very similar availability so it's always usually a longer wait."

Limited availability was also noted in a few advisor responses. The advisor's perspective was that caseloads were too large to manage efficiently and effectively. One advisor suggested improvement to the University Hills caseload model, identifying a "need to lessen the student-to-advisor ratio and mandatory once-a-semester advising sessions." Another advisor maintained it was too difficult to support assigned students consistently and all other students in the college with limited time:

Although I am very excited to meet with students, sometimes it can be very overwhelming because our caseloads are so big per advisor. My hope is to meet with every single student and establish that connection with students so that they know they can always count on advising. However, the large caseloads make this a bit difficult to do because our campaign times are limited.

Based on the University Hills proactive caseload model documents, the average student-to-advisor ratio was 135 students to 1 advisor. However, this average could mean that some advisors managed much smaller caseloads, while other advisors in larger colleges managed larger student caseloads. The average also did not calculate the student-to-advisor ratio for students outside caseloads, such as third-year and fourth-year students' advisors were responsible for supporting.

I asked advisors about additional trainings to help advisors with caseload advising. One advisor responded that more advisors were needed to make caseloads more manageable, and not more trainings:

At this moment additional training are not very necessary. I think what we need are more advisors and a more reasonable caseload. As you know, besides our caseload, we still serve students outside our caseload and so the amount of students we service is quite large.

Related to Matt's comments about limitations of the 30-minute maximum time for appointments, one advisor illustrated how students could feel overwhelmed from condensed information given in 30-minute increments:

It is an exciting time to meet with students and provide as much information as possible. While this is very good, I also find that too much information in one session does not stick. In my experience, many students do not retain all the information and tend to feel overwhelmed by all the information we provide in our 30-minute sessions. I know that I try to offer as much information as possible so that just in case they do not touch base with advising again, at least they have as much information possible. However, as I mentioned this can be counterproductive because students get overwhelmed by the amount of information.

Reactive Advising

The reactive advising approach is essentially waiting for the student to request assistance. The student initiates student-advisor interactions by scheduling advising appointments, dropping into the center in person or in virtual Zoom drop-ins, and sending emails with advising questions. Reactive advising is closely related to the theme of limited availability of the assigned advisor. Student participants shared feelings about assigned advisors reaching out to them inconsistently or sometimes not at all. Student participants with advisors who practiced more reactive advising and were less available felt they were not being cared for. These students felt alone in the university experience, especially as first-generation college students. Cece, Angie, and Naomi described reaching out to their assigned advisors most of the time. Naomi emphasized the dilemma of a first-generation college student who did not know which questions to ask or what information she needed? to be successful in college: "As a first year [first-generation college student] I don't know anyone who's gone to college. It's kind of hard because I don't know what I should ask or what I don't know. It's hard." Jenn described how it felt when her advisor was unresponsive to her calls for help and rarely reached out to schedule an advising appointment:

It's pretty nerve-wracking. Because the next time I have a question, like Shelby said, it probably won't be answered, and it doesn't seem like they're too concerned. My advisor, you know, not to put dirt on her name, is not concerned for her assigned students. [Receiving communications from my assigned advisor] it makes me feel like I guess more like cared about from my school. I feel like my advisor kind of lacks that. And it does feel like I'm on my own. But that extra help would be nice.

Jayson compared his experiences with his assigned advisor and dual advisor. After experiencing reactive advising from his assigned advisor, Jayson felt they were unsupportive and unhelpful. He contrasted his advising experiences with a proactive and reactive approach:

I think in [College Advising Center] I don't feel like my advisor is really there for me. I don't think she's the best. And I don't feel like the advice she gives was probably the best. Luckily for me, as I said before my [Dual] advisor reached out to me, so I was able to get good advice. But I think there is some benefit to have good advisors who are reaching out to you.

Angie's narrative revealed a rationalization for why she isn't being contacted by her assigned advisor. Angie did not expect anyone would help her at the university, yet she desired proactive support from someone like an advisor. Angie responded to a question about how she felt when her assigned advisor rarely communicated:

I guess how they make me feel or how it makes me feel. It's just, well, I guess that's understandable because we are in college now. I guess it's kind of like you're on your own, or that's what they always say, when you go to college. Everyone's doing their own thing. You got to find your own way. So, I kind of understand there's a lot of people in college. I mean, it's not just me, so I guess I could understand why they're not reaching out to me, but I'd appreciate if they ever did. I mean, it's nice to be reminded that someone is looking out for you, you know.

Lack of Caring and Personalized Advising

Not receiving personalized advising was another indication to student participants that their assigned advisor did not care about them. Providing a personalized advising approach can come in the form of asking personal questions to the student and showing empathy and interest through body language and meaningful interactions. This theme from data analysis involves the absence of this approach. Student participants expressed interactions with their assigned advisors that were transactional, routine, cold, and unsupportive. Many did not have an opportunity to meet with their advisors individually and were never asked how they were doing or feeling. The nature of the interactions focused on academic requirements; however, the delivery of those requirements was often not personalized to the student's academic or professional ambitions or interests. Several student participants' initial introduction meetings with their assigned advisors were conducted as large workshops in a Zoom meeting format. The assigned advisor disseminated standard academic

requirement information through a slide presentation to multiple students in their caseload at the same. Milly described this introductory orientation workshop devoid of the opportunity to build a connection with her assigned advisor:

Actually, the email wasn't really the introduction. It was kind of just the email with my classes. We kind of met during the orientation but I don't think we could show our faces because they were [sharing the screen with the presentation]. So, it was just the advisor on there [in the Zoom]. There's so many people in the Zoom so I never really got introduced to my advisor.

Angie's assigned advisor also used a slide presentation to deliver academic requirement information. This standard presentation was given in a group workshop format repeatedly. Angie appreciated the helpful information; however, the routine presentation was not what she hoped for in an advising interaction:

My experience hasn't been the greatest, it's been okay. The thing that I feel bothered me is that whenever I meet with my advisor, like a Zoom meeting, it's only been a PowerPoint. I feel like it's easier for them [because] they put all their information in one go, but I can go through the PowerPoint by myself, really. Sometimes it's repeated information and sometimes the meetings are early, and I'm like, "Oh, why did I just wake up for a PowerPoint presentation that I could have gone through myself?" Other than that, I mean, the information has been good even though I feel like that is repeated. I think it's a good reminder of what we need to be doing. But that's just it. I mean, it's just been PowerPoints I don't have much to say about that.

Corroborating Angie's description, the routine slide presentations were like reminders and not anything special to Naomi. When Naomi's advisor contacted her to schedule an advising appointment, it usually came in the form of a presentation rather than a personalized conversation. Naomi's interactions with her assigned advisor were repetitive: "It's how Angie said, it was a reminder. There's nothing really special to it. It's basically a PowerPoint with information. I could probably pull it up because I have screenshots of what they say. It's requirement for courses."

Jenn remembered an experience similar to those described by Milly, Angie, and Naomi, when her assigned advisor delivered a slide presentation in a group workshop format. Jenn felt her advisor's inability to be helpful in both individual and group workshop formats was a scary and lonely experience as a first-generation college student. This lack of helpfulness was interpreted as a lack of caring:

During the meetings that I've had with her, the very first one was the one I had scheduled for [a] question. She was not giving me the information I needed. She just wasn't helpful. The other meeting, I can remember it was for multiple students and in the major. I believe it was just a brief PowerPoint of what we needed in order to succeed in that major, I guess, but it was very brief. I remember so many students having questions, which in a way means [the advisor] wasn't doing a very good job explaining the PowerPoints thoroughly, or with explaining the information that was crucial. I feel like it was just lacking. You know it's kind of scary. I feel like it's nerve-wracking as a first-year and first-generation [student]. And it kind of feels like I'm doing most of the work when, you know, they're supposed to be there to help. Since they're not giving me that information, I feel the need to look for it somewhere else or by other people, not just my advisor. . . . I'll just go ahead and say I don't feel like my advisor cares about me.

The emphasis on degree requirements, citing the catalogue or degree planner, and not acknowledging the student's human experience in college created a cold and transactional interaction for several student participants. Much of the information they received was not unique to them. Ines could predict the rushed interaction with her assigned advisor:

I already know what she's gonna say. She's just gonna make sure that I'm following my courses. And I think she'll say I'll be in my major and then I won't be a pre-major anymore. She basically just tells me what's already on my degree planner. So, it's like I already know, but they still want me here, just to be sure—just so she could reassure me I'm doing the right stuff . . . Even though this is a 30-minute appointment, it's probably gonna be like 10 minutes instead.

Milly received identical reminder messages from her assigned advisor throughout the semester. The generic message made her feel her circumstances were not unique in the advising process. This provoked Milly to avoid meeting with her assigned advisor:

With my advisor, they usually reach out first because I wait until I really have to go. I don't really feel anything when I get the email because I've gotten them multiple times in one semester. It's just a reminder email and it says the same thing every time, so it feels like it's just a routine something I have to do.

The debate over to what extent is it the responsibility of the academic advisor to provide a personalized and holistic interaction was revealed by one of the advisors. The advisor responded in the survey about a difference among colleagues as to understanding of their role, extent to which they provided holistic support, and knowledge about needs of historically underrepresented students:

There is also a divide in the advisors who see themselves as solely academic advisors and those who see themselves as student success advisors and those who view themselves as academic counselors. This in itself causes barriers to underrepresented students as they need a blend of all three in order to properly be guided and persist . . . We need to understand our population and then within that population we need to

understand the underrepresented students and find out what we can do to see what they need instead of assuming that all the underrepresented students need the same thing.

This perspective illuminates the differences in students' experiences with various assigned advisors. Advisors who interpret their role and expectations around providing accurate information on course requirements, policies, and processes may intentionally avoid engaging their students personally, believing that is beyond the scope of their role.

Advisors were asked in what ways professional development and training offerings prepared them for caseload advising. One participant responded that they were already aware of advising policies, processes, and technical aspects, such as e-advising tools. This advisor response highlights the greater importance given to technical information over skills, practices, and approaches that facilitate personalized and developmental advising interactions. There was also an indication that the advisor did not benefit from any Advising trainings:

To be honest, most of what I've done from my Department/College has prepared me for caseload advising. I feel that we experimented with online advising, campaigns, and degree planner very early on and that just carried over to caseload advising. Being [my expertise with degree planners and EAB] also helped. I felt that most of what I did in caseload advising were things that I already knew how to do. However, I'm sure that other Colleges/Departments would have found [EAB Navigate] and Campaign trainings very helpful.

Several student participants described less than beneficial experiences with generic group workshops. They would have preferred a more individualized experience with their advisors. In contrast, one advisor viewed their use of a series of workshops as a beneficial strategy for connecting with their assigned students:

I made the students in my caseload aware that I am their assigned academic advisor by sending them an email prior to the start of the semester introducing myself. I also held a series of workshops to conduct a meet and greet as they transitioned to college.

When asked about additional trainings for advisors to help them with caseload advising, an advisor wanted to learn how to implement more group workshops with the aim of supporting student success: "Ways to implement more group workshops to help students succeed in college." Student and advisor study participants had different views on the use of group workshops.

Lack of Student-Advisor Relationship

Student participants were asked if they felt they had a relationship with their assigned advisor and what kinds of interactions or conversations led them to believe there was positive relationship. Half of the student participants recounted interactions with assigned advisors that felt more clerical and generic and did not facilitate development of student-advisor relationships. The theme of lack of caring and personalized advising is related to the theme of lack of student-advisor relationship. If student participants did not feel acknowledged individually and cared about as persons, then there was no evidence of a relationship between the advisor and the student. The student and the advisor also had to meet frequently enough in a one-on-one setting to develop a relationship. The University Hills caseload model was designed to have intentional frequent interactions (see Appendix ____) but benefits of structured proactive outreach campaigns and assignment of an advisor to a student could be undermined if the advisor was constantly unavailable to meet one-on-one for appointments.

Shelby was assigned to an advisor who was consistently unavailable and was often redirected to the Zoom drop-ins to meet with any advisor in the center for answers to questions. Shelby wondered if a more consistent contact with her assigned advisor could possibly generate a relationship. However, Shelby's advisor's emphasis on only academic requirements did not foster any kind of relationship:

I wouldn't necessarily say that I have like a relationship with my advisor. Just like I said before, I tend to join the drop-ins Zoom meetings whenever I have a question. I believe that if I did have more contact with my advisor—since he's very busy—I guess we would form a relationship? But usually, when I do have meetings with him it tends to be more about classes, just what classes I should be taking. That seems to be it. Yeah.

For Jenn, difficulty with scheduling an advising appointment and not having a relationship with her assigned advisor were the two main challenges with advising at University Hills:

I'd say my relationship with my advisor would be nonexistent, or just very distant. And wait time to make an appointment—I mean, for what I could think of right now—I feel like those are the major issues and challenges.

Milly understood there could be a benefit to assigning an advisor to a student, but only if that advisor was willing to get to know their students and provide personalized advising. Milly felt her

advisor could not recognize her on campus, and it did not matter which advisor she met with if there was no relationship:

I do not have a relationship with my advisor. I feel like if we were to see each other around campus, I don't think that he would recognize me. When we are in meetings, I just ask about the classes I should take and then I just get told about the degree planner every single time. So, that's it pretty much. That's basically the whole meeting. I think there's really only a benefit to it if your advisor knows who you are and is giving you actual things to work off of so that you know they're there for you. But I mean, if they're just gonna [refer to the degree planner], then I feel like you should be able to go to any advisor because they are all basically going to do the same thing, in my experience. Even when I'm trying other advisors in the center, it hasn't necessarily been any different than my assigned advisor. I don't understand the point of having the assigned one if I don't have a relationship with them.

Ines also did not feel she had a relationship with her assigned advisor. Her encounters with the assigned advisor left her feeling anonymous. Ines's assigned advisor did not attempt to get to know her:

I don't feel like I have a relationship with my [advisor]. When we meet, I'm just like any other student and she's just asking me about my courses and stuff. She didn't do [anything different from] how other advisors are. No, it's just straight to the point.

Some student participants recalled advisor behaviors that were detached, unemotional, and mechanical. Angie described her assigned advisor's behavior as a reason they did not have a positive relationship:

If you've met the advisor, he's very vague. He's kind of emotionless, almost, sometimes, which is not motivating at all. Dude, I'm not asking to be entertained or not interested in the meeting. It's very like, "Oh, here's a PowerPoint, I'll read it to you." I have no relationship with him.

Milly's assigned advisor's body language communicated a lack of attention and interest. Milly had recently declared a minor in another college and met with another advisor. She provided a recent example of a positive interaction sharply contrasting with her assigned major advisor's behaviors. Milly's advisor did not look into the camera into Milly's face throughout the entire Zoom advising session:

With my own advisor I don't have nearly the same type of energy or good feeling [I had] when I met with [Minor advisor] one time, and I think it shows a sharp contrast. Another thing I didn't like with my [advisor] was that they had two monitors up when they were on the Zoom. They would never look away from the computer they were on to look at me. It was just always looking at the monitor, hands on the mouse the whole time, and I felt

like it was just rushed. Because of that, there was not even like a connection. I didn't feel they were actually listening or trying to help.

Lack of Trust

Student participants retold interactions with their assigned advisors that provoked feelings of distrust toward the advisor and their advice. Not receiving specialized information about the student's major program, curriculum, and potential career pathways led students to believe their advisor was less knowledgeable and less trustworthy. Distrust developed when students received conflicting advice from multiple advisors in the college advising center. Student participants typically received conflicting advice in Zoom drop-in sessions and when they did not meet consistently with the same assigned advisor. Students recognized instances when their advisor lacked a full grasp of what the student was learning in courses or in a major. Maria's previous advisor stated they did not understand how any student could take the required courses in the major. Maria perceived the advisor as lacking the academic background to provide advising expertise:

I remember they [worked with students in] unrelated majors and had no experience within the fields we wanted to get into. We'd hear, "I don't know how you guys are doing all these classes. I could never." So how can you advise me if you don't know what it's like, or what it's like to go through the career path that I aspire to go down? It is important to have the career experience and background. I think that is essential in advising someone because, when it comes to advising, it goes much deeper than "These are the classes you have to take."

Jayson was able to identify his assigned advisor's lack of expertise about his major's curriculum.

Jayson thought that his major being small in a large college could explain why there was little attention given to it by his advisor:

Once I switched to [major] with College [Advising Center], I didn't really feel like my [advisor] was really knowledgeable of what exactly I may need from them. I felt like they do not give the best advice because the College is really big and the [major] is just a small section. . . . I just feel that there was too many majors for them to be an expert in what I needed. . . . I don't feel they're as knowledgeable because I don't know if the advisor has taken a differential equations class or a linear algebra class.

Jenn met with two different advisors in the same college advising center. She received conflicting advice from the two advisors, her assigned advisor and another advisor. Jenn was

concerned that she may have missed essential information as a first-year, first-generation college student:

When I went to my Advising Center, I had met up with my advisor. I feel like she wasn't really any help. Because recently I had another advising meeting and they told me that I wasn't supposed to be focusing on getting my [general education courses-GE] out of the way, that right now it was important to claim my major. When I met with someone from the [Advising Center], she was no help. She didn't tell me anything about that. If anything, she was helping me include all the GEs. I guess she didn't mention [anything about my major]. And, you know, coming in new, I knew nothing about how to do it . . . I guess the important stuff wasn't mentioned. It's crucial information that I should be knowing as a first-year.

Milly had a very similar experience of attempting to get accurate advice she could trust by going to more than one advisor. She sought out a second opinion because her assigned advisor had not been very helpful. The advisors became aware that Milly was trying to get a second opinion and displayed irritation:

There was one time when I visited my assigned advisor and I had visited the other advisor on the same day. I wanted to get different opinions because my [assigned] advisor hasn't really helped me, in my opinion. So, I went to that second advisor to ask for help. And they seemed a little bit irritated that I had went to the other advisor, and were like, "I'm just going to tell you the same thing that they did." They seemed like I had wasted their time with making another appointment. And, yeah, I didn't have too much of a good experience with that. When it's time to have the required meeting for the semester I don't like to go to my advisor because I feel like nothing happens and it's kind of a bummer. I have to go do that. I don't really have a choice.

Second Research Question

The second question guiding this study was "What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' sense of belonging?" To answer this question, student participants were asked about their advisors' role in connecting them to resources or activities, and whether or not they felt connected to University Hills. Some student participants indicated their advisors had connected them to a resource or encouraged them to get involved in campus activities and this led to a greater sense of belonging. Other students who were provided a campus resource from their advisor did not feel more connected to University Hills because of the circumstances of learning remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another finding emerged from student participants who expressed connection to the University; they had sought out an opportunity or resource on their

own without the aid of the advisor. Some students were unsure to what extent their assigned advisor was responsible for connecting them to campus involvement.

The themes identified thorough data analysis for the second research question are (a) advisor connecting student, (b) students connected through their own efforts, (c) students rarely connected to campus resources by their assigned advisor, (d) professional development and trainings focused on beneficial practices and approaches that contribute to students sense of belonging, (e) campaigns as a mechanism for intentional proactive outreach to support students, and (f) limitations of campaigns in supporting all historically underrepresented students in the caseload.

Practices Contributing to Sense of Belonging

Advisors Promote Connections

Student participants benefited from the work of academic advisors who intentionally promoted campus involvement and the use of resources. Maria's reflection revealed encouragement from her advisor to become involved in career and major program opportunities. More importantly to Maria, she described authentic interaction that required sincere curiosity from the advisor about Maria's interests. This genuine interest and caring about Maria's involvement gave her a sense of community from her advisor, college, and academic program:

I remember last year there were a lot of events that the advisor would send out. They invite us to Zoom events, like panels, so we could talk to alumni, students, [and professionals in the field] just to get out there to see what it's like. We can ask questions or understand what they're looking for in candidates. They also had an event in the spring semester. I don't know if every college has an event for their students, but it was different workshops and raffles and stuff. I wasn't able to attend the whole thing. But they did send out reminders and everything, so we could attend. They [promoted] a career panel mostly through Instagram, which makes sense, because there's a lot of students on Instagram. The college is always posting "Come join this soon" or "There's this thing going on." In regard to how my advisor helps us get connected to the campus . . . I don't think it's to the whole campus, but I think to feeling connected to our college and the people and professors and everything. I feel like there's a good mutual sense of care at every level within the college, from professors and advisors. It's like that sense of community that they established well.

Jayson clearly articulated benefits of his previous assigned advisor and current dual advisor connecting him to resources. Because of these resources, Jayson was supported academically and learned he could stay on track to graduate by taking winter and summer term courses. Knowing that

he is on track to graduate on time because of the support from his advisors elicited Jayson's feelings of connectedness, hope, and pride in being a student at University Hills:

In my sophomore year, I've stepped on campus like twice. But a combination of my advisors and one of my bosses that I worked for at [University Hills being] a professor, it's made me really feel like I actually know the school. I feel like I'm luckier than a lot of my friends who go to different colleges and schools who feel like they don't even know the campus, or they don't know anything, because they don't have anyone to talk to. They feel like I've been very fortunate with my advisors. And even though I'm no longer with my [previous assigned advisor] they really helped me out a lot about just feeling connected to the [University] and how proud I am. Some of my friends went to other schools, and we've been online for so long, they don't want to feel connected to it, as I feel like I'm connected to [University Hills]. I feel pride because I'm on track to graduate because of the advising I've gotten and the hope I've gotten from them helping me learn about resources like the tutoring center. I struggle with writing because I don't like writing. I don't like sitting down and writing. But just [advisors] letting me know, "Hey, just the same way you schedule for advising appointments, it's the same with the tutoring center." That resource—the tutoring center—really helped me push through and pass my English classes. Just letting me know about the resources, my [previous assigned advisor] helped me learn about taking classes over the winter, which I had no idea you can do. I did that. I took a GE at PCC. Just the fact that hey, I'm actually on track, is why I am so proud to be at [University Hills]. I have other friends who don't get anything similar to what I am getting. And we've all been on Zoom. We've technically all been at the same university at this point because we've been on online. But I have advisors who know what they're talking about. And that's why I really feel proud about [University Hills].

Brian's assigned advisor consistently motivated him to get involved in campus and major activities to encourage a well-rounded university experience. Brian described his advisor's beneficial advice to seek out career and extracurricular opportunities. Although he felt somewhat connected to University Hills, Brian identified much more with his college and major:

[My advisor] encouraged me to join an extracurricular and not just focus on academics, to get some experience being around other people in the same major. I really appreciate that because sometimes I feel like if I were to do it by myself, I don't feel as motivated to do it because I'm so busy but having him remind me things . . . He also says, "Okay, these clubs lead to these potential experiences," or "This resource in the school can help you with this." If this is something he's telling me then it must be beneficial, not only for my major but for myself as well. . . . I feel somewhat connected as well, because I've done both online and in person for some classes. I feel like I'm more connected to the college and my major rather than the entire University because I don't really get involved too much into the other things that the University does, because I usually focus more on my major. I think that's another thing I need to sort of do for myself—to be more outgoing, more involved with the University.

Like Brian, Cece discussed receiving beneficial information about scholarships and emotional support from her assigned advisor. Although her assigned advisor was proactive in sending out resources,

Cece did not feel entirely connected to the University because of how little she was on campus during the COVID-19 pandemic:

I like that my advisor gives me information about emotional support. They give information out even though we're not able to meet every single time. When they have a chance, they send out pamphlets and email me stuff. That person emails me pamphlets or information about scholarships. Yeah, it's helpful. . . . There were some scholarships I didn't know about when I was a first year, like last year. I didn't know there were specific types of scholarships I can apply to. . . . For me, exactly like Brian said, I feel somewhat connected. But all my classes have mostly been online. I've only been to one class in person, so [connection] is kind of difficult. I feel like I'm somewhat connected.

Cece's example highlighted how the benefits of her advisor connecting her to resources may not be enough to create a strong sense of belonging while learning remotely in the pandemic.

Structures Contributing to Sense of Belonging

The University Hills proactive caseload model document outlines in two areas the goal and responsibility of the advisor to connect their students to resources and services. Within key components of caseload advising, it states "Offer personalized referrals to resources and services to student caseloads beyond academics." The words "beyond academics" reveal a premise that student-advisor interactions should not focus solely on course requirements. The commitments section of the document lists advisor responsibilities, including to "serve as an institutional agent that connects student caseloads to various resources and services." The document does not clearly define how these actions could provide students with a sense of belonging.

Advisor participants were asked to describe how the advising caseload model has influenced the ways in which they advise their assigned students. Two advisors remarked that the caseload model did not influence any changes in their advising practices or approaches. In contrast, most participants commented that the caseload model did influence them to adopt an intentional, personalized, and proactive advising approach. One advisor participant expressed how their practice was changed, "I am more intentional with the students I reach out to in that they know who I am, and I have more of an established rapport with them." Their statements echoed the goals of the caseload model's guiding documents and students' experiences with being connected to resources and opportunities. The structure of the University Hills advising caseload model influenced one advisor's

sense of accountability to provide support for their assigned students in several areas: “Sense of ownership and accountability, target specific needs of the students - GPA, major specific criteria, progression, enrollment, support services, and building community.” Another advisor described their perceptions of their role and responsibility as a resource to their student caseload:

I really like the caseload model. It affords me a direct impact on the lives of students. The students are made aware that I am a resource to them in navigating their university experience. I assist them in staying on track with degree progression, resolving any problems they encounter with professors or academically, and providing motivation to persevere.

Another advisor’s experience with the caseload model for first-year and second-year students was not too different from a previous advising cohort model used in their center. In both advising models, this advisor perceived their role as someone who connected their students to services and resources:

This is similar to how I do cohort advising--I really focus on connection and helping students understand where and who they can go to if they need help, but also helping them develop into autonomous individuals who can critically think and use the tools they were given to do things themselves.

Professional Development and Trainings

Advisor participants were asked to describe the ways professional development and trainings prepared them for caseload advising. Most advisor participants described learning practices and approaches such as proactive and appreciative advising. They learned how to identify student populations within their caseloads that needed more attention and the importance of intentionally connecting with their students. Some advisors recognized the benefits of learning how to implement a campaign using the EAB Navigate platform as a mechanism for proactive support: “The professional development and trainings that are offered have helped to give me a bit of direction in the way that I am approaching the structured campaigns and also how and when I am connecting with my caseload.” Another advisor listed several organizational elements that supported advisors in their efforts to assist historically underrepresented students in their caseload: “Campaigns, trainings, caseload advising, forums, institutes, technology, case studies.” Another advisor acknowledged the advantages of technology in addition to learning about empirical research on advising and the proactive advising approach:

Leveraging technology [prepared me] to reach out to students for specific targeted needs. Technology won't replace advisors, but it can help us do our job better. Support [advising efforts with] research and literature [to] understand the importance of why we do what we do in higher education and reinforcing proactive advising approaches.

The trainings emphasized the kinds of practices and approaches that support students' sense of belonging. Most advisor participants incorporated these practices and approaches: "It has helped me to see different ways on how to implement caseload advising by looking at various strategies and ways to reach out and maintain a rapport with the number of students assigned to me." Additionally, one advisor discussed how their practice improved as a result of trainings and advisor university meetings:

They [trainings and professional development] have helped me find better ways to approach students, better ways to handle difficult conversations. Our Appreciative Advising training and our advisor [university meetings] have helped me come up with better approaches.

One advisor participant shared a renewed motivation for their work and enhanced sense of empathy for their students after the trainings and professional development:

I am reminded of why I got into this career and how I can positively enhance my students' experiences with advising. In the trainings, I learn to become more empathetic, appreciative, and making the most of the short time we have with each student.

Trainings were also gathering spaces for advisors to gain knowledge from each other. An advisor participant benefited from learning about high-impact practices in a community of advisors:

I appreciate the professional development and training offerings provided. As a seasoned professional in higher education who is new to academic advising, the knowledge gleaned from the professional development workshops and training has informed me on best practices. It has also helped me to connect with colleagues, learn from their experiences, and afforded me to make modifications in my approach along the way.

Learning from other advisors about how to care and outreach to student caseloads was a valuable experience for one advisor:

The professional development and training offerings have prepared me by giving me the tools to gather the correct list of students assigned to me. I also have enjoyed the feedback from other advisors on their email routine and approach. I also enjoy seeing how to monitor the list of students and compare who has responded and who has not. This helps a lot to ensure that we connect with those students who have not reached out to us.

Campaign Outreach

Advisor participants were asked to describe, based on their experience, structures and practices in the Advising caseload model that supported historically underrepresented students at University Hills. Many responses pointed to trainings and proactive campaigns as mechanisms to identify and communicate with students in need of support. One advisor thought campaigns and trainings were mutually beneficial components that informed their practice: “Campaigns and trainings such as Appreciative Advising support our historically underrepresented students. Campaigns let us know exactly what we are going to talk about, and trainings teach us, advisors, how to go about our conversations.”

Another advisor viewed campaigns as an organized way to identify historically underrepresented students who should be prioritized for advising interventions: “Campaigns are a great way to target historically underrepresented students and pull them in for advising.” These examples demonstrate the perceptions of some advisor participants that they had tools and the knowledge to support historically underrepresented students in their caseload.

Practice and Structure Limitations

Inconsistent Connections from Advisor

This category developed from data analysis comprises students’ assertions that their advisors did not connect them to any resources or rarely provided information. Some student participants believed that the assigned advisor could do more to provide beneficial information, resources, and support. Students also found their sense of connection and belonging to University Hills affected by learning remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A few student participants asserted that their assigned advisor was much more active in sharing resources with them in their first year at University Hills, especially their first fall semester. However, the information and resource sharing stopped after the first year. Shelby recalled how her assigned advisor initially shared resources in their first Zoom workshop and then never did that again:

I guess I would say he was able to do that in the first virtual meeting in the welcoming the freshmen portion. He did bring up some resources that we had on campus and stuff

like that. But besides that first time, I wouldn't say that he was encouraging students through email, for example, letting me know "Oh, by the way, we have this and this."

Naomi felt a sense of belonging because of her association with living and working on campus with peers. She would have preferred to receive information about resources and opportunities from her advisor, but Naomi learned to rely on herself to seek out information about resources:

I feel connected just because I live on campus. . . . I'm usually there Monday through Friday. I work in the dining hall, so my coworkers go to school, and I've gotten to know more people that way. And obviously, in my floor, I've gotten to know more people. . . . My [Resident Assistant] has done a better job at [connecting me to University Hills resources]. I feel like [my assigned advisor] could send an email to all of us, you know, not just specifically to me. They could do that. . . . If I need help with any [resources], I just look it up and see where it's at and just do it myself.

Angie agreed with others in the focus group session about feeling unsupported by her assigned advisor. Not receiving any information about campus resources and opportunities was another objective she had to figure out on her own:

My advisor hasn't connected me either, but I have been able to get emails from other resources from school. And some things I've gone out of my way to do on my own research as I read those emails. I've already signed up to a few things or, I looked into a few things because I want to do them. If it comes my way then I have to, you know, figure it out.

Like Shelby, Naomi, and Angie, Milly were not actively connected to opportunities or encouraged to participate in anything by her assigned advisor. Furthermore, Milly believed an advisor could easily disseminate beneficial information to their students if they were aware of their interests. Her sense of belonging to University Hills was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote programming in 2020-2021. Milly's reflection described a lack of information about opportunities to get involved in her major, college, or campus life:

I don't get really any information about anything [from my assigned advisor]. I feel like stuff that has to do with education, like study abroad or things like that, or even scholarships, should be something that an advisor could possibly mention if they know about what you're actually doing in school. I think that would be helpful. But yeah, most of the time I find it by myself. Sometimes, like with certain classes, I do [feel connected to University Hills], but so far with any events, because I'm on campus, there's not really many [events] and not really much to do on campus. I don't know if that's because of COVID. I came during COVID. But everything closes at 3:00, pretty much, on the main campus. So, if I'm not on the main campus, then down in the dorms we don't really have events or anything for the student body. And I don't like that. Sometimes that makes me feel like a little distant, because there's not much to do and I don't really feel like there's

a lot of notice ahead of time for me to plan it out and see if I actually want to come. I've been here more now because school started but when I don't have class, I tend to go home or go do something else so I can just not be bored.

During the student focus group session Jenn checked her calendar to see how many times her assigned advisor had reached out to her. Initially she thought there were more emails from her advisor, however those messages were automatic appointment reminders from the EAB Navigate platform. Jenn's peer academic coach was more successful in sharing and connecting Jenn to University Hills resources and opportunities than her assigned advisor:

I feel like there's no sense of connecting me to University Hills from my advisor. Like I said, it's very distant, there's a lack of connecting. Now that I look at the emails I received from my advisor, only two of them are her reaching out—one about that presentation, that short PPT slide and the other one saying she's my advisor. The rest are just, "Hey, reminder that you scheduled an appointment." Now that I think of it, I haven't really even talked to my advisor other than those two meetings that we had. My [peer academic coach] is more involved in connecting me to school activities, stuff that has to do with my major. You know, interesting stuff that's going on with [University Hills]. Just all of that, in general.

Campaign Limitations

Not all advisor participants believed campaigns were a successful mechanism to connect with historically underrepresented students in their caseloads. Advisors cited issues with examination of data to identify students who should be prioritized for support. One advisor believed that focusing only on first-year and second-year students, in addition to campaigns outlined on the calendar, fell short in reaching all historically underrepresented students in need of resources and advising support at University Hills:

I don't know that the structured campaigns pre-determined by the administration are actually reaching the underrepresented students on our campus. There needs to be more of a deeper dive into the data for each specific college and specific majors that can target our underrepresented students. I think assigning a caseload of first- and second-year students to each advisor isn't enough to target and reach this population. It may capture some of the students within the net but it is in no way targeting them specifically and providing them with the necessary resources that they need to persist and be successful.

The structured University Hills Advising Caseload Campaign Calendar was also limited for one advisor: "I don't think there are enough campaigns that are specifically dedicated to target underrepresented students." Another advisor believed it did not really matter if they ran campaigns

when caseloads are too large to manage: “Campaigns work—somewhat—but again the student advisor ratios are too large, and we lose touch with students.”

Student Belonging Unrelated to Advisor

Some student participants felt connected to programs, colleges, or organization on campus; however, their connection was not influenced by advisors’ actions. In one instance, a student participant learning remotely at home gave that as the reason for not feeling connected to University Hills. An important distinction is that students believed they should find resources on their own. Vane experienced personalized advising from her assigned advisor but did not believe her advisor was responsible for providing resources that benefitted her personally. Vane intentionally sought academic support from her advisor and connected herself to the Dreamers Resource Center on campus. It was important for Vane to not feel dependent on others for resources and to strive to be resourceful on her own:

To be honest, when it comes to finding resources or anything of that sort, I tend to use my academic advisor only for information for my education and classes. But when it comes to resources such as programs, or any of that sort, I tend to search myself. For instance, I'm not sure if a lot of you guys are familiar with DACA and the situation that's going on with it. I really don't mind sharing this experience because you guys might relate or not. I had turned in my DACA application. But sadly, it was that same day they had said DACA is being put on pause and I felt frustrated. It was unbelievable. [My mother and I] were both frustrated because all that was needed was my high school diploma and my transcripts. We already had everything else. So, after being frustrated I did not want to be on social media. Nothing. But I found that [University Hills] has resources for Dreamers and I'm so thankful for that. [The main reason I attended University Hills] was for the financial aid, and I didn't know that they had [Dreamers Resource Center]. I went to their meetings, and I was so blessed knowing that they knew how I felt the struggles. Some of us in the meeting did cry, and I don't [typically] cry in front of people. For me to cry in front of them, well, that shows how comfortable I am with them. Currently, they have a club, and we interact with other Dreamers. For me, with resources of that sort, I tend to find myself [paused] I don't like depending on others when it comes to resources. I find that myself. I really don't depend on my advisor. I depend on myself for finding programs or resources or any of that sort.

In the same way, Florencio did not view his assigned advisor as a resource to learn how to get connected to campus events and programs. Florencio took advantage of information emailed to the entire campus and attended events and several art exhibitions on campus:

I do feel really connected to [University Hills]. I have attended some events that the University had in the first semester—[first-year] type things. I did attend some of those.

And then recently I attended some things that the [Performance Center] had. I think it's the Andy Warhol exhibit. Those things were through my own, or marketing through the school, but it wasn't something the advisor did for me. The advisor did not connect me to those things. I don't blame them for that. If they're mostly there for academics, it's not their job to be connecting me to extracurricular activities. I was never expecting them to.

Matt's sense of connection and belonging to University Hills was much more negatively affected by learning remotely at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Matt received information about campus resources in his first year; however, he did not believe his advisor was responsible for linking him to on-campus activities:

I agree with Jen, and a little bit of what Shelby said, where my advisor did try to reach out and introduced me to on-campus stuff, essentially [in] my freshman year, and then after that, just not so much. But I wouldn't say that necessarily falls on her. I think personally it falls more on me than her. Because if that's something I'm interested in, I can reach out and stuff. I don't feel as connected to [University Hills]. I don't really feel connected. But I think a lot of that's just because classes are on Zoom. It's kind of hard to feel some kind of connection when I've only been on campus a few times. And classes have only just started [back in person]. I wouldn't say it's really the advisor, rather just the circumstances.

Third Research Question

The final research question directing this study asked, "What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' intent to persist?" This research question sought student and advisor participants' experiences and perceptions of practices, approaches, and caseload model structures that supported student persistence at University Hills. University Hills advising documents were examined for intentional design around retention efforts.

Student participants were asked two questions about their assigned advisor to gather insight into the perceived contributions of advisors to students' intent to persist. First, students were asked to describe how their assigned advisor encouraged or motivated them to continue in college and achieve their academic goals. The second question more specifically asked students to describe how their assigned advisor influenced their decision to return to University Hills. Many student participants identified advisor practices and behaviors that contributed to their intention to persist. Students also identified self-motivation as a reason for persistence. Finally, students who persisted regardless of advisor actions identified both beneficial and limiting advisor practices.

Contributions to Persistence

Persistence Related to Advisor

Some student participants perceived that their assigned advisors motivated and supported their persistence at University Hills. Some students' goals to earn a college degree were reinforced and celebrated. Advisors reminded their students to re-enroll in the following semester and demystified the process. Some students' experiences with their advisors strengthened a sense of community and established a safe space to engage in critique of University Hills campus policies. Maria's experiences with her college demonstrated how sense of belonging and persistence were connected. Maria was asked to describe how her assigned advisor encouraged her to achieve academic goals and continue at University Hills:

I think ultimately there's the personal—what really keeps you [at University Hills]. But I think aside from that, focusing on the role that advisors play, I would say that they have [encouraged], because the community they've built there—advisors are part of that. If I'm being honest there's been times where I question a lot of decisions that [University Hills] has made at the administration level. There was a point [when I thought] “I really don't want to be here.” In regards to specifically my college, I think they've made me want to come back. Not only the sense of community that they build but also, they allow you to, in a sense, voice and have your opinion without feeling like . . . and they encourage that, right? [College advisor] being that voice of reason when everything else is . . . and I just don't agree with it. Right? It keeps me at [University Hills]. They encourage you to question and think about everything that's going on, which then makes me question the administration. But it's a good thing since it's not just that I'm following along with everyone.

Jayson was very self-motivated to earn a college degree. However, his positive advising experience with his previously assigned advisor and current dual advisor contributed to his motivation to return to University Hills each semester. His memory of being celebrated by his previously assigned advisor for reaching a major academic milestone early was significantly impactful for Jayson. He felt proud of his achievements and developed a sense of pride for University Hills. This is another example of encouragement, belongingness, and persistence as intertwined:

Meeting with one of my advisors in [previous college advising center] was like getting excited for me because hey, I was gonna go into the major, I would no longer be a pre - major. I remember feeling very excited that hey, we're there. I remember her telling me, “It's usually around your sophomore year you do it [be able to declare a major] but try and do it your freshman year.” That was very exciting. It's little things like that, that really make a big difference. And I even get this type of feelings with my [dual] advisor that I

have right now. . . . [Getting good advising] certainly does make a difference. If I had terrible, maybe bad advising, I probably would be a lot more nervous. Well, what classes do I take? Or whether I feel prepared or not to take or handle multiple math classes. I think it probably does make a difference. Because I feel like overall, I've gotten really positive advising.

Florencio had a perception that his college experience would be cold and scary. Being consistently told that no one would care for him on campus left a profound effect. His advising experiences contradicted these notions and perceptions. Because of this support and his achievements, Florencio believed he could remain at University Hills:

I would say my advisor has given a small but important reason to return. It's mostly the academics and the fact that if I weren't to enroll, I wouldn't be in a great spot that makes [me] return. They have given me reason [to return]. It does show the university isn't at all like what some people have described it to me. I guess now that I know it isn't so scary, I could stay here longer.

Vane was also very self-motivated to complete her goal of earning a college degree. Her goals were nurtured and validated by professors and her assigned advisor. These institutional agents encouraged Vane to continue and take advantage of opportunities at University Hills:

Mostly it's been self-motivation [to return]. And it's them telling me, my advisor and my professors, telling me that education is the key and [education] will lead to great and bigger opportunities. So, I should be taking advantage of these opportunities given to me instead of not taking them. Right.

Matt was both self-motivated and encouraged by reminders from his assigned advisor that he was on track to graduate on time. The reminders nudged him to follow through with the process of reenrollment. Having his assigned advisor available to support the process of reenrollment was also encouraging for Matt:

I agree on the fact that it's more self-motivation. The only [external] motivation, I guess, I got from my advisor. Reminders like, "Hey, you're graduating on time" or "You're on track" or "You're on time." I guess that would be points of motivation that I've gotten . . . Everything's adding up. The signs come together. . . . I'd say [my advisor] has influenced [reenrollment and persistence] a bit. Constant reminders like "Sign up for classes" make the process a lot easier. I wouldn't say it guilt trips me, but it kind of makes me realize and feel like it's really up to me if I don't [reenroll], and it's my decision. I guess she puts that sort of realization on me [to] basically just do it. It makes it a lot easier knowing that I have [advisor] help and her assistance in the process as well.

Being taught how to use the e-advising tools that support course enrollment was empowering and instrumental for Shelby. Although she did not have a mostly positive advising experience with her assigned advisor or the center, she credited the initial new student advising session for providing her vital knowledge to support reenrollment. Shelby's persistence was influenced by her family members, personal drive to earn a degree, and knowledge she obtained from the assigned advisor:

I would say it comes from my first experience enrolling for classes. For my first semester, I do believe that my advisor was helpful for enrolling in classes. He did explain to me like, "Oh, make sure that as new semesters are coming, you do make sure that you're on time with enrolling for classes and whatnot." I feel like I also stuck with that as well. I got a good tutorial on how to enroll for these classes. It also comes with putting in my own part and making sure that I can't be counting on my advisor either to keep reminding me. I have that mindset where I also need to put in my part and enroll for my classes on my own.

Structures Contributing to Persistence

Campaigns

Advisor participants were asked to identify structures and practices of the advising model that helped to promote persistence for historically underrepresented students at University Hills. Most participants pointed out EAB Navigate campaigns to proactively reach out to students to schedule advising appointments and support reenrollment. Some advisor participants used e-advising tools and features to find specific student populations, communicate with students, and then provide a holistic and personalized advising experience. Campaigns were used as a mechanism for proactive and consistent advising practices. For example, an advisor participant listed the combination of outreach strategies, EAB Navigate LA tools, beneficial practices, and caseload model features they believed contributed to student persistence: "Targeted campaigns, email affirmations, holistic advising, assigned # of students that's reasonable within student-advisor ratios, appreciative advising, case studies." In contrast, some advisor participants were not confident that campaigns were effective in getting every student's attention. One advisor recognized EAB Navigate platform features to support persistence; however, the advisor was not entirely sure the caseload model was successful if students were not aware they had assigned advisors:

Campaigns work and the texting efforts that remind students of important deadlines and to meet with advising. Yes, assigning students to an advisor is very powerful, too, however it is not always clear to the student that they have an assigned advisor.

Another advisor acknowledged benefits of using EAB Navigate to focus on student groups to facilitate persistence: “Campaigns are great for this as said before, they target specific groups, and the advisor is able to communicate with them more directly.” In addition to being able to communicate with specialized messages, an advisor appreciated the use of campaigns to celebrate student achievements: “I think that all campaigns strategically target students who are academically struggling or deficient in certain areas as well as recognize the efforts of students that are doing well.” One advisor participant described multiple strategies, trainings, and features of the caseload model to support student persistence:

It is the implementation of a variety of strategies to engage and communicate with students using campaigns that get the student’s attention. The training equips the advisor with the knowledge of best practices that increase their skill set to be effective. The student-advisor ratios are ideal because keeping the pool of students relatively low makes it possible for consistent outreach and follow-up. I have also found creating advisor office hours for students to drop by for a brief consultation on course selection for the upcoming semester is helpful to get them ready to register.

According to the University Hills proactive caseload model document, a key component of the model is to “provide continuous and consistent proactive outreach to student caseloads to ensure they are making academic progress.” Campaigns were a vehicle for the advisor to meet with students who may or may not be on track for degree progress. In the document, an advisor’s “commitment” is to “develop holistic and developmental relationships with students to promote their retention and academic success.” Evidence that this statement was coming to fruition was found in responses of student participants who felt encouraged, motivated, belongingness, and desire to return to University Hills because of their meaningful advising interactions.

Moreover, the University Hills Advising Caseload Campaign Calendar for 2021-2022 lists eight unique campaigns with a description for each and indicates student populations the assigned advisor should proactively contact. These eight unique campaigns repeated throughout the calendar year, directing advisors to look ahead of major academic milestones and intervene to prevent potential

issues such as dropping-out, academic probation, or inability to meet the requirements for a degree program.

One such campaign focused on encouraging students to reenroll and enroll in 30 units over the academic year to be able to graduate within 4 years. The “Take 30 Campaign” instructed advisors to “improve graduation rates by encouraging students who are not enrolled and under enrolled for (term) and under 30 units for the year, to enroll in future terms to stay on track for a timely graduation.” The suggested advising model for the Take 30 session was a small group, to increase efficiency by meeting with more than one student at a time. Advisors were given three metrics as a starting point to measure the effectiveness of the effort: “Enrollment unit improvement, number of appointments, and appointment summaries.”

Another campaign explicitly claimed the intervention was designed to improve retention. The Proactive Pre-Major Advising campaign description was: “Improve retention by identifying students who are not meeting one or more major specific requirements (including major preparation courses & minimum GPA), provide proactive advising regarding major choice and retaking critical courses.”

The Caseload Campaign Calendar provided guidance for the timing and types of proactive interventions to be implemented by the advisor. Some students were contacted more than once per term, especially if their academic situation was more critical. A student who needed less academic support was not contacted as often throughout the academic year. The calendar’s layout intentionally prioritized students with higher need but no first-year or second-year students went without some type of proactive outreach at least once per term.

Practice and Structure Limitations

Persistence Unrelated to Advisor

Student participants were all motivated to return to University Hills. Most students believed their advisor had not influenced their intention to reenroll the following term and were not providing any form of motivation to return. Angie’s advising interactions did not contribute to her persistence: “I don’t feel motivated by my counselor.” In addition, Ines had not felt encouragement to return to

University Hills from her assigned advisor, “I didn’t feel that. [pause] I didn’t get that.” Shelby described factors that influenced her persistence and the lack of encouragement from her assigned advisor:

I wouldn’t necessarily say I have gotten any sort of motivation from my advisor to continue going. I would have to agree that it is more a self-motivation thing, and also my family members encouraging me because that’s certainly helpful. But yeah, besides that, I don’t think there’s necessarily a moment where my advisor was like, “Oh, you should keep going” or stuff like that in general.

Milly was equally self-motivated to persist, earn an undergraduate degree and pursue graduate school. Her graduate school goal inspired her to achieve academically. Because Milly’s advisor did not engage in conversation that could lead to motivation, Milly did not receive any form of encouragement from the advisor:

I wouldn’t say [the advisor] helped me want to keep enrolling because I’ve already kind of had a plan . . . I would finish my bachelor’s here, and I was hoping to go to go somewhere else for master’s. . . . I really never talked [with the advisor] about anything to even get to that point. So, nothing really [was talked] about like encouragement.

Finally, Jenn clearly described a lack of connection between her persistence and her assigned advisor’s behavior and practices: “It’s all self-motivation over here. I’m just determined to become something and it’s all just coming from me. No, no one else. . . . My advisor hasn’t influenced whether I keep enrolling or not. It’s all just coming from me.”

Campaign Limitations

One advisor participant perceived that outreach efforts to support persistence were only as effective as a student’s ability to respond and follow through. They believed that campaign outreach emails were not the best approach to get the attention of this student population:

Campaigns help promote persistence if the students actually respond to them. It’s difficult because Gen Z (our current student population) wants us to come to them and meet them where they are at, instead of begging them to come to us via email. Many of these students don’t even look at their emails and if you take a look at a student’s communication via EAB Navigate you can see that they are flooded with emails all day, every day. This isn’t meeting them where they are at. However, if we took more time to read (and understand) the data of our underrepresented students in each college and each major we could find approaches for this new generation that can better help them with persistence and quicker graduation.

Chapter Summary

Historically underrepresented students and professional academic advisors at University Hills participated in this study to increase understanding of how an advising caseload model for first-year and second-year students may enhance student-advisor interactions and relationships that contribute to students' sense of belonging and persistence. Findings indicated that the caseload model had a positive influence in some advisors' practice as they conducted intentional, proactive, consistent, and personalized advising practices and approaches. Student participant findings revealed that when their assigned advisor practiced these approaches, students felt cared for and developed positive student-advisor relationships. In some cases, these meaningful interactions, relationships, and feelings of being cared for led to a sense of belonging. For some student participants, their sense of belonging was related to their advisor's encouragement, and this encouragement motivated their desire to persist at University Hills. Campaigns, advisor trainings and professional development, assigning advisors to students, and access to the advisor were caseload model features and structures that facilitated beneficial advising practices and approaches for historically underrepresented students.

Not all student and advisor participants believed they were experiencing beneficial advising practices and interactions within the model. Some advisor participants perceived the student-to-advisor ratio as too large to effectively provide personalized, consistent, and proactive interactions with their student caseload. Similarly, some student participants struggled to get access to their assigned advisor. Despite the caseload model document's goals and organizational features, less beneficial and even harmful advising practices were experienced by some student participants. These student participants had lived experiences with reactive advising, and interactions that lacked caring, personalized advising, connection to resources and opportunities, student-advisor relationship, and trust. Because of these experiences, some students felt lost, alone, scared, and concerned as first-generation college students. Regardless of these advising challenges, student participants were all determined and self-motivated to continue to persist at University Hills.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine an advising caseload model at University Hills for first-year and second-year students, and how the model facilitated student-advisor interactions and relationships that can contribute to sense of belonging and persistence for historically underrepresented students. This study provided insights about the advising caseload model's processes, features, and structures that enable proactive, consistent, continuous, validating, and personalized advising practices. The problem this case study addressed is that traditional advising models at 4-year public universities are limited and do not provide beneficial approaches, such as proactive, personalized, and consistent student-advisor interactions, that contribute to historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging (Deil-Amen, 2011; Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klemplin et al., 2019; Lawton, 2018; Orozco et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2018, 2019; Rendón, 2002; Tovar, 2015). Few studies have investigated how higher education institutions have implemented an advising caseload model as a mechanism to provide proactive and personalized advising for all first-year and second-year students, and how the model has facilitated beneficial student-advisor interactions for historically underrepresented students that contribute to their sense of belonging and intent to persist.

A goal of this study was to contribute to the limited research and literature on advising caseload models for entire student populations at large, urban, public higher education institutions with persistent attrition issues and equity gaps for historically underrepresented students. The overarching research question guiding this case study was: In what ways is an advising caseload model that centers on building proactive, personalized, and continuous student-advisor relationships beneficial for historically underrepresented students? This study also examined two subsequent questions:

- a. What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' sense of belonging?

- b. What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' intent to persist?

A qualitative case study research design was utilized to answer the research questions and to elicit feedback from advisors and student about their experiences and interactions within the caseload model. I collected and analyzed multiple forms of qualitative data, including semistructured student focus groups with 13 participants, eight responses to an open-ended and anonymous advisor survey, and four University Hills advising caseload documents. Based on the research questions, three main categories became the anchor for the themes: beneficial advising practices, beneficial advising structures, and limitations. This chapter reviews the (a) summary of findings by research question; (b) conclusions; (c) implications for policy, practice, and future research; and (d) recommendations.

Summary of Findings

Three research questions guided this study. The research questions examined the ways the University Hills advising caseload model structures supported beneficial practices that can contribute to historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and motivation to persist. The findings from this study illuminate the caseload model's positive influence in facilitating intentional, proactive, consistent, and personalized advising practices.

Overarching Research Question

In what ways is an advising caseload model that centers on building proactive, personalized, and continuous student-advisor relationships beneficial for historically underrepresented students? Student participants described feeling cared for by assigned advisors who practiced personalized and holistic advising. These advisors consistently followed up with their students, reminded them about important enrollment deadlines, and helped students feel supported and not alone in the college experience. Student participants shared how especially valuable it was, as first-generation college students, to have an advisor who cared about their academic, career, social, and overall well-being. Another asset for student participants was their advisor's knowledge, experiences, and subject-matter expertise in their major degree programs and future careers. The students who believed they were receiving quality advising from knowledgeable advisors expressed higher levels of trust in their

advisor. The interactions with a trusted assigned advisor generated other emotions, such as feeling understood, validated, and secure about their futures.

Deriving from personalized and caring student-advisor interactions, was the presence of validation. Two types of validation were present in the student responses: academic validation and interpersonal validation. Students shared profound experiences of assigned advisors displaying enthusiasm for their academic achievements and capabilities. All the student participants described ideal student-advisor interactions that were consistent and ongoing, with meaningful, personalized, caring, and motivating conversations. Some students perceived they were experiencing their ideal student-advisor interactions. Few advisors intentionally created safe and welcoming spaces for their students, engaging in conversations related to career, personal, and academic goals. Both students and advisors revealed that relatability was generated by purposeful advisor self-disclosure.

Assigning an advisor to a group of students was advantageous for both advisors and students. Advisor and student participants described numerous communications introducing advisors and informing students about how their advisor could be reached. Students who were able to easily meet with their assigned advisor found it especially beneficial that they had designated advisors. Student participants interpreted an available and responsive assigned advisor as a caring advisor. In addition, an assigned advisor who proactively reached out to the student for specific reasons made students feel supported, cared for, noticed, and relieved. Advisors identified EAB Navigate campaigns as the mechanism to provide proactive outreach, and some understood it as a strategy for consistent connection with their students and mitigation of occurrence of larger academic issues. Some students and advisors gave credit to these consistent and caring connections as key to developing relationships.

Second Research Question

What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' sense of belonging? Some student participants attributed their sense of belonging at University Hills to their assigned advisors' behaviors and actions. These behaviors and actions included genuine

interest in students' aspirations, encouragement for on-campus involvement and well-rounded student development and supporting timely academic progress towards degree attainment. Student participant belongingness was also described as (a) feelings of pride in themselves and their campus, college, or academic program; (b) a sense of safety; (c) comfort; (d) inclusion, and (e) caring. Some advisors' practice had been influenced by the caseload model to provide intentional support based on student need. These advisors were specifically influenced by the advising caseload model's structures and features, such as an increased sense of accountability for a group of assigned students, trainings and professional development workshops, and campaigns.

Third Research Question

What types of advising structures and practices within a caseload model contribute to students' intent to persist? All students who participated in the study were highly self-motivated to persist and earn a college degree at University Hills although advisor behaviors and practices also augmented students' self-motivation to persist. Being supported to persist was interrelated with a sense of belongingness. For some students, the sense of community, caring, encouragement, reminders, and assistance to re-enroll generated by the assigned advisor contributed to persistence. Advisors credited the use of proactive EAB Navigate campaigns as a medium to outreach to specific student populations to provide retention support.

Conclusions

Effective Advising Caseload Model

An advising caseload model, when implemented appropriately, shows promise as an organizational model to deliver advising that contributes to a positive student experience. Quality advising organizations have a combination of structural supports and practices that benefit students. These quality elements include reasonable student-to-advisor ratios, available advisors, advisor training, central coordination and communication, accountability, evaluation, and developmental, personalized, and proactive advising practices (Cuseo, 2002, 2003; Donaldson et al., 2016; Habley, 1983, 1993; Hunter & White, 2004; Joslin, 2018; O'Banion, 1972; Sheldon, 2015). There were

multiple elements of a quality advising organization within the University Hills Caseload model. For example, most advisors in the study pointed to structured campaigns that guided them to identify student populations they should communicate with at specific times throughout the academic year. There was alignment between the caseload document expectations for implementation and advisors' behaviors and positive student outcomes. For example, some advisors had a sense of responsibility to care for a group of students, and some students experienced positive relationships and feeling cared for by their assigned advisor.

Consistent with the research literature, students with positive advising experiences were able to access their assigned advisor easily, were communicated to often, received accurate and personalized advising, felt cared for, and validated, and developed student-advisor relationships. Similarly, advisors with positive experiences with the caseload model felt prepared by the trainings and were supported with guidelines and expectations for providing intentional and proactive advising interventions. These advisors believed that student-to-advisor ratios were reasonable enough for them to develop student-advisor relationships and ensure students in their caseloads were making academic progress.

Resource Limitations Undermining Impact

The structures of the advising caseload model, when not adequately resourced, are limited in their impact on the student advising experience. This study found that larger college advising centers were hampered in their ability to provide access to advisors and proactive and consistent interactions. To scale-up the beneficial features of programs that support historically underrepresented students, the student-to-advisor ratio should be reasonable enough to allow the advisor time to meet with their caseload students several times throughout the academic year (Donaldson et al., 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klempin et al., 2019; Orozco et al., 2010). Some student participants in these larger centers were unable to meet with their assigned advisor because all appointments times were filled. Meeting with different advisors led to inconsistent advising information and was an impediment to developing student-advisor relationships for these students. As found in studies by Orozco et al.

(2010) and Moore et al. (2019), some students in this study felt rushed in drop-in advising sessions and 30-minute appointments and expressed frustration with not being able to meet with an advisor for weeks. Some advisor participants pointed to overwhelmingly large student caseloads as a barrier to their ability to provide proactive, personalized, and consistent advising interactions. Due to the varying sizes of colleges, advising staff, and resources, some advising experiences were less beneficial for historically underrepresented students.

Students Benefit from Validating Advisor Practices and Behaviors

Student participants benefited when advising practices validated them and their experiences. As demonstrated in this study, validating student-advisor interactions made students feel cared for, noticed, encouraged, motivated, and provided a sense of belonging at University Hills. Students felt validated when advisors exhibited signs of listening and interest, encouraged campus involvement and application for opportunities, displayed enthusiasm for students' achievement, and disclosed personal and academic backgrounds relatable to students. Students who experienced validating interactions from their advisors felt capable and motivated to succeed at University Hills. As other research has shown, validation can be a significant contributor to historically underrepresented student success (Deil-Amen, 2011; Lee, 2018; Museus & Neville, 2012; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). Students felt motivated to persist at University Hills when advisors encouraged students to achieve and celebrated those achievements. Some advisors shared during advising sessions that they were also first-generation college students, from low-income backgrounds, and that they or their family had immigrated to the United States. Students shared racialized, socioeconomic, and first-generation college student experiences with these advisors and felt understood. For historically underrepresented students, acknowledgment of their multiple identities can lead to a sense that they are being validated as people and it can also develop trust and positive relationships with advisors (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Lee, 2018; Museus & Neville, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018). This study contributes to the empirical research that illuminates the benefits for students when

advisors demonstrate cultural awareness and sensitivity, empathize, and care about the academic, professional, and personal well-being of their students.

Not All Advisors Engage in Beneficial Practices

Despite the structures of the caseload model in place, not all advisors engaged in beneficial advising practices. Even when an advisor practiced proactive outreach, it was not received well by the student if the communication was generic, lacked personalization, and there was no established student-advisor rapport. Introductory meetings were in large online conferencing workshop settings with slide presentations and students could not engage in any individual conversations with their advisors. Some student participants described advisors' behaviors as unresponsive to emails and requests for appointments, and as rude, disinterested, and annoyed. Conversations between students and these advisors focused only on academic requirements; however, academic plans were not individualized based on the student's academic and professional aspirations. When a student participant was able to secure a 30-minute appointment, some advisors did not ask questions about how the student was feeling, or experiencing University Hills, and ended the session early. For some students, the benefits of having an assigned advisor felt diminished when it was difficult to reach the advisor and when interactions were mostly negative. For these reasons, some student participants avoided their assigned advisor and sought advice from other advisors or faculty.

Implications

Implications for Policy

Students in this study benefited from assignment of students to an advisor who cared and built-in expectations for advisors and students to meet consistently and continuously. These students and advisors developed positive relationships and had meaningful interactions that contributed to their sense of belonging and motivation to persist. Additional structures that support assigning an advisor to each student and ensuring consistent and continuous interactions have the potential for greater impact on historically underrepresented student success, belonging, and persistence. At the time of the study, University Hills did not have a policy addressing mandatory advising beyond the

first year of college. The policy on first-year advising mentioned that students should be working with advisors throughout their 4-year college career to make timely progress; however, there was no formal mechanism institutionalizing consistent student-advisor interactions. Creating formal advising policies to support the development of student-advisor relationships will further contribute to the cultural shift away from traditional advising practices and toward a proactive and caring model that benefits historically underrepresented students.

Implications for Practice

Effective Formal Advisor Trainings

Advisors in this study pointed to trainings that prepared them with the technical skills to leverage EAB Navigate and the advising practices necessary to care and develop trust and positive relationships with students. However, not all students in this study experienced quality advising experiences with their advisors. The University Hills advisor training and professional development program was not consistently formalized or mandatory and allowed some advising centers to opt out of sessions to prioritize other efforts. Advisor trainings may not have met advisors' expectations or needs or may not have been seen as an important priority by advisors. When asked about additional trainings that would help advisors with caseload advising, one advisor stated, "Additional trainings are not very necessary" and rather, "What we need are more advisors and more reasonable caseloads." Another advisor thought, "Best practices would suffice, we don't want to inundate advisors with trainings and take away time from their students." These examples demonstrate that some advisors' advising loads and responsibilities felt too burdensome for effective caseload management and attendance at training workshops throughout the academic year.

One advisor wanted more real-life situations in training: "[I'd like] more role-playing in our training, more what-if scenarios we can practice with each other to find better approaches or different ways to handle certain situations." Another advisor believed data were important:

Advisors need to be able to read and UNDERSTAND data. If the data isn't widely shared, then the data of our underrepresented population needs to be explained and discussed with all the advisors, so they understand who they are targeting instead of blindly just reaching out to all first-year and second year students.

Additionally, an advisor wanted to learn more:

[I want to learn] effective practices to integrate sense of belonging strategies. Advising tends to be academic heavy but [I'd like to learn] an effective and efficient way to integrate students' sense of belonging so that students feel they can trust and rely on their assigned advisors from the beginning and [they are encouraged] to consistently meet with advisors.

These responses reveal an opportunity for the University Hills advising organization to provide trainings and professional development sessions that further explore the context, theories, approaches, experiences, and data for historically underrepresented students. Establishing effective advising training programs that prepare advisors to provide developmental, holistic, proactive, accurate, culturally sensitive, validating practices, in addition to successfully using e-advising tools continues to be a consistent gap for advising organizations that must be addressed to close the equity gap (Brown & Rivas, 1993; Cuseo, 2002, 2003; Joslin, 2018; Lawton, 2018; Lee, 2018; Moore et al., 2018, 2019; Tovar, 2015; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018).

Accountability and Advising Structure

This study uncovered differences in advising experiences and interactions dependent on the advisor and college advising center. In a study of decentralized advising organizations at state public universities, Moore et al. (2018, 2019) found wide differences in the quality of advising experience for students. The variations documented by Moore et al. (2018) were due to the absence of direct reporting lines in decentralized advising structures that resulted in a lack of accountability for advising, conflicting priorities and messaging, and significant challenges to providing students a cohesive advising experience. University Hills' advising caseload model's vast discrepancies in student-advisor experiences, interactions, and relationships may be related to challenges in creating accountability in its decentralized structure. Advising directors and advisors may not have a clear vision for successfully operating a campuswide caseload model. Without authority to make changes, central advising administrators may not be able to ensure cohesive implementation of the campuswide caseload model that benefits historically underrepresented students. These are similar questions that Pardee (2004) recommends higher education leaders should ask to determine whether

the organizational structure promotes or hinders the university's student success goals, and student's advising experience.

Importance of Staffing Resources

The extent to which University Hills' caseload model can be effective may depend on appropriate staffing of all advising centers. Students in this study perceived the availability of their assigned advisor to meet with them and respond to their emails as an act of caring. Feeling cared for by an institutional agent such as an academic advisor can lead to a sense of belongingness (Strayhorn, 2019). This study found that some students felt the caring and support they received from their advisor contributed to their sense of belonging at University Hills. However, students who received advising from larger college advising centers found accessing their advisor more difficult than student participants in smaller colleges. Student participants in larger colleges experienced fewer examples of caring and rarely developed positive relationships with their advisors. Moreover, some advisor participants perceived their caseloads to be too large to effectively manage, while other advisors stated that their caseloads were small enough for them to develop relationships with students. The different experiences related to college advising centers' student-to-advisor ratios may also be related to students' ability to access their advisors. Advisors in larger colleges could have struggled to balance the needs of transfer, junior, and senior student populations with the caseload model for first- and second-year students. Ratios should be small enough for the advisor to provide proactive, personalized, and consistent advising interactions to their entire caseload (Cuseo, 2002, 2003; Donaldson et al., 2016; Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Joslin, 2018; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klempin et al., 2019; Miars, 2019). Unique student needs and support required should also be considered in development of caseload student-to-advisor ratios (Applegate & Hartleroad, 2011).

Assessment of Advising

Assessment of advising organizations, services, and practices can identify areas for improvement; however, very few higher education institutions engage in this activity systematically (Cuseo, 2002, 2003; Habley, 2004). Assessing the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of advising

validates the profession of academic advising on college campuses and determines if goals and outcomes are occurring as intended (Cuseo, 2002, 2003; Troxel, 2008). This study exposed unhelpful and helpful advising interactions and practices for historically underrepresented students within the advising caseload model at University Hills. Conducting additional quantitative and qualitative assessments of University Hills' advising caseload model and the advising organization overall could uncover additional gaps beyond the scope of this study and lead to improved sense of belonging, persistence, and graduation rates for historically underrepresented students. Higher education institutions such as University Hills—public, 4-year institutions that serve a majority of historically underrepresented students with limited resources—require decisions to invest in advising based on clear and convincing evidence (Troxel, 2008).

Implications for Theory

This qualitative case study was informed by symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), validation theory (Rendón, 1994, 2002), and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Maestas et al., 2007; Means & Pyne, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019). Symbolic interactionism provided the larger framework used to study the interactions and relationships between students and advisors and their experiences and perceptions within the University Hills advising caseload model. The students gave meaning to these perceptions and experiences, identifying feelings of being cared for, validated, noticed, supported, and belonging to a group on campus. Symbolic interactionism offers researchers a framework that can be applied in student-advisor settings for assessing the deeper meanings and consequences of these interactions. This is particularly applicable for a study of students from historically underrepresented backgrounds, who often lack the social resources and knowledge of a university experience. Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) provided a model for specific language, behaviors, and approaches advisors can practice that result in student's higher levels of confidence, academic performance, campus integration, and development. Yet, this study demonstrated that the degree to which a student felt validated by their assigned advisor depended on the advisor's competence and skill in interaction.

Previous studies have shown students' level of sense of belonging influenced their intention to persist (Hausmann et al., 2007). This study instead found that students could feel motivated to persist without a strong sense of belonging to their university. Similar to Maestas et al. (2007) findings, students identified multiple aspects of their college experience contributing to sense of belonging. Furthermore, student participants pointed to other factors, such as family members, clubs and organizations, faculty, campus employment, peers, and self-motivation as significant contributors to their sense of belonging and motivation to persist. The study's conceptual framework was updated to reflect fluidity between sense of belonging, intent to persist, contribution of other factors, and the caseload model (see Figure 3).

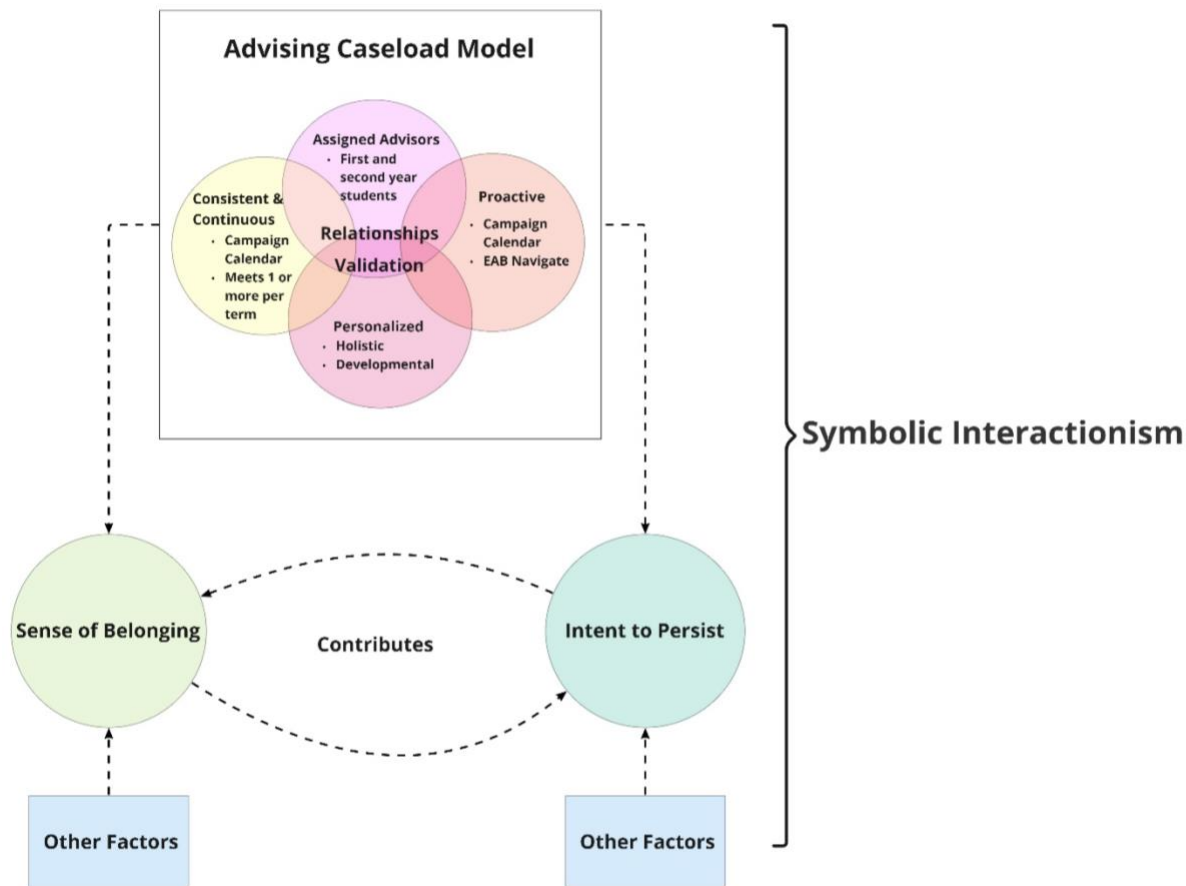


Figure 2. Revised conceptual framework diagram.

Some students who identified a beneficial relationship with their assigned advisor felt their advising interactions contributed to their persistence, however not always to their sense of belonging. In other cases, students pointed to validation they received from their assigned advisor as a

contributor to their sense of belonging. However, feelings of validation and sense of belonging were not present in every students' desire to persist. Many student participants were driven to achieve their academic goals of earning a college degree, regardless of their positive or negative interactions with assigned advisors.

Symbolic interactionism, validation theory, and sense of belonging are helpful theoretical frameworks for examination of this caseload model. These frameworks guided my understanding of the process in which beneficial interactions and practices positively impacted historically underrepresented students. Results of this study suggest that when historically underrepresented students do not feel a strong sense of belonging, positive aspects of the caseload model and its structures and intended practices can contribute to student persistence.

Implications for Future Research

Improving Advising Training and Professional Development Programs

This study demonstrates the importance of validating, caring, and proactive advisors. However, public, 4-year institutions with decentralized advising organizations have struggled to provide consistent, cohesive, effective, and mandatory campuswide training programs (Moore et al., 2018, 2019). Additional studies examining public institutions that have allocated sufficient funds and overhauled advising training and professional development programs to meet the needs of advisors and diverse student populations can benefit the research literature and be models for institutions. These studies can help educators understand how advisors effectively learn how to deploy beneficial practices in advising sessions. Much could be learned from advising training professionals through interviews, including their methods and process for teaching beneficial advising practices and approaches. An in-depth study of the training program improvement process for a public institution with limited resources would provide a practical example that could be adapted by institutions with similar limitations and opportunities.

Examining Advising Organization Structures

Students in this study shared a variety of experiences and interactions with University Hills' caseload model dependent on the college advising center from which they received services. Future research could examine various advising organizational structures that effectively implemented case management for entire student populations with a majority of historically underrepresented students. A qualitative case study could explore how advising organizations are able to ensure accountability, maintain cohesion, and provide effective campuswide case management. Researchers can compare similar institutions with decentralized and centralized advising structures to see which systems promoted the greatest opportunities for improved student-advisor interactions to build relationships. Decentralized advising organizations at public institutions have shown to pose significant challenges for accountability, cohesion, consistency in advising services, and adoption of new practices and models such as case management (Joslin, 2018; Moore et al., 2018, 2019; Pierce, 2016). Further study of public institutions that have moved toward a centralized advising model with direct reporting lines could demonstrate whether this structure does, in fact, improve the effectiveness of advising and the advising experience for students.

Recommendations

This study sought to gain knowledge and understanding about the practices and structures that benefit historically underrepresented students and contribute to sense of belonging and persistence. Students and advisors identified beneficial advising practices and structures that contributed to meaningful interactions and relationships within the University Hills caseload model. Some of these interactions validated students and promoted feelings of belongingness and motivation to persist. Studying the caseload model at University Hills can lead to practice and organizational changes that can help to improve outcomes for historically underrepresented students at other institutions. I propose three recommendations to maximize the success of campuswide caseload models for historically underrepresented students.

Add Advisors and Staff

Having enough professional advisors staffed in advising units is a perennial problem for higher education institutions (Applegate & Hartleroad, 2011; CCCSE, 2014; Hu, 2020; Joslin, 2018; Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Lawton, 2018; Moore et al., 2018, 2019), including University Hills. This study illuminated the benefits for historically underrepresented students when the advisor was easily accessible, proactive, and consistent in their communication. On the other hand, when advisors were unavailable and unresponsive to students when needed, students felt uncared for and did not develop positive relationships with their advisors. Appropriate staffing of advising units could profoundly improve student success outcomes, such as sense of belonging, persistence, and graduation rates, and closing the equity gap. The success of a campuswide case management system is contingent on an institution's advising resources (Jaggars & Karp, 2016; Joslin, 2018; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Klempin et al., 2019; Pierce, 2016). Some student and advisor participants' perceptions of limited staffing within the University Hill's caseload model revealed how resources were inequitably distributed across the advising units. Institutions should look for ways to reallocate and reorganize resources centrally to guarantee that first-generation, low-income, and historically underrepresented student populations can benefit from meaningful advising interactions and relationships. A properly funded advising organization signals to advisors, advising administrators, and students that the institution prioritizes student equity.

Increase Accountability

University Hills should consider a centralized advising organization structure with direct reporting lines to central advising administrators who have the responsibility and authority to maintain cohesion in advising services and practices campuswide. Ensuring consistency of advising experiences and interactions in the caseload model across all campus advising units is dependent on advising administrators' ability to hold all individuals responsible for advising accountable for their inconsistent or negative practices. Institutions like University Hills serve a majority historically underrepresented student population with diverse needs. This level of diversity and student need

requires a centralized organization model (Pardee, 2000, 2004), with mandatory and formal training programs. For example, first-generation college students in this study expressed frustration with not being able to access their advisor or receiving poor advising, when the advisor may have been the only person in their lives who could provide them on-time, accurate information needed to earn their degrees. The need for support is so great that advising organizations cannot depend on decentralized advising units to choose to be in alignment with other units or initiatives. Variations of alignment can create confusion that is unhelpful for any student, but especially detrimental to first-generation student success. Like University Hills, decentralized organizations with college advising units typically report up to deans without any professional advising experience and multiple conflicting responsibilities that often restrict their ability to devote attention to advising (Pardee, 2000). Successfully transitioning into a campuswide, proactive, personalized, case management advising model requires the entire attention of an administrator who has the support of the president and provost to lead this essential change to improve student success outcomes.

Develop Structures for Caseload Model Success

In addition to a centralized advising organization, there should be adequate staffing and budget in central advising administration to support successful implementation of a campuswide caseload model. My recommendations and implications regarding adding advisors, deploying a formal and effective advising training program, and centralizing responsibility and authority require additional centralized resources. I recommend incorporation of professional advising training coordinators whose main objective is to develop and lead professional development opportunities and workshops for all advisors and advising directors. The training coordinator should be responsible for assessment of training needs and program outcomes. To fund professional development opportunities equally for all academic advisors, I recommend a centralized budget to support activities including professional organization membership and conference attendance. Another essential centralized staffing requirement is a research analyst responsible for consistent and ongoing assessment of advising initiatives, practices, and services across the campus. This individual could

provide practical information regarding how students, advisors, and administrators perceive gaps and strengths of advising, while determining which efforts lead to higher persistence and graduation rates. Finally, I recommend a senior-level administrator position, such as a vice president of student success and advising, that reports to the provost and is a member of the president's cabinet. The entire advising organization would report to this vice president, who would focus on advising and coordinate student success efforts across the campus. This senior-level advising administrator should model the practices and approaches that benefit historically underrepresented students, advocate for additional advising resources, and promote quality of advising as an essential strategy for closing the equity gap.

Summary of the Dissertation

This study was situated within a social-cultural context of increasing historically underrepresented student populations in higher education institutions. These students were not persisting and graduating at the same rate as White students and economically privileged students (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Institute of Education Sciences, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Radunzel, 2018; U.S Department of Education, 2016). As a strategy to improve student success rates for historically underrepresented students and close the equity gap, institutions have sought to enhance their advising organizations (CSU Legislative Report, 2020; Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Moore et al., 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; U.S Department of Education, 2016); however, often without a cohesive and systematic campuswide plan (Moore et al., 2018, 2019). Although institutions similar to the university in this study had developed coordination for advising efforts and made strides toward a proactive and personalized model, there has not been an organizational mechanism to bring these practices into fruition campuswide (Moore et al., 2018, 2019).

This study examined University Hills efforts to scale up specialized programs' beneficial features and practices for all first- and second-year undergraduate students at a large, public, 4-year Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). I studied how the model's features and structures facilitated

validating student-advisor interactions and building relationships that contributed to sense of belonging and intent to persist for historically underrepresented students. Through a qualitative case study design, I collected data from caseload model documents, student focus groups, and an anonymous advisor survey. From analysis of these data, I found that students benefited from being assigned an advisor who practiced proactive, personalized, and validating interactions that were consistent enough to develop a positive relationship. I discovered that some advisors believed that the caseload model's structures, such as trainings, campaign calendar, and having a caseload assigned to them influenced and guided their approach to be more personalized, proactive, and consistent. This study confirmed that validating interactions and practices are significantly meaningful and so powerful that they can contribute to historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and motivation to persist (Deil-Amen, 2011; Lee, 2018; Museus & Neville, 2012; Orozco et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Vaccaro & Camba-Kelsay, 2018).

Unfortunately, I also uncovered some students' challenging and negative advising interactions within the model. These students were often unable to access their advisors, and when they did, the resulting sessions were not individualized or caring to lead to a relationship. For these student participants, the caseload model's features or structures were not enough to dispel reactive and uncaring advising interactions. Advisors and students pointed out impacted advisor schedules and high student-to-advisor ratios in some advising centers as reasons the caseload model's positive effect was hampered. Additionally, the inability to create standardized positive experiences was due to lack of (a) clear expectations for the role of the advisor, (b) a mandatory training program, and (c) enough accountability and centralized authority to ensure this model operated as intended. University Hills' advising caseload model was newly initiated at the time of the study and may yet have incredible potential to be effective for developing historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and closing the equity gap over time with adequate staffing, resources, assessment, and accountability.

The needs of today's students require higher education institutions to restructure older, traditional advising models and practices that are reactive and harmful. Student participants who had negative experiences with their assigned advisors were persisting and motivated despite these challenges, but these types of experiences and interactions are unacceptable and incompatible with student equity goals. I strongly encourage public, 4-year institutions of higher education to invest in their advising organizations and assess whether the structure is truly meeting the needs of the student population. I am optimistic that this study and its recommendations provide a practical example of a model that can be deployed at institutions as a scaled-up and strategic solution to improve historically underrepresented student success and help to close the equity gap.

APPENDIX A

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Objective: To explore the academic advising experiences and interactions between advisors and Fall 2020 cohort students at University Hills. The questions will focus on students' experiences with their assigned advisor, student-advisor interactions, advisor behaviors, approaches, and practices within an advising caseload model.

Structure: Focus groups will be conducted online via a password-protected Zoom session. Each focus group will last no longer than an hour and half. The researcher will be the focus group facilitator and the note taker. The protocol is semistructured and allows for the probing of additional relevant questions to better understand the range of perceptions, feelings, behaviors and advising experiences of second-year student participants within a caseload model at University Hills (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Upon participants' consent, the focus groups will be recorded and downloaded for further analysis. The Otter.ai application will be used as additional transcript recording instrument. Data will be collected and held confidentially to protect students' identities. Student participants will be given the opportunity to create pseudonyms during the focus groups session or allow the researcher to create pseudonyms.

Recruitment: Student participants were identified using EAB Navigate as enrolled in 12 units or more, a Fall 2020 cohort second-year student, a first-generation college student, and having experienced at least two advising appointments with the same assigned advisor. Participants will be emailed an invitation, consent form, and gift card incentive amount. Follow-up and reminder emails will be conducted to ensure attendance. Focus group sessions will take place during the Fall 2021 semester after fall census date and before Spring 2022 class registration begins. Student participants will choose the focus group session times and days most convenient to their schedules.

Date:

Time:

Number of Attendees:

Focus Group Script

Hello and welcome! My name is Andrea Villegas, and I will be facilitating today's focus group session.

I first want to thank you again for taking the time to participate. The purpose of this focus group is to gain a deeper understanding about the advising experiences of first-year and second-year students at [University Hills]. I will be asking you to share your experiences and perceptions regarding your advising experiences with your assigned advisor. We want to learn about what has contributed to your academic success, as well as any challenges you have encountered. The information from this focus group will be used to deepen my understanding of the advising experiences of students at University Hills for this study.

Prior to this you were sent an email describing what the focus group would entail. To recap, this focus group will take approximately 90 minutes, and it will be recorded. The information you share will be confidential. To corroborate, is everyone ok with being recorded for the purposes of this focus group? (wait for response).

Now that everyone has consented to participating and being recorded, I will go over some general group norms:

- Only one person talks at a time. Please try to use the “hand raise” feature in Zoom when you are ready to share.
- Confidentiality is assured. “What is shared in the room stays in the room.” Please do not share anything outside of this focus group to ensure the privacy of your peers.
- Respect each other’s ideas and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers to questions – just ideas, experiences, and opinions, which are all valuable.
- It is important for us to hear all sides of an issue – both the positive and the negative.
- It is important for everyone’s ideas to be equally represented and respected.
- Others? *(Ask participants if they have anything to add to the list)*

Before we begin, does anyone have any questions, comments, or concerns?

Ok, we will now begin...

Focus Group Questions

1. To get started, let’s **introduce ourselves**. Please feel free to share where you are from.
 - a. What is your major or academic interest?
 - b. How do you identify racially and/or ethnically?
 - c. Are you the first in your family to go to college?
 - d. Why did you decide to attend [University Hills]?
2. Tell me about your overall experiences thus far with academic advising in the college advising centers at [University Hills].
3. Do you know who your assigned academic advisor is?
 - a. If so, how did you learn that you have an assigned advisor?
 - b. If not, who do you usually meet with in advising appointments?
4. Who reaches out first to schedule an advising appointment, you, or your assigned advisor?
 - a. Follow-up: How do you feel when your advisor reaches out first?
5. Describe your relationship, if any, with your assigned advisor.
 - a. Follow-up: What types of topics do you talk about with your advisor?
 - b. Follow-up: How do you feel about these conversations?
 - c. Follow-up: Does your advisor follow up with you?

6. Describe any challenges or difficulties you have had with your advising experiences.
 - a. Follow-up: Do you have access to advising when you need it?
7. What would an ideal advising meeting be like with your assigned advisor?
 - a. Follow-up: What kinds of attitudes or behaviors would the advisor have? What kinds of questions would you like them to ask you? What would you like them to know about you?
8. How does your advisor show they genuinely care about you and how you are doing?
 - a. Follow-up: Please describe an example.
9. What role has your advisor played in connecting you with resources or activities at [University Hills]?
 - a. Follow-up: How did you feel when your advisor helped connect you to resources or other departments, (e.g., financial aid, tutoring)?
 - b. Follow-up: Please describe an example.
10. Do you feel connected to [University Hills]?
 - a. Follow-up: Describe how your advising experiences have or have not contributed to feeling connected to the university.
11. Describe how your assigned advisor encourages or motivates you to continue in college and achieve your academic goals.
 - a. Follow-up: What feelings do you associate with this encouragement or motivation?
12. Describe how your assigned advisor has influenced your decision to return or not return to [University Hills].

APPENDIX B

ADVISOR SURVEY

By proceeding to the survey, you affirm that you are at least 18 years of age and consent to participate in this study.

Objective: Survey questions will focus on gathering advisors' perspectives of the caseload model for first- and second-year [University Hills] students as a structure to deliver proactive and personalized advising to assigned students, and to illuminate the structures and practices that facilitate sense of belonging and intent to persist.

Definitions

Historically Underrepresented Students - Historically underrepresented students are student identities that were not considered when the system and institutions of higher education in the United States were originally designed (Lawton, 2018). Examples include first-generation; low-income; adult student; gender identities; undocumented student; and students from ethnic and racial backgrounds who have been historically denied access and have experienced institutional discrimination including African American students, Native American students, Hispanic/Latinx students, and Asian American students (Lawton, 2018).

Persistence - Persistence represents students' continuous reenrollment from term to term at any higher education institution.

Sense of Belonging - Students' sense of belonging is a perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, and valued by the campus community or practitioners (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 4).

Questions

1. Describe your experience advising a caseload of first- and second-year students at [University Hills].
2. How did you make students in your caseload aware that you were their assigned advisor?
3. Describe the ways the advising caseload model has influenced the way you advise your assigned students. If no influence, enter N/A.
4. In what ways have professional development and training offerings prepared you for caseload advising?
5. What kinds of additional trainings would help you with caseload advising?

The next questions are specifically about advising historically underrepresented students. Each question focuses on a different aspect of students' experiences: support, persistence, and sense of belonging.

6. Based on your experience, what structures and practices in the current advising caseload model support historically underrepresented students at [University Hills] (e.g., campaigns, trainings, student-advisor ratios, assigning students)?
7. What structures and practices of the advising model help to promote persistence for historically underrepresented students at [University Hills] (e.g., campaigns, advising approaches, assigning students)?
8. What improvements would you make to the caseload model to promote a sense of belonging for historically underrepresented students?

APPENDIX C**STUDENT LETTER OF INVITATION**

Dear Student,

Hello! My name is Andrea Villegas, and I am a doctoral student at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) in the College of Education, Community College Leadership Program. I am also the Executive Director of Advising and Student Success at [University Hills]. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in my research study called "Perceptions of Advisors and Students in a Caseload Model: A Case Study."

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the academic advising experiences and interactions between advisors and students within an advising caseload model at [University Hills]. If you meet the criteria for this study, I encourage you to participate. You must meet all five criteria: (1) 18 years or older, (2) first-generation college student, (3) enrolled in 12 units or more, (4) first-year or second-year student who started at University Hills, and (5) have experienced at least three advising appointments with the same assigned advisor. A goal of this study is to learn from your perspectives about having an assigned advisor and your student-advisor interactions, to improve the advising experience for students.

You will be asked to share your experiences in a group interview session with 5 other students. The 60- to 90-minute session will take place in Zoom and will be video- and audio-recorded. You will receive a \$25 [University Hills] bookstore gift card at the time of the interview as my thanks for your participation.

There is only minimal risk associated with your participation. Sometimes study participants experience mild discomfort in talking about past experiences that may have been negative. A pseudonym (another name) will be used to identify each person who participates to maintain confidentiality.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question and you can withdraw from the study at any time. There will be no negative consequences if you choose not to answer or to withdraw during the study.

If you would like to contribute your knowledge and experience by participating in a group interview, or if you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]@csu.fullerton.edu or call/text [REDACTED]-[REDACTED].

Thank you,
Andrea Villegas
CSUF Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

California State University, Fullerton Research Study Consent Form (Students)

Study Title: Perceptions of Advisors and Students in an Advising Caseload Model: A Case Study

Protocol Number: HSR-21-22-5

Researcher: Andrea Villegas, Doctoral Candidate, College of Education, Educational Leadership Department, ■■■-■■■-■■■

You are being asked to take part in a research study carried out by Andrea Villegas. This consent form explains the research study and your part in it if you decide to join the study. Please read the form carefully, taking as much time as you need. Ask the researcher to explain anything you don't understand. You can decide not to join the study. If you join the study, you can change your mind later and leave the study at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of services or benefits if you decide to not take part in the study.

What is this study about?

This research study is being conducted to examine a university advising caseload model for first- and second-year students, and how the model improves student-advisor interactions and building relationships that contributes to historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and intent to persist. This study will elicit feedback from students and advisors about how they describe their interactions and whether there are benefits to the caseload model as a structure to improve historically underrepresented students' sense of belonging and intent to persist.

You are being asked to take part because you are a currently enrolled full-time undergraduate student in their first-year and second-year at the university and have had three advising appointments with your assigned advisor.

Taking part in the study will take about 90 minutes.

You cannot take part in this study if are no longer an undergraduate student at the university.

What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a group interview (focus group) session with other students. Student participants will choose the focus group session times and days that are most convenient to their schedules.
- Focus groups will be conducted online via a password-protected, recorded Zoom session. Each focus group will last no longer than an hour and half. The researcher will be the focus group facilitator and the note taker.
- Focus group questions will be about your academic advising experiences and interactions with advisors at University Hills. The questions will focus on experiences with your assigned advisor.

- Data will be collected and held confidentially to protect students' identities. Student participants will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym (alias) during the focus groups session or allow the researcher to create a pseudonym. The information you share will be kept confidential.
- Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question and you can withdraw from the study at any time. There will be no negative consequences if you choose not to answer or to withdraw during the study.

Are there any benefits to me if I am in this study?

There is no direct benefit to you from being in this study, but your participation will contribute to our knowledge and understanding of advising caseload model and may be able to contribute to research that could potentially benefit historically underrepresented, low-income, first-generation college students who attend large, urban, public institutions.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?

There is no more than minimal risk for participation in this study. Recalling past events and situations may cause some discomfort.

Will my information be kept anonymous or confidential?

Data for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. I will use a pseudonym (alias) in place of your name in the documents associated with this study. No published results will identify you, and your name will not be associated with the findings. Under certain circumstances, information that identifies you may be released for internal and external reviews of this project.

Data for this study, including recordings, will be kept on a password-protected computer. I am the only person who will have access to the study data.

The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain confidential.

Data for this study will be kept for a minimum of 3 years as required by CSUF, and then indefinitely, for future educational use, presentations, and publications. Data will be kept to ensure accuracy in future analysis.

Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?

There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study. You will receive \$20 [University Hills] Bookstore gift card for taking part in this study. Participants will be emailed a gift card at the conclusion of all the focus group sessions.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact the researcher, Andrea Villegas, at [REDACTED]@csu.fullerton.edu or [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED]. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the CSUF Institutional Review Board at (657) 278-7719, or e-mail irb@fullerton.edu

What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.

Statement of Consent

I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By signing below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Name of Participant (please print) _____

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Your signature below indicates that you are giving permission to audio- and/or /video-record your responses.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E

ADVISOR LETTER OF INVITATION

Dear Professional Academic Advisor,

As a graduate student in the California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) Doctorate in Community College Educational Leadership Program, I am conducting a research study to explore how the advising caseload model and its processes and structure facilitate outcomes such as students' sense of belonging, validation, and intent to persist.

Advisors participating in the study must meet the following criteria: (a) currently working within the advising caseload model for first- and second-year students at [University Hills], and (b) have met with 30% of their assigned student participants, and (c) have met with a portion of assigned students at least three times from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021. You have been identified as a professional academic advisor at [University Hills] who meets the study criteria. Further, you have been identified as someone who may have experiences and insights about student-advisor interactions and relationships with assigned students that can contribute to students' sense of belonging and intent to persist.

If you decide to take part in the study, you will respond in an anonymous survey that will take approximately 15-18 minutes to complete. Survey questions focus on gathering advisors' perspectives of the caseload model for first- and second-year [University Hills] students as a structure to deliver proactive and personalized advising to assigned students, and to illuminate the structures and practices that facilitate sense of belonging and intent to persist. In the survey, you will not be expected to answer questions that make you uncomfortable. If you choose not to answer, there will be no consequence and you will remain a part of the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. Data for this study will be anonymous. All data for this study, including Qualtrics survey reports, will be kept on a password-protected computer. I am the only person who will have access to the study data.

Attached you will find the study consent form. Please proceed to the link below to give your consent to participate and the survey.

Thank you,

Andrea Villegas, M.A.
CSUF Ed.D. Candidate
[REDACTED]@csu.fullerton.edu
[REDACTED]

http://fullerton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4IRwzLyzEIMMbik

APPENDIX F**ADVISOR CONSENT FORM****California State University Fullerton
Research Study Consent Form (Advisors)**

Study Title: Perceptions of Advisors and Students in an Advising Caseload Model: A Case Study

Protocol Number: HSR-21-22-5

Researcher: Andrea Villegas, Ed.D. Candidate, College of Education, Educational Leadership Department, ■■■-■■■-■■■

You are being asked to take part in a research study carried out by Andrea Villegas, a graduate student in the California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) Doctorate in Community College Educational Leadership Program. This consent form explains the research study and your part in it if you decide to join the study. Please read the form carefully, taking as much time as you need. Ask me to explain anything you don't understand. You can decide not to join the study. If you join the study, you can change your mind later or quit at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of services or benefits if you decide to not take part in the study or quit later.

What is this study about?

This research study is being conducted to investigate a caseload model at [University Hills] for first- and second-year students, and how the model improves student-advisor interactions and building relationships that contribute to sense of belonging and intent to persist for historically underrepresented students. You are being asked to take part because you have been identified as a professional academic advisor with experiences and insights to better understand student-advisor interactions and relationships with assigned students that can contribute to students' sense of belonging and intent to persist. Participating in the study will take about 20 minutes.

What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to review this consent form and then complete an anonymous survey. The survey questions are about advisors' perspectives of the caseload model for first- and second-year [University Hills] students as a helpful or problematic structure to deliver proactive and personalized advising to assigned students to illuminate the model's role in facilitating beneficial student-advisor interactions. You do not have to answer any survey questions that make you uncomfortable. If you choose not to answer, there will be no consequence and you will remain a part of the study.

Are there any benefits to me if I am in this study?

There is no direct benefit to you from being in this study, but your participation will contribute to our knowledge and understanding about how an advising caseload model be particularly beneficial for historically underrepresented students and this may help others in the future.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?

There is no more than minimal risk for participation in this study. Recalling past events and situations may cause some discomfort.

Will my information be kept anonymous or confidential?

Your responses to the survey will be anonymous. Data for this study, including Qualtrics Survey report, will be kept on a password-protected computer and in a password-protected Qualtrics account online. I am the only person who will have access to study data, and I will not know the identities of survey respondents.

The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of survey participants will remain anonymous.

Data for this study will be kept for a minimum of 3 years as required by CSUF, and then indefinitely, for future educational use, presentations, and publications. Data will be kept ensuring accuracy in future analysis.

Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?

There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study. You will not receive money or any other form of incentive for taking part in this study.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact me, Andrea Villegas, at aville10@csu.fullerton.edu, XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the CSUF Institutional Review Board at (657) 278-7640, or email irb@fullerton.edu.

What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

What does my online click on this consent form mean?

Clicking below means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks

Statement of Consent

I have carefully read and/or I have had the terms used in this consent form and their significance explained to me. By clicking below, I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this project.

Agree

Disagree

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