

CASE STUDY: EVALUATION OF A CASE MANAGEMENT ADVISING MODEL

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this single-case study was to evaluate the impact of strategies and the effectiveness of the case management advising model (CMA) on student persistence as measured by perceptions of students, advisors, and counselors and re-enrollment from one semester to the next at Harper College. Focus groups were utilized to determine perceptions of the impact of the CMA model. Fall-to-spring persistence data was used for comparison purposes between students who participated in the CMA model and students who did not.

The major findings in this study show that persistence for students who participated in the CMA model was higher than it was for a like control group of students who did not participate in the model. Themes emerged from the focus groups that support a case management approach to academic advising and illustrate the importance of developing rapport between student and advisor/counselor. Proactive communication and creating a Degree Works plan were two specific strategies that were identified by students, advisor, and counselors as important in the CMA model.

Themes from the advisor and counselor focus groups, however, also suggest the importance of balancing the use of advising technology with rapport building in an advising relationship. Additional themes from the advisor and counselor focus groups highlight a need for ongoing professional development and training as the new CMA model continues to evolve.

Recommendations for improvements to the new CMA program at Harper College include further clarifying the advisor and counselor roles in the CMA model, examining the number of

technology platforms utilized in the model, and further examining the impacts of the CMA model on different student groups.

Key Words: advising, case management advising model, CMA

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Introduction**

In 2011, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) launched an initiative titled the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges for the purpose of challenging America's community colleges to graduate an additional "five million students with a college credential by 2020" (AACC, 2012, p. v). Community colleges are poised to prepare citizens of the U.S. to earn a credential that will decrease income inequality and "reverse the decline of the middle class" (AACC, 2012, p. viii).

For the first time in history, the United States is no longer the leader in college completion rates, but ranks 16<sup>th</sup> in the world (AACC, 2012), with its "younger generations actually less educated than their elders" (AACC, 2012, p. vii). AACC (2012) calls for the redesign of the community college that includes moving "from low rates of student success to high rates of student success" (p. ix). According to AACC (2012), the "American Dream is imperiled" and it is incumbent upon community colleges to determine what factors of the college environment have the power to impact the student's motivation to stay and complete a college credential, or to drop out.

Academic advising has been identified as an aspect of community college that has the potential to impact students to stay in school and complete a college credential (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Crocket, 1978; Cuseo, 2002; Habley, 1981; Metzner, 1989). The role of academic advising in student retention has been widely studied and has a long history that has evolved in step with the evolution of higher education (Cook, 2009). Beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the founding

of Harvard College, faculty served as the primary advisor to the student and assisted with decisions ranging from what extracurricular activities to be involved with to how to live a moral life (Cook, 2009).

It wasn't until 1841 that the first formal academic advising program was created along with a growing interest in activities such as new student orientation, freshmen week activities, and assigning students to faculty member for guidance in course selection (Cook, 2009). As programs such as these grew in popularity, an increase in awareness of the importance of these activities to student success began to emerge, and the field of academic advising started to see an increasing number of professional positions such as dean of students (Cook, 2009). It was common for this position to oversee the operations of the advising functions. As the recognition of academic advising as a valuable student service continued to grow, the wide array of student needs led to further specialization of advising and delineation of what was becoming known as "student personnel work" that utilized "fundamental principles of counseling" (Cook, 2009, p. 21).

It was during these early years that William Rainey Harper, the founding president of the University of Chicago, recognized the great value of studying the needs of students and using this data to the improve student support services (Cook, 2009). The first documented study on factors that could lead to students dropping out of college took place in 1948 and found that a "lack of guidance" to students on course selection could be an important contributing factor (Cook, 2009, p. 22). With increasing attention being focused on the connection between student success and effective academic advising, there was a growing need to support and study the profession of academic advising which resulted in the establishment of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and the first national survey of academic advising by the

American College Testing Program (ACT) (Cook, 2009). While this increased attention on academic advising provided a foundation for supporting the profession, results from ACT's third national survey in 1987 highlighted the need to improve the "management of advising programs, training, evaluation, and reward systems" (Cook, 2009, p. 24).

Grites (1979) summarized the changing face of academic advising to this point in history:

Academic advising in American higher education has evolved from a routine, isolated, single-purpose, faculty activity to a comprehensive process of academic, career, and personal development performed by personnel from most elements of the campus community. This evolution has resulted from changing enrollment patterns, a new diversity of college students, increased student involvement in academic process, and the recent economic and labor conditions of the country. (p. 1)

With advising coming under closer scrutiny, it became increasingly important to provide a theoretical framework as a vehicle to explain how and why academic advising was critical in supporting students to stay in school. Astin's (1975) theory of involvement was one theory that suggested that a student is more likely to stay in school if they became involved in campus activities. Astin (1984) also suggested that academic advisors were in a critical position to encourage students to become more involved by joining student clubs, visiting faculty during office hours, and participating in extracurricular activities. More importantly, Astin (1975) recognized that academic advisors could help students overcome academic difficulty by encouraging them to be more involved in their academics.

Spady's (1970) theory of involvement also suggested that if students become socially integrated into the fabric of the institution by interacting with a variety of individuals on campus, they are less likely to drop out. Tinto's (1975) theory took Spady's theory one step further and took into account the level of the student's commitment to the institution as a factor in whether or not the student will drop out or stay in college. Tinto (1999) argued that while colleges cannot

control the attributes that students bring to the college environment, they can control conditions that may impact student persistence such as the quality of advising. Tinto's model of student involvement was later validated by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) when they developed a measure that assessed Tinto's model and paved the way for additional research on the variables that could impact student retention.

Bean and Metzner (1985) contributed to the theoretical foundation for academic advising when they developed a conceptual model of the drop out process for nontraditional students. Their model suggested that this specific population may not be as impacted by social integration as more traditional college students due to environmental factors such as finances and family responsibilities that could impede their ability to get involved in the campus community. However, Bean and Metzner's (1985) work found that academic advising was the primary method of interacting with the institution for nontraditional students and was the measure that should be used in determining the impact on student persistence. Each of these theories of involvement makes a strong case for the importance of interacting with an academic advisor that could lead to students getting more involved on campus and being more likely to persist.

Beyond theories of involvement, the value of academic advising and its role in student retention has been widely examined (Bean & Metzner, 2085; Crocket, 1978; Cuseo, 2002; Habley, 1981; Metzner, 1989). Crocket (1978) suggested that academic advising has risen to a level of importance that deserves the title of the "cornerstone of student retention" (p. 29). Academic advising has been found to lead to a higher student GPA (Crocket, 1978), to increased cost effectiveness for the college as an enrollment management strategy (Cuseo, 2002), and to lead to students to feel more supported by their campus community (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). Furthermore, Habley's advisement-retention model (1981) outlined a direct

connection between academic advising and retention by illustrating how an advisor can assist a student to overcome the dissonance that exists between the student's expectations of the college-going experience and the reality of the higher education environment. The three core advisor roles of humanizing agent, counseling/mentoring agent, and educational/instructional agent suggested by Cuseo (2002) outline further how advisors can develop critical relationships with students that result in persistence and retention.

As the importance of the relationship between the academic advisor and student became more pronounced, new advising models began to evolve that would better nurture the connection between the advisor and student. Furthermore, the 1970s represented a time when community colleges experienced a growing level of diversity in students who were considered more academically at-risk, requiring a higher level of support from academic advisors (Cook, 2009). It was during this time that developmental advising was introduced as a contrast to prescriptive advising (Crookston, 1972/1994; O'Banion, 1972/1994).

Prescriptive advising had served as the primary method of advising up until this time and took a more authoritarian approach with the advisor providing a "prescription" of courses to the student (Fielstein, 1989). Developmental advising, on the other hand, was considered to be more holistic and took into account student development theory (Crookston, 1972/1994) and provided guidance on career and life goals (O'Banion, 1972/1974). Ender, Winston, and Miller (1982) reiterated the importance of taking a developmental approach and suggested that advisors should serve as role models and mentors to students. Although developmental advising was starting to be recognized as the model best suited for supporting student success, Fielstein (1989) found that students still prioritized course selection when meeting with an advisor, albeit within the context of a developmental advising model.

The proactive advising model stems from developmental advising and involves advisors reaching out to students proactively to offer information at key points in the semester before the student knows he or she needs it (Glennen, 1975). Studies on the use of proactive advising strategies have shown an increase in student retention (Backhus, 1989), as well as improved advisor evaluations (Rajecki & Lauer, 2007). One possible explanation for the success of proactive advising is that this form of advisor support may lead to students feeling that they matter to a significant person on campus.

Theories of mattering (Schlossberg, 1989) and validation (Rendon, 1994) both offer a foundation that supports the concept that interactions with an advisor can lead to higher levels of persistence. According to Schlossberg (1989), it is not uncommon for students transitioning to college to experience feelings of marginality that can be overcome when a caring, proactive advisor reaches out to offer support and encouragement to get involved on campus. Laura Rendon's validation theory (1994) further suggested that students will feel validated and reassured that they can succeed in college when a staff person from the college reaches out to offer support. Both of these theories suggest that "student affairs staff must be ready to actively reach out to students, be accessible, and be open to establishing close relationships with students" (Linares & Munoz, 2011, p. 26).

As academic advising (and the relationship between advisor and student) continues to play an important role in student persistence, the periodic evaluation and improvement of advising programs becomes even more critical. Despite the fact that early theorists suggested the importance of evaluating advising programs (Crocket, 1988; Grites, 1979), national surveys of academic advising distributed by ACT in the 1980s showed that less than half of respondents reported that they evaluated their academic advising programs (Frost, 1991). More recently, the

2011 NACADA National Survey on Academic Advising found that little more than half of community colleges responded to questions regarding assessment of their advising programs. For those colleges that have conducted assessment of their advising programs, most have primarily used a student satisfaction survey for this purpose (Banta, Hansen, Black & Jackson, 2002).

Attempts have been made to define best practices for the purpose of evaluating advisors and advising programs (Banta et. al., 2002; Crocket, 1988; Cuseo, n.d.; Srebnik, 1988). Such practices may include gathering input from key stakeholders about what constitutes “good advising” (Crocket, 1988), the use of a variety of assessment tools in order to garner more valuable data (Banta et. al., 2002), and advisor self-assessment (Cuseo, n.d.). In addition, the NACADA (n.d.) core competencies have served as a helpful guide in the development of advisor evaluation tools.

In recent years, retention and completion data for American community colleges has come under great scrutiny and has led to what some are calling a “retention crisis” (Price & Tovar, 2014). From fall 2014 to fall 2015, only half of first-time/full-time students enrolled in public community colleges were retained, and only 22% of the same population graduated with an associate’s degree within three years (American College Testing, 2011). In 2009, at the beginning of his first term, President Obama called on community colleges specifically to play a significant role in reaching the goal of achieving an additional 8.2 million college graduates necessary for the United States to re-establish itself as the world leader in education (Mullin, 2010).

This challenge set forth by President Obama led to the establishment of several college completion initiatives that each strive to increase community college completion rates. Organizations such as the Lumina Foundation, Achieve the Dream, and the American

Association of Community Colleges have dedicated themselves to devoting much needed resources that support research on completion rates in every state (Matthews, 2012), for enabling community colleges to explore sustainable institutional transformation (Achieve the Dream, 2017a) and to offer leadership in the redesign of community colleges (AACC, 2012, April). The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCSSE) was established in 2008 specifically for the purpose of assisting community colleges in surveying students to determine what educational practices lead to higher levels of student engagement (CCSSE, n.d.a). Community colleges use this survey data in addition to the five CCSSE benchmarks of active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners to improve practices that support student persistence and completion.

The use of case management strategies in academic advising has most recently taken a strong foothold as a result of one initiative put forth by Achieve the Dream called the Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPASS) initiative (Achieve the Dream, n.d.b). This provides a framework to community colleges for redesigning their advising programs and involves the use of case management strategies. Case management as a strategy has previously been widely used in the fields of social work and healthcare as a way of supporting clients and involves assessment, connection with resources, client interventions, community interventions, monitoring, and advocacy (Wilson et al., 2013).

Although case management was first introduced to higher education as the result of the shooting tragedy at Northern Illinois University in 2008 (Adams, Hazelwood & Hayden, 2014), it has also been recognized as a strategy that could help students overcome barriers in college and lead to higher rates of persistence (Van Brunt, Woodley, Gunn, Reinach Wolf, & Sokolow, 2012). Assigning students to an advisor in a case management model allows for increased

communication between student and advisor, increased student accountability and greater access to school resources (Van Brunt et al., 2012). Effective case management should include a defined number of contacts between student and advisor each semester, effective referral to campus resources, documentation of all advising activities, advocating for the student, and ongoing evaluation of case management advising services (Richardson, 2008). Colleges that have implemented case management advising strategies as a component of Achieve the Dream's iPASS initiative have experienced higher course completion rates for students, increased fall-to-spring retention, and higher GPAs (Excelencia in Education, n.d.).

The transformation of academic advising at community colleges through the implementation of case management advising strategies has proven to increase student persistence and could potentially offer one solution to the completion challenge put forth by President Obama in 2009.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of strategies and the effectiveness of the case management advising model on student persistence as measured by perceptions of students, advisors, and counselors and re-enrollment from one semester to the next at a community college.

The following research questions will be addressed:

1. How does the assignment to an advisor or counselor impact student persistence from one semester to the next?
2. What are the perceptions of the impacts of the case management advising model from students, advisors, and counselors?
3. Are there some case management strategies that are more effective than others?

## Definitions of Terms

Definition of the following terms are useful for this study. The researcher developed all definitions not accompanied by a citation from the literature.

- *Case Management Advising (CMA) Model.* The CMA model involves intrusive advising strategies and consists of the assignment of a student to an academic advisor or counselor (A/C). The role of the assigned A/C is to develop an ongoing relationship with students to completion of academic goals, to be invested in the student's success while also facilitating student's self-competency and self-advocacy, to fulfill a minimum number of attempted contacts with students on their caseload each semester, and to proactively and intrusively follow up with students after each contact (Harper College, 2017).
- *Strategies for Effectiveness.* Strategies that are used within the context of the CMA model to connect with students on the A/C caseload. These strategies can include, but are not limited to email, phone, text, or a face-to-face meeting.
- *Student Persistence.* For this study, persistence is defined as continuous enrollment between fall and spring semester.
- *Community College.* "A regionally accredited institution of higher education that offers the associate degree as its highest degree; however, today, in a number of states, community colleges offer the bachelor degree as well" (Vaughn, 2006, p.1).
- *Academic Advisor.* According to Winston, Ender, and Miller (1982), the academic advisor assists students in defining life and career goals and with the process of creating educational plans that will help them reach their goals. They may also exchange information with students that will assist them to make decisions that will enable them to maximize their academic potential. The advisor can serve as a "facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary" (Winston et.al., 1982, p.17). In the context of this study, an academic advisor is also defined as a college staff member who works twelve months a year with the credential of a bachelor degree or higher.
- *Counselor.* For the purpose of this study, a counselor performs duties similar to the academic advisor stated above but also assists students who are more academically at-risk, have complex personal concerns that are serving as barriers to their academic success, or are experiencing mental health issues. Counselors in the context of this study maintain a faculty ranking and work under a nine-month contract.

## **Methodology**

The method for this study was a single-case study of one college that implemented the case management advising model in 2017-2018. Focus groups were utilized to determine perceptions of the impact of the CMA model by students, advisors, and counselors. Two focus groups of students who participated in the CMA model and two focus groups of advisors and counselors who provided service in the CMA model were conducted. Fall-to-spring persistence data was also used for comparison purposes between students who participated in the CMA model with students who did not. Maximum variation purposeful sampling was used for the selection all focus group participants.

## **Assumptions**

There were certain assumptions made on the part of the researcher as they related to the nature of the study conducted. They are as follows:

- It was assumed that responses from students, advisors, and counselors to questions in focus groups would be honest and for the sole purpose of collecting data for this study.
- It was assumed that this study would provide a body of data for the use of making improvements to the CMA model.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This study is a single-case study limited to one suburban community college outside the Chicago area.

## **Importance of the Study**

The role of academic advising in supporting student success has continued to evolve throughout history, placing efforts to improve academic advising models at the forefront of increasing student persistence and completion. This study is important as it provides an

opportunity to evaluate and improve a new case management advising model at Harper College. The relationship between student and advisor/counselor is a critical one. Improving the strategies that strengthen this relationship could potentially result in increased student retention and completion of a college credential at the site of this study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of strategies and effectiveness of the case management model of academic advising on student persistence. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (1) Evolution and Criticality of Academic Advising to Student Retention; (2) Developmental Academic Advising and Importance of Relationship; (3) Evaluation and Quality of Academic Advising; (4) Community College Call to Action (5); Educational Case Management, and (6) Summary.

### **Evolution and Criticality of Academic Advising**

Academic advising plays a critical role in student retention and has a long history that has evolved in step with the evolution of higher education (Cook, 2009). Cook (2009) provided a comprehensive historical timeline of the evolution of academic advising that denotes important milestones for the profession and provides valuable insight into how academic advising has become associated with student retention and persistence. Cook's timeline is delineated by three major time periods; higher education before academic advising was defined, academic advising as a defined but unexamined activity, and academic advising as defined and examined activity. Each of these periods presents significant developments that advanced academic advising as a profession.

## **History of Academic Advising**

During the first period that Cook (2009) described as “higher education before academic advising,” the president of the college, and then later the faculty, was mainly responsible for advising students about extracurricular activities and their moral life (p.18). It wasn't until 1841 that the first formal academic advising system was created with every student being paired with a faculty member (Cook, 2009).

During the “academic advising as a defined but unexamined activity” period, several key occurrences contributed to the growing importance of academic advising as a support for student success. This period began with some colleges implementing faculty advising programs to better support students in the course selection process. The need to orient students to the college was recognized to be an important contributor to student success and, as a result, freshmen seminars, orientation courses, and freshmen week activities became the norm for many institutions. Freshmen week activities typically consisted of testing, advising, and registration. As a result of increasing numbers of advisors on campus, professional positions such as dean of students were created to oversee both advising and disciplinary functions.

It was also during this time period of 1869 to 1958 (Cook, 2009) that counseling and advising became more specialized due to the recognition that students present a variety of issues when they enter college. The three areas of specialization for advising included personal, vocational, and academic concerns. As a result of the increased need to specialize and be informed of student needs, the term “student personnel work” started to become more common in higher education, and colleges began operating under “fundamental principles for counseling” (Cook, 2009, p. 21). In 1932, The University of Chicago was one of the first institutions to

recognize that “students should have the same counselor for a sufficient period of time” (Cook, 2009, p. 21) and implemented a system for assigning students to advisors.

Another significant occurrence during this time period was the recognition that the study of students would aid in the formation of programs and services that would better support student success. William Rainey Harper, the founding president of the University of Chicago predicted that “the scientific study of the student would be of great importance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century higher education” (Cook, 2009, p. 19), and that “the data collected would determine the character of all advice given the student” (Cook, 2009, p. 19). Harper's insight suggested then, as it does now, that leaders in higher education were beginning to recognize that student characteristics were important in determining how best to support their academic success. One of the earliest documented studies on the link between academic advising and why students leave college was conducted in 1948 by the Educational Research Fund of the Tuition Plan. This study found that “lack of guidance and planning with regard to a student's academic work” (Cook, 2009, p. 22) could be a contributing factor to students dropping out.

Cook's (2009) third and final historical period of advising is called “academic advising as a defined and examined activity” and unfolds from 1958 to 2008. Increased attention on how academic advising operates to support student retention in this time period brought to light the criticality of advising. As a result of the need to further study and improve systems of academic advising, the first national organization of academic advising was founded. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was established in 1979 and was the most significant development during this time period but was preceded by a number of key occurrences.

The first was a report published by the *North Central Quarterly* that cited academic advising as a “problem” in need of attention, and the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education recognized that “increased emphasis should be placed on academic advising as an important aspect of higher education” (Cook, 2009, p. 22). Soon after, both the establishment of a national organization (NACADA) as well as the study of academic advising by the American College Testing Program (ACT, 2011) provided further needed attention on the evolving role of academic advising in student retention. ACT published its first national survey of academic advising in 1979 and provided insight into how academic advising function was operating on both the four-year and two-year college campus.

During the latter part of this time period, there was an increase in attention to improving academic advising in order to improve student retention. ACT published a survey report titled *What Works in Student Retention* that found that advising interventions were one of three campus practices that had the greatest impact. Cook’s (2009) historical timeline provides valuable insight into the evolution of academic advising and the role that it plays in student persistence and retention.

## **Theories of Involvement**

As outlined in Cook’s timeline (2009), academic advising has been at the center of discussions surrounding retention efforts in higher education since the 1940s. This section of the literature review outlines key theoretical underpinnings that served as the foundation for creating advising programs to increase the student's sense of integration and connection to the institution, leading to an increased probability that he or she would stay in school.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1984) described involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience”

(Astin, 1984, p. 518). Astin based his theory of student involvement on two longitudinal studies that he conducted for the purpose of determining reasons for dropping out of college. Both of Astin's studies (1975, 1977) supported the idea that the factors that led to students staying in college led to higher levels of involvement in the campus environment. Factors that can impact level of involvement include the student's place of residence, participation in honors programs, academic involvement, student-faculty interaction, student government, and athletic involvement (Astin, 1984).

Astin (1984) suggested that there is a practical application of his theory of involvement for academic advising and student personnel workers. This theory can “provide a unifying construct that can help to focus the energies of all institutional personnel on a common objective” (p. 527), that of assessing the level of involvement of students. Furthermore, Astin suggested that if the institution is committed to elevating the level of involvement of their students, counselors and advisors are in a critical position to interact with students and encourage them to join clubs, visit faculty during their office hours, and become more involved with extracurricular activities. More specifically, advisors can help students in academic difficulty by examining their level of academic involvement and provide strategies for becoming more involved academically. Astin's theory of involvement can serve as a valuable frame of reference that informs the work of academic advisors and counselors as they work towards supporting student success.

Both Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975) have provided an extensive review of the literature on the phenomenon of college dropout. Both reviews presented the argument that the majority of research conducted on college dropout was descriptive in nature, rather than theory-based (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980), which led both authors to develop theoretical models that explain

college dropout. Both Spady and Tinto used Durkheim's theory of suicide as a foundation for their longitudinal models that describe the process of social integration (or lack thereof) into the campus community (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975).

Although suicide is a more drastic action than dropping out of college, Durkheim's theory of suicide provides insight into the factors that may lead to student's lacking a sense of connectedness to the campus community. Spady (1970) suggested that there are parallels between suicide and dropping out of college: “a lack of consistent, intimate interaction with others, holding values and orientations that are dissimilar from those of the general social collectivity, and lacking a sense of compatibility with the immediate social system” (p. 78) can all lead to students dropping out. Tinto (1975) drew further parallels between college dropout and suicide suggesting that “one can reasonably expect, then, that social conditions affecting dropout from the social system of the college would resemble those resulting in suicide in the wider society” (p. 91).

Spady (1970) was the first to explain the dropout process from a “disciplinary approach involving an interaction between the individual student and his particular college environment in which his attributes are exposed to influences, expectations, and demands from a variety of sources” (p.77). In Tinto's seminal article, *Dropout from Higher Education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research* (1975), he took the work of Spady which was “to develop an explanatory, predictive model of the dropout process which has at its core the concepts of academic and social integration in the institution” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, p. 60), one step further to include the concept that the student's commitment to the goal of completing college is also a factor in the decision to dropout (Tinto, 1975). According to Tinto's model,

The process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college

during which a person's experiences in those systems continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout. (p. 94)

Similar to Spady, Tinto noted that students enter college with a variety of personal attributes and backgrounds. These personal attributes can impact the level of their commitment to their goal to graduate and their commitment to the institution. The college does not have control over these factors. However, if the college can find ways to increase the level of academic and social integration into the campus community, the level of goal and institution commitment will increase, leading to higher probability that a student will stay in school (Tinto, 1975).

While colleges cannot control student attributes, Tinto argued that colleges can control certain conditions that can lead to increased rates of persistence and academic success in college (Tinto, 1999). One such condition for success is setting high expectations for students. Academic advisors can help to establish this condition by sharing information with students regarding the “rules and regulations” of the campus community. However, Tinto (1999) warned that advising has become a “hit-or-miss” affair on many campuses, leading to students not receiving the information that would support their success. Lack of access to a quality advising program can “undermine motivation, increase the likelihood of departure, and for those who continue, result in increased time to degree completion” (Tinto, 1999, p. 3).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) developed a measure that supported the predictive validity of Tinto's model. The measure consisted of five-response Likert items designed to assess each dimension of Tinto's model: peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, faculty concern for student development and teaching, academic and intellectual development, and institutional and goal commitments. The results of Pascarella and Terenzini's landmark study

supported the predictive validity of the dimensions of Tinto's model and paved the way for additional research on what factors impact college student retention.

Spady (1970), Tinto (1975) and Astin (1975) have all made valuable contributions to the field of college student retention and persistence. However, the majority of the research that supports these models was conducted for the purpose of examining retention in residential universities (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Wild and Ebbers suggested that not only is it important for community colleges to use a different definition for retention than four-year universities, it is also critical to study the specific factors that may impact retention in the community college.

Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a conceptual model which described the dropout process for nontraditional students. This model was influenced by the theoretical contributions of Spady (1970), Tinto (1975), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), but also took into account the unique characteristics of this population of students. Their model describes both the direct and indirect impact of several variables on the attrition of nontraditional students and differs from earlier models in that it suggests that these students are not impacted by lack of social integration into the institution as much as traditional students are.

In Bean and Metzner's model, academic variables such as academic advising, study habits, and certainty of major are considered to be the primary methods of interacting with the institution, but Bean and Metzner (1985) also suggested that environmental factors such as finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, and family responsibilities can play a more significant role in the attrition of nontraditional students.

Although academic advising is cited as a variable impacting student attrition in this model, Bean and Metzner (1985) found that the frequency and quality of academic advising were the measures used most often in determining the impact on student persistence.

## **Link Between Academic Advising and Student Retention**

Theories of involvement and social integration have paved the way for increased attention to the relationship between the academic advisor and the student. This relationship can play a key role in students feeling more connected to their college community and has been widely explored throughout history in the literature as a critical factor in the success of the student. In his seminal article, *Academic advising: A cornerstone of student retention*, Crocket (1978) suggested that although academic advising has been in existence since the beginning of American higher education, a number of factors contributed to a reconsideration of the importance of academic advising. Crocket (1978) cited the following factors for this renewed interest in academic advising:

1. Recognition that academic advising is an integral part of the higher education process, not a minor support service only tangentially related to the purpose of the institution.
2. Genuine concern for the individual student growth and development.
3. Greater student choice of curriculum than ever before.
4. Increase in the number of nontraditional students.
5. Growing student concern about the linkage between academic preparation and the world of work.
6. Interest in increasing student retention. (p. 29)

Crocket (1978) also suggested that the advising process can assist students in earning a higher GPA, can lead students to feel more positively about the college, and can help students understand the relationship between an academic credential and the world of work. All of these outcomes have been shown to improve the chances of a student staying in school (Crocket, 1978). Crocket recognized the critical link between retention and academic advising and suggested that the frequency and quality of the advising relationship is an important factor to

consider when strengthening an advising program. It may not be enough to meet once a semester with a student, but rather, “dynamic advising programs are characterized by frequent high-quality contacts between adviser and advisee” (Crocket, 1978, p. 33).

According to Crocket (1978), the more an advisor knows about their advisees (i.e., career goals, academic habits, etc.), the higher quality the relationship will be and the more likely the student will express satisfaction with the advising relationship. “The four major factors that students most frequently cite as important to them in the advising process are accessibility, specific and accurate information, advice and counsel, and a caring and personal relationship with the advisor” (Crocket, 1978, p. 34).

Habley (1981) presented an advisement-retention model that outlined a direct relationship between academic advising and retention. Habley (1981) defined academic advising in the context of retention:

Academic advising provides assistance in the mediation of dissonance between student expectations and the actualities of the educational environment. This dissonance occurs at two levels. First, students may have inaccurate or undefined expectations concerning their own educational goals and intellectual abilities. Students who are unable to define these elements will also experience difficulty in defining the value of the higher education experience. Second, students may experience dissonance regarding the purpose of higher education. (p. 46)

Habley (1981) suggested that a strong academic advising relationship can help reduce student’s dissonance around these issues. Habley's (1981) advisement retention model outlines several continua that have an impact on the educational environment and whether the student persists or drops out. Habley (1981) postulated that the academic advisor interacts with the student more than any other support service on campus and can profoundly impact all of the continua outlined in his model, leading to a higher probability that the student will persist.

Cuseo (2002) made the case that improving retention through a stronger academic advising program is not only beneficial to the student but can result in greater cost effectiveness for the institution, as well as, serve as an effective enrollment management strategy. “Retention initiatives designed to manage student enrollment are estimated to be 3-5 times more cost-effective than recruitment efforts” (Cuseo, 2002, p. 2). Cuseo (2002) used findings from national advising surveys conducted for 25 years by American College Testing (ACT) to support the case for focusing attention on academic advising as a key retention strategy. Cuseo (2002) stated that:

Although a direct, causal connection between advising and retention has yet to be established, a strong case can be made that academic advising exerts a significant impact on student retention through its positive association with, and mediation of, variables that are strongly correlated with student persistence. (p. 1)

Utilizing a comprehensive literature review, Cuseo (2002) outlined five empirical relationships between academic advising and retention: “1) student satisfaction with the college experience, 2) effective educational and career planning and decision making, 3) student utilization of campus support systems, 4) student-faculty contact outside the classroom, and 5) student mentoring” (p. 1). The literature review provided by Cuseo (2002) led him to present three core advisor roles that can lead to increased retention. Cuseo (2002) described the “advisor as a humanizing agent” (p. 14) to be someone that a student is comfortable seeking out, developing a personal relationship with, and confiding with about their personal experiences and goals. Second, the advisor as a “counseling/mentoring agent” (p. 14) is someone that will help the student “navigate the bureaucratic maze of institutional policies” (p. 14), as well as someone who can advocate for the student when needed. The third core advisor role that Cuseo outlined as key to retention is advisor as “educational/instructional agent” (p. 14). This role supports

students in providing guidance on study habits, raising awareness, and making connections between school and the student's future plans.

Metzner (1989) reported that although “academic advising offers the potential of linking students' goals with institutional resources on a personalized basis” (p.422), many studies on the connection between student retention and academic advising have produced mixed results. Furthermore, Metzner (1989) suggested that the effects of academic advising have been difficult to fully ascertain because oftentimes studies on the link between academic advising and retention only focus on the direct effects of advising, not the indirect effects that are related to retention such as GPA and student “perception of the value of their college education for future employment” (p. 423). The purpose of Metzner’s research (1989) was

To conduct a more thorough investigation of the role of perceived advising quality in student attrition by considering indirect as well as direct effects, to discover if levels of advising quality had different total effects on student attrition, and to compare the size of the total effects on attrition for levels of advising quality. (p. 434)

Bean and Metzner (1985) found that quality advising did not directly impact dropout, but the indirect effects such as student GPA, which “constituted the majority of the total effect” were significant. Bean and Metzner (1985) also reported that “good advising was negatively associated with attrition, whereas no advising was positively related” (p. 434). These outcomes indicate that even if advising programs are considered to be low quality or poor, it's better than no advising at all when considering the impact on student persistence.

More recently, the findings of the 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), illustrated that the more that students met with their academic advisor, the more they felt that their campus environment was supportive (NSSE, 2014). Furthermore, it was found that one in three first-year students rarely met with an advisor and reported that their campus environment

was supportive only “some” or “very little” of the time (NSSE, 2014). This data further illustrates a link between a relationship with an academic advisor and the possibility that a student will feel supported and connected to the institution.

### **Developmental Academic Advising and the Importance of Relationship**

The relationship between advisor and student has been explored in the literature as a key factor in persistence and retention (Cuseo, 2002). However, there is one model of academic advising in particular that supports the notion of the importance of the relationship between the advisor and the student more than others. This section of the literature review will explore how developmental advising can lead to stronger relationships between students and advisors.

The literature on developmental advising is vast and can be divided into two major time periods: pre-developmental advising and post-developmental advising. The 1970s represented a time in the history of higher education when community colleges experienced increasing enrollments due to open admissions policies and growing diversity due to increased federal financial aid for first-generation and low-income students. During this period, community colleges also began experiencing greater numbers of academically at-risk students, students with disabilities, and nontraditional students (Cook, 2009). Due to this increasing diversity on community college campuses, the function of academic advising was challenged to re-evaluate how best to support student success. Up until this time, the primary method of providing academic advising was considered prescriptive.

Prescriptive advising is defined as the more traditional form of advising during which the advisor assists the student with course selection, registration and is considered a more authoritarian approach (Fielstein, 1989). Burns Crookston (1972/1994) and Terry O'Banion (1972/1994) are well-known as the first authors to contrast the idea of developmental academic

advising with prescriptive advising. In his seminal article, *A Developmental View of Academic Advising as Teaching* (1972/1994), Crookston called for a “critical reexamination of this traditional helping function, as well as the assumptions which undergird it” (p. 5). He likens prescriptive advising to that of a doctor-patient relationship where the student seeks advice from the advisor who maintains the authority to make decisions on behalf of the student. Crookston (1972/1994) found that the information giving that takes place in the prescriptive advising relationship can play an important role in solving specific problems (symptoms) that a student presents, however, it may not be sufficient to treat the underlying condition (i.e., student motivation, poor study skills, etc.).

Crookston (1972/1994) proposed that applying student development theory to the function of advising would change the relationship between student and advisor from doctor-patient to teacher-student: “Within this developmental framework, the nature of the relationship between the academic advisor and the student is of critical importance in distinguishing those dimensions of this relationship that are developmental from those that are not” (Crookston, 1972/1994, p. 5). While Crookston did not make a direct link between developmental advising and student persistence, his comparison between the prescriptive and developmental advising relationship suggests that students can benefit from a relationship that supports the process of the “student becoming aware of his own changing self within a rapidly changing society” (Crookston, 1972/1994, p. 5).

Terry O'Banion's (1972/1994), *An Academic Advising Model*, also provided a contrasting approach to prescriptive advising. He recognized that the function of advising should go beyond mere course selection and help students answer the question, “How do I want to live my life?” (O'Banion, 1972/1994, p. 10). O'Banion (1972/1994) expanded the prescriptive model of

advising to include five steps that would help students address these important issues: (1) exploration of life goals, (2) exploration of vocational goals, (3) program choice, (4) course choice, and (5) scheduling courses.

While Crookston and O'Banion were the first to expand the definition of academic advising beyond that of course selection, Ender et al. (1982) went even further and presented an argument for redefining the academic advising process to include student development theory and focused on the importance of relationship between advisor and student. Ender et al. (1982) offered a list of defining characteristics for effective developmental advising:

- Developmental advising is a process.
- Developmental advising is concerned with human growth.
- Developmental advising requires establishment of a caring human relationship.
- Advisors serve as adult role models and mentors.
- Development advising is the cornerstone of collaboration between academic and student affairs.
- Developmental advising utilizes all campus and community resources. (p.7)

Advisors must “recognize the tremendous significance the advising relationship can have for students” (Ender et al., 1982, p. 9), and be prepared to serve as role models and mentors for all of their students. Furthermore, if developmental academic advising is to truly take hold on college campuses, advisors must play a key role in formulating the mission of advising on their campuses, assist in the development of their own job descriptions, and participate in ongoing professional development and training (Ender et al., 1982).

In *Academic Advising for Student Success: A System of Shared Responsibility*, Frost (1991) further supported the idea that effective advising can serve as a conduit for increased faculty contact, leading to increased involvement and persistence. With academic advisors

serving as one of the most “structured relationships that links students with concerned representatives of the institution” (Frost, 1991, p. 13), they play a profound role in encouraging students to interact with faculty more, to become more involved in their college experience, and potentially to persist and complete their academic goals. Frost (1991) also reiterated that students prefer individualized advising relationship, although they “prefer one that is organized around academic matters and not personal concerns” (p. 18).

Frost (1991) was one of the first authors to draw attention to the idea that academic advising will be more effective if the advisor recognizes unique differences in diverse student populations that may require varying levels of service. She provides insight into the unique advising needs of ethnic minorities, academically underprepared students, students with disabilities, student athletes, students in transition (freshmen, undecided students, transfer and adult students), and international students.

Although much of the literature focuses on the benefit of developmental academic advising in creating a sense of connection to the college environment, Fielstein's (1989) research found that students prioritize advising tasks that have been described as prescriptive (choosing courses, learning about graduation requirements, and helping a student plan their course of study) over tasks that have been considered more developmental (helping with personal problems, discussing long-range goals, and being personally acquainted with the advisor). However, Fielstein (1989) suggested that students really do desire a personal relationship with an advisor, but not necessarily for the purpose of discussing issues that are more private such as family or other relationship concerns. Fielstein (1989) believed that students view these types of concerns as more appropriate for a personal counseling environment.

In Grites's *Developmental Academic Advising: A 40-Year Context* (2013), he provided a comprehensive review of the literature in which he examines the evolution of developmental advising and its relationship to the success of students. He reiterates his earlier recommendations that advising should be assessed on a five-year review cycle; that academic advisors should be trained, evaluated, and rewarded; and that additional research is needed to improve the process of advising. Grites (2013) also suggested that the new millennium has introduced a variety of new approaches to advising, all stemming from a developmental academic advising approach. These new approaches include appreciative advising, advising as coaching, strengths-based advising, and proactive advising.

### **Proactive Advising**

While these new approaches to advising utilize a foundation of developmental academic advising, proactive advising is one approach in particular that “involves 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). The concept of the intrusive advising strategy was first introduced in Glennen's *Intrusive College Counseling* (1975). Glennen's research described an advising program that combined counseling theory with prescriptive advising that resulted in “a reduction in academic attrition, probation, suspensions and withdrawals; and an increase in Dean's honor list achievement” (Glennen, 1975, p. 2).

Intrusive advising eventually became known as proactive advising and is a way for counselors to “thrust oneself into the affairs of others or to be unduly curious about another's concern” (p. 2). Proactive advising was the first attempt at reaching out to students proactively to offer information and support before they knew they needed it. Proactive advising involves advisors expressing caring and concern for the academic and personal well-being of students and

requires advisors to use defined tasks to reach out to students at specific times during the semester (Varney, 2013). Proactive advising does not leave the student wondering how to connect with an advisor but provides students with a definite connection and way of seeking support.

Varney (2013) suggested that proactive advisors should create a communication calendar that specifically details when they will reach out to their students:

1. During the first three weeks of class when students are making initial adjustments to college. Students may not reach out at this time, “but proactive intervention may help students lay plans for handling possible difficulties” (p. 147).
2. At midterm when students are receiving the first indication of their academic progress in classes.
3. Prior to registration for the following semester when students may need assistance further exploring their program of study.
4. Between semesters when some students might be feeling disappointed about poor grades, undecided about whether or not to return for the next semester, and isolated from the college community they had developed connections with.

Varney (2013) also noted that other intrusive strategies can help support student retention and include contacting students whose grades are low at mid-term, encouraging use of study skills, implementing an early warning system that allows faculty to provide feedback to advisors on student's grades, and classroom behaviors that could be problematic.

Research by Backhus (1989) illustrated that the use of intrusive advising strategies in a centralized advising center resulted in an 8% increase in retention. A longitudinal study conducted in the psychology department at Indiana University introduced an intrusive advising track resulted in improved evaluations for the advising that students received (Rajecki & Lauer, 2007). In another study by Smith (2007), an initiative designed to increase student retention using intrusive advising methods resulted in increased advisor-student communication and could potentially lead to increased retention at that school.

## **Mattering vs. Marginality**

One reason that intrusive advising has a positive impact on student retention may be that students who experience this form of advising feel that they matter to someone at the institution. Nancy Schlossberg's (1989) construct of marginality and mattering and Laura Rendon's (1994) theory of validation both support the idea that if students feel validated by a relationship with someone at the college, or that they matter to someone, they will feel connected to the institution, and, as a result, will be more likely to persist and complete a college credential.

According to Schlossberg (1989), the transition to college for many students can be difficult and lead to feelings that they do not belong, or that they are marginal. Feelings of marginality are normal to some extent for someone entering a new phase of life such as beginning the first year of college, but institutions can find ways to help students to overcome these feelings of marginality by developing programs that help students to feel more connected to the institution.

Schlossberg (1989) considered the feeling that a student matters as the polar opposite to feeling marginal and is "our belief, whether right or wrong, that we matter to someone else. This belief acts as a motivator" (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 9). Schlossberg (1989) studied adult learners at one institution and found that when they felt that they mattered to an advisor, this feeling "kept them engaged in their learning" (p. 11).

Using Astin's theory of involvement (1984) as a framework, Schlossberg found that if colleges are going to realize the goal of increased student involvement, they need to find ways to make students feel they matter. "Institutions that focus on mattering and greater student involvement will be more successful in creating campuses where the students are motivated to learn and where their retention is high" (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 14). Schlossberg (1989)

encouraged colleges to consider the following questions as they work towards the goal of creating a mattering environment which will lead to greater student involvement:

- Do institutional policies assure all students that they matter?
- Do programs and services encourage involvement in all aspects of the institution and indicate that each student is unique and important to the institution?
- What new initiatives could be undertaken to draw the marginal student more into campus life? (p. 14)

Laura Rendon's theory of validation (1994) also utilized Astin (1985) as a foundation and was the result of a qualitative study consisting of student interviews and focus groups that were designed to determine the impact of student's out-of-class experiences on retention. The study focused on the experiences of both nontraditional and low-income, first-generation college students. The results of this study found that students' belief in their ability to be successful resulted not necessarily from being involved on campus, but rather as a result of some "reassurance and validation they received from individuals they encountered at the college (i.e., faculty, peers, counselors, advisors, and/or coaches) (Linares & Munoz, 2011, p. 14). This feeling of validation led to students "acquiring a confident, motivating 'I can do it' attitude, believe in their inherent capacity to learn, become excited about learning, feel a part of the learning community, and feel cared about as a person" (Linares & Munoz, 2011, p. 15).

Similar to intrusive advising, validation theory requires college staff and faculty to "actively reach out to students to offer assistance, encouragement, and support, as opposed to expecting students to ask questions first" (Linares & Munoz, 2011, p. 17). In addition, validation theory can lead to students feeling that they are "more capable of learning, more confident in their ability to get involved in college, and to having a better sense of self-worth" (Linares & Munoz, 2011, p. 17).

Linares and Munoz (2011) offered epistemological and ontological assumptions of validation theory that support the relationship between feeling validated and an intrusive academic advising model:

- Validation theory works with students as whole human beings. Attention is not placed only on academic development, but also on emotional, social, and inner-life aspects of human development.
- Validation theory engenders transformative consequences for students as well as for validating agents. With validation, students can begin to view themselves as competent college students and college staff can begin to work with students in a more respectful, compassionate manner, while not sacrificing academic rigor.
- Validation theory shifts the role of the institution from passive to proactive in terms of promoting learning and retention. Proactive measures to actually get student to take advantage of these services must also be in place. Student affairs staff must be ready to actively reach out to students, be accessible, and be open to establishing close relationships with students. (p. 26)

### **Evaluation and Quality of Academic Advising**

Although academic advising has been recognized as a vehicle for increasing student retention, the quality of academic advising and the evaluation of advising programs remains an area in need of attention. According to Crocket (1988), evaluation of academic advising serves several useful purposes that include

documentation of effectiveness of individual advisors for purposes of self-improvement, identifies areas of weakness to be addressed in future planning and training sessions, provides data for the recognition and reward of advisers, and gathers information to support requests for funding or other administrative contributions. (p. 173)

Historically, evaluation on the effectiveness of advising programs has not been a common occurrence in institutions of higher education. Grites (1979) was among one of the first to call for a more organized approach to evaluating the quality of academic advising programs and suggested that “before an advising program can hope to improve, its current efforts and efficiencies must be clearly understood” (p. 35). Grites (1979) recommended a self-study

approach and suggests that a thorough assessment that includes the use of data that reflects “number of advisor appointments, course withdrawals, registration errors, referrals, and advisor loads” (p. 46) should be utilized. Without this type of assessment of the advising program, a “fragmented, imbalanced and undirected program will likely occur” (Grites, 1979, p. 47).

In 1979, the first ACT national survey of academic advising was conducted with 820 two- and four-year colleges and found that there were few evaluation programs in place for academic advising (Cook, 2009). In fact, the national ACT surveys provided the most comprehensive research on academic advising in the 1980s and showed that little progress was made with less than half of respondents reporting that they evaluated their academic advising programs (Frost, 1991).

In 1986, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) published standards and guidelines that specifically address the need for assessment of academic advising programs (as cited in Cook, 2009). According to CAS, advising programs must:

- specify programmatic goals and intended outcomes
- identify student learning and development outcomes
- employ multiple measures and methods
- develop manageable processes for gathering, interpreting, and evaluating data
- document progress toward achievement of goals and outcomes
- interpret and use assessment results to demonstrate accountability
- report aggregated results to respondent groups and stakeholders
- use assessment results to inform planning and decision-making
- assess effectiveness of implemented changes
- provide evidence of improvement of programs and services (p. 3)

Despite the existence of CAS standards for academic advising, the 2011 NACADA National Survey on Academic Advising found that of the two-year colleges surveyed, 54% did not respond to the assessment questions (Carlstrom & Aiken-Wisniewski, 2011, figure 13.6). For those that did respond, the primary source of assessment data that was collected and used consisted of student satisfaction surveys, and only 31% of respondents reported collecting this data (Carlstrom & Aiken-Wisniewski, 2011, figure 13.6). This data illustrates that the majority of community colleges are still not collecting or using assessment data for the purpose of evaluating their advising programs.

In *Academic Advising: A Cornerstone of Student Retention*, Crockett (1978) outlined the requirements for an effective advising program which includes “systematic and periodic” (p. 34) evaluation as a key component. Crockett (1978) suggested that evaluations should support measurable criteria such as the frequency of contact, what topics are discussed in advising sessions, accessibility of advisors, and retention of advisees.

Aside from providing valuable information that can be used to improve academic advising, evaluating advising programs serves another important purpose. According to Cuseo (n.d.), evaluating academic advisors and programs is important because it can send a strong message to the campus community that the function of advising is important, and “conversely, failure to do so tacitly communicates the message that this student service is not highly valued by the institution” (p. 1).

When a college makes the effort to evaluate their advising program and, as a result makes improvements, student retention has been shown to increase. In a national survey of 944 colleges and universities, administrators reported that ineffective academic advising programs were the primary cause of student attrition at their institution, and that improving the advising program

was the most common retention strategy utilized to increase retention and persistence (Beal & Noel, 1980). Metzner (1989) conducted a longitudinal survey that provided evidence that the higher the level of student satisfaction with the advising system at their college, the more likely they were to persist and stay in college. Results revealed that students withdrew from the university at lower rates when they perceived the academic advising that they received to be good quality.

More recently, colleges have been demonstrating increasing interest in evaluating academic advising programs. In the 2017 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the optional academic advising custom module was the most widely adopted as an “add-on” component by colleges who administered this student engagement survey on their campus, indicating a growing concern for colleges about the quality of their advising programs. The NSSE is a tool commonly used by bachelor-granting colleges to measure the level of student engagement in practices that have shown an empirical link with desired outcomes such as learning, development, satisfaction, and persistence (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017).

Banta et al. (2002) found that most of the publications regarding the outcomes assessment process for advising programs used one source of data (a student survey) and focused on student satisfaction and perceptions of the advising process. While this type of data can provide valuable information to institutions that need advising program improvements, in order to “demonstrate the systematic long-term effects of advising on students, they need to conduct comprehensive studies of advising impact on outcomes, such as academic performance and persistence in college” (Banta et al., 2002, p. 7).

## **Best Practices in Evaluating Academic Advising Programs**

Although the literature has shown that evaluation of academic advising has not been a priority for colleges until recently, there is some evidence of best practices for colleges to use when developing an evaluation process for their advising programs. According to Crockett (1988), the evaluation of academic advising programs should consist primarily of formative evaluations designed to offer strategies for improving both individual academic advisors, as well as the overall academic advising program. Frost (1991) also noted that evaluation of academic advising programs that are “used not for final judgements but to guide planning is usually considered most helpful” (p. 65).

Banta et al. (2002) provided guidance on planning, implementing, and improving the assessment process for academic advising programs. In order to develop effective assessment tools, all stakeholders should be involved and aware of the program's desired outcomes. Although it may be common for practitioners to have some resistance to evaluation, it is imperative that they be involved in both the development of the assessment tool and the implementation of the assessment processes.

Achieving consensus amongst appropriate stakeholders of what constitutes “good” academic advising is also key (Crockett, 1988). In *Evaluating and Rewarding Advisors*, Crockett (1988) supported using a variety of sources to determine which criteria will be used in the evaluation of academic advising and provides examples of criteria that could be used for outstanding advisor behaviors. Regardless of which resources are used to craft an evaluation tool, several authors agree that input must be gathered from the advisors who will be evaluated (Crockett, 1988; Cueso, n.d.; Frost, 1991)

According to Banta et al. (2002), an effective academic advising assessment program involves a planning stage that is timely, allowing for stakeholders to “generate appropriate advising initiatives” (p. 10), that includes the alignment of the assessment with the goals of the institution (i.e., improved student retention), and has clear objectives. Furthermore, Banta et al. (2002) recommended that a variety of assessment tools be utilized in order to provide more useful data: “In addition to surveys, which are used most frequently, interviews, focus groups, and student academic and co-curricular records that track student progress are valuable tools in comprehensive assessment designs” (p. 11).

The most common tool used for assessing academic advising is a student satisfaction survey. Institutions can either develop their own assessment survey or purchase a commercially developed survey for this purpose. Cuseo (n.d.) suggested that the commercially developed surveys have the benefit of established validity and reliability. For campuses that have unique concerns or objectives to be measured, they may be better served in developing their own instrument as these tools may “elicit more qualitative data than the typical quantitative data generated by standardized inventories” (Cuseo, n.d., p. 5).

Srebnik (1988) provided a review of several commercially developed academic evaluation tools with a description of length, content, format, and evaluation goals. Evaluation tools are presented in four categories: surveys for students to evaluate advisors, surveys for students to evaluate advising centers, surveys that provide dual forms for both advisors and students, and surveys for advisors alone. Similar to Banta et al. (2002), Cuseo (n.d.) recommended that all stakeholders should be involved in planning the assessment processes. Academic advisors can provide valuable feedback on the quality of administrative support,

effectiveness of advisor training and development, effectiveness of technology supports, and administrative policies.

Another form of advisor assessment that Cuseo (n.d.) noted was that of advisor self-assessment by either responding to their student evaluations or by taking the advising survey as if they were a student. This process could allow advisors to compare how they answered the survey questions and how students actually answered the questions. This self-reflection process could help advisors learn from what Cuseo (n.d.) labeled a disequilibrium that could lead to a change in advisor attitudes or behavior. Once data is collected, all stakeholders should have a chance to review the outcomes of the assessment and provide input on the decisions that will be made about necessary changes for improving the advising program (Banta et al., 2002).

NACADA (n.d.), the leading national organization for the profession of academic advising, recently developed the *NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Model* that is designed to be used to “identify the broad range of understanding, knowledge, and skills that support academic advising, to guide professional development, and to promote the contributions of advising to student development, progress, and success” (para 1). The NACADA core competencies consist of three content areas: conceptual, informational, and relational and can be used to identify strengths and areas for improvement of both individual advisors and advising programs. The NACADA advisor core competencies can serve as a guide to colleges in the process of developing an evaluation tool or assessment process for their advising program.

### **Community College Call to Action**

Academic advising in the community college specifically is poised to play a critical role in increasing the retention and completion rates of college students. In recent years, retention and graduation data for American community colleges has brought much attention to how best to

support student success in higher education and has led to philanthropists, employers and higher education leaders to focus their attention on what is being called the “completion crisis” (Price & Tovar, 2014). According to the *National Collegiate Retention and Persistence to Degree Rates* report (ACT, 2011), roughly half of first-time/full-time students enrolled in public community colleges were retained from fall 2014 to fall 2015, and only 22% of the same population graduated with an associate’s degree within three years.

The need to improve retention and graduation rates gained a strong foothold when President Obama challenged all citizens to become engaged in higher learning at the beginning of his first term:

I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It’s not just quitting on yourself, it’s quitting on your country – and this country needs the values and the talents of every American. That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. (President Obama, Address to a Joint Session of Congress, February 24, 2009, as cited in Cahalan, 2013, p. 6)

Five months later at Macomb Community College in Michigan, President Obama emphasized the important role that community colleges would play in accomplishing the agenda he had set forth. If the United States were to achieve the goal of an additional 8.2 million college graduates necessary to re-establish itself as the world leader in education, an additional five million community college graduates would be needed (Mullin, 2010). This directive from President Obama drew much attention to the college completion agenda and was the beginning of a national movement in community colleges in particular to more closely examine practices that could potentially increase persistence and completion rates of their students. This section of

the literature review provides an overview of college completion initiatives that have been established through a variety of organizations and foundations and call on community colleges to establish programs that will increase completion rates.

## **Completion Initiatives**

### **The Lumina Foundation.**

The Lumina Foundation, a private organization founded in 2000, has defined a mission that is dedicated to increasing college completion rates in the U.S.A.:

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials. Our goal is to prepare people for informed citizenship and for success in a global economy. (Lumina, n.d.a, para 1).

The Lumina Foundation has set a “Big Goal” of raising the number of college graduates by 5.9 million over the next three years, allowing the U.S. to keep pace with countries such as Japan, Canada, and South Korea, each of which have graduations rates of upwards of 60% (Lumina, n.d.b., para 4). Lumina's “Big Goal” of increasing the number of Americans who hold a post-secondary credential to “60% by 2025 provides an urgent call to community colleges to more closely examine how students are being supported to succeed and graduate” (Matthews, 2012, p. 4).

One valuable resource that Lumina publishes annually titled *A Stronger Nation through Higher Education* (Matthews, 2012) has meant to serve as a tool for tracking college completion rates in every state. This publication outlines a strong connection between the urgency for increased number of college graduates and the need to fill jobs that require some level of higher education. The Lumina Foundation has begun working with employers and has found that “most

now agree that, as a nation, we desperately need more citizens with postsecondary degrees. We need them to bolster our economy, to strengthen our democracy, to lead our communities and more” (Matthews, 2012 p. 5).

### **Achieving the Dream.**

In 2004, the Lumina Foundation launched an initiative called Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count (AtD, n. d. a). The primary focus of this national, nonprofit organization is to support success of community college students, specifically low income, working adults, and students of color. AtD consists of a network of “220 institutions of higher education, 100 coaches and advisors; all working towards supporting the success of community college students” (AtD, 2017a, para 6). AtD’s mission is to “to lead and support a national network of community colleges to achieve sustainable institutional transformation through sharing knowledge, innovative solutions and effective practices and policies leading to improved outcomes for all students” (AtD, 2017a, para 8).

AtD outlines 14 focus areas in which they make recommendations for improving success and closing achievement gaps. One focus area outlined is “Student-Centered Supports” and suggests approaching student support from a holistic perspective to include a variety of areas that could impact student success. More specifically, this area of focus contains one initiative focused on academic advising.

### **Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success.**

The iPASS initiative, or the Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success initiative, seeks to transform the advising experience by “engaging with students in a proactive, personalized, and integrated way in order to connect students to on and off-campus resources”

(AtD, n.d.b, para 3). The iPASS initiative is currently providing support to “26 two- and four-year higher education institutions to leverage technology and human relationships to transform their advising and planning services at scale, with the goal of increasing retention and completion for all their students” (AtD, n.d.c., para 2).

Achieving the Dream's iPASS initiative provides a framework for schools that are attempting to transform their advising programs to better support student persistence and completion. Selected schools that are currently participating in iPASS are redesigning their advising programs to include technology, career pathways, and personalized advising using predictive analytics and case management strategies.

#### **American Association for Community Colleges.**

Founded in 1920, American Association for Community Colleges (AACC) represents close to 1,200 community colleges and has become the leading voice of community colleges on a broad spectrum of issues facing community colleges on a national level (AACC, n.d, para 1). “AACC supports and promotes its member colleges through policy initiatives, innovative programs, research and information, and strategic outreach to business and industry and the national news media” (AACC, n.d., para 5). AACC has been at the forefront of supporting student success and most recently has taken the lead on two key actions that support the completion agenda.

#### ***Democracy’s Call to Action.***

In 2010, AACC took action as a direct response to President Obama’s call to educate an additional five million Americans by 2020. They took the lead in forming a group of six national organizations that signed a commitment called Democracy's Colleges: Call to Action (Boggs,

2012). The five organizations that joined AACC in signing this pledge to increase completion rates by 50% in 2020 are the League for Innovation, Center for Community College Student Engagement, National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, and Phi Theta Kappa. The Call to Action recognizes the critical role of community colleges in fulfilling the need for more Americans to graduate with a college credential.

### ***21st-Century Initiative.***

The second significant action taken by AACC was the introduction of the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Initiative. The goal of this initiative was to “educate an additional 5 million students with degrees, certificates, or other credentials by 2020” (AACC, 2012, p. v), and consisted of three phases. The first was a listening tour that included meetings with community college faculty, staff, administrators, and state officials in an effort to determine what major issues that community colleges are facing today.

The second phase involved the formation of the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges. The charge of this commission was to take the findings of the final report from the listening tour and present recommendations for redesigning the community college. The commission outlined a framework for this redesign in their final report, *Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future* (AACC, 2012). This report was recognized as the first major attempt to honestly examine the vision of the community colleges, acknowledging that the open access policies that community colleges have been historically known for are not enough to meet the needs of the U.S. economy. When the report was released in 2012, it was widely reported in a variety of media outlets as a wakeup call for community college leadership.

AACC's framework for redesigning the community college includes seven recommendations grounded in the “three Rs.” The three Rs include “redesigning student's educational experiences, reinventing institutional roles, and resetting the system” (AACC, 2012, p. ix). These three Rs, along with the seven recommendations have provided community college leaders with a helpful framework for determining how to proceed in improving completion rates at their institutions. The third phase of the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Initiative provided an opportunity for community college leaders to form implementation teams that developed specific model action plans that could be used to guide community colleges in implementing the strategies outlined in *Reclaiming the American Dream*.

#### **Center for Community College Student Engagement.**

The Center for Community College Student Engagement was established in 2008 by the University of Texas College of Education for the purpose of overseeing “survey research, focus group work, and related services for community and technical colleges interested in improving educational quality through strengthened student engagement and student success” (CCSSE, n.d.a, para 1). The Center is most well-known for providing survey research on the connection between student engagement and learning outcomes. CCSSE's original survey, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement was launched in 2001 for the purpose of providing community colleges with information that would help them improve student learning and retention. The survey has been widely used by community colleges and between “2009-2011, 669 colleges in 48 states administered the survey to over 440,000 students” (Price & Tovar, 2014, p. 3).

The CCSSE used extensive research on educational practices that led to increased retention as the basis for the survey questions. The survey is designed to ask students about their college experiences and poses questions that focus on:

how they spend their time; what they feel they have gained from their classes; how they assess their relationships and interactions with faculty, counselors, and peers; what kinds of work they are challenged to do; how the college supports their learning. (CCSSE, n.d.a, para 1)

Community colleges typically administer this student survey every three years and are provided with benchmark scores that reflect key areas of student learning and engagement. The five CCSSE benchmarks are active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners. Community college leaders can use the data provided by CCSSE to improve practices that lead to higher persistence and completion rates at their institutions.

The Lumina Foundation, Achieve the Dream, the American Association for Community Colleges and the Center for Community College Student Engagement have each in their own way called on community colleges to focus on increasing student persistence and completion. The mission of each of these organizations is similar in that they are all working towards improving community college outcomes, creating opportunities for college faculty and administrators to network and learn from one another, informing community colleges on best practices for student engagement, all for the purpose of creating “student focused cultures that promote student success” (AtD, n.d.a, para 2).

## **Educational Case Management**

Case management is a support strategy that can be utilized in academic advising for the purpose of increasing student success. While there is a dearth of literature on the use of case

management in academic advising, there is some evidence that colleges are starting to implement this model of advising more recently. This section of the literature review offers a brief overview of how case management has been utilized historically in a variety of fields such as social work and healthcare and will also provide some examples of the use of case management in academic advising.

The use of case management as a proactive academic advising strategy has taken a strong foothold recently at colleges that are participating in Achieving the Dream's iPASS initiative. When South Texas College implemented the case management approach to academic advising program in 2005, they assigned all new students to one of 21 certified case managers from the advising and counseling center (Excelencia in Education, n.d.). Students who participated in case management advising at South Texas College experienced higher course completion rates, fall to spring retention, and GPAs (Excelencia in Education, n.d.).

When the Community College of Philadelphia, another iPASS school, restructured their advising program to include case management strategies, they hired seven new academic advisors and implemented an early alert system to track proactive advisor interventions. As a result, the number of advising appointments and advisor interventions nearly doubled (AtD, n.d.b). A third iPASS school, Middle Tennessee State University implemented case management advising and hired 47 new academic advisors. This strategy, along with an enhanced predictive analytics platform, enabled them to offer a personalized advising approach with a student-advisor ratio of 260:1 (AtD, n.d.b.).

Assigning students to one person, the academic advisor or counselor, who can assist students with educational planning, career exploration, academic supports, as well as make

referrals to necessary support services, utilizes a case management philosophy that has a long history in the field of mental health.

The underlying philosophy of case management is that optimal functioning for individuals can be achieved by efficiently and effectively providing an integrated delivery of services. The focus is on services that are comprehensive and that address the multitude of an individual's needs through the use of advocacy, ongoing communication, and service linkage. (Richardson, 2008, para 6)

This technique has proven beneficial as a strategy to help individuals struggling with mental illness to navigate the complex system of social services (Wilson et al., 2013). There are a number of case management models, but each involves managing a defined caseload of clients and consists of a specific process for supporting the client: assessment, connection with resources, client interventions, community interventions, monitoring, and advocacy (Wilson et al., 2013). A case manager serves as a “human link between the client and the community system” (Adams et al., 2014, p. 448) and works to coordinate services based on individual needs.

In *Student Affairs Case Management: Merging Social Work Theory with Student Affairs Practice*, Adams et al. (2014), were one of the first to explore the increasing need for case management services in higher education as the result of the recent tragic shooting events at Virginia Tech in 2007 and at Northern Illinois University in 2008. *Case Management in Higher Education* (Van Brunt et al., 2012) also explored case management as a concept from the perspective of assisting students in crises, but recognizes that

Case management, at its very core, is about helping students to overcome the obstacles they encounter in their lives. This is central to the mission of most institutions of higher education, which seek to retain students and provide them with an environment conducive to academic success. (Van Brunt et al., 2012, p. 5)

Davis's (2010) student affairs case management model focused on supporting students in a time of crisis and consists of four stages: assessing the needs of the student, student advocacy,

student empowerment, and providing follow-up and resolution. Davis's model can easily be applied to supporting students from an academic success perspective and provides a logical framework for more effective intrusive academic advising methods.

A joint publication of the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (NaBITA) and the American College Counseling Association (ACCA) titled, *Case Management in Higher Education* (Van Brunt et al., 2012), suggested that case management strategies can be employed to serve a wide range of student needs from those of a first-year student who needs assistance navigating the college's support services to students that have been placed on academic probation.

The administrative model of case management places case managers in a variety of college departments located within student affairs (Van Brunt et al., 2012). Case managers located within the academic advising center of a college can be beneficial to students because "these case managers have a foundational knowledge of academic advising but would take on a caseload of students who need more attention and can holistically respond to the needs of the student" (Van Brunt et al., 2012, p.15). Furthermore, student affairs case managers should have knowledge of support services available on campus that will address a variety of student needs, should have strong rapport-building skills, and should have a strong knowledge of student development theory in order to be effective (Van Brunt et al., 2012). According to Van Brunt et al. (2012), strengths of the administrative model of case management included "increased student accountability, ability to connect students to college resources easily, increased freedom in communication, and a balance of counseling and student development skills that provides a diversity of intervention strategies" (p.18).

In *A Case Management Approach for Academic Advising*, Richardson (2008) illustrated how the Department of Social Work at Southern University applied the methods of case management to intrusive academic advising in their department. In an attempt to strengthen relationships with their assigned students, advisors in this department implemented a “modified proactive, aggressive case management approach to advising to include the following key components: outreach, referral, ongoing assessment, advocacy, and evaluation” (Richardson, 2008, para 2). According to Richardson (2008), applying these key components of case management to the academic advising function include the following:

- Outreach: Define a minimum number of advisor-student contacts per semester and identifying barriers that may impede student success.
- Referral: Maintain awareness of campus support services and systematically refer students to these services when appropriate. Consistently follow up with students to encourage use of such services.
- Ongoing assessment: Monitor effectiveness of advising services through documentation of all advising activities.
- Advocacy: Serve as a student advocate on all levels of the college to ensure that college policies and structures support all aspects of student success.
- Evaluation: Perform ongoing evaluation of individual advisors and case management model as a whole to ensure quality services.

Although case management methods have been more widely applied in fields such as social work and mental health, more colleges are starting to implement these strategies in academic advising. Most recently, participating schools in the Achieving the Dream iPASS initiative have illustrated how the application of case management strategies to academic advising can improve developmental, proactive advising and support stronger relationships between students and advisors, resulting in increased student success.

## Summary

The recent call to action for community colleges to increase persistence and completion rates has led to a keen focus on determining which aspects of the college environment will impact whether students will stay in college or drop out. This review of the literature provides a theoretical framework for supporting the idea that effective academic advising programs can have a significant impact on the likelihood that students will stay in college and complete a credential by way of a relationship with an academic advisor or counselor. Academic advising has played an important role in supporting students in higher education since the 1800s when the president of the college would advise students on extracurricular activities (Cook, 2009), and has evolved to a point where advisors are assisting students with educational planning, study strategies, goal setting, and career choice from a developmental approach.

The importance of a relationship with an academic advisor to student persistence and completion is supported by theories of marginality, mattering, and validation (Schlossberg, 1989; Rendon, 1994) that suggest that if students feel that they matter to a significant person at the college they will be more likely to feel motivated to be involved in the campus community. Furthermore, increasing student involvement in the campus community has been shown to lead to increased student success and a decrease in college dropout (Astin 1975; 1977; 1984; Tinto, 1975; Spady, 1970; Bean & Metzner, 1985). Academic advisors can play a key role in helping students to feel more connected to the college environment by way of a strong relationship.

Some academic advising models have shown to be more effective than others when it comes to developing relationship between advisor and student. Academic advising models have evolved over time from a strictly prescriptive/authoritarian approach, consisting of course selection only, to becoming more proactive and developmental (Crookston, 1972/1994;

O'Banion, 1972/1994). Both Crookston (1972/1994), and Ender et al. (1982) introduced the idea that student development theory should lie at the heart of a strong academic advising relationship that is more collaborative and caring in nature in order to strengthen the relationship between advisor and student.

The proactive advising model takes developmental advising one step further and suggests that advisors should take a more intrusive approach, reaching out to students at key times during the semester (Varney, 2013). Case management is a form of proactive advising that assigns students to one advisor who provides support in educational planning, goal setting and career exploration. Community colleges that have been utilizing the case management approach to academic advising recently have shown that this model has increased persistence and overall academic success (Excelencia in Education, n.d.; AtD, n.d.b.).

With academic advising coming into the spotlight as a critical factor for supporting student success and completion, it is more important than ever for colleges to evaluate the effectiveness of their advising programs. The importance of doing so is not a new concept and has been documented in the literature extensively (Crockett, 1978; Grites, 1979). When a college makes the effort to evaluate their advising program and as a result makes improvements, student retention has been shown to increase (Beal & Noel, 1980). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a tool that is now widely used by colleges to assess the effectiveness of their advising programs and has been used more recently for this purpose. Furthermore, both the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education and NACADA are organizations that provide nationally recognized standards that are now used to by colleges when formulating assessment tools for their advising programs. Best practices in advising program evaluation include getting all stakeholders involved and aware of the program's desired outcomes (Banta et

al., 2002); using a variety of assessment formats such as surveys, interviews and focus groups (Banta et al., 2002); gaining consensus from all stakeholders regarding what constitutes “good advising” (Crockett, 1988); and advisor self-assessment (Cudeo, n.d.).

In order for community colleges to answer the call to action set forth by President Obama, Achieving the Dream, the Center for Community College Student Engagement, and the American Association of Community Colleges to increase retention and completion rates, it is incumbent upon them to take steps to improve the effectiveness of their academic advising program. Through this literature review, the relationship between the student and advisor has been shown to be a critical factor in the student’s drive to stay in school and complete a college credential. Continued program evaluation and improvements will empower community college academic advising programs to answer this call to action.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of strategies and the effectiveness of the case management advising (CMA) model on student persistence as measured by perceptions of students, advisors, and counselors and re-enrollment from one semester to the next at a community college. In order to provide the context for this research, a description of the community, as well as a brief history of academic advising at the research site is provided below. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (1) research site, (2) sample, (3) design of the study, (4) instrumentation, (5) data collection, and (6) data analysis.

### **Research Site**

The setting for this study was Harper College, a suburban community college located in Palatine, Illinois, approximately 50 miles northwest of Chicago. Harper College was founded in 1967 and currently serves the surrounding community of approximately 536,000 residents. Total enrollment at the college is approximately 14,000 credit students. Student demographics include 55% female, 45% male, 11% Asian, 4% Black Non-Hispanic, 27% Hispanic, and 52% Caucasian. Furthermore, the Harper district is comprised of 25% first-generation immigrants compared to 14.3% statewide. With regards to college completion rates, 26% of Harper College students graduate with a college credential, and 30% transfer to a baccalaureate-granting institution (Harper College, 2016).

In recent years, Harper College's surrounding communities have experienced an increase in the number of households living in poverty. Although the phenomenon of the suburbanization

of poverty is not unique to the Chicago metropolitan area, the suburbs of Chicago have seen a larger than average increase in the number of poor people in the suburbs with a rise from 39% to 76% between 2000 and 2010. Furthermore, “according to the fall 2013 enrollment counts, there were 31 schools in the Harper district with percentages of low income students that were higher than the statewide average of 49.9%” (Harper College, 2014, p. 34). In addition, all towns except for two in Harper’s surrounding districts have seen a drop in household median income between 2008 and 2011 leaving many families to rely on food stamps in order to survive (Harper College, 2014).

### **Academic Advising at Harper College**

The Department of Academic Advising and Counseling is situated in the division of Student Development and is organized using a combined approach of the satellite model and the self-contained model (Habley, 1983). While all academic advising functions are self-contained within one division, the service is provided in three distinct satellite offices: The Center for New Students and Orientation, and two Academic Advising centers located in separate locations on campus.

Until 2017, the primary service providers of academic advising were faculty counselors who held a master’s degree in counseling, student personnel, or psychology. In 2017, a decision was made at the executive level of the college to enhance advising services by hiring nine staff academic advisors with a minimum credential of a bachelor’s degree, enabling the assignment of all new, credential-seeking students to be assigned to an advisor or counselor (A/C). Until more recently, students in need of academic advising and support would meet with the counselor of their choice, with the majority of students selecting to meet with a different counselor every time they needed advising. The primary objective of academic advising and counseling services at

Harper College is to help students develop and achieve educational, career, and personal goals using a developmental academic advising philosophy (Harper College, 2016). During an academic advising session, students may explore majors, transfer and/or career information, enhance academic success skills, and develop educational plans. A/Cs may also assist students in enhancing academic success skills. For students experiencing academic difficulty, an “intrusive” approach is taken in which students are actively encouraged or required to meet with a faculty counselor.

The new case management advising model was implemented in the fall 2017 semester in support of the college’s institutional priority of increasing student success. This model of assigning each student an advisor or counselor for academic advising was a significant change from the model that had been in use at the college and was designed to better support students in navigating their college-going experience beginning with the new student orientation and ending at graduation or transfer. Beginning in the 2017 fall semester, all new, credential-seeking students were assigned to one advisor or counselor, and a significant portion of academically at-risk continuing students were also assigned to counselors only. Once assigned to an A/C, students in need of advising are directed to schedule an appointment with their assigned A/C.

### **Case Management Advising Model and Guidelines**

Preparation for the implementation of the CMA model involved developing a strategy for making student assignments to a counselor or advisor, creating case management guiding principles, and defining case management guidelines that would provide a framework for the work of case management advising. Figure 1 offers a description of how assignments were made to either a counselor or advisor, and the case management definition and guiding principles.

Caseload Assignment Guidelines
<p><b>Advisors:</b> Receive caseload primarily through new student orientation. Caseload sizes range between 200-250.</p> <p><b>Counselors:</b> Receive caseload primarily from students with an academically at-risk standing of Academic Probation at the college. Caseload sizes range between 100-125 in order to allow for student referrals from advisors. Referrals are made when students exhibit mental health concerns or move into Academic Probation status.</p>
Case Management Guiding Principles
<p>Case Management involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing relationship with student to completion of goals at Harper <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intent is to have the same Academic Advisor or Counselor stay with the student from start to finish</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Investment in student’s success while also facilitating student’s self-competency and self-advocacy</li> <li>• Awareness and facilitation of student’s goals</li> <li>• Consistency with “universal” outreach expectations</li> <li>• Variable number of on-going contacts depending on student’s unique needs</li> <li>• Proactive/intrusive follow up</li> </ul>

*Figure 1. Caseload Assignments and Guiding Principles for Case Management at Harper College*

Case management guidelines were also created for the purpose of providing a framework for counselors and advisors as they work to support students on their caseload. These guidelines were developed collaboratively by a small work team that was convened by the dean of student development that consisted of advisors, counselors, and administrators familiar with the concepts of advising and case management. Figure 2 outlines the case management guidelines.

Case Management Guidelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of advisor/counselor to student via email or face-to-face meeting at new student orientation. Request that student complete the student intake in Starfish.</li> <li>• Learn about students on assigned caseload by reviewing student intake information and other data such as student’s academic history.</li> <li>• Meet with students a minimum of 3 times per semester; ideally one face-to-face meeting and 2 additional contacts via phone or email.</li> <li>• Provide information on campus resources as needed.</li> <li>• Contact students with timely info at key times throughout the semester as defined by the Communications and Outreach plan.</li> <li>• Check Starfish (early alert platform) daily. Monitor and respond to Early Alert flags. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrate successes and help troubleshoot challenges/barriers.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Monitor student’s Degree Works educational plan, refine the plan as needed, and contact student if off track.</li> <li>• Monitor key student characteristics each semester to be proactive in off-setting possible attrition factors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of key student characteristics: On/off track with Ed Plan, re-enrollment for next semester, FAFSA completion/financial aid status, academic standing, compliance with enrollment in developmental coursework, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Be maximally accessible to students. Respond to emails/texts/calls within no longer than two business days.</li> <li>• Maintain log of contacts for each student, and document key information discussed, using Starfish.</li> <li>• Encourage the student to return to see you – stress benefits of continuity.</li> </ul>

*Figure 2. Case Management Guidelines at Harper College.*

## Sample

There were two stakeholder groups that served as a target sample for this study. The first were students who had been assigned to either an advisor or counselor in the new CMA model, the second was advisors and counselors who were responsible for managing a caseload of students in the CMA model.

## Sampling Techniques

A purposeful sampling technique was used for this study. Purposeful sampling is used when the researcher wants to “discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). To this end, the first stakeholder group, students who had been assigned to an A/C, were purposefully sampled to include those that had met with their assigned A/C a minimum of two times. A list of students who had met with their assigned A/C at least twice was obtained through the college’s appointment software SARS, and an invitation was sent by email (see Appendix A) requesting participation in the focus groups. A \$25 gift card was offered to incentivize participation. Focus Groups 1 ( $n=13$ ) and 2 ( $n=14$ ) were formed, and consisted of students from a variety of races, gender, credit hour completion rates, and academic statuses.

Focus Groups 3 and 4 consisted of counselors and advisors who worked directly with the CMA model. These groups were also purposefully selected. An invitation was sent by email (see Appendix B) requesting participation in the focus groups to all advisors and all counselors, allowing for anonymous response to participate in the study. The following criteria were used as a guide in forming the focus groups to ensure a diversity of perspectives:

- Focus group 3: 5-10 academic advisors.
- Focus group 4: 5-10 counselors.
- Each counselor and advisor represented a diversity in academic credentials, length, and type of work experience in higher education.

By purposefully sampling key stakeholder groups, rich data was collected that provided insight and feedback for process improvement to the CMA model, as well as an in-depth understanding of how each target population perceives the impact of the CMA model.

## **Design of Study**

In order to better understand the experiences, impact, and perceptions of Harper students, advisors, and counselors of the new CMA model, an intrinsic case study for the purpose of formative evaluation was utilized as the design for this study. According to Stake (1995), an intrinsic case study is one in which the researcher has an intrinsic interest in the study. A formative evaluation research framework was used to provide data on the effectiveness of the CMA model. Formative evaluation research “serves the purpose of improving a specific program, policy, group of staff, or product” (Patton, 2002, p. 221). By using a formative evaluation research approach, this study provided an opportunity to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the model and to provide recommendations for improvements to the model.

In this case, the researcher is currently employed at Harper College and supervised the implementation of the new CMA model, offering abundant access and opportunity to evaluate the impact of the new model. Krauss (2005) believes that the best way to understand a phenomenon is to become fully immersed in it, experiencing what it is like to be a part of the context.

The researcher’s professional role as Associate Dean of Counseling and Advising at Harper College provides an ideal opportunity to observe the phenomenon in the natural context. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), applied research is different than basic research in that it has the purpose of “improving the quality of a practice of a particular discipline” (p. 4) versus simply increasing knowledge about a particular phenomenon. This approach enabled the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the student and advisor experience with the new advising model and to determine which case management strategies have the most impact on students.

The philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research also offer a perspective that is valuable in this study. Constructivism, the underlying philosophy of qualitative inquiry, suggests that there is not one reality to be discovered by the researcher, but rather that there are multiple realities. Qualitative researchers also believe that “conducting research without taking this into account violates their fundamental view of the individual” (Krauss, 2005, p. 760). Each participant in this study had an opportunity to express their own unique reality and experience with the new model as data is collected through their personal narratives.

Other characteristics of this study that support the use of the qualitative paradigm is that it took place in the natural setting of the phenomena being studied and utilized words as data, whereas quantitative research seeks to prove defined hypotheses using numbers to tell the story (Hoepfl, 1997). The goal of this applied research was not to prove a specific hypothesis, but rather to examine the impact of case management and how specific case management strategies being utilized in the academic advising model could be improved to be more effective.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that qualitative research is commonly used to learn more about a topic for which there is little known. While there is an abundant amount of research on various advising models as well as on the connection between student persistence and advising, the use of case management techniques in academic advising specifically have not been explored thoroughly.

## **Instrumentation**

Questions from the literature were developed along with focus group guides for RQ2 and RQ3. Table 1 reflects the questions that were developed and grounded in theories identified in the literature. Additional questions were included on the focus group guide that were not

necessarily grounded in theory but were important to include for the purpose of the evaluation of the case management advising model.

Student persistence data for all students assigned to an advisor or counselor during the 2017-2018 academic year, as well as for students who did not participate in the CMA model in 2016-2017 was requested from the Institutional Research Department at Harper College.

### **Data Collection**

Implementing a new academic advising model on a college campus can be a complex process and involve a variety of stakeholders. Assessing the effectiveness of the new model and determining areas for improvement is a critical step to ensure success for both students and advisors. This study utilized two data collection methods common in qualitative research – focus groups and mining data from artifacts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Focus groups offer an enhanced type of data due to the fact that individuals who participate may be more likely to share insights that they would not have otherwise as a result of what they hear from other participants (Patton, 2002).

Table 1: Focus Group Questions Grounded in Theory

<b>Student Focus Group</b>	
<b>Question</b>	<b>Theorist(s)</b>
How has being assigned to one A/C impacted your level of academic success?	Tinto, 1999
How has being assigned to one A/C impacted your motivation to stay in college?	Varney, 2013
How has being assigned to one A/C impacted your level of involvement at Harper College?	Astin, 1975
How did the following case management strategies assist you in your academic success: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing an academic plan in Degree Works.</li> <li>• Proactive communication from your assigned advisor/counselor.</li> <li>• Developing a relationship with your advisor/counselor.</li> <li>• Receiving referrals to the appropriate success service.</li> </ul>	Varney, 2013
Describe your relationship with your A/C.	Cueso, 2002; Crocket, 1978; Habley, 1981; Schlossber, 1989
<b>Counselor/Advisor Focus Group</b>	
<b>Question</b>	<b>Theorist(s)</b>
How has the case management model of academic advising impacted your relationships with students?	Cueso, 2002; Crocket, 1978; Habley, 1981; Schlossber, 1989
What is the most challenging aspect of the new model and how would you improve it?	Crocket, 1988; Grites, 1979; Richardson, 2008
How did the following case management strategies assist you in supporting the academic success of your students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing an academic plan in Degree Works.</li> <li>• Proactive communication with students on your caseload.</li> <li>• Developing a relationship with students on your caseload.</li> <li>• Making referrals to the appropriate success service.</li> </ul>	Varney, 2013
In your opinion, what makes a “good” case manager?	Crocket, 1988
How do you think the new CMA model is impacting student success?	Varney, 2013
What do you think would be an appropriate way to evaluate your success as an advisor or counselor in the CMA model? (Grites, 1979; Cuseo, 2002; Banta et al, 2002)	Grites, 1979; Cuseo, 2002; Banta et al, 2002

Additional advantages of focus groups for qualitative inquiry include cost effectiveness and “the extent to which there is relatively consistent, shared view or great diversity of views can be quickly assessed” (Patton, 2002, p. 386). All focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim, utilizing open translation for emerging themes (Patton, 2002). Due to the nature of the

supervisory relationship of the researcher over the case management model, an independent focus group facilitator was used for all groups in order to avoid researcher bias. Focus group guides were developed for each population that were designed to collect the feelings, perceptions, and opinions about the new advising model.

A second method for data collection came from the college's Institutional Research (IR) Department in the form of student success reports. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the term "existing documents" is used broadly in qualitative research and typically means any existing materials that provide relevant information to the study. Data reports were requested that contained persistence rates for fall 2017 to spring 2018, for all students who were assigned to an A/C in fall 2017. This data was analyzed for comparison between students who met with their assigned A/C against students who did not meet with their assigned A/C. Data reports were also requested for students who were not assigned to an advisor or counselor during the 2016-2017 academic year prior to the implementation of the CMA model. In sum, four focus groups were utilized for research questions 2 and 3. Data reports from the Harper College IR department were used to address research question 1.

## **Data Analysis**

Responses from focus groups were transcribed verbatim and open coding was used to identify themes. Identifying a thematic framework is the beginning of the development of a classification system for the data (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). Using a phenomenological approach, transcripts were reviewed for patterns in how students and staff experience the CMA model. These patterns led to the creation of themes or broad categories that were used to sort smaller data bites into areas that were relevant to the purpose of this evaluative study. Themes were either found using a priori themes taken from the literature that are pertinent to the study or

from patterns that were noticed when reviewing the data. (For example, while reviewing transcripts from student focus groups, it may be noted that a common theme expressed is “feeling connected” to the advisor as being an important component of the CMA model). These themes were compiled in a code book.

A constant comparison approach to coding allowed for consistency as each subsequent piece of data was coded. Coding can be a fluid process that changes as new patterns emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The code book was used as a guide in the ongoing data analysis process and ensured a strong audit trail. Fall-to-spring persistence data for students participating in the case management advising model in 2017-2018 was compared for differences between students who met with their assigned A/C and students who did not meet with their assigned A/C. Fall-to-spring persistence data from 2016-2017 for students who did not participate in the CMA model prior to its implementation were compared for differences with students who did participate in the CMA model in 2017-2018.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of strategies and the effectiveness of the case management advising model on student persistence as measured by perceptions of students, advisors, and counselors and re-enrollment from one semester to the next at a community college. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (1) Research Question 1: How does the assignment to an advisor or counselor impact student persistence from one semester to the next? (2) Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of the impacts of the CMA model from students, advisors, and counselors? (3) Research Question 3: Are there some case management strategies that are more effective than others? and, (4) Summary.

### **Research Question 1**

How does the assignment to an advisor or counselor impact student persistence from one semester to the next?

RQ1 was addressed with comparison data for fall-to-spring persistence provided by the Institutional Research department of Harper College for students who were assigned to an advisor or counselor as part of the CMA model in 2017-18 and for students who were not assigned to an advisor or counselor during the 2016-17 academic year prior to the implementation of the CMA model. When the decision was made to hire nine academic advisors who were 12-month professional staff to support the new CMA model, it was important to make a distinction between the type of support provided to students by the advisors compared to the type of support that would be provided by the eight full-time and ten part-time faculty counselors

already in place at the institution. The CMA assignment guidelines outlined in Figure 1 state that all new, credential-seeking students would be assigned to an academic advisor, with students on academic probation, post-dismissal, and post-suspension being assigned to a counselor who is better equipped to support a student who may be experiencing nonacademic issues that impact their academic success.

The CMA guidelines also describe the protocol for referring students from an advisor to a counselor. If a student who is on an advisor caseload progresses into academic probation, expresses a need for career counseling, or mental health support, they are referred to meet with a counselor. The counselor then assesses the number of meetings necessary with the student in order to provide the appropriate level of support. Because counselors and advisors provide varying levels of support to students and may have different perceptions of the impact of the CMA model, separate focus groups were held for each group.

Once assigned to a counselor or advisor, the CMA guidelines in Figure 2 state that four standard communications are sent to all students on the A/C caseload using Starfish. Starfish is the college's early-alert platform that allows for advisors and counselors to proactively communicate with students on their caseload and provides a holistic picture of their student's academic progress by allowing faculty to raise "alert flags" when students struggle in their courses (Starfish Retention Solutions, 2014). Standard Starfish communication outreaches were created by college staff and include a welcome email during the second week of school, a week four reminder to attend an educational planning workshop, a week six mid-term check, and a week nine registration reminder. Beyond these standard case management communications, advisors and counselors also send more personalized emails to students whom they have already met with and with whom they have begun developing a relationship. Ongoing proactive

communication is expected throughout the semester to assigned students that encourages them to make an appointment for academic planning.

Comparison data for fall-to-spring persistence was provided by the Institutional Research department of Harper College for students who were assigned to an advisor or counselor as part of the CMA model in 2017-18 and for students who were not assigned to an advisor or counselor during the 2016-17 academic year prior to the implementation of the CMA model. Fall-to-spring persistence for students who were assigned to an A/C as part of the CMA model was 3.32% higher than it was for a like control group of students who were not assigned to an A/C in 2016-17 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Fall-to-Spring Persistence for Assigned Students

	Fall	Spring	Persistence %
2016-2017 (No assigned A/C)	2305	1908	82.78
2017-2018 (Assigned A/C)	2096	1800	86.00

Comparison data for fall-to-spring persistence was also provided for students who were assigned to an A/C in 2017-18 who met with their assigned person and those who did not meet with their assigned person during the 2017-18 school year. Fall-to-spring persistence for students who met with their assigned person was 23.5% higher than for students who did not meet with their assigned A/C (see Table 3).

Table 3: Fall-to-Spring Persistence for Students Who Met with Their Assigned A/C

	Fall	Spring	Persistence %
Met with their assigned A/C	1424	1330	93.4
Did not meet with their assigned A/C	672	470	69.9

## **Research Question 2**

What are the perceptions of the impacts of the CMA Model from students, advisors and counselors?

A total of four focus groups were conducted to determine the perceptions of the impacts of the CMA model from students, advisors and counselors. Data was analyzed using an open-coding technique and themes for each stakeholder group were identified.

### **RQ2a: What are the perceptions of the impacts of the CMA Model from students?**

Two focus groups were conducted with a total of 27 students to determine their perceptions on the impact of the CMA model with five major themes identified. Students who met with their assigned A/C at least twice were sent an email invitation to participate with the first 10-15 students who responded being selected. Students represented various levels of credit hour completion (i.e., 15 credit hours or less, 15-30 credit hours, 30+ credit hours completed) and represented a variety of academic statuses (i.e., good standing, academic caution, warning, or probation). The researcher did not facilitate the focus groups due to the nature of the supervisory relationship of the researcher over the implementation of the CMA model and to avoid researcher bias in the data collection process. Harper College staff who had been trained by the Institutional Research Department to facilitate focus groups on campus were responsible for this task.

The questions relating to their perceptions of the impacts of the CMA model were utilized in the content analysis with five themes that emerged. The questions asked:

- How has being assigned to one A/C been helpful to you?
- How has being assigned to one A/C impacted your level of success in college, impacted your motivation to stay in college, and impacted your level of involvement at Harper College?

- Describe your relationship with your A/C.
- What is one thing you would change about working with your assigned A/C that would make it more helpful to you?

***RQ2a, Theme 1: Relationship with Advisor***

It's easier to develop a personal relationship when you're assigned to one person. This personal relationship allows students to open up about challenges they may face in college, allowing the advisor to provide relevant support.

Theme 1 suggests that students feel that being assigned to one advisor or counselor makes it easier to develop a relationship with their "person." Twenty-three references were made to how being assigned to one person made it easier to develop a more personal relationship with that person. This, in turn, led to greater levels of comfort and trust with their A/C. These feelings of comfort led students to open up more about challenges they were facing, making it easier for the assigned A/C to provide relevant support to students on their caseload.

Examples:

- I feel like you develop a personal bond with your counselor/advisor, and they kind of get a feel for who you are and your personality and getting a personalized academic advisor can really help them to gauge what would make sense for you in your major, and it helps you to have success in your endeavor as a student.
- If you have one counselor, you do get to develop a relationship. And if you know that they care about you, the more you're going to aim to pass all your classes and [make that] work seem more important, so I like that, too.
- It's good. I said before that I'm pretty close. I feel like I can say pretty much anything. And then if I have issues in class or if I have disagreement with a teacher and I don't want to go to them, it's like what course of action should I take. I feel comfortable saying that. And I don't feel like I'm going to get ratted out or something.

### ***RQ2a, Theme 2: Navigating College***

Navigating the college system is easier when you have one person who you can go to for help, any time you need it.

Navigating college systems can be tricky for many students. Theme 2 reflects that being assigned to one person makes it easier to receive the support that is needed to navigate the college policies and procedures. For example, many students don't know where to find the right resources when researching transfer schools or what steps to take when having difficulty in a course and feel intimidated by their instructor. Knowing that there is one person to contact when faced with challenges such as researching transfer schools, communicating with faculty, and being aware of college policies and procedures makes overcoming challenges easier. The assigned A/C can provide knowledge and support to overcome institutional challenges based on what they know about the student. Four references were made to how being assigned to one person was helpful in navigating the college system.

Examples:

- I'm a freshman here, so figuring out college stuff, like coming to Harper and thinking about transferring, I mean, it's been pretty confusing, tumultuous, so having one counselor, I guess, has just felt...it's made the process feel a lot more stable, like less scary, I think.
- Having someone there to guide you through exactly where you have to be. And like she said before, contacting them if you have a problem or anything. Because my first semester I had a couple issues with classes and stuff and the first person that popped up was my counselor, my advisor, and I went to her, and she reached out to me, and it helped me to reach my best potential for my semesters and everything.
- I had struggled with a teacher as well. It was kind of like just a, I don't know, just kind of butting heads a little bit, and even outside of taking classes my advisor was definitely there for me trying to figure out what's the best way to go about this, help making sure you're doing the right thing here when it comes to academics, but also making sure that you're following the right process and everything. Like something I might have had to look up deep in our handbook to find stuff out, but they were there to help me with that kind of thing, too, so it was cool.

### ***RQ2a, Theme 3: Relevant Advising***

Having a relationship with one advisor allows the advisor to know the student better, and to provide advising that is relevant, based on each student's individual situation.

Theme 3 suggests that students perceive that being assigned to one person for advising allows their A/C to offer academic advising that is more relevant and timely because the assigned A/C knows them better than a random A/C would. For example, if an A/C is aware that a student is transferring to Northern Illinois University to major in business and learns of a change in the course requirements for that major at NIU, the advisor can proactively reach out to the student to be sure that they make the appropriate change to their course plan. Prior to the implementation of the CMA model, many students would "advisor/counselor hop," having to tell their story over and over. When students meet with a different A/C every time they need advising, it is possible that they would receive different information from each person, leading to confusion on the part of the student. Seven references were made to how being assigned to one person led to more effective advising.

Examples:

- I feel like you develop a personal bond with your counselor/advisor, and they kind of get a feel for who you are and your personality and getting a personalized academic advisor can really help them to gauge what would make sense for you in your major, and it helps you to have success in your endeavor as a student.
- So, for example, I had an idea to take a few summer classes, and then I changed my plans when something came up, and so I went in and asked. And because I didn't have to explain it again, I had a lot more time to kind of realize okay, I'm only going to take this many, or I'm going to do it online or whatever. And it was a lot easier to just kind of judge that. And they also knew me and what I could do, because they see what I'm doing now. So, then they're like okay, so based on what I'm hearing now, you'll be fine taking one or two or whatever, how many classes, which helps a lot.

### ***RQ2a, Theme 4: Campus Involvement***

Being assigned to one person had an impact on campus involvement.

As a result of the relationship that develops between an assigned A/C and their student, they are better able to provide appropriate information to their students about on campus activities. Students commented eight times on how being assigned to one person allowed their A/C to provide appropriate information about on campus activities. This, in turn, led to a greater sense of awareness about campus activities and an increased level of campus involvement. The student comments suggest that because their A/C knows them better, they could provide information about campus activities that relate specifically to their major, academic goals, or personal interests. Students expressed positive feelings about their assigned A/C providing them with information about campus activities and suggested that their relationship with their A/C impacted the likelihood that they would participate in campus activities.

Examples:

- I think it feels very warm and comforting to know that you have someone who's involved in your education other than a parent a guardian or yourself. So, to be having someone like that at school also makes you want to expand that kind of feeling into other places. You're like oh, I'm comfortable here, I might as well join a club; I'm comfortable here, I can talk more in class. Like it definitely has an effect I've noticed.
- They always let us know what's going on, which will be like of our interest. So, they let us know you should check this out, this is closer to your field. So, you always know what's going on. And they actually motivate us into getting involved.

#### ***RQ2a, Theme 5: Confidence***

Being assigned to one A/C leads to feeling more confident in ability to succeed.

The fifth and final theme that emerged from the student focus groups was that students perceived that being assigned to one person who knew them on a personal level allowed that person to “witness” their success and be able to offer encouragement to succeed because they know what the student is capable of. This encouragement offered by the assigned A/C led to an increased sense of confidence in the student that they could achieve academic success. Nine

references were made to how being assigned to one person led to feeling more confident about achieving academic success.

Examples:

- The fact that they can testify to your own success is kind of an encouragement to keep going. I met with my counselor today and I was feeling a little intimidated by some of the courses I had had, and she can testify to my success. So I feel like if someone can do that, that means they have confidence in me, which gives me confidence in myself to do better. They're invested in you.
- They kind of act like as a witness for your own success, and they can testify to it, and so it's kind of encouraging to have someone back you on things. So if you don't feel confident he or she can say, well, judging off of how you handled this semester, we see that I don't think it's too unattainable for you to do this next semester if something is looking a little daunting.
- I think I've always had a desire to go to college, but I feel like my counselor, she has definitely done a good job to kind of make me feel as though she's in my corner and she wants the best for me as well, and we just met. But she's putting forth the effort to be like all right, these are the classes that you need, like she's looking out for me on a personal level as well, which is something that I really enjoy and I feel like wow, if I really need anything and I want to go to her about so many questions, since I am a first generation student to go to college, she's one person I can definitely go and I know her intentions are always welcome.

### **RQ2b: What are the perceptions of the impacts of the CMA Model from advisors?**

One focus group with advisors ( $n = 6$ ) was conducted to determine their perceptions of the impact of the CMA model. Four major themes were identified by the advisors. All advisor participants had worked in their current position for less than one year, since they were each hired in June 2017 with the implementation of the new CMA model. Since the researcher did not participate as the facilitator of the focus group in order to maintain anonymity of the participants, further information on the demographics of the advisor participants is not known. The questions related to their perceptions of the impacts of the CMA model were utilized in the content analysis with four themes that emerged. The questions asked were:

- How has the case management advising model of academic advising impacted your relationship with students?
- What is the most challenging aspect of the new model and how would you improve it?
- How do you think the new case management model is impacting student success?

***RQ2b, Theme 1: Beneficial and Limiting***

Being assigned to one person can be both beneficial and limiting for students.

The first theme that emerged from the advisor focus group suggests that advisors perceive that assigning students to one A/C whom they can seek out when they need support can make it easier for them to seek that support but can also lead to less flexibility for students. Prior to the implementation of the CMA model, students were able to schedule an appointment with anyone and mostly scheduled with the next available A/C. In the CMA model, a student is directed to make an appointment only with their assigned A/C, even if they would need to wait a couple of days for the next available appointment time. Although most A/Cs have abundant appointments available for convenient scheduling, there is some perception that being assigned to one person may limit students if they have an advising question that needs more immediate attention. Eight references were made to the benefits/limitations to being assigned to one person. Five references to the benefits and three to the limitations were made.

Examples:

Being assigned to one person is beneficial:

- Yeah, I think it provides a more seamless experience for them, where you really see that history and kind of understand if they come in and are talking about a change in what their interest is, you have a little bit more context and history with the student, so I think you're better able to address it.
- I think it's kind of like less of a burden on students, too, because before a lot of students would advisor or counselor hop, kind of like just take the next available person, and then have to maybe explain their background again, or explain what was

going on again. So it kind of takes that burden off of the students, that they can just focus on what's important and the classes they need to take.

Being assigned to one person is limiting:

- I know as a student I would feel very frustrated if I felt as though I had an immediate need and I needed to justify that to someone at a front desk in order to get an appointment with someone because my advisor is out on vacation, or in a meeting, or happens to be booked up for whatever that reason is.
- But there's definitely been times where I feel like we're forcing it too much on a student when maybe we need to readjust that lens and allow them to meet with someone and then have a follow-up with their advisor.

***RQ2b, Theme 2: CMA Technology is Complicated***

The case management technology currently being utilized is complicated.

Theme 2 from the advisor focus group on the perceived impacts of the CMA model is that the college is currently using too many technology platforms to support the case management advising process. Currently, A/Cs are using an appointment scheduling platform; Banner, the colleges data system; Starfish, an early alert software program; Degree Works, a degree audit platform; and a "home-grown" student composite that allows the A/C to view the student's course history, GPA, and academic standing. During an advising appointment, an A/C is typically toggling between each platform in order to provide good service to students. Theme 2 suggests that advisors perceive that technology can make it difficult to do their jobs and really know what the best practices are for effective case management. Six references were made to the challenge of using case management technology or the need to simplify the technology currently being used in the CMA model.

Examples:

- Technology. [Laughter.] Technology, hands down, because we have like ten different windows open to access the information that we need to provide the best experience for the student. And sometimes if there's some challenges, too, or something, a browser goes out, you have to reset everything, go through it. And they're very

patient and understanding, but it would be nice to have everything in one central place.

- And I think that's another challenge, going back to some of the technology, is it's not all...it doesn't all hit at the same point. So we might get a report that was accurate up until a week ago, but in that time we've met with two students and we're trying to send a note out, and we're like... Like I had one today where I had to go back in and I had to look at my SARS calendar going back a week to figure out who I'd met with since then to pull them off of the communication list because they were going to get this other email that was irrelevant to them. So some of it ends up being extra work for us because the technologies don't...the reports we get don't talk to one another and they're not all live, up to the minute reports.
- That's another example of how a CRM would be so helpful. Like we can filter on notes, and we can't...without doing a lot of manual work and going into multiple systems. It's so hard to target communication.

### ***RQ2b, Theme 3: Pressure***

There is pressure to build relationship with students quickly.

The third theme that surfaced from the advisor focus group is that there is a perception that building a relationship is top priority in the CMA, and that this feels like pressure when advisors are balancing large caseloads and other work projects. As the CMA model continues to evolve, with caseloads potentially exceeding 250, some advisors expressed a fear that it would be more difficult to build relationships with their students. A perception was also expressed that if caseloads continue to grow, that advising appointment times might be reduced, making it even more difficult to build relationship. Five references were made to feeling pressured to build this relationship while balancing other work responsibilities.

Examples:

- I think some of it, too, is figuring out, especially with the advisors, the balance between student time, especially now when we're going to be getting so many more students, two fifty, let's say, like the balance between seeing students and then other things, and like what the expectations of the other things are going to be now, especially that we're taking on a lot of counselor roles, too.

- And I think that's really the root of what makes that relationship-building work, because should we have less time because we're taking on more students, you're going to lose a lot of those pieces and a lot of parts of those conversations. So the time thing I think is important because I am wondering how we're going to balance all of these different projects, committees, and meeting with more students. And I would hate to see the root of all of it, which we all agreed was relationships, be the part that gets hurt in that process.
- I think one of the biggest things that I find is, and we mentioned it earlier, is the trust, is building that relationship with a student. I think that's the hardest part. Right off the bat.
- We're kind of expected to do it. We'd like to be able to do it in a 45-minute meeting, but I think the more students return, so it might take a semester or two before they really start to gain that trust.

***RQ2b, Theme 4: Too Early to Tell***

It's too soon to measure the impact of the model on student success.

When asked how advisors perceive that the CMA model is impacting student success, eight references were made to the fact that after only one year of implementation of the model, it is difficult to truly measure the impact on student success. There was also some suggestion that the college must first define success before it can be determined if the CMA model has had a positive impact on success.

Examples:

- I would think we have to define success first, and what that looks like. So is that actually that they graduate or is that that they are taking the classes that are in the Degree Works plan, like what does that look like, or are they transferring. Because I don't know if the graduation rate is going to necessarily reflect correctly if they're students transferring prior. So, I think we have to define first what that is.
- You would need to be following a cohort, like a diverse cohort with multiple dimensions versus like the Title 3, which is phenomenal, and you can track that one population and slice of the pie. But to get an overarching, like our students are all diverse, and some are part-time, full-time, families, work. So I think yeah, you'd need to be following a...
- I think one, like the first one that comes up, because we said this model was rooted in relationships, I think one is, is a student connecting with you. Because if they're not

connecting with you, then they might be successful, but can it necessarily be attributed to the case management model? They just may have been a high achieving student who was able to plan out their academic success. But when we talk about case management success, I think it would start with are we connecting with students, are we not connecting with students.

**RQ2c: What are the perceptions of the impacts of the CMA model from counselors?**

One focus group with counselors ( $n = 7$ ) was conducted to determine their perceptions of the impact of the CMA model. Five themes were identified by the counselors. Counselors at Harper College range in years of experience from ten to sixteen in their role as counselor. Eight full and ten part-time counselors were invited to participate in the focus group. Since the researcher did not participate as the facilitator of the focus group in order to maintain anonymity of the participants, further information on the demographics of the counselors is not known. The questions relating to their perceptions of the impacts of the CMA model were utilized in the content analysis with five themes that emerged. The questions asked were:

- How has the case management advising model of academic advising impacted your relationship with students?
- What is the most challenging aspect of the new model and how would you improve it?
- How do you think the new case management model is impacting student success?

***RQ2c, Theme 1: Advising is Valued***

Academic advising is valued more than counseling.

Theme 1 that emerged as a perceived impact of the CMA model from the counselor focus group is the perception that more emphasis is being placed on the importance of providing academic advising in the CMA model with less value being placed on actual counseling. Prior to the implementation of the CMA model, counselors were the primary providers of academic advising to students. With the implementation of the new model, it became clear that there was a

need to hire 12-month advisors who would be able to provide support to students as a true case manager on a year-round basis. With the addition of 16 staff advisors, counseling faculty began expressing concern that college leadership no longer valued the skills and expertise that a master's level counselor could provide to students. In addition, there has also been a regional trend to move away from faculty counselors serving as the primary provider of academic advising on the community college campus. This could also be a contributing factor to these perceptions from the counselor participants.

In addition, prior to the implementation of the CMA model, counselors had more flexibility to structure the student appointment time according to what they thought the student needed most. For example, if the student presented that they were experiencing a high level of stress, the counselor might spend the entire appointment time exploring the reasons for stress and scheduling a follow up appointment to conduct academic planning. The CMA guidelines presented in Chapter 3 outline specific expectations regarding the advising process that involve the creation of a Degree Works plan for every student that the A/C meets with, as well as a timeline for standard case management communications to be sent to every student on the A/C caseload.

Theme 1 from the counselor focus group suggests that there is perceived pressure to place priority on academic planning, and that counselors perceive that these expectations, in addition to the hiring of sixteen 12-month staff advisors, suggest that the college values the function of academic advising over counseling from a holistic perspective. Eleven references were made to either the “over-emphasis” to advising, or to the perception that a holistic counseling approach is being under-valued in CMA model.

Examples:

- So, when we're sitting down with students and we have these glaring concerns in front of us we've been trained to recognize and to help with, it's a mental thing in your mind where you're going this student needs to work on this and we need to focus on this time. But my job is starting to be something else.
- Sometimes there's so much counseling that needs to be done, you don't even get to advising. But then you're supposed to have this ed plan developed for them, and it's being tracked and stuff, and....
- But the case management model currently is very focused on the academic advising piece, and so it was pushing some of the personal counseling, maybe some of the career counseling to the side because of this focus on the plan, on the academic piece, so as a practitioner, we really had to refocus what was important to the student and then pick up the rest of the administration piece later.

### ***RQ2c, Theme 2: Lack of Trust***

There is a lack of trust between counselors and department administrators.

A second theme that emerged from counselors on the impact of the CMA model was a lack of trust between counselors and the college administrators within the department. Some counselors expressed that they felt that the decision to implement the CMA model was made without considering input given by the counselors. Others expressed a perception that the administrators did not trust the counselors to use their best judgment in how to provide appropriate supports to students. This perception is related to Theme 1 that the CMA model devalues counseling and over-emphasizes academic advising. Nine references were made to either the lack of trust of administration for implementing a new advising model without considering input from counselors or to the perception that administration did not trust counselors to provide the type of support that was best for students (counseling vs advising).

Examples:

- I think where we were allowed to determine what messaging was appropriate or when stuff gets sent out, or when we should reach out to the students and that kind of thing,

it felt like there was more trust back then, that we knew, again, like I was saying before, we knew what's best for the student.

- But I think that's the trust that we need to be able to know that we're doing our job and best serving the student, when maybe they're not the best fit for us or there's something else this other person can bring to the table as well.
- You give the administrators ideas of this is how it can work and then it's just flipped and not even discussed why it's flipped or changed or turned into something new. And then it's just kind of handed, like okay, we're going this way with it. It's like, well, what was that long discussion we had about how to utilize skills and talents and abilities, and then wind up just taking it to something new that really, in a lot of ways, feels like disregarded what you talked about in that conversation.

### ***RQ2c, Theme 3: Too Soon to Know Impact***

It's too soon to measure the impact of the model on student success.

Similar to the advisors, Theme 3 for counselor perceptions was that it is too soon to measure the impact of the CMA model on student success. It was expressed that not only is it too soon to know if the CMA model is impacting student success, but that defining success is difficult because success can vary greatly by student and be dependent on the student's goals. Other comments suggested that department leadership had not communicated clearly how success was being measured. Six references were made to evaluating the impact of the model on student success.

Examples:

- How do you define success? What does success mean? I don't think we've been doing it long enough to determine whether or not it is.
- Don't think we can look at it midstream going how are we effective at what we're doing, or are we being effective at what we're doing when we're constantly changing it. You can't really significantly measure that way. So I think that kind of opportunity is out of our hands, in some ways, of measuring is it making the difference the way we want it to.
- Yeah, yeah, okay. So, after one semester, with a fall for new students, we don't know then if we reached that goal yet, because they haven't graduated yet, obviously.

***RQ2c, Theme 4: CMA is valuable system***

Case management provides a valuable framework/system for supporting students.

Theme 4 of the perceptions of impacts from counselors was that the CMA model does provide a valuable framework for offering advising support to students. The system of assigning students to one A/C upon entry to the college provides students with a support network or foundational structure that makes it easier for students to find the support they need. Both the CMA guidelines and Starfish, the early alert platform, provide a system for reaching out to students proactively using prescribed communication templates. The CMA model also provides teaching faculty with a vehicle for flagging students when they are struggling in their classes. These flags go to the student directly and to the assigned A/C who reaches out to the struggling student to offer support and then “loses the loop” with faculty to let them know what proactive steps have been taken. Counselors perceive that this system is beneficial for supporting students in the CMA model.

Examples:

- When you have teachers who say I know you’re working with that student, so can you kind of follow up on a concern, I think that’s a good piece of what comes out of it.
- So, I think the model itself brings about the idea that we can have a system, if you will, of maintaining connections with students. And I think that’s a strong idea.

***RQ2c, Theme 5: CMA is prescriptive***

Case management model is too prescriptive.

Theme 5 is the perception that the CMA guidelines and expectations are too prescriptive in nature. Daily, weekly, and monthly expectations include monitoring Degree Works plans and Starfish flags, conducting a minimum of three student contacts per semester, and conducting regular calling campaigns to students who have not enrolled for the current semester. These and

other expectations are clearly defined in the CMA guidelines and monitored closely by administration. Four references were made to the perception that case management guidelines are too prescriptive to allow for a personalized, holistic counseling approach, and scripted messages sent from Starfish early alert are too impersonal for students.

Examples:

- So, the idea that these messages can just be pushed out to 30, 40, 50 people and that it will make sense to the student, when I might have met with that student two or three weeks ago, and this is contradicting what we talked about, that was a very frustrating piece of the technology that's linked to the case management system currently. And we really haven't addressed...to me, if I was a student and I got the same message semester after semester, and there's nothing changing, they need to adapt these messages for the student as they track through their career at Harper so that it makes more sense for the student.
- Now I just feel like things are dictated, and it's supposed to be just send it this week, this week, this week, and this outreach, this outreach. You have to have three contacts. And it just...I just feel like now it's more controlled and it doesn't allow us to, again, work holistically with the student. It doesn't allow us to do our jobs the way we know best. It's hard to say this. It's in my head, but I'm not saying it properly.

### **Research Question 3**

Are there some case management strategies that are more effective than others as perceived by students, advisors, and counselors?

During the four focus groups with students, advisors and counselors, questions were asked about the effectiveness of specific case management strategies.

#### **RQ3a. Are some case management strategies that are more effective than others as perceived by students?**

The focus group questions relating to student perceptions of the effectiveness of specific case management strategies utilized in the content analysis with three themes that emerged. The questions asked:

- Were there some strategies used by your counselor or advisor that were more effective than others?
- How did the following case management strategies (activities) assist you in your success in school:
  - Completing an academic plan in Degree Works.
  - Proactive (advisor reaching out to you) communication from your assigned advisor/counselor.
  - Developing a relationship with your advisor/counselor.
  - Receiving referrals to the appropriate success service.

***RQ3a, Theme 1: Degree Works***

Completing an academic plan in Degree Works helps students to visualize their future and stay on track to complete their academic goals.

Degree Works (DW) is the college's degree audit system that provides a comprehensive approach to academic advising and planning, allowing students to track their progress towards degree completion (Ellucian Degree Works, n.d.). After advisors create a DW plan with students in an advising session, students are able to access their plan on the student portal and use it as a guide to stay on track with their course requirements. Creating a DW plan is an integral component of the CMA model. Sixteen references were made by students to the perception that having a DW plan helps to visualize a path to completion and stay organized.

Examples:

- I would definitely say that for me, I'm like one that loves to see things through as far as possible, so being able to plan my whole two years here at Harper has really helped me.
- I think for me, especially, it kind of goes back, again, to having that framework of knowing what grades I need to stay ahead and be ready to leave in two years is what really helped me. Seeing in Degree Works, I use it all the time. I know my future, I know what classes I'm looking to take, I know what grades I need to get into the classes.

- So it's like that framework of seeing it all right there in front of you is really helpful. It's very visual and I'm a very visual person, so it's like right there, and I have no excuse to not do a good job.

***RQ3a, Theme 2: Communication is important***

Proactive communication from the A/C via email is important at key times during the semester.

A/Cs send out standard email communication at predetermined times in the semester for the purpose of providing reminders and checking in with their assigned students. Prior to the implementation of the CMA model, A/Cs were not expected to communicate proactively with students about registration dates, mid-term preparation, or special events on campus. Seven references were made by students to the perception that receiving proactive communication from their assigned A/C was beneficial.

Examples:

- My advisor personally always reaches out to me when it's midterms or even the start of the semester, like hey, have you registered for classes? Like registration started today. She emailed me, like oh, hey, have you noticed that this is the date to register for classes? And she's very on top of me, I would say. It's very helpful to just be there for extra assurance.
- It's really effective because we forget that there is upcoming registration or anything, and she [sends us] emails. Communicating with them is like I can talk to somebody about myself and what's going on, especially personal life and college life. It's really helpful.
- That's been extremely effective, especially when they email you and they're like hey, the deadline's approach for registration, or like get this in, and you have no idea that's been happening, often. I had no idea we were supposed to register by like the 19th or whatever it was, and I was like got to get on that. So if I never got that email, I probably never would have even registered.

***RQ3a, Theme 3: More Information***

A/Cs should provide information about college support services on campus more consistently.

Eleven references were made by students about their perceptions of how often their assigned A/C provided referral information for college support services. Six students referenced not having received referrals to relevant support services such as tutoring or the Writing Center. Five referenced the perception that they had received information from their A/C about where to seek help from a support service when they needed it, and when that occurred, it was helpful.

Examples:

- I was failing classes and I was never told to go there. So it kind of like ticked me off that I—I knew the places, so I went there, and I made sure I was doing the right thing, but I wasn't asked if I was doing that, despite being in classes that were easily attainable, or like easily helped—I shouldn't say easily helped.
- My counselor never mentioned success services to me, either, but today I went there for extra credit and we talked about time management.
- I think also probably my counselor had a lot of options in terms of support for my classes. If I was struggling with something, there was always, you know, like all different areas to Harper that she can recommend that I go to fix that situation.

**RQ3b: Are some case management strategies that are more effective than others as perceived by advisors?**

The focus group questions relating to advisor perceptions of the effectiveness of specific case management strategies utilized in the content analysis with three themes that emerged. The questions asked:

- Were there some case management strategies that you used that were more effective than others?
- How did the following case management strategies assist you in supporting the academic success of your students:
  - Completing an academic plan in Degree Works.
  - Proactive communication with students on your caseload.
  - Developing a relationship with students on your caseload.
  - Making referrals to the appropriate success service.

### ***RQ 3b, Theme 1: Degree Works Plan / Advisors***

Completing a Degree Works plan during the first advising appointment can detract from rapport building, can overwhelm the student, and is not productive for undecided students.

Creating a DW plan for every student on a counselor's caseload is an expectation during the first advising appointment in the CMA model. Thirteen references were made by advisors to their perceptions that creating a DW plan too soon in the advising relationship is not productive. While the advisors did express the idea that building a plan could be beneficial for students, the ideal time to do so was not during their first appointment with students. Nine of the thirteen references specifically identified that creating a plan for undecided students before they were ready could feel overwhelming to the student if they're not ready to focus on one area of study. Some advisors also expressed a perception that the pressure to create a plan to completion during the first appointment with one of their students could detract from building a relationship with their students. It is important to note that this theme is in contradiction to Theme 1 from the student focus group. Students expressed that the creation of a Degree Works plan helped them to visualize their future and stay on track to complete their academic goals.

Examples:

- I think they also want us to build their plan to completion relatively in the first appointment, which I don't think is the most...I don't think it's the best use of time because if you're trying to build a relationship, you're trying to get familiar with the student's goals and what they're trying to achieve at Harper, trying to shorten that and then build a four or five semester plan, which most of the time they don't even follow from the very beginning, is to me not the best use of the case management approach. I'd rather get to know them and build their semesters as they go, and give them a heads up as to what to expect and when they would be done, but not do it all in one appointment.
- So I don't do it all the way to completion based on what you said as well, because I find it's overwhelming for the student and I want them to come back, so I encourage them to do that. So I'll do a semester or two versus going all the way to completion. And I think it's just helpful for them to be able to have that accessible and have that information right there.

- It can be overwhelming for some of my students. I start talking about what will be needed ultimately and I can see them start to not panic, but like you can see a shift in the way that they're even engaging with you.

### ***RQ3b, Theme 2: Starfish Email Templates***

Email templates sent from Starfish to every student on a caseload is the least effective strategy for communicating with students.

The case management guidelines outline the expectation that four standard email communications be sent to all students on the A/Cs caseload at key times during the semester. They include a welcome email during the second week of school, a week four reminder to attend an educational planning workshop, a week six mid-term check, and a week nine registration reminder. While advisors do have flexibility to personalize email templates so that they seem more relevant for their students, there were fourteen references made to the perception that these standardized templates seemed impersonal and may appear awkward to students.

Examples:

- The mass Starfish. The ones that are kind of built into our guidelines throughout the semester to send out. I think it's too much. But again, we have no way to measure what is or isn't too much, or what response rates are. Or maybe they do have that data, but I haven't seen it. But it feels like too much.
- These every two week blast out hey, and they're scripted and very boring, and very fake type notes. I think those are the most ineffective.
- And I think it just sounds generic. It sounds very impersonal. So if I'm a student and I'm opening up those emails, and if I'm apt to continue to open those because it's a communication from my advisor, if I think it's just to touch base or just generic, I might ignore it, versus I'll be like oh great, that's another something I'm supposed to do type of thing.

### ***RQ3b, Theme 3: Encourage Attendance***

Students need encouragement to attend support services when they are referred by the advisor.

One strategy for supporting student success in the CMA model is to provide referrals to support services when students are struggling academically. Five references were made by advisors to the importance of the strategy of making a referral to a support service on campus. However, making a referral may not be enough to ensure that students seek help when they need it. Advisors expressed that students need encouragement and to be held accountable in order to ensure that they utilize the recommended support services. It was also expressed that it helps to initiate contact with the recommended support service for the student in order to increase the likelihood that the student will follow up and utilize the service. It is then the sole responsibility of the student to follow up for support.

Examples:

- Sometimes I'll even call the tutoring center. Let's say they're in Chem 121, and I'll call and ask when is our tutor there for Chem 121 because I'm not sure they're really going to go over, so I'll try to narrow it down for them, go at these times. And write it down for them. And that seems to help. I also stress how helpful that office is. So, to sell it to them, that this is going to be a good thing.
- For me, I think we talk through things, and as I hear that they're struggling in a certain way, then I'll talk to them about an appropriate service on campus, and I'll try to sell them on it, of how that might be helpful.
- For me, I talk about it as something that you're paying for. I think sometimes students only come on campus for their class and then they leave, and they don't know, like they've never been to building—or they say they've never been to Building A or C, or just even the library. So I tell them it's part of your student experience, and Harper doesn't expect you to do it all on your own, and they work really hard to make sure that you have access to these things as a part of your student package.

**RQ3c: Are some case management strategies that are more effective than others as perceived by counselors?**

The focus group questions relating to counselor perceptions of the effectiveness of specific case management strategies utilized in the content analysis with three themes that emerged. The questions asked:

- Were there some case management strategies that you used that were more effective than others?
- How did the following case management strategies assist you in supporting the academic success of your students:
  - Completing an academic plan in Degree Works.
  - Proactive communication with students on your caseload.
  - Developing a relationship with students on your caseload.
  - Making referrals to the appropriate success service.

***RQ3c, Theme 1: Degree Works Plan / Counselors***

Completing a Degree Works plan during the first counseling appointment can detract from taking a holistic approach with students.

Similar to advisors, counselors made reference four times to the perception that expectation to create a DW plan during the first appointment with a student reduces their ability to support students from a more holistic perspective. The focus on creating a DW plan in the CMA model is perceived as devaluing the importance of counseling to students who need more than academic advising.

Examples:

- Sometimes there's so much counseling that needs to be done, you don't even get to advising. But then you're supposed to have this ed plan developed for them, and it's being tracked and stuff.
- But I think in the past it was more focused on the holistic approach where you got to know the student first, you get to do things, instead of okay, we've got to get in and we've got to get a four-year plan done. I know that as a counselor I really need to be talking to you about what's going on at home, because I know this background, but what the challenge is, is I'm expected to have this plan in, but that's not what's best for the student.

### ***RQ3c, Theme 2: Degree Works Plan May Be Overwhelming***

Creating a Degree Works plan during the first counseling appointment is premature and can overwhelm students, especially those that are undecided on their major.

Similar to advisors, counselors expressed that creating a DW plan too soon in the counselor/student relationship can feel overwhelming to students who are not ready to commit to one single plan of action. Ten references were made by counselors to the perception that the expectation to create a DW plan for every student on their caseload too soon is not beneficial for students. It is important to note that similar to the advisors, in this theme, counselors also contradict what students expressed in theme one for RQ3a, that the creation of a Degree Works plan is helpful for visualizing their future and staying on track to complete their academic goals.

Examples:

- Some students I know it causes anxiety when you have this plan built out and then they see they're off track, and then they are just beside themselves. Why am I off track? What does it mean? And they get all anxious. And then you say calm down.
- So no, I'm not doing that for that student. No way. I'm going to do this semester and next semester, and we're going to call it a day, because that's where the student's at. Because if I overwhelm you, guess what? You're not going to come back and see me. You're going to think I'm nuts, right? And you're going to walk away and have a bad taste in your mouth.
- But with the knowledge that the student's plan is probably going to change as they change their major, as they change their transfer school, as their goals change, as life events occur and they've had to go down to part-time, or no time, or they work part-time and now they can be full-time. I mean, the plan is fluid. It's never a black and white thing.
- But with the knowledge that the student's plan is probably going to change as they change their major, as they change their transfer school, as their goals change, as life events occur and they've had to go down to part-time, or no time, or they work part-time and now they can be full-time. I mean, the plan is fluid. It's never a black and white thing.

### ***RQ3c, Theme 3: Proactive Messaging***

Proactive messaging to students on caseloads is beneficial and is an effective way to engage students.

A/Cs are encouraged to proactively communicate with their caseloads, whether it be standardized email communication, a more personalized note, or phone call at key times during the semester. There were six references made by counselors to the perception that proactive communication as a case management strategy is beneficial.

Examples:

- They want to feel valued as a human being, and that somebody cares that they're here, and that somebody cares that they're successful. Twelve templated emails doesn't make them feel cared for. But one email saying hey, really loved seeing you today, let me know how that research goes, whatever, but something personal, that goes miles and miles for students. And that's not going to change.
- I think that proactive messaging, I think it's student dependent. For some students it was a trigger to get them to come in when they might not have, or they might have waited a little bit longer to come in, but for other students, there are students that, no matter how much messaging you do, they're just not going to come in, or they're going to come in when they want to come in.

### **Summary**

The data collected to illustrate the impact of the CMA model on persistence from one semester to the next showed that fall-to-spring persistence was higher for students who were assigned to an A/C as part of the CMA model in comparison to students who did not participate in the CMA model prior to its implementation. Data also illustrated that when students met with their assigned A/C as part of the CMA model, their fall-to-spring persistence was higher than for students who did not meet with their assigned A/C.

Data was also collected from each stakeholder group: students, advisor, and counselors, through focus groups on their perceptions of the impacts of the CMA model, as well as their

perceptions on whether or not some case management strategies were more effective than others.

The data collected resulted in themes that are summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Research Question 2: Theme Summary

<b>RQ2. What are the perceptions of the impacts of the CMA Model from students, advisors and counselors?</b>
Perceptions of the impacts of the CMA Model from students
Theme 1: It's easier to develop a personal relationship when you're assigned to one person. This personal relationship allows students to open up about challenges they may face in college, allowing the advisor to provide relevant support.
Theme 2: Navigating the college system is easier when you have one person who you can go to for help, any time you need it.
Theme 3: Having a relationship with one advisor allows the advisor to know the student better, and to provide advising that is relevant, based on each student's individual situation.
Theme 4: Being assigned to one person had an impact on campus involvement.
Theme 5: Being assigned to one A/C leads to feeling more confident in ability to succeed.
Perceptions of the impacts of the CMA Model from advisors
Theme 1: Being assigned to one person can be both beneficial and limiting for students.
Theme 2: The case management technology currently being utilized is complicated.
Theme 3: There is pressure to build relationship with students quickly.
Theme 4: It's too soon to measure the impact of the model on student success.
Perceptions of the impacts of the CMA Model from counselors
Theme 1: Academic advising is valued more than counseling.
Theme 2: There is a Lack of Trust between counselors and department administrators.
Theme 3: It's too soon to measure the impact of the model on student success.
Theme 4: Case management provides a valuable framework/system for supporting students.
Theme 5: Case management model is too prescriptive.

Table 5: Research Question 3: Theme Summary

<b>RQ3. Are there some case management strategies that are more effective than others?</b>	
As perceived by students	
Theme 1:	Completing an academic plan in Degree Works helps students to visualize their future and stay on track to complete their academic goals.
Theme 2:	Proactive communication from the A/C via email is important at key times during the semester.
Theme 3:	A/Cs should provide information about college support services on campus more consistently.
As perceived by advisors	
Theme 1:	Completing a Degree Works plan during the first advising appointment can detract from rapport building, can overwhelm the student, and is not productive for undecided students.
Theme 2:	Email templates sent from Starfish to every student on a caseload is the least effective strategy for communicating with students.
Theme 3:	Students need encouragement to attend support services when they are referred by the advisor.
As perceived by counselors	
Theme 1:	Completing a Degree Works plan during the first counseling appointment can detract from taking a holistic approach with students.
Theme 2:	Creating a Degree Works plan during the first counseling appointment is premature and can overwhelm students, especially those that are undecided on their major.
Theme 3:	Proactive messaging to students on caseloads is beneficial and is an effective way to engage students.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of strategies and the effectiveness of the case management advising (CMA) model on student persistence as measured by perceptions of students, advisors, and counselors and re-enrollment from one semester to the next at a community college. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (1) conclusions and (2) recommendations.

### **Conclusions**

This research used a single case study of one college that implemented a case management advising model in 2017-2018 to determine the perceptions of the impact of the new advising model and to compare persistence rates of students who participated in the case management model with students who did not. A total of four focus groups were conducted respectively with students ( $n = 27$ ), advisors ( $n = 6$ ), and counselors ( $n = 7$ ), and persistence data was obtained from the college's Institutional Research Department to address the research questions.

### **Research Question 1: How does the assignment to an advisor or counselor impact student persistence from one semester to the next?**

The persistence data provided by the Harper College IT department supports Crockett's (1978) notion that academic advising deserves the title of the "cornerstone of student retention" (p. 29). Students who were assigned to an advisor or counselor as part of the newly implemented

case management advising model persisted from fall to spring at a higher rate than students who did not participate in case management advising during the 2016-17 academic year, prior to the implementation of the CMA model. Prior to the implementation of the CMA model, students would make an advising appointment with any counselor, mostly based on availability. Counselors were also not expected to proactively communicate with students. Furthermore, students who were assigned to an advisor or counselor in the CMA model and actually met with their assigned person persisted from fall to spring at a rate of 23% higher than students who did not meet with their assigned A/C. Crocket (1978) suggested that the advising process can assist students in earning a higher GPA, can lead students to feel more positively about the college, and can help students to understand the relationship between an academic credential and the world of work. All of these outcomes have been shown to improve the chances of a student staying in school (Crocket, 1978).

This persistence data also aligns with the literature of Habley's (1981) advisement-retention model, the theories of mattering (Schlossberg, 1989) and validation (Rendon, 1994), as well as the theories of Cuseo (2002) who suggested that the relationship between advisor and student can play a key role in persistence and retention. Bean and Metzner (1985) also reported that "good advising was negatively associated with attrition, whereas no advising was positively related" (p. 434), supporting the idea that students who did not meet with their assigned advisor/counselor as part of the CMA model would be less likely to persist from fall to spring.

**Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of the impacts of the CMA Model from students, advisors, and counselors?**

Focus group data were collected from students, advisors, and counselors on the perceptions of the impacts of the CMA model. Five themes emerged from the student focus groups and are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Perceptions of Impact of CMA Model: Students

Theme	Perception
1 Relationship	It's easier to develop a personal relationship when you're assigned to one person.
2 Navigation	Navigating the college system is easier when you have one person who you can go to for help, any time you need it.
3 Individualized Attention	Having a relationship with one advisor allows the advisor to know the student better, and to provide advising that is relevant, based on each student's individual situation.
4 Campus Involvement	Being assigned to one person had an impact on campus involvement.
5 Confidence	Being assigned to one A/C leads to feeling more confident in ability to succeed.

Overall, the five student focus group themes illustrate clearly that students feel that being assigned to one advisor or counselor is beneficial to them in several ways and are aligned with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 (Adams et al., 2014; Excelencia in Education, n.d; Richardson, 2008; Van Brunt et al., 2012).

Themes one and three align with the literature of Ender et al. (1982) who was one of the first to suggest that the inclusion of student development theory in the academic advising process was critical because it introduced the concept of building a caring human relationship between the advisor and student. Frost (1991) also suggested that the relationship between the advisor and student could play a profound role in the student persisting to complete their academic goals. Furthermore, Varney (2013) presented the idea that a proactive case management advising model such as the one implemented in this study “involves institutional contact with students such that personnel and students develop a caring relationship that leads to increased academic motivation and persistence” (p. 137). The importance of the relationship between advisor and student that

was expressed in themes one and three from the student focus groups are also supported by the literature of Schlossberg's (1989) construct of marginality and mattering, as well as in Rendon's (1994) theory of validation. These theories both suggest that if students feel validated by a relationship with a significant person at the college, or that they matter to someone, they will feel connected to the institution, and as a result will be more likely to persist and complete a college credential.

The student focus group themes do not align with the literature of Fielstein (1989) that suggests that students may desire a personal relationship with an advisor or counselor, but prioritize advising tasks that have been described as prescriptive (choosing courses, learning about graduation requirements, and helping a student plan their course of study) over tasks that have been considered more developmental (helping with personal problems, discussing long-range goals, and being personally acquainted with the advisor).

Theme two, in reference to navigating the college system being easier when a student is assigned to one A/C, aligns with the literature of Adams et al. (2014) who suggested that a case manager serves as a “human link between the client and the community system” (p. 448). Van Brunt et al. (2012) also recognized that “case management, at its very core, is about helping students to overcome the obstacles they encounter in their lives” (p.5).

Theme four from the student focus groups suggests that assigning students to an A/C may have an impact on the level of student involvement in campus activities. According to the literature by Astin (1984) on student involvement theory, when students are more involved on campus and, as a result, feel more connected to the campus community, they will be more likely to persist. Astin (1984) suggested that advisors could play a key role in encouraging students to join clubs, visit faculty during their office hours, and get more involved with extracurricular

activities. There is a connection between Astin’s (1984) theory and Theme four that suggests this likely happened as a result of the CMA model. Theme five also aligns with the literature, as Linares and Munoz (2011) suggested that students who feel a sense of validation and mattering from their advisor might adopt an “I can do it” attitude, feeling a sense of confidence in their ability to succeed in school.

Five themes emerged from the advisor focus groups and four from the counselor focus groups. These themes are summarized in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7: Perceptions of Impact of CMA Model: Advisors

Theme	Perception
1 CMA Limiting	Being assigned to one person can be both beneficial and limiting for students
2 Advising Technology Complicated	The case management technology currently being utilized is complicated.
3 Pressure to Build Rapport	There is pressure to build relationship with students quickly
4 Evaluating Success	It’s too soon to measure the impact of the model on student success.

Table 8: Perceptions of Impact of CMA Model: Counselors

Theme	Perception
1 Counseling Devalued	Academic advising is valued more than counseling.
2 Framework is Valuable	Case management provides a valuable framework/system for supporting students.
3 Too Prescriptive	Case management model is too prescriptive.
4 Evaluating Success	It’s too soon to measure the impact of the model on student success.
5 Lack of Trust	There is a lack of trust between counselors and department administrators.

Tables 7 and 8 highlight that most themes that emerged from the advisor and counselor focus groups do not align with the emerging themes from the student focus groups, nor are aligned with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. All themes from the counselor focus group and themes two through four of the advisor focus group tended to be evaluative of the CMA model,

rather than focus on the impact of the CMA model on the student's relationship with their assigned A/C and how this relationship impacted their academic success. Advisors and counselors expressed perceptions that the technology used to support the CMA model (Degree Works and Starfish) can lead to an advising process that is too prescriptive, can over complicate the advising process, and potentially impede their ability to focus on relationship building with their students. Counselors also expressed a perception that the emphasis on creating an educational plan in Degree Works places a higher value on academic advising than on actual counseling. The perceptions of the advisors and counselors of the impacts of the CMA model may suggest that the CMA model is not in alignment with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 on the importance of building a relationship between student and the advisor/counselor, but perhaps is too prescriptive and too focused on the technology used to support the CMA model.

Beyond the A/C themes that focused on evaluation of the CMA model itself, both advisors and counselors had one emerging theme each that referenced the value of assigning students to one person. Theme one from the advisor group suggests that some perceive that while students could benefit from being assigned to one person, some students may feel restricted by this assignment if they are not allowed to schedule an appointment with an advisor/counselor other than the one they were assigned to. However, the CMA model does allow for students to request a change in their assignment if for some reason they do not form a bond with their assigned person or had a previous relationship with a different A/C. The idea expressed by advisors that students may feel restricted by a case management model does not align with the data from the student participants, or with literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Theme two from the counselor group suggests that they perceive that the CMA model provides a valuable framework for supporting students. Both Varney (2013) and Backhus (1989)

discussed the importance of a structured framework for proactive, intrusive advising models. Varney (2013) discussed the idea that advisors should develop a proactive framework that includes specific strategies for communicating with students, and Backhus (1989) found that intrusive advising strategies used within an advising model led to an 8% increase in student retention.

Theme three from the advisor focus group suggests that they perceive a pressure in the CMA model to build relationship with their assigned caseloads too quickly. One respondent in particular expressed concern that building a relationship quickly with students will become more difficult as caseload sizes grow in the CMA model. According to Robins (2013), the National Survey of Academic Advising conducted by NACADA in 2011 suggests that the average caseload size for advisors working in two-year institutions is 441. While Robins (2013) goes on to say that it is important for colleges to define the ideal caseload size for their advising program based on student needs, advising delivery modes, and other advisor responsibilities, it will also be important for Harper College to stay within national averages for caseload sizes.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the CMA model was an emerging theme from both the advisors and counselors (theme four for both groups). Both groups perceived that it was too soon to adequately assess the new advising model and the impact that it is having on student success. The literature reviewed on the evaluation of advising programs widely supported the importance of effective evaluation and improvement of academic advising programs (Crocket, 1988; Cuseo, n.d.; Grites, 1979), but also suggested that the majority of institutions of higher education do not consistently evaluate their advising programs (Carlstrom & Aiken-Wisniewski, 2011; Frost, 1991). Evaluation methods for the new CMA model are currently underway after one year of implementation and will include recommendations provided by several authors that

were reviewed in chapter two of this study (Banta et al., 2002; Crockett, 1988; Cueso, n.d.; Frost, 1991). Although both counselors and advisors perceived that it is too soon to evaluate the success of the CMA model, results from the student focus group suggest that the model is impacting students positively. The researcher would like to suggest that it is not too soon to evaluate the success of the CMA model if student perceptions are considered as a means of measuring success.

Theme five from the counselor focus group, “There is a lack of trust between counselors and department administrators,” is not connected to the literature review in this study, but important to note because there were nine references made to this theme by counselor participants. The comments made by counselors in relationship to this theme appear to be related to themes one and three from the same group. The perception that the CMA model values academic advising more than actual counseling and that it is too prescriptive relates to the perception that administrators do not trust counselors to make decisions about what they perceive as necessary or best practice for supporting student success.

In order to make sense of themes one, three, and five from the counselor focus group, it is important to consider the context in which this study took place. During the time of this study, the Advising and Counseling Department was in the midst of great change, transitioning from an advising model that utilized credentialed counselors as the primary service providers, to a model in which 12-month staff advisors became the primary service providers in conjunction with prescriptive software programs. During this transition period, 16 new 12-month staff academic advisors were hired to support the new model. Decisions were also made to not fill counseling positions as they became vacant, resulting in far more advisors than counselors to support the function of academic advising, now a stated priority of the college. While the impact of change

was not the focus of this research study, it is important to consider that these changes most likely impacted the outcomes of the focus groups of both advisors and counselors. These perceptions will be important to consider as the model continues to evolve and department administrators navigate the nuances of change management.

**Research Question 3: Are there some case management strategies that are more effective than others?**

The use of case management strategies in academic advising have only taken a foothold more recently according to the literature review in chapter two. The iPASS initiative by Achieve the Dream (n.d.b.) is one example of how colleges are starting to utilize proactive case management advising strategies to support student success. Participating iPASS schools that implemented case management advising strategies have experienced higher course completion rates, fall-to-spring retention, and GPAs for students who were assigned to one person (Excelencia in Education, n.d.).

Focus group data was collected from students, advisors, and counselors on the perceptions of the effectiveness of case management strategies being used in the CMA model, with three themes emerging from each focus group. The themes from each are summarized in Tables 9, 10, and 11.

Table 9: Perceptions of Effective Case Management Strategies: Students

Theme	Perception
1 Degree Works Plans Helpful	Completing an academic plan in Degree Works helps students to visualize their future and stay on track to complete their academic goals.
2 Proactive Communication	Proactive communication from the A/C via email is important at key times during the semester.
3 Referrals are Key	A/Cs should provide information about college support services on campus more consistently.

Table 10: Perceptions of Effective Case Management Strategies: Advisors

Theme	Perception
1 Degree Works Plans Disruptive to Rapport Building	Completing a Degree Works plan during the first advising appointment can detract from rapport building, can overwhelm the student, and is not productive for undecided students.
2 Proactive Communication Needs Personalization	Email templates sent from Starfish to every student on a caseload is the least effective strategy for communicating with students.
3 Students Need Encouragement	Students need encouragement to attend support services when they are referred by the advisor.

Table 11: Perceptions of Effective Case Management Strategies: Counselors

Theme	Perception
1 Holistic Approach is Best	Completing a Degree Works plan during the first counseling appointment can detract from taking a holistic approach with students.
2 Proactive Communication	Proactive messaging to students on caseloads is beneficial and is an effective way to engage students.
3 Degree Works Plans Premature for Undecided Students	Creating a Degree Works plan during the first counseling appointment is premature and can overwhelm students, especially those that are undecided on their major.

All three themes that emerged from the student focus groups align with the literature presented on educational case management and proactive advising (Richardson, 2008; Van Brunt et al., 2012; Varney, 2008). While this literature did not specifically refer to the use of Degree Works in case management advising, reference is made to the use of personalized advising strategies (AtD, n.d.b). Wilson et al., (2013) also suggested that an effective case management model will involve interventions that support the client. The research in this study found that the use of Degree Works as an educational planning tool allows for personalized advising and is a foundational strategy to the CMA model. Theme one from the student focus groups aligns with this belief. Students clearly feel that having a Degree Works plan is helpful and keeps them focused on achieving their academic goals. However, it is interesting to note that both the advisor and counselor participants highlight the use of Degree Works as a potentially premature

strategy to use with undecided students and potentially prohibitive to developing rapport with students if too much focus is placed on creating a plan too early in the advising relationship.

Both students and counselors had an emerging theme of proactive communication as an effective strategy in common. Theme two from both groups aligns with the literature of Varney (2013) who outlined a specific communication calendar for proactive communication between A/Cs and their students that involved critically timed messages throughout the semester. There is also a connection between Richardson (2008) and theme two from students and counselors who suggested that advisors who strengthened their relationship with their assigned students used a proactive case management approach. Theme two from the advisor participants references the use of email templates sent out via Starfish, the early alert platform used in the CMA model, as an ineffective case management strategy. These email templates are considered a form of proactive communication, and while the advisors view this form of mass communication template to be ineffective, the themes from their focus group also revealed that they would prefer a more personalized proactive communication method.

The third emerging theme from the student and advisor focus groups (theme three from each group) highlights the importance of the strategy of providing referrals to campus support services. Students expressed that they wanted more consistent referrals from their assigned A/C, and advisors felt that students could benefit from more encouragement to utilize the support services once a referral is made. It may be helpful for advisors and counselors to offer encouragement to students who need referrals to a success service on a more consistent basis in order for students to follow through and pursue assistance from these services on campus. This recognition of the value of referrals by both students and advisors aligns with Richardson (2008) who included effective referral to campus resources as a key component of effective case

management. There is also a connection in the literature with Winston et.al. (1982) who viewed the academic advisor as an “agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary” (p. 17).

Counselors did not reference providing referrals to support services for students as a strategy that they use. The absence of this theme from the counselor group does not necessarily mean that counselors do not refer students to the services that could support their success. Theme three from the counselor group further supports the perception that the use of Degree Works as a case management strategy may be premature for students who do not yet know what their selected major is and could lead to students feeling overwhelmed. This theme is not aligned with the literature review in Chapter 2.

Overall, students perceive that having an academic plan is an effective case management strategy that supports their academic goals, but both advisors and counselors perceive that the creation of this plan should perhaps take place later in the advising process in order to allow for rapport building early on in the relationship. In addition, students, advisors, and counselors all agree that some form of proactive communication provided at key times during the semester is an important case management strategy, whether it be a mass email that is sent to the entire caseload or is more personal in nature.

## **Recommendations**

Considering all the data collected, factoring in input from stakeholders, and combined with a thorough review of literature, the following recommendations are made for future research in the field of case management advising as well as for the improvements to the CMA model at Harper College.

1. Continued evaluation of the impacts of the CMA model at Harper College will be important for program improvements. Data on student persistence, GPA, and credential completion will be key indicators on how the new model is impacting student success.

2. Evaluate the amount of technology currently being utilized to support the CMA model and consider reducing the number of platforms used for this purpose.
3. Provide additional training for advisors and counselors on balancing the need for relationship building with their students and the need to use technology in the advising process.
4. Research the possibility that advising technology disrupts the relationship building process between A/Cs and their assigned students.
5. Consider strategies for further clarifying roles of advisors and counselors as they apply to the CMA model.
6. Explore the impact of case management advising on unrepresented populations such as first generation, low income, and other academically vulnerable students.
7. Explore the impact of having an academic plan specifically within a guided pathways model on student persistence and completion.

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## APPENDIX A: EMAIL INVITATION FOR STUDENTS

## STUDENT EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUPS

E-MAIL INVITATION TO STUDENTS (similar script used for follow-up phone calls or emails).

Dear :

My name is Kris Hoffhines and I am the Associate Dean of Counseling & Advising at Harper College. I am also a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program at Ferris State University. *I am conducting a study as part of my dissertation research and would value your participation.*

I am studying the experience of Harper College students who have participated in our new academic advising model and am offering two opportunities to participate in a focus group discussion about your experiences with your Academic Advisor/Counselor.

**If you decide to participate you will receive a \$25 gift card that can be used at Starbucks, Subway, or the Harper College cafeteria.**

The focus groups will take place on two dates (select one time):

**Monday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 12-1pm, Building D, room 169**

**OR**

**Tuesday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 5-6pm, Building D, room 169**

If you are interested in participating in **ONE** of the above focus groups, **please reply to this email by Wednesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>** with the time you can attend. Seating is limited to 10 participants per group.

If you any questions about the study feel free to contact me by phone (847) 925-6676 or email [khoffhin@harpercollege.edu](mailto:khoffhin@harpercollege.edu).

Thank you for your consideration.

With kind regards,

Kris Hoffhines

## APPENDIX B: EMAIL INVITATION FOR COUNSELORS AND ADVISORS

E-MAIL INVITATION TO ADVISORS/COUNSELORS (similar script will be used for follow-up phone calls or emails).

Dear \_\_\_\_:

As part of my doctoral studies in the Community College Leadership program at Ferris State University, I am conducting a study titled: *Case Study: Evaluation of a Case Management Advising Model* as part of my dissertation research and would value your participation.

I am studying the experience of both Harper College students and counselors/advisors who have participated in our new case management advising model. In particular, I am very interested in hearing from you about your perceptions of how the new advising model has impacted your relationships with students, how the model has impacted student success at Harper College, what case management strategies might improve our advising model, and the challenges you have encountered in working in the new advising model.

To this end, I have asked a representative from the Institutional Research Department to facilitate one focus group with counselors, and one with advisors. The Advisor focus group is scheduled for **Tuesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 11:00-12:00 in D169.**

Confidentiality Concerns: The focus group discussions will remain entirely confidential. The discussions will be audio taped and transcribed by a consultant that I will hire for this task. In order to maintain anonymity for all participants, the only person who will have access to the audiotapes will be the transcriptionist. The focus group facilitator and transcriptionist will both sign a confidentiality agreement. During the focus group sessions, participants will be assigned a participant number and referred to as that number within discussions and in the transcribed notes. Your identity will not be revealed at any time. I will not access the audiotapes, only the transcripts for my research. Following my analysis and the preparation and defense of my dissertation, both audiotapes and transcripts will then be destroyed.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me by phone at ext. 6676 or email [khoffhin@harpercollege.edu](mailto:khoffhin@harpercollege.edu), or you may contact my faculty advisor, (Dr. Sandra Balkema, (231) 591-5631, [balkemas@ferris.edu](mailto:balkemas@ferris.edu)) if you have study related questions or concerns. Furthermore, if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Research Board at the Ferris State University at (231) 591-2553.

Thank you for your consideration. I believe it is important to hear directly from the stakeholders who work directly with students so that we can continue to improve our new advising model. If you are willing to participate in my research study, please reply to this email or call me directly at ext. 6676.

With kind regards,

Kris Hoffhines

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE FOR COUNSELORS AND ADVISORS

## Focus Group Guide

### Counselor/Advisors

1. Describe your role as an advisor or counselor. What do you do and what do you think is most important?
2. How has the case management model of academic advising impacted your relationships with students?
3. What is the most challenging aspect of the new model and how would you improve it?
4. What is the one thing would you not change about the model?
5. Were there some case management strategies that you used that were more effective than others?
6. How did the following case management strategies assist you in supporting the academic success of your students:
  - Completing an academic plan in Degree Works.
  - Proactive communication with students on your caseload.
  - Developing a relationship with students on your caseload.
  - Making referrals to the appropriate success service.
7. What mode of contact was most effective in attempting to reach your students?
  - Do you think the amount of communication with your students was too much, too little or just right?
8. In your opinion, what makes a 'good' case manager?
9. How do you think the new CMA model is impacting student success?
10. What do you think would be an appropriate way to evaluate your success as an advisor or counselor in the CMA model?

## APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

## Focus Group Guide

### Students

1. How has being assigned to one A/C been helpful to you?
2. How has being assigned to one A/C:
  - Impacted your level of academic success?
  - Impacted your motivation to stay in college?
  - Impacted your level of involvement at Harper College?
3. Were there some strategies used by your A/C that were more effective than others?
4. How did the following case management strategies assist you in your academic success:
  - Completing an academic plan in Degree Works.
  - Proactive communication from your assigned advisor/counselor.
  - Developing a relationship with your advisor/counselor.
  - Receiving referrals to the appropriate success service.
5. How do you prefer to be contacted by your A/C?
  - Do you think the amount of communication from your advisor/counselor was too much, too little or just right?
6. Describe your relationship with your A/C.
7. What is one thing you would change about working with your assigned A/C that would make it more helpful to you?
8. What would motivate you to meet with your A/C more often?
9. Other reflections/comments on the advising model.

## APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVALS



Date: Jan 31, 2018

To: Sandra Balkema  
From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair  
Re: IRB Application for Review

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, "*Case Study: Evaluation of a Case Management Advising Model*" and determined that it does not meet the Federal Definition of research on human subjects, as defined by the Department of Health and Human Services or the Food and Drug Administration. This project does not meet the federal definition of research on human subjects because it is a program improvement activity designed to measure the value of a program to its participants. As such, approval by the Ferris IRB is not required for the proposed project. Please remove reference to the Ferris IRB as a point of contact from any documents to be distributed to potential participants.

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission; it does not apply should changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, submit a new request to the IRB for determination. This letter only applies to Ferris IRB Review; it is your responsibility to ensure all necessary institutional permissions are obtained and policies are met prior to beginning the project, such as documentation of institutional or department support from Harper College. Note that quality improvement project findings may be published, but any findings presented or published should be clearly identified as part of a quality improvement initiative and not as research.

Your project will remain on file with the Ferris IRB for purposes of tracking research efforts at Ferris. Should you have any questions regarding the determination of this letter, please contact the IRB.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregory Wellman".

Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair  
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs



# Harper College

**Go Forward<sup>®</sup>**

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL  
EXEMPT REVIEW**

**Date:** February 13, 2018

**TO:** Kristin Hoffhines  
**From:** Dr. Katherine Coy, IRB Chair  
**Re:** Project Entitled: *Case Study: Evaluation of a Case Management Advising Model*

The Chair of Harper College Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, "*Case Study: Evaluation of a Case Management Advising Model*" and agrees with the Ferris State University determination that it does not meet the Federal Definition of research on human subjects, as defined by the Department of Health and Human Services or the Food and Drug Administration. This project does not meet the federal definition of research on human subjects because it is a program improvement activity. As such, approval by the Harper College IRB is not required for the proposed project.

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission; it does not apply should changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, submit a new request to the Ferris State University IRB for determination. This letter only applies to Harper College IRB Review; it is your responsibility to ensure all necessary institutional permissions are obtained and policies are met prior to beginning the project, such as documentation of institutional or department support. Note that quality improvement project findings may be published, but any findings presented or published should be clearly identified as part of a quality improvement initiative and not as research.

Your project will remain on file with the Harper College IRB for purposes of tracking research efforts at Harper College. Should you have any questions regarding the determination of this letter, please contact the IRB.

Sincerely,

Katherine C. Coy  
Harper College Institutional Review Board  
Director, Office of Institutional Research

File #FY18\_012