

Academic Advising at a Distance:
A Case Study Where No Face to Face Interactions Occur

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By
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A CASE STUDY WHERE NO FACE TO FACE INTERACTIONS OCCUR

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Perhaps the biggest surprise of all was how much I identified with the students and advisors in my study. I was like the students in that I too spent many years stopping and starting my education as I am well in to my forties as I near completion on my PhD...I like the students faced two heritages and cultural expectations that sometimes clashed as a descendent of both Western European and Native American cultures...I like the students faced health and disability issues as I suffered from a bout with cancer, and eye issues ...I faced sometimes impossible choices like when my husband was shot by robbers and needed me more than I could have ever guessed. But I, like the students, knew that my obstacles were only set-backs as I returned to jobs and school when I could and even earned credits online as necessary.

I also saw myself in the advisors as I like they struggled daily to provide good advice and assistance to others while still trying to keep up with all the tasks that needed completing. I, like the advisors, remained invested in my students' success and felt

failure when students were not successful. And I, like they, felt the bittersweet moments when students were successful in their educational and career goals. But I, like them all, would not have missed this for the world. Because in the end I, like the students and their advisors, had hope for the future that overshadowed all the set-backs and knew that what we were doing was important for ourselves and for those around us.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to explore the relationship between professional academic advisors and undergraduate college students at a distance where face-to-face meetings did not occur. This case also utilized evidence from a number of advising relationships at the institution to not only illustrate the case of distance advising but also to show different perspectives on the issue. Findings included that distance advising was enacted somewhat differently online than face-to-face due to diverse student populations, technology and the organizational structures of the college. Also policies and practices borrowed from face-to-face operations sometimes disadvantaged students' needs and abilities to be successful online. Teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence were also found to be enacted in varying ways online and social capital impacted learning, interactions and relationships of advisors-advisees online as well. Implications for action and future research are also included.

CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the relationship between professional academic advisors and undergraduate college students at a distance where face-to-face meetings did not occur. While the primary purpose was to explore what is occurring at one distance education institution, I also utilized evidence from a number of advising relationships at the institution to not only illustrate the case of distance advising but to also show different perspectives on the issue. The chapters are organized as follows: Chapter One introduces the topic of academic advising at a distance; Chapter Two provides a literature review on the subject as well as providing more information on the theoretical frameworks; Chapter Three reviews the design and methods of the study; Chapter Four includes the results of the study; and Chapter Five includes discussion of the findings, as well as implications for action and recommendations for further study.

Past research has not adequately addressed the advising role when college students and their advisors were not interacting face to face. It has often been assumed that advising is the same whether it is where students see their advisors eye-to-eye or whether it is via e-mail or telephone. As a former advisor working with distance education students I did not meet, I sometimes utilized different skills and tools online as there were subtle differences in the ways in which the relationship was manifested when neither party was ever face-to-face. With this research, I confirmed that my experiences are commonplace in distance advising. As a part of that process, I employed time-sampling strategies to assist in determining if change occurred over time or if the setting remained stable during the two years under investigation.

This small qualitative case study represents the findings of one online college setting where advising was completed between full-time professional advisors and college students working towards their undergraduate degree completion with no face-to-face (F2F) interaction between the advisors and the students. A qualitative case study design was chosen as I sought an approach that allowed for adjustments and deeper explanations as the process unfolded. Note, however, that naturalistic observation was often different because of the virtual nature of the setting. In order to develop a more robust case study I not only observed participants virtually in their interactions via list-serves and e-mail trails, I also observed advisors from the physical location of the advisor offices and students from locations where they accessed distance advising.

In their relationships with academic advisors at Virtual University (a pseudonym for a distance education program in the central United States), students generally made contact via telephone or e-mail but could also access information resources through the college website. Student access to advising resources at Virtual University was generally not live (or synchronous) but rather asynchronous as students and their advisors accessed e-mail and list-serves when they had time. This was also the most common form for distance advising in distance education colleges around the U.S. (NCES, 2009). Virtual University was also found to mirror the literature on student enrollment at online colleges (NCES, 2009; NCES, 2011) as the enrollment statistics for both years of the study indicated the college was predominantly made up of adult women and minority students (African American or Black, Hispanic and Native American or American Indian) who were over the age of 30 and had both family and job obligations in addition to their schoolwork.

Initial data was collected between 2010 and 2012 to ensure enough time to witness and explore and determine if distinct patterns existed. Virtual University, like many online colleges in the U.S. included academic terms organized into five 8-week terms and students could enroll in up to two courses per term. Thus students could earn up to 30 hours in an academic year, just as they would if they took 15 hours in the fall and 15 hours in the spring at a more traditional college.

Data collection included field notes, observations, open-ended interviews, weblog journals (blogs), the college website and documents such as textual data from e-mail trails with students, college catalogs, orientation modules and advising list-serves. Grounded theory methods were utilized to code the data and determine the common themes as they related to the research questions. Additional review and coding of the data was employed using theories that prefaced learning and social capital to determine common themes upon which to build the case study.

Literature Review

Academic advising has been defined in a number of ways but primarily as either *prescriptive* or *developmental* in terms of the relationship and roles of both college students and their advisors. Borgard, Hornbuckle & Mahoney (1977) described prescriptive advising as a relationship in which the advisor guided the student in making course scheduling decisions and ensuring the student followed the appropriate academic regulations. Activities included registering for classes, solving students' problems or directing them to other resources for solutions (Bland, 2004). Advisors served as sources of information and direction in this role, and students came to advisors when they needed assistance. In prescriptive advising, the advisor was also found to retain the power or

control over the relationship and directed the student on actions to take (Bland, 2004; Borgard, et. al, 1977). To perform this role, advisors needed to be well versed in policies and practices of the college, the curriculum, as well as resources available to support the student (Winston, Grites, Miller & Ender, 1984).

Developmental advising, on the other hand, has been described as a process in which there was shared responsibility between the advisor and the student with the ultimate goal being both learning and empowerment of the student (Bland, 2004; Crookston, 1972). In this role, the advisor not only provided direction or prescriptive advising as needed but also helped the student explore connections between their life and career goals and their college choices. In the process, the advisor and student worked together to create an academic plan for personal and academic experiences that would best move the student closer to their goals. While not only empowering the student to take more responsibility for their own learning, the developmental or learning centered advising relationship was also said to be more collegial and less directive over time (Bland, 2004). Lowenstein (2005) in particular defined the learning centered advisor role as such:

The excellent advisor plays a role with respect to a student's entire curriculum that is analogous to the role that the excellent teacher plays with respect to the content of a single course. He or she also helps the student to understand, and in a certain sense, to create the logic of the student's curriculum. Thus the advisor's instruction in the logic of the curriculum elevates the advisor's work to a central role in enhancing a student's education. (p.65)

Thus, advisor-advisee relationships and interactions/activities might be considered similar to faculty roles as advisors guide advisees through the learning process and

curriculum of navigating one's way through college policies, practices, as well as knowledge acquisition. But advisor roles may vary from faculty roles in that the instruction occurs over a period of years rather than months as would be evidenced in a typical college course.

Since the 1970s, scholars and advisors alike began to view academic advising as being more advantageous to the student and the institution when advising moved beyond prescriptive to the more developmental advising (Bloland, 2002; Crookston, 1972; Gordon, 1992; Winston, et. al, 1984; O'Banion, 1972). However, it was often the case that advisors took a more prescriptive role at the beginning of the student's career. This was necessary as new students needed to start with information dissemination about college policies and practices as well as what courses to take. Advisors at this stage tended to focus more on what limitations the student had to overcome to be successful in college (Crookston, 1972; Gordon, 1992). The advisor then worked with the student to move to a more developmental or learner centered role as the student progressed (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Gordon, Habley & Grites, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991; Lowenstein, 2005; Peck & Varney, 2009).

This shifting back and forth between prescriptive and developmental or learner centered advising has sometimes been referred to as *scaffolding* (Wegerif, 1998), where the advisor, much like a classroom instructor, provided much support or structure for the student at first and reduced the scaffolding as the student advanced in becoming more active in their own success. But this kind of empowerment did not just happen on its own; it required the advisor to encourage initiative and become actively engaged with

learning opportunities in order to challenge students' intellectual and social development (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Kuh, et. al, 1991; 2005). It also required the student and advisor to develop a relationship built on trust, shared responsibility, and much interaction. Crookston (1972), one of the earliest proponents of developmental advising, indicated that student self-responsibility and empowerment occurred through deliberate communication that involved interplay of communication skills and learning by both the advisor and the student to further this collegial relationship.

Recent studies investigating advising relationships in traditional college settings (with F2F interactions) found positive correlations between developmental relationships and student satisfaction with the institution (Abernathy & Engelland, 2001; Afshar, 2009; Alexitch, 2002; Allen & Smith, 2008a; Corts, Lounsbury, Saudargas & Tatum, 2000; Harrison, 2009a; Sutton & Sankar, 2011; Vivian, 2005). An interesting and valuable by-product of student satisfaction was also found to be that the more students were satisfied, the more they felt connected to the college community (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Harrison, 2009; MacArthur, 2005; Smith, Dai & Szelest, 2006). Once they felt connected, students were more likely to invest in their academic planning, which often translated into academic success (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Harrison, 2009; MacArthur, 2005; Smith, Dai & Szelest, 2006). And both satisfaction and academic success positively impacted higher levels of student retention to degree completion (Harrison, 2009; Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004; Sutton & Sankar, 2011).

An added benefit to the higher education institution that encouraged developmental advising was that besides higher graduation rates, these positive advising relationships where students felt empowered were also found to contribute to the economic success

and positive academic reputation of the college from which the student graduated (Greenwood, 1984; Hunter & White, 2004; Khatib, 2004; Schilling Ross, 1999; Skorupa, 2002). Thus in this day and age of increased accountability to the public, advising relationships have been found to play a very important role in documenting student success within departments and colleges and the continued success of the college.

Even in the best of circumstances though, academic advisors have faced a daunting task. Ideally they should have provided all of their advisees with accurate and timely information that suited the individual's needs and aided in their growth and academic success, all the while trying to develop a positive personal relationship with each advisee (McGillin, 2000). Issues in the advising relationship have been found to include:

- Information overload for both students and advisors (Gordon, 2000; Sutton & Sankar, 2011);
- An increase in enrollment of less academically prepared students and a lack of understanding of the needs of these students by advisors (Bloland, 2002; Clopton & Finch, 2009; Holland, 2010; Karp, et. al, 2008; Smith, 2007; Vivian, 2005);
- Student populations who viewed college from a consumer orientation that prioritized service over learning and advisors who prioritized learning over customer service (Archer, 2008; Morey, 2004);
- Student populations more comfortable with e-mail than F2F contact (Duran, Kelly & Keaten, 2005; Taylor, Jowl, Schreier & Bertelsen, 2011);
- Student populations who did not always utilize appropriate or respectful communication skills in e-mails (Brunner, Yates & Adams, 2008; Dunn; 2005) and who sometimes expected immediate responses to e-mails no matter the time

of day or complexity of the request (Dunn, 2005; Morey, 2004; Sato, Kato & Kato, 2008; Taylor, Jowl, Schreier, & Bertelsen, 2011);

- Advisors more comfortable and skilled at F2F interactions (Abernathy & Engelland, 2001; Allen, 2008a & b; Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem & Stevens, 2012; Bruner, Yates & Adams, 2008; Epps, 2002; Sutton & Sankar, 2011; Taylor, Jowl, Schreir & Bertelsen, 2011; Vivian, 2005);
- A lack of appropriate training for advisors regarding institutional policies, practices and available resources (Afshar, 2009; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Sutton & Sankar, 2011);
- A lack of recognition or rewards for this time intensive role (Gordon, 2000; McGillin, 2000), as well as many varied responsibilities for advisors that lessened the time available for advising (McGillin, 2000; Tuttle, 2000; Vivian, 2005).

Issues in the advising relationship have also been found to be impacted by issues outside the actual relationship itself. For example, a number of scholars have confirmed that with increasingly turbulent economic issues, colleges have had to do more with less available resources (Archer, 2008; Hebel, 2001; Kelderman, 2011; Morey, 2004; Wheeler, 2008). This may have included redirecting scarce resources away from advisor training and may have also increased the number of advisees per advisor, amongst other things (Afshar, 2009; Bland, 2004; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Sutton & Sankar, 2011). Colleges have also being called upon to incorporate expensive new technology (Archer, 2008; Morey, 2004) which required more training and increased college costs (Stafford, 2005), again, taxing the time and available resources. There have also been calls to help more diverse student populations such as adult and minority students complete college

degrees, but less was found to be known about these newer and more diverse student populations and what might aid in their academic success (Bland, 2004; Howell, Williams & Lindsay, 2003; McCabe, 2007; Museus & Ravello, 2010). All of these issues have sometimes contributed to less individual attention to each advisee, perhaps to the detriment of the advising relationship as well as both the student's success (Afshar, 2009; Barbuto, Jr, Story, Fritz & Schinstock, 2011; Harrison, 2009; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Pizzolato, 2008; Smith, Dai & Szelest, 2006; Vivian, 2005) and the advisor's potential burn-out (Afshar, 2009; Epps, 2002; Petress, 1996). But few studies (see for example, Beitz, 1987; Brigham, 2001; Dunn, 2005; Curry, 2003) have been accomplished on how to manage this relationship when the student studied at a distance and did not ever visit the college or ever meet the advisor face-to-face.

As the Internet and related technology have grown, distance education for college degree attainment has also grown. Estimates are that between 2002 and 2007 alone, more than half of American colleges were offering online courses and even complete college degrees online, with an enrollment of over 4 million students and annual revenue of over \$225 billion dollars (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Harper, Chen & Yen, 2004; Waits & Lewis, 2003). This unprecedented growth is not expected to stop any time soon as online enrollment increased by 21 percent in 2010 compared to face-to-face enrollment which increased by only 2 percent (Allen & Seaman, 2008). But along with this increased enrollment comes the possibility of increased numbers of students to advise, which may only exacerbate the problem.

Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007, p. 2) introduced us to the "NetGeneration" a term that described students who were most likely to take courses online and access academic

advising through e-mail and other online sources. These students were born in the 1980s and beyond. They witnessed the Columbine school shootings, the Oklahoma City bombing and the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon. They essentially grew up with cell phones and computers as a common source of communication. And this has likely informed and shaped their communication skills as well.

Turkle (2011) indicated that besides students, many Americans have chosen to communicate via e-mail or voice mail rather than through actual interactions with others. But this growth in diverse communication technology has both isolated and connected them with others at the same time (Turkle, 2011). Academic advisors may be the one person at the college institution who “sees” or develops a relationship with students from their first enrollment, all the way through graduation. If the advisor and student never meet, can a positive working relationship be developed? This is the question sometimes asked by academic advisors in traditional college settings regarding the online setting. Curry (2003) voiced a common opinion about the difference between face-to-face advising and distance advising in the following way:

Because of the physical separation of advisor and student, communication may be infrequent and impersonal. If the advisor never meets the student individually, the student may not be comfortable sharing personal information that may affect academic choices and outcomes. Without such disclosure, the advisor may have difficulty understanding the educational planning needs of the student. (p. 181-182)

In other words, without the aid of eye contact and other non-verbal communication, will students feel the virtual space is real enough and personal enough to share

confidences with the advisor, and if not, will the advisor be able to gauge the student's feelings and concerns enough to provide appropriate assistance and guidance for student success?

Tinto (1975, 1987, 1988 and 1998) found that in order for students to persist in traditional colleges they had to feel they belonged both in the classroom and within the college community. Pascarella and Terenzini (1977, 1978, 1979, 1980), building on Tinto's theory, found that students were less likely to leave the institution if they had regular interactions with at least one representative from the institution (like an advisor or faculty member), especially during the first year of enrollment. And Wegerif (1998) found that "individual success or failure...depended upon the extent to which students were able to cross the threshold from feeling like outsiders to feeling like insiders" (p. 47). But how might this translate into online college settings? Some studies have reported lower retention rates of online students to course completion as compared to traditional campus students (Nash, 2005; Park & Choi, 2009). Feelings reported by early departure students included a lack of academic preparation (Funk, 2005), lack of motivation (Artino, 2009), boredom or frustration with either the curriculum or the technology (Baker, et. al, 2010; Beard & Harper, 2002; Murray, 2001), along with feelings of isolation and a lack of student services or at least a reduction in services, including distance advising (Herbert, 2004; Murray, 2001). Also the populations most likely to seek out distance education were sometimes the most at-risk for failure in traditional college settings, such as adult women and minority students (NCES, 2002). These students often had fewer academic skills in their tool kit, fewer financial resources

on which to draw and less social capital in the form of those in their social network who could assist them in finding and using resources for their academic success (Funk, 2005).

Some studies have contradicted these findings however, as online students have been found to be equally prepared to their traditional college counterparts (Johnson, Aragon, Shaik, & Palma-Rivas, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). A number of researchers have also found no significant difference in motivation, academic achievement or satisfaction of online students compared to face-to-face students (Bernard, Abrami, Lou, Borokhovski, Wade, Wozney, Waiet, Fiset, & Huang, 2004; Dickey, 2004); and online students have sometimes achieved higher grade averages than face-to-face course participants (Jaggars & Bailey, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

One of the more critical findings is that student support services for students such as advising had to be available from the college to help students succeed (Evans, 2009; Park & Choi, 2009). The growth of distance education is often initially set up with only coursework offerings and not student services, as colleges start small in their offerings and try to use existing services rather than provide unique and sometimes costly services to online students.

A review of the top twenty-five U.S. online degree programs reported by the U.S. News and World Reports (www.usnews.com/education/bestcolleges) and thebestcolleges.org rankings in 2012 revealed that only three of the top twenty five best online colleges from either list actually offered distance advising assistance to their online students. Those who offered advising online often provided only prescriptive advising services: assistance with degree plans, course selection and completion of

college paperwork but little else. I can confirm this information as I recently aided my former online college by doing a small survey of the top twenty five programs reported in both lists to determine what their student services offerings included and how many students were being served. Most programs used existing advising structures such as F2F advising or provided no advising options at all to online students. And those programs that did offer advising services were often serving as many as 1000 students per advisor, compared to F2F advisors who often advised 500 students or less per semester in the same college. Many online advisors I contacted felt 1000 students was too many for one advisor but felt the situation was temporary as they expected to have more advisors hired when larger enrollments were consistent over more than one term. This was also a common view as many school officials reported their leadership being reluctant to provide more student services or more individual attention at the onset of online programs. This was reported to be due to the highly competitive nature of offering online programs for the lowest cost. Thus, college officials did not want to invest in too many academic advisors until they could verify that enrollment would stay high enough over time to justify the expense of additional advisors and ensure continued profitability of the online programs. Most college leaders in this unscientific survey conceded that they knew this choice might also be a factor in increased drop-out rates and feelings of isolation students felt online but it could not be helped at this early stage of growth.

One particularly important finding in distance education research has been that student perceptions of how and where they fit in to the online setting and mechanisms to support informal interactions were just as important as it was in the F2F setting (Dickey, 2004; Herbert, 2004; Kramarae, 2001; McLoughlin, 2002). And for advising

relationships, when students felt their advisor was more of enrollment manager than a partner in their educational planning, students were more likely to fail (Morris & Miller, 2007).

Some researchers (such as Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001; Ling, 2007; McKerlich, et. al., 2011 and others) have used new models such as the Community of Inquiry (COI) model in online settings to further explore how to maximize learning in the online classroom in order to enhance satisfaction, reduce feelings of isolation and increase feelings of community for academic success. Early results indicated using the COI model aided in creating an online classroom environment that encouraged learning and academic success but this model has not been applied to learning in the advising relationship, only in the online classroom before this study. It is not a perfect fit however, as the model recognized the need to incorporate peers, family, and professionals at the college into the students' resource networks, but it did not explain how to incorporate social capital resources into online experiences. Therefore I felt the need to include another theory from which to view distance advising in addition to the COI model – that of social capital theory (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Portes (1998) described social capital as “the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structure” (p. 26) such as those of an academic advisor at a college. Thus it would not be a stretch to assume that by being a member of a college community, where one felt they were an insider, that one could gain some valuable resources just by getting to know and connecting with people who understood how colleges worked and how to access resources for success. And if those they connected with had more diverse and perhaps more significant knowledge in certain

areas, such as advisors, they could theoretically help students find information that was beneficial to their continued success. But we also live in a culture in America built on a concept of the rugged individualist able to count on oneself to further one's ambitions. In fact, some people believe in individual effort so much that they do not think they should ask for help or provide help to others they know, thus reducing the social capital they share with others and thereby reducing the value of certain connections, social networks or social capital (Daniel, Schweir & McCalla, 2003; Nahapiet & Ghoshol, 1998).

A second issue with social capital is that to preserve one's own social capital, some have felt the need to close their social networks to others not enough like them. This has resulted in some "haves" and "have nots" regarding what resources a person can draw on to further their academic and social success (Daniel, Schweir & McCalla, 2003; Nahapiet & Ghoshol, 1998).

And therein might be the problem of social capital in higher education. We want students to succeed from their own merit – that is from their ability to use their intelligence and talent as an individual to succeed. But the problem is that access to and success in higher education is not a level playing field. As a result, some students, because of this lack of social capital may not be successful in college. Even though they may have the intelligence to succeed, they still may not succeed because they do not understand how colleges operate or how to use the available resources to their best advantage.

An example of social capital at play in the college environment can be seen in a community college study completed in 2008 by Karp, O'Gara and Hughes. One of the missions of community colleges was reported in the study as the desire to provide access

to college for those who might not otherwise have the opportunity. Karp and associates found that while community colleges provided many free services to help students succeed, students with less social capital were often found to be less knowledgeable about what services existed, which ones were free, and how and when to access services. Additionally, college administrators often assumed all students (regardless of their social capital) had equal knowledge of resources. This led to an additional assumption that students simply chose not to utilize resources that were made available at the college.

Concerns about supporting online students have led scholars and practitioners to call for student services and resources to be made available online such as academic advising (Cain & Lockee, 2002; Hill, 2007; Marsh, 2003; Pevoto, 2000; Steele & Thurmond, 2009). But research thus far has not directly addressed the issue of how to best manage academic advising relationships without F2F interaction and whether there are unique issues to advising online students. An additional limitation of the literature is that very few empirical studies have been accomplished on advising online; most have not investigated the relationship between undergraduates and their advisors, but rather with graduate students – students likely to be more autonomous, independent, and perhaps more skilled in navigating their way through the college environment. And in the prior studies, face-to-face advising was always an option for students.

Given that distance learning online degree programs are becoming more common and there is little prior knowledge about what aids in student satisfaction and retention when advising is offered completely online, or whether these are unique issues compared to F2F advising needs, the findings of this study may advance not only our understanding of what might aid students in this arena, but also shed light on what practices aided or

hindered the academic advising relationship without F2F interaction. Information about the types and amounts of activities advisors and their advisees engaged in would also be useful for advisors in more traditional settings who are now receiving more e-mail traffic for advising, as well as policy makers and administrators alike as they seek to increase student success in online undergraduate degree programs. Additionally, the focus of academic advisors working with online students is extremely important not only to students, but also to academic advisors and institutional leadership as they move forward with developing advising models in the online setting but more research is needed.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between professional academic advisors and undergraduate students enrolled in an online college where F2F meetings did not occur. The research questions sought to answer the following questions:

Research Questions

1. What activities/interactions do full-time professional academic advisors and their undergraduate advisees engage in to cultivate relationships and accomplish advising tasks and goals when there is no face-to-face meeting in an online college setting?
2. According to the participants, how do these activities/interactions impact satisfaction, retention, and meaning making for both undergraduate students enrolled in an online college setting and their professional academic advisors?

Definition of Terms

Asynchronous learning. Learning or communication that does not occur at the same time, so it is said to not be live.

Case study. “An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

Cognitive presence. “Reflects the learning and inquiry process...defining a problem or task; exploring for relevant information/knowledge; making sense and integrating ideas; and finally, testing plausible solutions” (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010, p. 32).

Community of Inquiry model. “A conceptual framework that identifies the elements that are crucial prerequisites for successful higher educational experience...and assumes that learning occurs...through interaction of three core elements: cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence...and that the environment in which this occurs is a computer-mediated environment (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000, p. 88).

Distance advising. This is a form of academic advising where the advisor and the advisee are not face-to-face when communicating or interacting with one another.

Distance education. Education that does not require students and teachers to be in the same space at the same time for teaching and learning to occur. Distance education can include such things as correspondence courses but is more often associated with video-based or Internet based education where the classroom is a virtual space and the instructor may be separated by time as well as space.

Face-to-Face (F2F). This refers to interactions where individuals can see facial cues from one another and where individuals are often said to be in the same room or similar proximity with one another during a face-to-face interaction.

Social capital. “The aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248).

Social presence. In the online environment, it is said to be “the ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities” (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010, p. 32).

Synchronous learning. This is the opposite of asynchronous learning in that this form of communication or learning is live via such things as the telephone.

Teaching presence. In distance education, this is said to be “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes & Fung, 2010, p. 32).

Implications and Limitations of the Study

It is hoped that the findings will add to the body of knowledge of academic advising at a distance. If we understood more about how distance advising was similar and yet different from face-to-face advising we might be able to better organize for the success of students. The findings may also have implications for technology designers and for administrators who develop policies, practices and technology for this communication format as well as those in academic advising roles. But of course the limitations are that this is a small study of one online college setting and may not represent other online college settings. However, it is hoped that continued research in this area will trigger more interest and more knowledge in this burgeoning area of higher education.

Summary

To summarize, there are numerous gaps and limitations in the knowledge we have about what is necessary to achieving a comparable academic advising relationship online that leads to the personal and academic success of students. Research so far has not directly addressed the issue of how to best manage academic advising relationships without meeting F2F. An additional limitation of the literature is that very few empirical studies have been accomplished on advising at a distance and most have not investigated the relationship between undergraduates and their advisors, but rather with graduate students, who are likely to be more autonomous, independent, and perhaps more skilled in navigating their way through the college environment, even though undergraduates are the primary population utilizing online colleges in the United States. And, in the prior studies, F2F advising was always an option for the student, which is not always possible for online students. Thus, using the COI model and social capital theory as lenses to view distance advising, this study will hopefully provide more knowledge on what helps distance advising further students' personal and academic success in the online setting.

In the next chapter of this paper, I will review the literature on this topic and introduce the theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATUR REVIEW

In this chapter I provide a review the literature and an introduction to the theoretical frameworks on the topic. I have divided the literature into sections including an overview of distance education, an overview of academic advising, and an introduction to the theoretical frameworks guiding the study.

Overview of Distance Education

Historical foundations of distance education. Distance education has been called online learning or distance learning as well as distance education. Boettcher (2000) defined distance education as a system of instruction “characterized by the separation, in time or place, between instructor and student” (p. 73).

Online learning or distance education is actually the latest in advancements to learning activities from a distance. Distance education is an outgrowth of correspondence courses that began in the 1700s (Harting & Erthal, 2005; Mackenzie & Christensen, 1971; Pittman, 2003). By the 1800s, U.S. colleges and universities offering correspondence courses, self-directed learning or independent study for college degree completion included Illinois Wesleyan University, the University of Chicago, Pennsylvania State University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996; Pittman, 2003).

In the twentieth century new technology ushered in the use of instructional radio, audio-taped course materials as well as one-way and two-way television (Harting & Erthal, 2005). But perhaps the most notable changes to distance education began in the 1980s and later when computers became less expensive, software programs became more

user friendly, and access to the World Wide Web and Internet became commonplace (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996), all leading to the explosion in distance education enrollments and offerings today. For example between 2002 and 2007, more than half of American colleges were offering not only online courses but also complete college degrees online with an enrollment of over 4 million students, and over \$225 billion dollars earned annually (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Harper, Chen & Yen, 2004; Waits & Lewis, 2003). Thus, distance education in its various formats has a long history in the U.S. and this unprecedented growth is not expected to stop any time soon (Allen & Seaman, 2008a).

Who is offering distance education and why? Peters (2010, p. 48) determined there were many different types or configurations of institution offering college work online. Some were divisions within traditional colleges and universities, some were separate campuses within college systems, and others involved collaborations between colleges and other entities around the world. In the U.S. in 2006-2007, 4200 colleges that were eligible for federal financial aid funding for their students offered online college course-work (NCES, 2009). Ninety-seven percent of public two-year colleges, 89 percent of public four-year colleges, 70 percent of private four-year colleges, and 53 percent of private not-for-profit colleges offered online courses for college credit (NCES, 2009) and 66 percent of these were for undergraduate college credit (NCES, 2009). Thus, many types of institutions, including both public and private college settings have been offering online college course-work, and the majority has been for undergraduate college credit.

Colleges in the U.S. have also begun offering entire undergraduate degrees online. (NCES, 2011). The undergraduate majors online with the highest enrollments in 2007-2008 included computer and information sciences (27 percent), business (24 percent), general studies (23 percent), social sciences (17 percent), and humanities (14 percent) (NCES, 2011). These undergraduate degrees were most often delivered asynchronously (non-live) via the Internet (NCES, 2011). And college leadership offered these degree programs online to meet student demand for flexible scheduling (68 percent), to increase access to students who might not otherwise have had the opportunity to attend the college (67 percent), to make courses available through other avenues (46 percent), and to add additional sources of revenue (45 percent) (NCES, 2009). Thus undergraduate degrees offered online in the U.S. have primarily increased via the Internet to provide flexible options for different student populations and to increase revenue for the colleges.

College distance education has been fraught with negative perceptions though. For example, there has been a perception that students online have been enrolled even if they were ill-prepared because of profit motivations (Madrak, 2012). There have also been questions regarding whether students received appropriate assistance when faculty and advisors were unable to see the facial expression or read the body language of their students (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2009; Curry, 2003) and that academic rigor was compromised without F2F interaction (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2009; Blakelock & Smith, 2006; Hassler, 2006; Kim, et. al, 2007; Migliore, 2012; Sellani & Harrington, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). But these negative perceptions have not been confirmed through research (Kim, Carvalho, & Cooksey, 2007; Migliore, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). For

example, the U.S. Department of Education (2010) reviewed over a thousand empirical research studies between 1996 and 2008 and found that online students consistently outperformed students in F2F college settings. Also faculty and advisors involved in distance education reported more positive perceptions than those whose preference was for F2F interactions (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2009; Sellani & Harrington, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Willson (2009) likened our perceptions about virtual experiences to the early concerns about telephones. They were originated for business practices and believed to be of no use to individuals. But today, cell phones and smart phones have become an integral part of people's lives in their communication with others (Willson). Thus, undergraduate coursework without live interaction has become more common and has garnered positive researcher findings but perceptions about it in the college community have varied depending on individual perceptions of communication and learning without F2F interaction.

Who is taking distance education coursework and why? Distance education offered learning options from its inception primarily to women who were unable to attend colleges face-to-face due to the social conventions of the day (Mackenzie & Christensen, 1971) and for those who could not afford to leave their jobs to attend college full-time (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996). Thus, even in its early forms, distance education was catering to those who did not fit in at traditional college settings. And unfortunately, the reputations of schools that offered this forerunner to distance education were said to be inferior to traditional colleges, mostly because of the types of students they enrolled – namely women and those of less financial means (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996).

Today, according to the most recent statistics collected by the U.S. Department of Education (NCES, 2011), 20 percent of all undergraduate students completed at least one distance education course by 2007-2008. Students enrolled for online college degrees have tended to be adult and minority single or divorced students seeking new job opportunities (Kramarae, 2001; NCES 2011). They have also been found to be predominantly over the age of 30 (53%), had children still in their households (55%) and worked full-time (61.5%) while enrolled for undergraduate degree completion online (Kramarae, 2001; NCES, 2011; Waits & Lewis, 2003). Additionally, online students tended to be more equally represented between males and females compared to F2F college settings which have seen more females than males in all races or ethnicities in the past few decades (NCES, 2001; NCES, 2011; NCES, 2012; Waits & Lewis, 2003). Thus, students enrolled online have tended to be older, non-traditional students that were historically underrepresented in higher education. They also tended to have many outside obligations including children and working full-time while completing college degrees online part-time.

In 2002 Hispanics became the largest minority population in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2010). Hispanics have sometimes been assumed to be one large homogeneous group when in fact it is an amalgam of many subcultures with the three largest populations being Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Cuban Americans (NCES, 2003b; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000) but for the purpose of this study this minority group will be referred to as Hispanics with the understanding that like African Americans and Native Americans there is much diversity within this race or ethnic group. Additionally, adult learners have tended to be categorized as those 25 years or older who

have not yet completed a college degree (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Bland, 2004; Furst-Bowe, 2002; Marques, 2005; Skorupa, 2002) and that is how they have been defined in this study as well.

While a college degree may not be for everyone, completion of college has often been found to be a critical step in the economic and cultural emancipation of our citizens (Baum & Payea, 2005; Berkner, He, & Cataldi, 2002; College Board, 2010; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 1993). For example, adult women between the ages of 25 and 34 were found to earn 79 percent more with a college degree than those with a high school diploma or equivalent (College Board, 2010) and for men of the same ages they were found to earn 70 percent more than those with only a high school diploma or equivalent (College Board). College graduates also tended to provide more tax dollars to government entities and needed less social services such as food stamps because they earned more, had health insurance, and were less likely to be unemployed compared to high school graduates (College Board, 2010).

Nearly fifty percent of the U.S. Hispanic population has also been found to speak another language at home besides English (Aud & Fox, 2010) and speak English with difficulty (NCES, 2012). This may not be considered a positive as some in the U.S. have asserted that English be the only spoken language allowed (Carter, 2006; Ford, Grantham & Whiting, 20008; Longerbeam, Sedlacek & Alatorre, 2004). Thus, it could have a negative impact on the social capital Hispanics might muster in the college setting. Additionally, Hispanics have been found to represent as much as 28 percent of those living in poverty compared to African Americans (22 percent) and Whites (9 percent) who lived in poverty in the U.S. between 2000 and 2010 (NCES, 2003, NCES, 2012).

And this high level of poverty could also negatively impact the financial decisions about college attendance. Hispanics have also been found to be more likely to have earned a General Education Development (GED) certificate rather than a high school diploma, and this is most often the result of having children while still in high school (NCES, 2003; NCES, 2012).

Many Hispanic students have also reported they have been assumed to be unmotivated by educational leaders and assumed to be doomed to failure in college by their families (NCES, 2003; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres & Talbot, 2000). Thus they like other adult learners or minority students may have received mixed messages from families, friends and school leaders about the value of education in their lives (Carter, 2006; Rodriguez, et, al, 2000).

African Americans have also been less visible in higher education (Aud & Fox, 2010; Holland, 2010). African American children have been found to be the most likely to come from poor households in the U.S. compared to any other race or ethnic group (Aud & Fox, 2010). Additionally, their reading and writing scores on the SAT exams for college entrance has been the lowest of all race or ethnic groups. For example, in 2008 Whites had scores of 528 on the SAT, followed by 485 for Native Americans, 456 for Hispanics and 430 for African Americans; writing scores on the SAT included 518 for Whites, 470 for Native Americans, 445 for Hispanics and 424 for African Americans (Aud & Fox, 2010).

Being poor and having some difficulty with reading and writing may have some significance on African Americans' college enrollment as they were found to be less likely than Whites or Hispanics to go to college right after high school (Aud & Fox,

2010). They have also been more likely to attend high schools that tracked them into less rigorous courses, lacked advanced placement courses or college awareness programs, which might have also played a significant role in their SAT scores and relative absence in colleges (Holland, 2010).

African American men have especially been invisible in higher education as African American women have been found to represent 63% of the college going population for their race (Aud & Fox, 2010; NCES, 2003). Beyond the lack of adequate high school preparation issues, African Americans, especially males, have also been found to have social networks that did not encourage college going behaviors thus further inhibiting their knowledge of and perhaps desire to attend and complete college as a result (Holland, 2010). But past research has indicated that African Americans often have the most to gain from a college education as a college degree has been found to increase their income and reduce their unemployment rates to be similar to that of Whites compared to all other race or ethnic groups in the U.S. (College Board, 2005; College Board, 2010).

Native Americans have also been less likely to attend higher education, perhaps more so than other race or ethnic groups which has resulted in some statistics on their access to and progress to college completion or their success after college being unavailable (Aud & Fox, 2010; College Board, 2010). Native American students have been found to be less likely than any other minority group to access college (DeVoe, Darling-Churchill & Snyder, 2008; NCES, 2008; NCES, 2012).

Eleven percent of Native Americans in the U.S. enrolled in higher education between 2000 and 2010 (College Board, 2010; DeVoe, et. al, 2008; NCES, 2012), compared to over 80 percent of Whites, 62 percent of Hispanics and 56 percent of Blacks who were

found to enroll in college within a year of high school graduation (College Board, 2010). Nevertheless, for Native Americans, this eleven percent, small as it is, has been progress as it represented the highest enrollment ever in American higher education (DeVoe, et. al., 2008; NCES, 2012).

Between 1973 and 2009, the College Board (2010) found that for those who entered college, almost 40 percent of White men and 30 percent of White women completed a college degree, compared to 20 percent of Black women and 15 percent of Black men. For Hispanics, 31 percent of women and 25 percent of Hispanic men who enrolled graduated from college (Kelly, Schneider & Carey, 2010). For Native Americans, the degree attainment reversed between men and women with more Native American men (19 percent) than women (10 percent) completing college degrees (DeVoe, et. al., 2008). And of the adult learners enrolled in college only 42 percent of them completed college (College Board, 2010). Aud and Fox (2010) confirmed that adults and minorities without a college degree had higher levels of unemployment than their White counterparts. For example, with only a high school diploma the unemployment rate in 2008 for adults over the age of 25 was 4.8 percent for Whites, 9.2 percent for African Americans and Hispanics and 11.6 percent for Native Americans (Aud & Fox, 2010). But by completing college, unemployment rates were more consistent between race and ethnic groups for the same time frame with the unemployment rate for Whites being 1.9 percent, Hispanics being 3 percent, African Americans 3.4 percent and Native Americans being 5.3 percent (Aud & Fox, 2010; College Board, 2010).

Additionally, in traditional college settings, women represented between 52 and 63 percent of college enrollment compared to men (Aud & Fox, 2010). However, both genders were found to be more equally represented in online college enrollment of 18 percent overall, and women outnumbering men by a smaller margin (51 percent to 49 percent) in online programs (NCES, 2012). Further, online college enrollments have been found to have the highest representation of minority students in U.S. colleges (NCES, 2005; NCES, 2012) as no one group had more than 50 percent enrolled online as compared to the larger population of White students seen in more traditional college settings (NCES, 2011; NCES, 2012).

Thus, adult and minority learners have been found to be less likely to complete college degrees than White and traditional aged students. Without college degree completion, adult learners, African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans have been found to earn only about \$27,000 annually compared to all other race/ethnic groups in the U.S. who earned at least \$35,000 per year without a college degree (DeVoe, et. al., 2008). But with a college degree, their earnings have increased to an average of \$58,000 for men in 2007, and an average of \$50,000 for women (Aud & Fox, 2010).

Students who attended college through distance education have also been reported to have lower retention rates compared to traditional campus students (Angelino, Williams, & Natvi, 2007; Diaz & Cartnal, 2006; Terrell, 2005). But retention rates for individual colleges have been found to vary tremendously as no standard definition of dropping out has been applied to online courses and no national statistics on either the retention or departure of distance learners have been kept (ACT, 2011; Lipka, 2012). This lack of national statistics by groups such as the National Center for Education Statistics is said to

be the result of online students not being counted as college students in general (Lipka, 2012) as they have often transferred online from other schools, attended part-time, and stopped their education for a year or more at a time thus they did not meet any U.S. Department of Education categories for tracking college students (Lipka, 2012). Thus online students' drop-out rates and their retention to graduation have not been documented in the U.S. beyond what specific institutions report, making it unclear how successful students have been in being retained to graduation from online degree programs.

Kramarae (2001) studied student enrollment in online college settings. Like other research (NCES, 2003; NCES, 2009; NCES, 2011), she found that men and women who were adult learners and/or minorities were the primary student groups enrolled online. Some sought online experiences to prepare them for new job opportunities that included the need for past experience working at a distance or a familiarity with different forms of technology that could be gained through online enrollment; others enrolled online because they were unsuccessful in traditional college settings or because they could not move closer to a campus because of job or family responsibilities; still others enrolled online as a result of health or physical limitations that limited their mobility (Kramarae, 2001). Women in particular also identified childcare and travel costs, as well as a preference for reading and writing over oral communication that attracted them to online colleges (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Kramarae, 2001). Additionally, many did drop out but 80 percent returned to online colleges within two years to complete their degrees (Kramarae, 2001).

Besides lack of academic ability, persistence to graduation in any college setting has sometimes been found to be negatively impacted by having lived in a single parent household or having been poor or from a lower Socio-Economic Status (SES) as a child, thus impacting the financial resources available for college (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Blanco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011; NCES, 2012).

Another factor that has often put students at risk for failure in college has been having at least one parent with only a high school diploma, GED, or less education which has sometimes impacted the encouragement students received regarding further education from family (NCES, 2003a; NCES, 2003b; NCES, 2003c; NCES, 2012). Also, being raised in a household where English was not the primary language spoken has been found to sometimes put students at risk for failure in college because the student has been found to speak English with difficulty which puts them at a disadvantage in U.S. colleges (NCES, 2003a; NCES, 2003b; NCES, 2003c; NCES, 2012).

Further, being a college student who was the first in their family to attend college has often put the student at risk for failure due to the student being unable to seek guidance on structures and resources at college from their family and friends who also lack knowledge of the college environment as well (NCES, 2003a; NCES, 2003b; NCES 2003c; NCES, 2012). Students who have not entered college right after high school have also been found to be at risk for failure in college because they not only had competing demands for their time but also because they had rusty academic skills the longer they remained out of school (NCES, 2003a; NCES, 2003b; NCES, 2003c). Also being an adult learner or being a member of a minority group such as African American, Hispanic or Native American has sometimes contributed to lack of college persistence to

graduation and this has been said to be the result of having two or more of the previous factors listed above that kept them being successful in college (Carter, 2006; College Board, 2010; NCES, 2003a; NCES, 2003b; NCES, 2003c; NCES, 2012).

Thus, for adult and minority students who are most often online degree seekers, they face the potential of having multiple issues that could prohibit their college degree attainment. Those factors that placed them at risk included lack of academic prowess, lack of financial resources, lack of knowledge or guidance of the college environment, lack of support or advice from family and friends, lack of English language proficiency, and/or rusty academic skills.

But risk factors for failure in college have not always led to actual failure. For example, taking advanced courses or college credit courses while still in high school have reduced the risk of failure for some college students (Horn & Kojaku, 2001).

Additionally, connecting with a guidance counselor in high school or college admissions or advising staff was beneficial when they shed light on admissions processes, financial aid resources (McDonough, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001) and other aspects of college entrance and enrollment (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos & Sanbonmatsu, 2009; Choy, Horn, Nunez & Chen, 2000; Cunningham & Ensmann, 2001; Engberg & Wolniak, 2010; Hill, 2008; Looney, 2000).

Further, completing college awareness programs (Constantine, Seftor, Sama, Silva & Myers, 2006) or courses to prepare for admissions exams such as the ACT or SAT tests (Plank & Jordan, 2001) have been found to be beneficial to college admissions/persistence. Access to and understanding of financial aid processes and programs such as the Pell Grant have also been found to reduce risk factors for college

attrition (Grotsky & Jones, 2007; Horn, Chen & Chapman, 2003; King, 2006; NCES 2012). Thus, preparation for college by taking advanced courses in high school, participating in college awareness programs and college entrance exam preparation courses as well as connecting with individuals and information that can aid the student have been found to reduce their risk of attrition in college.

In the next section I will provide an overview of academic advising including its historical foundation, studies of academic advising in general and studies of distance advising in particular.

Overview of Academic Advising

Historical foundations of academic advising. Academic advising for college began as a faculty role (Cook, 1999). But as colleges became larger, serving more diverse students, and degree programs became more complex, faculty needed assistance (Cook, 1999). This assistance eventually grew into professional academic advisor positions (Cook, 1999; Frost, 1991).

By the 1970s academic advising as a profession took many new steps as Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) introduced the idea that advising could encompass the whole person at their stage of human development and readiness (developmental advising) rather than just addressing the academic issues addressed by prescriptive advising (Crookston, 1972). Additionally, a professional association, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), as well as a refereed journal called the *NACADA Journal* (Beatty, 1991; Cook, 1999; Tuttle, 2000) were created by the early 1980s as a part of the movement toward professionalization of academic advisors.

Since the 1980s however some colleges have kept faculty advisors but supplemented their efforts with professional advisors. Other colleges have moved to all professional advisors (Cook, 1999; Tuttle, 2000).

The 2000 survey accomplished by Lynch and Stuckey of NACADA members indicated several thousand members in the organization. Most were White women under the age of 50, with an earned master's degree who had been advising less than three years and worked as full-time professional advisors (Lynch & Stuckey, 2000). The primary mode of contact with advisees was through individual contact (over 87%) with contact lasting 15-30 minutes on average (Lynch & Stuckey).

Studies of academic advising. Tinto (1975, 1988, 1998) determined that when students met F2F for classes and advising, they needed to be integrated with the social and academic aspects of the institution in order to persist. Pascarella and Terenzini (1977, 1978, 1979, 1980), found that students were less likely to leave the institution if they had regular interactions with at least one representative from the institution (like an advisor), especially during the first year of enrollment. Thus connecting with others at the institution has been found to be helpful to retention over time.

More recent studies investigating advising relationships in traditional college settings with F2F interactions found positive correlations between learner-centered, developmental advising relationships and student satisfaction with the institution (Abernathy & Engelland, 2001; Afshar, 2009; Alexitch, 2002; Allen & Smith, 2008a; Corts, Lounsbury, Saudargas & Tatum, 2000; Sutton & Sankar, 2011; Vivian, 2005). The more students were satisfied, the more they felt connected to the college community. The more connected they felt the more they became academically successful (Campbell

& Nutt, 2008; MacArthur, 2005; Smith, Dai & Szelest, 2006). Student satisfaction and academic success also led to higher levels of degree completion (Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004; Sutton & Sankar, 2011). An added benefit to the institution of this academic success and student satisfaction was continued economic success and a positive reputation of the college (Greenwood, 1984; Hunter & White, 2004; Khatib, 2004; Schilling Ross, 1999; Skorupa, 2002).

Even in the best of circumstances though, academic advisors faced a daunting task of providing all of their advisees with accurate and timely information that suited the individual's needs and aided in their growth and academic success, all the while trying to develop a positive personal relationship with each advisee (McGillin, 2000). Issues in the advising relationship have been found to include information overload for both students and advisors (Gordon, 2000; Sutton & Sankar, 2011); disadvantaged students feeling "socially, financially or academically underprepared or under supported" (Vivian, 2005, p. 336) as they were advised by individuals who failed to recognize their heightened risk for failure (Clopton & Finch, 2009; Holland, 2010; Karp, et. al, 2008; Smith, 2007; Vivian, 2005).

A third issue in advising relationships was the lack of institutional knowledge or appropriate training for some advisors to serve as good resources (Afshar, 2009; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Sutton & Sankar, 2011); a fourth issue was lack of recognition or rewards for this time intensive role for advisors (Gordon, 2000; McGillin, 2000); and finally many varied responsibilities lessened the time available for advising (McGillin, 2000; Tuttle, 2000; Vivian, 2005).

All of these advising issues have been found to contribute to less individual attention to each advisee. This is perhaps to the detriment of the advising relationship as well as the student's success (Afshar, 2009; Barbuto, Jr, Story, Fritz & Schinstock, 2011; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Pizzolato, 2008; Smith, Dai & Szelest, 2006; Vivian, 2005) and the advisor's potential burn-out (Afshar, 2009; Epps, 2002; Petress, 1996). But what about the student who studies at a distance and does not visit the college or meet the advisor face-to-face?

Studies of academic advising at a distance. A review of recent literature reveals that the majority of studies about online students were quantitative in nature and more often about student perceptions or satisfaction in online courses (such as Artino, 2009 and Herbert, 2004) as well as student perceptions of online instructors (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Gibson, 2003; Taylor, 2002). General findings have been that students were often satisfied online but still felt somewhat isolated and disconnected from others because they did not meet anyone face-to-face.

Communication online included individual e-mail and group list-serve conversations between students and those at the institution (Harasim, 2000; Lipschultz, 1999). These were useful for sharing information with a large group, for keeping track of what was shared, for communicating with shy or more reserved individuals (Brunner, Yates & Adams, 2008; Harasim, 2000; Lipschultz, 1999), for working through problems and communicating ideas without sharing time and space (Harasim, 2000). The down side of these forms of communication was that students were not always respectful of others and used inappropriate language (Brunner, et. al., 2008), and content of conversations could

be misinterpreted, thus the need for other forms of communication (such as the telephone) was also found to be necessary (Harasim, 2000; Lipschultz, 1999).

Dickey (2004) found that when students kept online blogs or journals and asked for help, feedback or support from others in the community that their feelings of isolation, frustration and alienation were greatly reduced, even if others were unable to solve their issues. Thus, multiple ways of communicating and connecting with others online was important to problem solving and the reduction of feelings of isolation.

As mentioned previously, academic advising relationships have been found to aid in student success but these were relationships were predicated on face-to-face meetings, often not feasible in online college settings (Cain, 2002; Curry 2003). Additionally, past distance education studies looked at academic advising for graduate or professional students (Beitz, 1987; Forshnell, 1993; Luna & Medina, 2007; Trent, 1993) but not undergraduates, even though undergraduates were found to be the largest population online (NCES, 2012). Thus, more research on undergraduate advising relationships online would be beneficial as academic advisors may be the one person at the institution who “sees” or develops a relationship with the student from first enrollment to graduation. So if the advisor and student never meet, can a positive working relationship be developed?

In a case study of the issues faced by Regents College in providing advising to distance education students, Brigham (2001) found that when advising online, that a peer study/support group was necessary to aid in peer to peer interactions and support. Institutional members also determined they needed to make other changes to support online students. Those changes included utilizing team or group advising instead of

individual advising to accommodate student access throughout the day, evenings and weekends through one access point.

In a more recent study of private colleges offering distance education programs, Morris and Miller (2007, p. 2) found that distance advising, while similar to F2F advising online included higher student per advisor ratios than in F2F settings and more directed conversations about preparing for accelerated terms that were shorter than traditional 16-week semesters were a necessity for student success online.

Dunn (2005) looked at Canadian academic advisement online and found little consensus on how to best provide student services from various colleges. But students did count advising as one of the most important relationships that impacted their education. Success as a distance education student also depended more on the resourcefulness of the student than the advisor.

In the next section I will discuss the two theories used as lenses to view distance advising in this case study.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Community of Inquiry model. The model has been employed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000, 2001) and others (such as Arbaugh, 2008; Ling, 2007, McKerlich et. al, 2011; Anderson, Riis & Eastman, 2011; Stodel, Thompson & MacDonald, 2006; Swan, 2001) to investigate educational interactions in computer mediated distance education courses. But until now this model of primarily text-based communication has not been employed to investigate academic advising relationships at a distance.

The model includes three overlapping parts of an educational experience: (1) *cognitive presence*, (2) *social presence* and (3) *teaching presence*. Cognitive presence refers to knowledge construction; social presence refers to the ways in which participants act “real” in the virtual world; and teaching presence refers to the ways in which teachers or in this case advisors direct or facilitate learning and interaction online.

For cognitive presence to occur, a *triggering event*, like the need to work with an advisor to choose a major must be exhibited; this is said to have led to *exploration* such as exploring which courses to take, or what academic skills need to be improved; exploration was then followed by *integration* such as when the student implemented the plans; and finally *resolution* such as when the student completed courses and degrees.

However, cognitive presence alone has not been found to be enough to guarantee retention to satisfactory completion of a course (Garrison, et. al, 2000, 2001), educational interactions without face-to-face interactions required both social presence and teaching presence to occur as well. Social presence needed both *open communication* and *group cohesion* as a necessity for the student to *trust* others enough to collaborate (Garrison, et. al., 2000, p. 64) and teaching presence involved the teacher/advisor *setting the curriculum, facilitating discourse* and resolving issues through *constructive exchanges* (Akyol & Garrison, p. 89).

When used in conjunction with cognitive presence goals, social presence and teaching presence have been found to aid in satisfaction (Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Arbaugh, 2008), feeling a sense of community or common purpose (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes & Fung, 2004), and furthering quality interactions (Ling, 2007) for effective collaboration and retention to goal completion (Arbaugh, 2008; Garrison, 2007).

Thus, using the COI model, academic advising at a distance would require cognitive presence, teaching presence and social presence to further the relationship and achieve the goals of advising.

Bourdieu (1985, p. 248) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.” However although peer, family and professional support have been recognized as a necessary component of the COI model, the connection to them was not made clear by the model. But communication and feelings of support can vary tremendously from individual to individual because of their gender, race/ethnicity, generational status as a college student, and their socioeconomic status (Holland, 2010). Informal communication can also aid in reducing feelings of frustration, isolation and alienation (Holland, 2010). But the COI model does not clearly indicate how networks of social capital can be an integral part of the process for learners. Hence, the need to include a social capital framework as well.

Social capital theory. Portes (1998) and Bourdieu (1985) indicated that social networks are socially constructed and require time and attention to be of any use to the individual. One must socialize with others that have social capital the individual wants or needs in order for social capital to be shared (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Portes, 1998). The capital one can extract from a useful social network can include power, influence or valuable information not always available to the general public (Portes, 1998).

How social capital might be exhibited by entering college students is that some students already know how to access resources for their benefit in the college environment and those students tend to be more successful in their college endeavors.

At-risk students such as adult women, African American, Hispanic and Native American students enrolling in online colleges have not generally been found to have high social capital when it comes to postsecondary education (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

Dika and Singh (2002) confirmed the positive link between relationships that support and encourage academic success (social capital) and students' degree completion. Thus advising relationships could be incredibly impactful for these underprepared students if they developed into supportive and trusting relationships that encouraged students to access all of the social capital resources available through the advisor as well as the social capital of peers at the college (Dika & Singh, 2002).

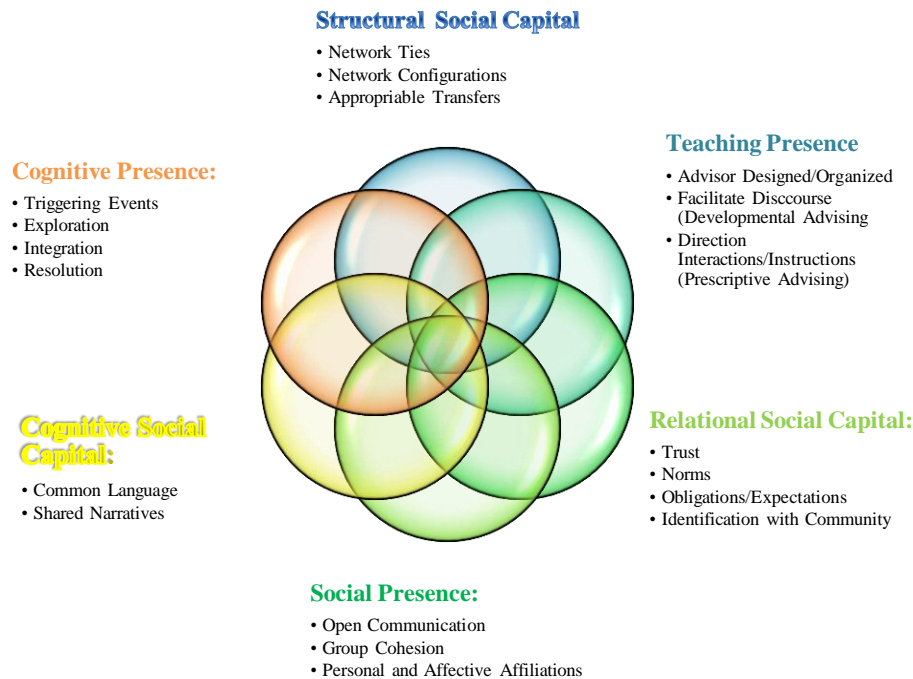
Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) studied social capital and its connections to intellectual capital in an organization and postulated three dimensions to social capital: structural, relational and cognitive.

The *structural* dimensions included the ways in which social capital was shared through the use of *network ties* that provided access to various resources. The structure was also impacted by the *network configurations* that increased opportunities to connect with others in various ways, thereby increasing the resources available to all within the network.

Relational dimensions as identified by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) included how relationships developed through *trust* that the information and the informant were credible, the creation of *norms* that everyone in the relationship deemed as acceptable behaviors, the *obligations and expectations* within the relationship to help and be helped for the good of the social network, and *identification* with the group or individual leading to feeling like insiders in the long run.

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) also defined the *cognitive* dimension of social capital in intellectual organizations that included not only a *common language* to better understand one another and show respect to one another's backgrounds, but also *shared narratives* to help each other understand one's past has impacted the present.

Figure 1: Visualizing the Potential Connections between the Elements of Social Capital and the Community of Inquiry model



By having a common language and shared narratives, advisors and advisees might begin to appreciate one another more deeply and increase knowledge as a result.

I have provided Figure 1 (above) as a Venn diagram to help visualize the relationships between the COI model and social capital theory as the elements of each theory interact and connect with one another. Each element of the COI model (teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence) interacts with and is impacted by the elements of social capital (structural capital, relational capital and cognitive capital). For example, structural capital and teaching presence (represented by different shades of blue) have the most in common with each other. Notice also that they impact and are impacted by relational capital and social presence (different shades of green) as well as cognitive capital and cognitive presence (yellow and orange shades) to further the educational experience of an advisor and advisee as they might interact with one another and work to accomplish the tasks and goals of advising. Note also that no one element is assumed to supersede another. Each is assumed to have an equal role in furthering or inhibiting distance advising relationships and goal completion. Thus, distance advising relationships are not simple matters but rather complex relationships that are not just about learning how to function in the college environment as can be viewed using the COI model, but must also take into consideration the social capital that students and their advisors bring to the relationship as well.

Implications for Research

As there has been little prior research in this area as well as some perception issues regarding distance education and distance advising, the need for new models and theories of how relationships can be advanced without F2F interaction are crucial not just to advancing the relationship but also to addressing critical learning and socialization that must occur in order for advisors and advisees to come together. Distance education does

not appear to be going away and as a result, distance advising is likely to remain a critical step in the retention and completion of students in colleges. If new or strengthened methods could be advanced, it would be most beneficial for not only the student, but also the advisor and the institution. Studies such as this should help to further the process.

Significance of Study

It is hoped that that the findings of this study will add to the body of knowledge of academic advising in distance education. If we understood more about how it is similar and yet different from face-to-face advising we might be able to better organize for the success of students. The findings may also have implications for technology designers and for administrators who develop policies, practices and technology for this communication format as well as those are in academic advising roles. But of course the limitations are that this is a small study of one online college setting and may not represent other online college settings. However, it is hoped that continued research in this area will trigger more interest and more knowledge in this burgeoning area of higher education.

Summary

Distance education in its various formats has a long history in the U.S. and this unprecedented growth is not expected to stop any time soon (Allen & Seaman, 2008a). Many types of institutions, including both public and private college settings offered online college course-work, and the majority for undergraduate college credit. In the U.S. these have primarily been via the Internet to provide flexible options for different student populations and to increase revenue for the colleges. There have been positive researcher

findings regarding online course-work outcomes. Even so, perceptions vary depending on individual preferences for communication and learning without F2F interaction.

Students enrolled online tended to be older, non-traditional students, historically underrepresented in higher education such as adult women, African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans. They also had many outside obligations including children and working full-time while completing college degrees online part-time.

Adult and minority learners have also been found to be less likely to complete college degrees than White and traditional aged students. And this can have a negative effect over time as college graduates provide more tax dollars to government entities and need less social services, earn more, have health insurance, and are less likely to be unemployed compared to high school graduates.

Online students' drop-out rates and their retention to graduation have not been documented in the U.S. beyond what specific institutions report, making it unclear how successful students have been in being retained to graduation from online colleges. But for those who enroll online they did so because they were unsuccessful in traditional college settings, because they could not move closer to a campus because of job or family responsibilities or because health or physical limitations limited their mobility. Women in particular also identified childcare and travel costs, as well as a preference for reading and writing over oral communication that attracted them to online colleges.

Adult and minority students may face multiple issues that could prohibit their college degree attainment though, including lack of academic prowess, lack of financial resources, lack of knowledge or guidance of the college environment, lack of support or advice from family and friends, lack of English language proficiency, and/or rusty

academic skills. But risk factors for failure have not always led to actual failure. Preparation for college by taking advanced courses in high school, participating in college awareness programs and college entrance exam preparation courses as well as connecting with individuals and information that can aid the student have been found to reduce their risk of attrition in college.

Academic advising studies at traditional colleges with F2F interactions have revealed that connecting with others at the institution was particularly helpful to retention over time. Development of relationships with others at the college positively impacted student satisfaction, academic success and degree completion. But advising could also result in negative outcomes as well including information overload, lack of feeling supported to overcome risk factors, advisors not being well trained in academic resources, or advisors not being recognized for their efforts as well as inadequate time to invest in the advising relationship.

Distance advising was also found to be less researched than student satisfaction with graduate courses even though undergraduates represent the largest enrolled group online in the U.S. Forms of communication utilized online included e-mail, list-serves and telephones to avoid students feeling isolated or frustrated. Also successful students tended to need more initiative to find help and many diverse populations enrolled online tended to have less understanding of college settings.

Thus little is known about academic advising relationships that support the personal and academic success of students online and this study should shed some light. Given that online advising is comprised of learning, relationship building and sharing of resources, theories guiding the study included the Community of Inquiry model to assess

teaching presence, cognitive presence and social presence enacted, and social capital theory to assess the meaning making that resulted from these relationships and activities completed online. The next chapter will address the methodology used to complete the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I describe the design, methods, setting and participants, data collection and data analysis processes used in the study.

Research Design

This small qualitative case study concerned one online college setting where advising was accomplished at a distance by full-time professional advisors without any F2F interaction with students. Merriam (1998) envisioned the case study as one unit of analysis, and I employed it in that way as well.

Research Questions

The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What activities/interactions do full-time professional academic advisors and their undergraduate advisees engage in to cultivate relationships and accomplish advising tasks and goals where there is no face-to-face meeting in an online college setting?
2. According to the participants, how do these activities/interactions impact satisfaction, retention, and meaning making for both undergraduate students enrolled in an online college setting and their professional academic advisors?

Setting

Virtual University (a pseudonym) was a medium sized private, not-for-profit university that was regionally accredited and located in the central United States. As a former employee of this university I chose the setting for ease of access as well as the reputation and stature of the college in the higher education community. Students in

particular often described feeling both “safe” and “valued” as members of the college community.

The creation of Virtual University was described by the system president as a calculated yet risky move to stay on the cutting edge of higher education models. Virtual University creation coincided with advancements in technology that made online learning more user-friendly and less expensive to operate. University leadership also touted themselves as a group who adopted an altruistic mission, vision and values statement (see full text of mission, vision and values statement in Appendix B). A review of the 2011 Annual Report for the system indicated that Virtual University was also a very important revenue generator as it contributed 53.1% to the operating budget of the college system.

Virtual University was part of a multiple campus system with different locations spread across the United States, but its online campus was located near the main campus. The main campus had been around since the 1800s and began as a not-for-profit religious based women’s college. By the 1970s, the college faced stiff competition for students as a liberal arts college. To attract more students, the college expanded enrollment of military and older adult students regardless of gender or religious affiliation and this led to the opening of many branch campuses over the next forty years.

Virtual University opened as a program at the main campus in 2000 with approximately 185 students in 10 courses. By 2012, Virtual University was its own branch campus with enrollment of 18,000-20,000 students and 900 classes every term. During the time of the study (2010-2012) this included over 8000 students enrolled exclusively in at least 17 undergraduate online degree programs (see Appendix C for degree listings).

Most of the students at Virtual University began their enrollment as two-year associate degree students online but nearly eighty percent remained for their bachelor's degree as well. The degree programs with the highest enrollments included business (25%), computer and information studies (24%), general studies (20%), and humanities (15%) according to the Registrar (see Appendix D for more specific enrollment details). Additionally, during the time of the study White students accounted for approximately half of the student population in Virtual University, followed closely by 24 percent being African American or Black, 19 percent being Hispanic and 4.3 percent Native American students. The Registrar also shared that during the study sixty-nine percent of the students enrolled at Virtual University were women, predominantly over the age of 30 (62%), employed full time (62%) and were likely to have children under the age of ten in their household (69%). Thus, Virtual University was also chosen because it represented both popular degree program offerings and diversity of enrollment in online colleges across the U.S. (Waits & Lewis, 2003; NCES, 2011).

Virtual University's terms of enrollment included five terms per year, terms began in January, March, June, August and October. Each term lasted eight weeks and included sixteen weeks of information compressed into eight weeks of time for each course.

According to the college's website, tuition and fees included a one-time \$35 application fee, tuition of \$220 per credit hour, and a graduation fee of \$75. With two 3-credit hour classes per term considered full-time enrollment, the cost of enrollment per term was \$1320. Additionally, students were expected to either have financial aid resources to cover the cost of enrollment (processed through the main campus financial aid office) or they could pay one-half of the enrollment fees at the time of registration and

the second half by the last day of class. Students could purchase their books from any source, but the preferred bookseller for Virtual University was a textbook shipping company located nearby and no estimate of book costs was provided on the college website. A review of the textbook shipping company link to the college website indicated that prices for books were consistent with other college bookstore textbook prices in the area.

Potential students reviewing the campus website were directed to a number of resources. These included a course user guide to see how a course was constructed online and the opportunity to practice skills for online communication. Courses were found to be driven predominantly by the syllabus and online course discussions using a Desire2Learn software program. With Desire2Learn, students were able to log in to courses and related resources such as course syllabus, contact information for the instructor, a drop box for uploading of assignments, a discussion area guided by the instructor, a grade book area to monitor grades posted, and a chat area. Additionally students could access the college e-mail system as needed.

Virtual University's undergraduate catalog confirmed the campus had an open admission and open enrollment policy, which was different than its face-to-face campus locations (which had more stringent admissions policies). So long as students could confirm high school or GED completion and that they had met any pre-requisite requirements for course enrollment, past academic achievement was not a factor in admission or enrollment. Once admitted, students could enroll in up to two terms (90 days) prior to receipt of official transcripts from prior institutions. At the end of 90 days, if transcripts were not received from all prior institutions, students were blocked from

further enrollment until such time as transcripts from all past colleges had been received and evaluated. The purpose of this policy was apparently to allow students a taste of the online experience but required transcripts in the long run to assist advising staff in providing long term assistance in education planning. During the time of the study, the Registrar's office confirmed nearly seventy percent of the students enrolled had attended three or more colleges prior to enrolling at Virtual University.

The undergraduate catalog confirmed the institution had similar academic policies and standards of excellence compared to other regionally accredited institutions. Virtual University also offered an online scholarship, honor society, and Dean's List for students who achieved a 3.5 GPA (grade point average) or above on a 4.0 scale. The Dean's office also maintained a list of academically successful students from Virtual University and these names were posted to Virtual University's website every 6 months. The Dean's office also maintained a confidential list of students who did not meet the terms of satisfactory academic progress after each term. According to the Dean's Office staff, out of the 8,700 students enrolled exclusively in online programs in 2012, over 600 students (approximately 7 percent of enrollment) were either on probation, on one-year suspension or on three year dismissal from the campus for lack of satisfactory academic progress.

Virtual University's organizational structure (see Appendix E for organizational chart) included an Assistant Dean who managed the campus. The Assistant Dean reported to a Dean for the division of branch campuses who in turn reported to a traditional Vice President, who in turn reported to the President of the system. At Virtual

University, faculty and academic advisors were considered part of the leadership team and were said to have somewhat equal shared governance with the Assistant Dean.

Faculty members teaching for Virtual University had earned at least a master's degree in a related field and received ongoing training on how to teach online as technology and other requirements changed. Administrators for Virtual University generally held a master's degree in business administration. Academic advisors held either a bachelor's or master's degree in the fields offered by Virtual University degree programs but if they did not have an earned master's degree they were expected to complete a master's degree within two-three years of initial employment to remain in the role of full-time professional advisor. The organizational chart for Virtual University (in Appendix E) also includes a list of the offices within the campus system that supported Virtual University operations.

Virtual University began academic advising online at its inception but students were not assigned a particular advisor. They were instead aided by three advisors available during the week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. via e-mail and phone. As enrollment grew, the advisor group expanded as well as the addition of advising resources, including list-serves managed by advisors. During the time of the study, the college employed between ten and thirteen advisors and each advisor was assigned between 1500 and 2000 students to advise each term. Assignments were based on the first letter of students' last names, but students were free to move from one advisor to another for any reason. To aid in this team approach, advisors posted their student records in a virtual filing cabinet that all advisors could access as necessary. During the time of the study, advisors were available 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. during the week and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays.

Participants

Participants included four advisors and eight students, with two students randomly selected from within each advisor's assigned advisees. As for how they were selected to participate in the study, advisors were selected more carefully than the randomly selected students. At the beginning of the study, ten advisors were employed at Virtual University. All ten were evaluated for their varying teaching and advising styles. Amongst those, four of the advisors were chosen. Reasons included their longevity with the university in this role as I wanted advisors who had more than one year's experience from which to draw data. Two of the advisors had a little more than three years' experience and two of the advisors had more than ten years' experience. Additionally advisors were selected because their varied skills and interactions appeared to be learning centered in their relationships with students. This was in keeping with my decision to apply the COI model (Garrison, et. al., 2000; Garrison et. al, 2001) from which to view the educational components in the advising relationships. As Virtual University reported as many as seventy percent of its students were first generation college students I had hoped at least one advisor might be a first generation or otherwise disadvantaged or at-risk student in the past, to aid in viewing social capital theory, the second theory guiding this study. However, none of the advisors were first generation college students themselves. Thus, all of the advisors in the study had social capital that exceeded their advisees.

In meeting with all ten of the advisors prior to determining the final four, I asked each to write a description of their backgrounds, their job and their preferred styles of dealing with students. I also observed each advisor in conversations on the phone with

advisees and interviewed each of the ten advisors about their perceptions of their styles and philosophies applied to advising (Interview protocols are contained in Appendix F). The four chosen came closest to performing teaching presence that directed or facilitated social presence and cognitive presence of their advisees. It was also revealed in conversations with advisors that two of the four had some familiarity with issues their students might face as a result of race/ethnicity, social class or generational status in college as they had received some training in the subject as professional advisors. The data gained from this exercise primarily aided in evaluating advising as prescriptive versus developmental perspectives. It also aided in determining advisor perceptions of social capital and its impact on various interactions with students.

Since I left Virtual University, the dilemmas associated with including students I had advised prior to my departure did not seem to be much of a conflict. But I ultimately chose not to include my former advisees as the eight participants in the study to ensure as objective a study as possible and allow for replication in the future. Instead I randomly selected two students from each of the four advisors' rosters of advisees as of December 2011. I did not ask the advisors for their input on selection but rather asked the Dean's office at Virtual University to provide me with a list of students who were advised by each advisor previously selected. I also asked the Dean's office to exclude anyone who had previously been advised by me. From these four lists, I chose two students from each advisor's area, making a total of eight students from which to solicit data.

Researcher Role

Case study is said to be the direct result of interaction and communication between the researcher and the participants in the study (Ghesquière, Maes, & Vandenberghe,

2004). The researcher must have enough knowledge to be able to translate what they see into a coherent case study (Yin, 2003). Thus some information about my background should be included here.

My employment with and thereby my access to Virtual University began with a research internship with Virtual University. In that role I sought to learn what helped students be successful academically in an online setting and led to my finding that Virtual University was doing a great job of attracting and enrolling a large number of economically disadvantaged adult women and minority students, especially African American, Hispanic and Native American students who were first generation college students. Thus, I knew before the study began that the college was attracting students with little social capital, just as was found in the literature.

In addition to my past employment at the site for study, as a former Research Associate for the state agency that oversaw higher education within the state, I had previous experience evaluating the policies and practices of college personnel in both public and private institutions. I also served as a graduate assistant academic advisor in a public college setting with F2F interactions as the primary mode for advising in the past as well as having served as an online advisor at Virtual University. Thus my understanding of and experiences with varying advising structures may be more involved than perhaps most researchers.

My prior connection with the college could have also hindered me though. For example, in my research internship with the college, the prior project negatively impacted my ability to complete the initial study in a timely manner. Different leaders within the college felt the need to be involved in decisions regarding what I might be allowed to

accomplish with the study and what I might be able to report as a college employee. Some feared my study might adversely impact the college in either reputation or in their ability to effectively compete with other online colleges as a private college. Thus, in an effort to accommodate their concerns, while still maintaining the access and integrity of my study, I left my position to complete this study and also reduced a number of descriptors about the college and its operations for this study.

Additionally, I am a female who is both White as well as part Native American, but my ethnic identity is not physically discernible, and my language of origin is English (even though we spoke other languages at home). I have often been assumed to be White thus more invisible than the students included in this study. But as a multiracial who is multilingual, I may better understand students who also identify themselves in this way. I was also a non-traditional adult learner as I did not begin college until I was 21 years old. In constructing the study, I assumed that gender, race and cultural differences and the fact that I was finishing a doctorate would be both an aid and a hindrance for me in understanding student perspectives at times and I incorporated participant review of my findings and interpreted meanings throughout the process to find common ground from which to confirm my findings and report their experiences as objectively as I could.

As a past employee at Virtual University, I was also able to engage and converse in this unique setting without a lot of translation about their meanings and environment. However, this could have also blinded me to certain realities. To address this issue, I utilized multiple sources of data, maintaining a database system and a chain of custody of the evidence. All was done to ensure findings were confirmed in multiple ways. As a former academic advisor I also sought to adhere to the core values of the National

Academic Advising Association (NACADA), including doing my best to protect the privacy of confidential information, and do no harm in the process of building a case about advising at a distance.

Mengalio (2003) defined social reality as being relative to the time and space under investigation. As I developed this case study, I provided an approximation of each person's view of the advising relationship and the tasks and activities central to the advising relationship. To ensure the findings stayed as close to the original meanings as possible I employed member checks throughout the two years of the study. These were accomplished by providing individual participants with excerpts or complete statements from blogs, interviews, e-mail and list-serve trails they had completed as well as documents I had written and asking them to review, clarify and confirm intended meanings as well as contribute their ideas to the study.

Near the completion of the study, I gathered all of the advisors and students from the study for a group session that included not only my reporting of initial findings but also one last round of member checks with each participant. All attended either in person or via Skype at a public library conference room rather than Virtual University. This location was chosen intentionally to ensure privacy and encourage honest discussion about the findings and about the college. Feedback from the session did not change the findings but further clarified meanings from the group. Overall perceptions of the findings were that the students and advisors felt they were represented fairly and without harm. Many remarked how surprised they were that their actual feelings, comments and ideas were used or incorporated into the study. They also remarked on the fact that individual case studies used for the milestones seemed to capture so many of the issues

advisors and students felt and experienced, even if the case presented was not about them in particular. For further details on individual case studies see Chapter Four and Appendix G.

Ethical, Legal and Privacy Protections

In a virtual learning environment, there were unusual ethical, legal and privacy issues beyond the issues faced in a traditional advisor-advisee relationship. Wu, Lau, Atkin and Lin (2011) indicated that confidential information is protected in the U.S. through the following:

- privacy of communications (the 1986 Electronic Communications Privacy Act and the Telephone Consumer Protection Act of 1991);
- privacy of financial information (the 1970 Fair Credit Reporting Act);
- privacy of government collections (the Privacy Act of 1974);
- privacy of medical records (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996);
- privacy of other personal records (the Video Privacy Protection Act of 1988)...

Thus, while each law cited above represents different aspects of the ways in which privacy and confidentiality are protected, in one form or another, each of these laws has been applied to the online college experience in the U.S. and also served as a guide for lawful protections in developing and implementing this study.

Perhaps the most important law protecting not only privacy but also confidentiality in college records is FERPA (the Family Education Rights & Privacy Act of 1974, 20 U.S.C § 1232g, also known as the Buckley Amendment) that protects educational records. Educational records for college students have been interpreted as including any

document kept in students' records that related to their educational pursuits such as past transcripts as well as advising records (Van Dusen, 2004). Given that student records at Virtual University were protected and maintained virtually, the possibility of unlawful review or use of secure data (known as hacking) could lead to private information becoming public. Logging in to the computer system for the college and its associating logging records is one area that has not been completely covered by FERPA laws however, and this has led to complaints by students and their families that there has been too much latitude in how much access college officials have in records maintained electronically (Wasson, 2003). The location in which this study was conducted included similar policies that were vague regarding this matter (see Appendix I for the complete policy provided by Virtual University's Registrar). Bryce and Klang (2009) have challenged college leadership and researchers to act on behalf of students not only by abiding laws already in place but also by enacting policies and actions to uphold those policies to protect students and others at the institution.

Another issue of the virtual world articulated by Lipschultz (1999) was that one can try but cannot guarantee private and confidential e-mail information security. Bryce and Klang (2009) in a study of online privacy practices found that although young adults thought they protected their personal information online, many disclosed information voluntarily through various postings to social media or to friends with the thought that friends would not harm them with their actions. One cannot be absolutely sure one is communicating with the person on the e-mail tag line, as we have seen on the news that e-mail has sometimes been hacked in the past. However, for online colleges, given the heightened nature of secure information being shared, most, including Virtual University

developed higher security protocols to not only avoid being hacked, but to also maintain 24 hour detection and response to potential situations that could harm students, faculty and staff or the college in general. In cases of hacking (accessing an e-mail account without permission), staff in Technology Services for Virtual University indicated access to individual accounts was more likely to be by individuals other than the owner of the e-mail account as a result of the individual allowing the access with permission from the owner of the account.

Given the issues above, I reminded individuals in the study about these potential ethical, legal and privacy issues. I also employed the following in order to support both privacy and confidentiality laws as well as ethics and morals:

1. My requests for information were reviewed and approved by the Registrar and legal authority for Virtual University prior to any access being granted.
2. As I requested specific information I also sought approval from advisors/advisees impacted.
3. To minimize risk in my study, each participant was also assigned a unique code number rather than name or other identifying features and information completed online did not track e-mail addresses from responses. I also destroyed audio tapes after they were transcribed to further protect identities.

Data Collection Procedures

Ethnographic methods such as staying in the field for a lengthy period of time (over two years) for the study were employed to observe and explore activities, interactions and relationship development within the university along with exploring their meanings. Atkinson and Pugsley (2005) indicated ethnographic methods have sometimes been

assumed to be less valid because in watching those who interact, people try to be on their best behavior while being observed. Staying in the field for two years allowed multiple interactions, multiple observations such that people often forgot I was there and thereby enhanced validity of the findings.

Multiple sources of data. Yin (2003) posited that the best way to construct a case study's evidence was to draw from multiple sources to triangulate one's findings because these different sources served as complements to one another in constructing evidence for the case. For this case study, I collected data from the following sources: Virtual University's website, the college's undergraduate catalog, orientation modules, college newsletters published online, students' educational records as well as data collected from interviews, observation, and e-mail trails. Naturalistic observation in particular included multiple times viewing the students and advisors in their interactions with one another including from both the homes of students as well as the advisors offices at the college to aid in confirming data over time.

I also reviewed the training and ongoing professional development documents provided by Virtual University's advisor trainer for the advising staff. Advisors at the college were not only required to stay up to date on professional training but to also write reports to their supervisor on their professional development training and conference attendance. As for training for students, I reviewed the orientation modules, student success course documents, webinars/podcasts (visual presentations posted online – webinars when originally broadcast allowed for question and answer sessions that were then archived and podcasts typically included video and pdf documents) and other resources provided to students by advisors.

While reviewing the documents indicated above, field notes were generated to keep track of what was learned and how it related to the case. And this required me to add additional documents as the case study progressed. All field notes as well as documents collected were housed in a computer database.

Advisors and advisees were also asked to maintain personal journals or weblogs (often called blogs). These helped determine participants' impressions of their interactions and their relationship with one another. And while reviewing blogs and journal entries I kept field notes on my impressions as well as questions generated from the review. All of this information was uploaded into the case database, after member checks for clarification and confirmation of meanings.

Case study database and chain of evidence. A case study database has been said to include both the evidence used to build the case as well as the researcher's field notes (Yin, 2003). The chain of evidence has been described as detailed information of where information was obtained and how so as to add further validity and reliability to a constructed case study (Yin, 2003). And both were employed to further the validity of findings and provide for potential replication of the case study in the future. For example, individual case information included in the findings was compiled from documents as well as interactions such as those witnessed via phone or e-mail at either the advisors' office or the student's home, or from transcripts of these interactions recorded on the advisors' computers. Participant meanings were compiled from advisor and advisee blogs used as journals to reflect on their interactions with one another. Where ever possible, source of information or corroboration has been identified.

Given the sheer quantity of information gathered from multiple sources, the database helped maintain and organize the data. To aid in this organization I incorporated a number of software programs that allowed for data to be imported to one another for collection and analysis purposes as Yin (2003) suggested. Those software programs included EndNote X 4, a software program from Thomson Reuters to maintain literature review information; Dragon: Naturally Speaking, version 11, from Nuance, which was utilized to create and maintain transcripts of taped interviews; NVivo10 from QSR International of Australia was used to help in coding and analyzing data from all sources, including social media sites such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook maintained by Virtual University.

Transferability. Case studies are said to assume the likelihood of transferability to other settings (Yin, 2003), but as the case study is time, place and individual contingent, conclusions from the study can only be applied to this case and may not represent the perspectives of other advisors and students in Virtual University. However, by providing thick descriptions of the case as well as suggestions for further implications and directions to take research, readers can evaluate the case and determine for themselves if there are enough similarities to other settings to be transferable from this case study. And the case study may serve to add to the knowledge we have about distance advising that might not otherwise be known by those less familiar with online college environments.

Data Analysis

Throughout the study I used constant comparative to not only collect data but to also analyze it in order to further the study. Interviews were not only taped (if completed by

phone), but also followed up with field notes after each interview or e-mail completion of interview questions to ensure as much information could be applied later when interviews were transcribed and evaluated. Individual stories were also confirmed through discussions with school personnel interviews or document reviews to corroborate credibility and trustworthiness of information provided.

I employed grounded theory to compare and contrast data for their similarities and differences to each other in analyzing the data (Boeije, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). Data collected or created was viewed, analyzed and compared with one another a number of times until no new categories or themes were detected. I also looked at the data sentence by sentence, line by line, paragraph by paragraph, and section by section to discern emergent themes and conclusions about the differences and similarities amongst and between different types of data collected.

The process of constant comparative in data analysis was also inductive, meaning that even though I had some ideas about the themes in distance advising, I did my best to avoid predetermining what I looked for in the data. The data was also reviewed and compared to the two theoretical concepts that partially guided this study. Using each theoretical framework, I reviewed the coding completed before. With each succeeding framework, I was able to reflect more fully on the meaning of the data as it continued to emerge into categories and subcategories with many overlapping topics as they related to my research questions.

Summary

This small, qualitative case study included multiple sources of data collection to strengthen the case and allowed for triangulation of not only the data sources but also the

researcher, the methods and finally the case study. I also employed a master database to maintain such things as field notes, document reviews and interview transcripts. I used a number of software programs to keep track of where the evidence was gathered and how so that future researchers might be better able to determine the transferability of the case study to other settings if there are enough similarities to their settings.

Participants in the study included four full-time professional advisors with much social capital and expertise as advisors who had worked between three and twelve years at the institution. There were also eight students pursuing their undergraduate degrees who were randomly chosen to participate in the study. Unlike the advisors, students had very little social capital because they were all first generation college students and they had attended several colleges prior to Virtual University without academic success.

Data collection took place between 2010 and 2012 to ensure I had enough time to witness and explore distance advising in a natural setting over time. While collecting data in the form of field notes, participant observation, interviews, blogs and documents, I also started the data analysis process using grounded theory methods such as constant comparison. The purpose of doing analysis of the data while collecting it was to not only start the analysis process but also to determine next steps in the study. I utilized a number of software programs to collect and analyze the data. The process of analysis included reviewing data collected line by line, paragraph by paragraph to determine emergent themes and to compare the similarities and differences between different advising relationships. Another step in the analyzing process was to compare the data and emergent themes to the two theories partially guiding this study. Once the data was collected and analyzed, then the findings were incorporated into a case study that include

major activities and interactions involved in distance advising relationships and the participants' perceived satisfaction, retention and meaning making in the online college setting. By choosing to illustrate the case of this one online college setting using a number of advisor/advisee relationships and interactions enacted there between 2010 and 2012, it is important to remember that individuals' views and perceptions have been shaped by past knowledge, experiences, group identity, time and place as well. Thus these may not be reflective of others' views at the institution such as advisors not selected for the study.

In the next sections I will address the results of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

As stated in Chapter One, the study reported on the activities, interactions and relationship between advisors and undergraduate advisees at Virtual University, an Internet based online college without F2F interactions between students and academic advisors. The chapter includes a review of participants in the study, key themes and issues found, negative cases that provided an alternative perspective and finally a summary of the findings.

The Virtual Learning Environment

Virtual University was organized as an additional campus of a traditional F2F private not-for-profit college, offering college degrees online through asynchronous Internet access. Between 2010 and 2012, the college offered at least 17 undergraduate associate and bachelor degree programs (see Appendix C for a complete list), the most popular of which were computer and information sciences, business, general studies, social sciences and humanities (see Appendix D for enrollment by degree program). The decision to offer degrees online was reported by the college leadership to be based on student demand for more flexible courses, to increase student enrollment, and to increase revenue to the college.

The Registrar confirmed that between 2010 and 2012, Virtual University enrollment increased from 3400 to over 8000 undergraduate students. Enrollment included many adult learners and minority students aged 30 or older, who were primarily female, had children at home, and worked full-time (see Appendix D for enrollment statistics). The

Virtual University annual report for 2012 confirmed the campus generated over 60 percent of the revenue collected for its entire 30-plus campus system.

Participants in the Virtual Space

The four advisor participants were predominantly White with 1 Hispanic and 1 who was White and Native American (see Table 1 located in Appendix A for complete advisor demographics). One advisor had a master's degree completed and the others were working towards graduate degrees and their degrees varied tremendously.

Of the 8 students in the study, 1 was White, 2 were African American, 1 was Hispanic, 1 was Native American and 2 reported being more than 1 race: White and Native American, Hispanic and African American. Their degree seeking varied tremendously as well (see Table 2 in Appendix A for complete student demographics).

Advisors were observed during the study working in a large room at Virtual University. Within the room there were separate cubicles side by side for each advisor with at least two advisors working together 6 days per week. Advisors had several computer screens on their large desks enabling them to review documents on one screen while writing e-mails on another screen. Advisors also had access to new computers and the latest software on an annual basis through the college technology office.

Advisors logged in to phone and software programs through high speed Internet connections. When they logged out of the system, phone calls were routed to another advisor or a message explaining how to access information from Virtual University's homepage.

The college computing system also enabled advisors to maintain student files virtually so any advisor could access current student information from their computer so

long as the record had been updated in a timely manner. The system also allowed them to capture and save phone conversations to their computer (with permission from all being recorded). This was beneficial to the study as it allowed review of phone conversations without needing to observe every one. Participants also used the recordings to comment on their meanings in their blogs for the study.

From visits to 5 of the students' homes, their homework/computer spaces were found to be at the dining room table in or near the kitchen – an area that saw high traffic from others in the house. Students generally accessed Virtual University from old computers, using dial-up connections and older student versions of software with fewer capabilities than professional versions but chosen by students because they were less expensive. Students accessed classes, e-mail and advising most often when they were alone, late at night, after the job was done and the kids were in bed.

From observations in the advisor and student spaces, students accessed the college homepage to enroll, access classes and to access resources such as advisors and the college e-mail system. Advisors accessed the homepage to complete their jobs and to attend graduate student courses. The primary modes of communication for advising were found to be e-mail, phone and fax. But three of the advisors also developed list-serves for their assigned advisees as well.

Each advisor was assigned 1500-2000 students to advise in any given 8-week term during the study. Students were assigned by the first initial of their last names but were allowed to move from one advisor to another without question. During the time of the study between 8 and 13 advisors were available on weekdays and evenings and at least two were available on Saturdays. Advisors also kept statistics that revealed that over the

previous five years, nearly 30 percent of their weekly evening and weekend calls were not from online students but students from other campuses. This was because the other 30-plus campuses in the system were not open on evenings or weekends. The college policy was to provide advice to all students who called, but administrators, advisors and students acknowledged the policy sometimes disadvantaged the immediate needs of online students.

Prescriptive and Developmental Advising

The college administration indicated they placed a strong emphasis on training advisors to use both prescriptive and developmental philosophies. Prescriptive advising was initially used because advisors were said to need to direct new students in such things as registering for classes and completing required college paperwork, which kept the control of the relationship in the hands of advisors, thereby reflecting prescriptive advising. But over time, leadership said advisors were expected to relax their control as students became more knowledgeable of the college environment and were encouraged to take more ownership over their own learning which was more indicative of the developmental advising philosophy.

The use of both prescriptive and developmental advising was confirmed by documents provided by the advisor-trainer as well as observations of activities and interactions between advisors-advisees. For example, the philosophy of advising document (located in Appendix J), confirmed advisors were expected to direct students through enrollment procedures and academic regulations that had to be followed. During observations of their interactions, advisors were witnessed on the phone making sure students understood how to follow these processes. But if students questioned the

procedures or practices, advisors indicated students could not deviate from these established requirements to complete tasks – thus enacting prescriptive advising where the advisor remained in control.

As for developmental advising at Virtual University, this was exhibited in the philosophy of advising document (Appendix J) as well as the advising outcomes document (located in Appendix K) and in interactions observed. For example, both documents included the statement that the primary goal of advising was development of relationships that included mutual respect, trust and ethical behavior while sharing responsibilities between advisors and students, both tenets of developmental advising. And how this was enacted was most noticeable when advisors-advisees worked to create education plans. These were premised on assessment of students' activities, interests and values rather than advisors'. Education planning included shared responsibility indicative of developmental advising as advisors reviewed plans and mentored students to clarify their goals while at the same time ensuring plans adhered to college policies.

Interactions, Activities and Relationships and Their Meanings

Students were found to vary tremendously in their interactions, activities and relationships with academic advisors, resulting in varying levels of satisfaction, meaning making and retention to the college. However, by viewing the advising curriculum as the entire academic career of the students with the college, five milestones were exhibited in each of the 8 relationships followed throughout the study. These common milestones included: admittance to the college and the first term of enrollment; development of an education plan for degree completion; evaluating the need for co-curricular experiences to enhance the degree; working through academic and personal issues; and finally

preparing for either further education or entry into the job market. Within each milestone described below, themes and findings were organized around the two research questions posed in Chapter One. Additionally, case studies of individual interactions were used to illustrate common occurrences. These activities, interactions and their related meanings were compiled from documents, observations, advisor and advisee blogs, as well as individual and group member checks during the study as described in Chapter Three.

Milestone 1: Admission to the college. Being admitted to Virtual University and making the transition from prospective to degree seeking student involved a number of specific goals, tasks and relationship building activities that impacted satisfaction, retention and meaning making for advisors and their advisees.

Initial activities, interactions and the start of advising relationships. As Virtual University was an open admission online college, new students were admitted without regard to their prior educational success so long as they could document they had a high school diploma or GED. Prospective students applied for admission through an online application. Applications included students' self-reports of biographical data such as age, race or ethnicity, financial aid needs, criminal background, disabilities, English language skills, past postsecondary education coursework and other training that might earn the student credit towards certificate or degree programs such as military training.

Application data was uploaded to the college through two software programs, Datatel and Document Imaging. Datatel was a database that included biographical and enrollment information, financial aid and student billing data. Document Imaging served as a virtual filing cabinet for the application, letters, transcripts and other documents as no paper copies of student files were kept. Advisors indicated information contained in

these two programs served a vital role in properly advising students on their best courses of action.

Admissions applications were posted to the college system automatically as students were admitted but admissions staff indicated it could take up to two days for the documents to show in times of high admittance such as the first week of a new term. Additionally, during their first two terms, students could enroll in up to 2 classes per term without providing official college transcripts for evaluation by the college. Transcript coordinators indicated nearly 95 percent of students admitted to Virtual University had at least two prior transcripts to be evaluated for credit during the time of the study. Amongst the students in the study, the average number of prior college transcripts was three, with one student having only two and another having four prior transcripts. When asked why they had attended so many prior colleges, the answer most often given was because they were not successful, either because of the courses themselves or the inability of the student to have a more flexible schedule that allowed for full-time work, family obligations and academic work.

Transcript coordinators explained that enrolling for up to two terms without official evaluation of prior transcripts was standard practice in online higher education. This was confirmed by contacting two other online colleges (University of Phoenix and Capella University). But common practice does not necessarily mean good practice according to advisors. They indicated that allowing new students to enroll without advisors knowing their past course and grade history, as well as the slow upload of admissions applications could be problematic for the advising relationship as was evidenced by the admission of DeAngelo Davidson to Virtual University in the case below.

DeAngelo Davidson's admission. DeAngelo was a 28-year-old African American male attending Virtual University while also serving as a non-commissioned officer in the United States Army. DeAngelo had earned a GED rather than high school diploma as he left school at age 15. By his eighteenth birthday DeAngelo had to choose between jail and the Army after a run in with the law. He chose the Army and found he liked being Military Police. He also had a growing family of three children, all under the age of 14. While none of his children lived with him, he did his best to see them as often as he could, like school holidays and summers, as he was stationed in Europe and his children lived in America. DeAngelo could not have his children with him in Europe as he was a single parent with no caregiver available when he frequently traveled overnight to war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan to complete police investigations.

DeAngelo wanted to move back to the states and be promoted to a commissioned officer position not only for increased pay and reduced physical risks but also to have more time with his children. He found that the only way for him to achieve all of this was to have 90 hours of college credit earned so that he could be considered for officers' candidate school. He tried taking courses on his base in Germany but his erratic schedule kept him from being able to complete more than 40 hours. In desperation DeAngelo met with the education coordinator for the Army and was directed to contact Virtual University to see if he might be better served by online courses.

DeAngelo talked with his advisor Sarah Thompson on the phone while I observed from Sarah's cubicle. Sarah was a ten year veteran of the Virtual University advising staff. She was also a 55-year-old White woman with two grown children and a husband who was a professor at another institution. Sarah had both a bachelor's and master's

degree in political science and came from a college educated family. As a result she shared she did not always understand the issues faced by those who did not have the kind of resource knowledge she had.

Sarah got her first job with the main campus as a secretary but eventually became a skilled transcript evaluator for nearly twenty years before becoming the first academic advisor with the Virtual University campus when it opened. By all accounts from students, supervisors, and Sarah herself, she was fabulous when it came to written communication and extremely knowledgeable about courses to take to complete degrees. But when oral communication was required, such as when a new student was on the phone seeking immediate advice on courses to take, Sarah did not always feel she was the best resource. She believed it was because she was shy and needed time to reflect before responding orally. Thus, Sarah indicated her biggest failing was that she did not ask enough questions about new students' backgrounds to provide the best advice on the spot, especially when times were busy, like the first week of classes. How she countered this dilemma was that she often followed up phone conversations with an e-mail that provided the student with all of the information she forgot to share over the phone.

Thus, DeAngelo was on the phone the second day of classes, having just been admitted. He was talking to Sarah about how quick he could earn the 50 hours he needed to get promoted. But he failed to tell her that he was military, that he had police training or that he had taken 40 hours at his past colleges, because he, like Sarah was not comfortable with oral communication. He also did not share this information on his admissions application, so no one at Virtual University knew of his past. Thus a series of costly mistakes and trust issues occurred.

DeAngelo indicated to Sarah that he had applied as a general studies major because it appeared to be the fastest degree to complete and he wanted to take as many courses as he could to earn 50 hours. She asked if he had any courses in mind to start with and he did not. Thus, Sarah recommended he take two general education courses required of all students. But, had Sarah known more about his background, she later indicated she might have directed him to the criminal justice major instead, which would have taken fewer hours to complete and would have been more fitting to his background. She also indicated after the phone call that she forgot to suggest he take the online orientation available on the website. These were developed by the advisors to answer new student questions and provide resources to help him succeed. In the end, he disconnected so he could go online to enroll and she shot him an e-mail with resource information she failed to share on the phone.

DeAngelo later shared in his blog that he thought he had enrolled correctly but when he went to log on to his classes he was barred from access but wasn't sure why. He shared he would have preferred to e-mail but thought he needed to talk to someone right away and so called back to Virtual University but could not get through. He tried two more times before finally getting through on Thursday evening that same week to find the number he had dialed was answered by another advisor who said he needed to make a payment to have access to courses. When DeAngelo referred to this interaction in his blog, he said that as a student taking courses on a military base, he never had to tell them he was military before – they assumed it and processed his payment so this process was new for him. He said he also learned from the advisor that since he was military, he would need to provide his military training records so advisors could better advise him on

courses to take. From this conversation, he realized he could not resolve his problems that night so he hung up feeling annoyed (according to his blog).

DeAngelo shared that the next day he called and got the ball rolling with tuition assistance and transcripts but again had trouble getting anyone on the phone at Virtual University, in part because it was the first week of classes and the lines were busy and in part because he was calling from Germany which was 6 hours ahead and according to DeAngelo, connections were not always reliable. On Saturday he finally got ahold of another advisor and learned that the last day of processing of enrollment for the term was the day before. She told him not to worry, that he could start the next session in 9 weeks and he would have more time to plan for it.

By the time enrollment began for the next term DeAngelo revealed on his blog that he had tried to find another online school to enroll in because he was angry about the delay but in the end his military paperwork was in place and he found it faster to enroll at Virtual University than go through the process again with another school. But although he had provided a transcript of his military training, it had not been evaluated yet so Sarah could not see it in his virtual file. He had also not provided transcripts from his three prior colleges and this past experience was still not discussed with Sarah.

According to Sarah's blog regarding this interaction, she recommended the same two classes and let DeAngelo know she sent him an e-mail after their last conversation with links to resources to help him and should he need anything more to please call or better yet... e-mail her. According to DeAngelo's blog on this interaction, although he was dissatisfied with the relationship he had with Sarah so far, he just did not have time to reflect on it further at the time.

Once enrolled in the classes, DeAngelo believed he was in the wrong classes because the courses seemed similar to something he had taken before. He called Sarah for advice and their interaction was recorded on her computer. The transcript of this interaction revealed Sarah finally learned DeAngelo had attended three prior colleges before Virtual University. She asked him to submit official transcripts but also requested he get her unofficial copies so she could see what he had taken. He faxed her copies while they continued talking on the phone. After reviewing his transcripts she realized he did have credit already for the two classes he was enrolled in. It was still the first week of classes so she told him to drop the two classes he was in and talked with him about courses that were not on his prior transcripts. She shared with him that it was late in the week and many classes were full so she suggested he take two higher level courses for the major or consider sitting out another term. DeAngelo told her he was not about to sit out for another term so he would enroll in the two courses suggested.

As the term progressed, DeAngelo indicated in his blog that he could not seem to fully catch up and at week 4, he finally read the e-mail Sarah provided him. He took the orientation modules and learned he should have done a few things differently. DeAngelo then called Sarah for advice on what to do to resolve his problems. In Sarah's blog of this interaction, she indicated she was upset that DeAngelo was having trouble but admitted she did not ask enough questions to really understand DeAngelo's needs during their previous conversations. Her immediate response though was that she scolded him for not letting her know sooner that he was in trouble and recommended he drop the classes, which according to Sarah really upset DeAngelo. In a member check discussion, DeAngelo revealed he was extremely upset from this interaction because he did not feel

his “goals were getting any closer with this online stuff.” Both DeAngelo and Sarah also confirmed in their individual member check sessions that the call ended in a heated discussion as both advisor and student felt the other was primarily to blame for what happened and neither were exactly sure how to fix it. Sarah felt DeAngelo should have known to share more information about his past college experiences, should have known that he had already taken the courses originally enrolled in and should have let her and the instructors know he was having trouble. She also felt she had provided him with more information in an e-mail but he should have accessed them sooner.

DeAngelo on the other hand thought Sarah should have asked him more questions and gotten to know him better before recommending classes. But he admitted he was not used to the fast pace of online courses, underestimated how hard it might be, and did not access the syllabus or resources suggested in a timely manner. It was only when he got his grades at week 4 that he realized how much he had missed from the first week of classes. For DeAngelo, he said he was “completely dissatisfied with online courses, and with my advisor...I felt like I could not trust Sarah to be in my corner so I should just admit it wasn’t working and withdraw from [Virtual University].” He also said he went online and tried to withdraw but could not get it to work either. He said he could not believe he had to call back to ask for help again. He said he thought of himself “as a smart person but just could not seem to get this online college stuff to work...maybe Sarah was right...maybe online just wasn’t for me.” Sarah also indicated that she was also unhappy with how things went and felt she had failed DeAngelo. She tried to call him back but kept getting a busy signal so she talked with the night advisors before she left and let them know what happened should he call back that night.

DeAngelo did call back that night and talked to another advisor, Floria Garcia. In his blog regarding this interaction, he said he felt she was different than Sarah. Floria sounded young (she was 35), sounded Hispanic (she was), and was much more talkative than Sarah as she shared with him she was pursuing her master's degree online. He also remembered her telling him she knew how isolating and confusing it could be online sometimes, a sentiment he said he felt as well.

According to Floria's blog about this interaction, she listened to DeAngelo's story and apologized for all the things that had gone wrong and how upset he had gotten as a result. She also told him that Sarah had given her a heads up on the situation and she knew what to do to help. She said she told him that as a first year student who was having trouble with his grades that his advisor had categorized him as an early warning student – one who was at risk for failure. Sarah had put a code in the system that made him have to speak with an advisor before he could post anything else to his courses and he would not be able to drop the classes without assistance from an advisor. Floria thought he was mad when he heard that Sarah had done this until she explained that the early warning system was in place to help students get back on track.

Floria and DeAngelo both reported they spent a lot of time listening and talking that night. She explained to him in more detail how online learning worked and how the advisor and advisee responsibilities were expected to work – that each had to take responsibility for what happened and work to fix it. She also reported she directed him to the course catalog and the advisor/advisee list-serve that Sarah hosted for her advisees. Floria told him this would give him access to other students at the college and archived conversations on topics of interest so he could be more knowledgeable about Virtual

University from more than just one source. She also asked DeAngelo to give her online permission to log into his classes with him so she could see what was going on. Floria indicated she could then look into each of his postings, assignments and the responses from his instructors. After reviewing his coursework, she told him that he was a good student but had been less careful about paying attention to feedback from the instructors on his past assignments and that was why he had gotten the low midterm grades.

Advisor and advisee both shared they talked about what to do in the future to communicate better with advisors and instructors and Floria e-mailed DeAngelo some links to resources that would help him with his assignments in the future. But she reiterated in her e-mail to DeAngelo that night that “time was of the essence, the longer he waited to access the resources, the less useful they would be to his success...and his children were depending on him to work through this.” At the close of their combination phone/e-mail conversation DeAngelo said he wished she could be his advisor. In his blog, DeAngelo said he liked Floria because he “trusted her...felt like she listened and understood his situation and shared the right information at the right time.” Floria said in her blog that she was equally pleased she could help and recognized that she kept DeAngelo from leaving the college, which had a great deal of personal and professional meaning for her as a fellow student, as an advisor and as a minority. She eventually agreed to be his new advisor and e-mailed Sarah to let her know as well. Sarah e-mailed her back to indicate that she was “happy and somewhat relieved as they just did not seem to mesh and she’d hate to see him withdraw because of his interactions with her.”

Four weeks later, Floria sent a congratulatory e-mail to DeAngelo for passing his first two classes. She also explained that his transcripts had been evaluated and he had 52

hours earned instead of 40 because of his military training. She indicated that she could see three different majors that he might qualify for that would take less time and asked him to call her or e-mail so they could discuss it further.

How activities and interactions in the admissions process impacted satisfaction, meaning making and retention for the advisors and advisees. Both DeAngelo and

Floria were satisfied with the relationship they had begun to forge with each other.

According to DeAngelo's blog, his first foray into online advising with Sarah had been "a disaster...but I can see it was both our faults." But he indicated the experience with

Floria had "great meaning for me in terms of my satisfaction, staying at the college and moving closer to achieving my goals." He said he would stay with the college as he had

"finally found someone I felt was on my side and understood my needs and goals --

Floria." Thus the relationship with his first advisor was observed to negatively impact

how he felt about the online college experience but the interactions with his second

advisor proved to be a positive impact on not only his satisfaction with advising but also

his determination to stay with the college because he felt a representative of the college

was finally listening to him and supporting his need for information, advice and support.

For Floria, in her blog she reported her satisfaction was the result of:

Feeling like a good professional who knew how to use my communication skills and past experiences to forge another successful relationship with a student who needed

some additional guidance... I could tell he was really going to be a good student who

would gain a lot from online learning in the long run and I had something to do with

that...maybe it was the result of my training or maybe it was because I was an online

student, or because I was a minority. Maybe it was all of the above...but who cares how we go here so long as we did...hoorah!

For Sarah it was different, in her blog she confided that she realized that her “relationship with DeAngelo got off on the wrong foot” but was “pleased that he found someone who was better able to meet his needs as I would have hated to see him leave the college.”

Thus the satisfaction felt by advisors Floria and Sarah appeared to be different. Floria appeared to be satisfied that her counseling and advising skills supported a student in distress and this had great meaning for her as a professional as well as personal meaning as both a minority and a fellow online student. On the other hand, Sarah appeared relieved that DeAngelo was assisted by another advisor but dissatisfied with her own efforts. Sarah’s assessment also seemed to be confirmation to her that her phone skills and poor relationship with DeAngelo were examples of a bigger issue in her role as an advisor as she later shared that this set of circumstances was “just another sign that it was time for me to consider retiring” as she felt she was “just not as accessible to and for the students” as she thought she should be. Thus, within a year, Sarah retired after thirty years with the college.

Similar to DeAngelo’s case, all but 1 of the other students in the study was admitted within days of the first day of class. This meant that like DeAngelo, most had not submitted prior transcripts for evaluation before they enrolled and their applications for admission had not been visible by advisors when they initially advised students on courses to take and resources available. As a result, four of the students provided

inaccurate information about their past courses, which led to them being advised to enroll in at least one course for which they had already earned credit and no discussion was documented regarding any dilemmas students might have reported on their applications. Thus this first interaction led advisors and advisees to report they were wary of trusting one another as a result. Students felt they did not get a chance to know their advisor or the advisor to know them. Nor did they feel they were listened to and as a result many reported receiving bad advice which resulted in costly mistakes of enrollment in terms of both time and money . And advisors sometimes could not understand why students did not know what classes they had already taken. But even so advisors felt responsible for these mistakes.

Milestone 2: Constructing a comprehensive education plan. Regardless of whether students were pursuing an associate's or bachelor's degree, all of the students in the study worked with their advisor to develop an educational plan.

Activities, interactions and relationship cultivation as a result of education planning. Students at Virtual University were required to select a major at admissions. As a result, when the evaluation of prior transcripts was completed, a degree audit was completed by the advisor based on the major chosen at admissions. The degree audit was a computerized sheet that listed the student's major, followed by the courses they still needed to complete in general education core areas as well as the major and elective courses to complete the credit hours as well as degree. A sample degree audit is contained in Appendix L.

Many students in the study complained about the difficulty in reading and understanding the degree audit, and this resulted in advisors developing some new

resources to help make this easier as the degree audit itself was the product of a software program that could not be altered. Advisors created an excel spreadsheet to accompany the degree audit that included the advisor's take on the courses that remained to be taken, any prerequisites to be completed prior to taking certain courses and the remaining hours needed to complete the degree. Advisors also developed a webinar/podcast that showed a student working through the entire process of developing an education plan from the degree audit and provided resources to view and download as well. Students could access the webinar/podcast at any time from the college website and advisors often included links to the webinar/podcast along with the directions on the education plan in their e-mails to students.

According to the advisors, the learning goals associated with developing an appropriate education plan were to help the student articulate and achieve their goals while a student at Virtual University. And this was generally based on an assessment of the activities, interests, values, life and career goals of the student as well as advisors' knowledge of college policies and career fields. Advisors indicated their role beyond providing the degree audit and resources for students was to serve as a mentor and provide feedback on completed education plans based on knowledge of the college environment, career fields, and the student.

When asked about developing an education plan, all 8 of the students indicated this was one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish and many felt the feedback that advisors gave them was sometimes hurtful. The advisors on the other hand said that honesty with students was critical in bringing them to a level of reality and ownership for course

selection and college plans that also took into consideration their personalities and background.

In reviewing the e-mail trails back and forth between students and their advisors regarding educational plans I could see both sides playing out as students and their advisors tried to understand each other's meanings in their discourse on the education plan. Many advisors eventually opted to contact students on the phone to resolve student anxiety and keep the miscommunication to a minimum when there were questions or disagreements. All four advisors also indicated they often needed to do research and resource searches prior to contacting students to ensure they could address individual questions such as how a criminal past, poor English language skills or disability issues might affect college plans and future career goals. Maria Rohas's case explores how this milestone was most commonly enacted with the students in the study.

Maria Rohas's education planning issues. Maria was a 33-year-old Hispanic woman who had earned a GED instead of a high school diploma as she dropped out at age 16 due to pregnancy and marriage to a troubled boyfriend who also did not have a high school diploma. Maria came from a poor background and her mother and grandmother both had left school early to have children.

Maria's mother came to the U.S. from El Salvador as a pregnant teenager so that Maria could have citizenship in America. But it was not an easy life according to Maria as her mother came with no money, no job skills and no English speaking ability. She did however have an uncle who lived in the U.S. He was a migrant worker who traveled throughout California harvesting different crops. This became Maria and her mother's life as well. But traveling with the seasons meant no consistent schooling for Maria as

she indicated she would start in one school, spend some months there and then move on to another school as seasons changed. Maria felt she was treated poorly in some of her schools because she was the child of a migrant worker. She felt that teachers and administrators never assumed she would amount to much and she met that expectation according to her.

Between age 16 and 18, Maria had two children and a criminal record for the felony theft of \$750. She said this was because she had taken credit for a crime her husband had actually committed. She did so to keep him from going to jail for life due to the three strikes rule in California where felons can serve life sentences after being convicted three times. As a first time offender, she did not serve jail time and only needed to pay the money back. After her conviction though she said she had nightmares and felt paranoid cops might come after her and tell her they made a mistake, that she would need to serve jail time. She became so distracted that soon after her conviction she indicated she was hurt in a farm accident that left her partially blind and with a limp. According to her social worker, this coupled with her lack of education and poor English skills kept her from many job opportunities and lowered her self-esteem as well.

Luckily, a number of social services were provided to help Maria pay for her medical expenses, earn her GED and get a new job. She became a custodian, making more money than she had as a migrant worker. She was able to pay back the stolen money, pay for her divorce, and keep her two children in one school location as a result. Her social worker also helped her enroll at a technical school with vocational rehabilitation funding for secretarial practice. But her grades were poor as her eyesight made it difficult to complete typing courses and she was eventually dismissed from the school. Next she

tried a community college and spent several semesters there, but she said the school was not completely handicapped accessible and she had trouble with some of the general education courses due to her poor English skills. She dropped out without asking for help.

Maria eventually decided to try an online college and was admitted to Virtual University where she “virtually” met her new advisor, Daniel Edwards. Daniel was 28-years-old, White, had no children and came from a well-educated family. He had a bachelor’s degree in business and at the time he became Maria’s advisor he had been working as an advisor for three years while pursuing his master’s in business online through Virtual University.

Daniel and Maria appeared to have nothing in common, and according to Maria that translated into some mistrust on her part. She was worried he might judge her and so had not shared her past criminal background, or her disability issues. She had managed to keep her language issues somewhat secret as well because she chose to e-mail rather than call Daniel. She did tell Daniel she wanted to earn an associate and bachelor’s degree in human services, which would prepare her for a career in social work. And she had asked Daniel for information on how many and which courses remained for her to take to complete these two degrees.

Daniel provided Maria with an e-mail that included her degree audit and an excel spread sheet on his take of what remained of her coursework. Daniel, along with other advisors had developed a template of e-mails that they sent to students for common requests and the e-mail template he sent Maria included a standard explanation that Maria should develop an education plan that included the following:

- Her reasoning for going into the field of social work
- Her past background that would relate to the field
- What other experiences she thought she would need to be a competitive candidate for a social work job
- What sequence or order she would be taking the courses that remained
- How she planned to pay for her education
- How she would manage her time as a worker and student
- And when she expected to graduate

All of these areas, according to Daniel, were so he could get a feel for how much she understood the realities of being a student and the things she would need to accomplish while being a student at Virtual University.

A week later, Maria provided a short e-mail statement to Daniel on her education plans that included the following:

I don't write English so good but here goes... I take social work to earn college degree. I finish classes in order listed on your list but I don't see so well. Can you send me larger print? When I was arrested I am assigned a social worker who helped me and my kids out a lot. I want to do same for others. I will pay for degree with financial aid. I finish when all classes are done. No one in the family thinks I will finish this like my past college tries so I am on my own.

When Daniel read her education plan he wrote in his blog that “a lot of red flags went up” in his mind. First he realized he did not know she had a visual issue, and a quick check revealed she was not registered with the Disability Coordinator for the college to receive additional assistance. “Did she not know what to do to register or was she not eligible for services?” Second, “what kind of criminal record did she have? And would it preclude her from graduate school and/or certain jobs in the social work field?”

Third, he did not know English was not her first language. He thought to himself “how could I have missed that in prior conversations?” A check of his prior discussions with her revealed she had only e-mailed him – never a phone call. He had assumed her curt style was like many other students – they wrote from their cell phones and dispensed with pleasantries writing short and cryptic e-mails at times. He also did not know she had kids and wondered, “was she even eligible for federal aid given her criminal record?” And finally, he realized from this e-mail that she “probably did not have any support from anybody in her personal life to help her succeed...” And the list went on and on.

Daniel knew he needed to do his homework on resources she might use and then make contact right away to get some answers as well as give some valuable resources and tips to Maria. But before he did so, Daniel said he looked up Maria’s current courses and contacted her professors “to see how she was doing in the classes as this would give me an indication of how much assistance she would need right away.” One of the professors indicated that Maria seemed to be connecting less and less on the discussion boards and he had also contacted her by phone to see if she was in difficulty, with no response.

As a three year veteran, Daniel felt he needed the advice of someone with more experience and knowledge of Hispanic women. He contacted Floria and asked how to best proceed. Floria (an advisor introduced in the first case) spoke fluent Spanish, so she offered to speak to Maria in her own language. Floria contacted Maria by e-mail in Spanish and Maria responded within a few hours by phone. A transcript of this conference call included the following information.

Maria told Floria and Daniel on speaker phone that she was having some difficulties with every aspect of college online but Maria felt “really nervous about sharing my

eyesight issues, my lack of English skills and my criminal record.” She said that in a recent class discussion she had learned that a felony record could keep a person from being a social worker. Maria was upset as she had not heard this before. She shared this information with family only to be told she was better off just quitting school rather than wasting her money. And this completely deflated her spirits about college. Floria reassured her that all of these issues might be solved if Maria would be willing to work with her and Daniel more closely and follow their guidance. First of all, Maria needed to contact the Disabilities Coordinator for the college and while they spoke, Daniel connected the Disabilities Coordinator to the conference call.

After much discussion it was decided Maria only needed to forward paperwork on her visual disability and the Disabilities Coordinator would make sure all her instructors were aware of her need for visual assistance and would adjust their course postings, assignments and testing accordingly. And Daniel indicated if she wanted to keep him as her advisor, he would increase the size of posts or call for advising in the future.

The Disabilities Coordinator also had her log onto her computer during the call and he walked her through step by step how to change the screen for visual impairments so she would not have to adjust course materials or e-mails unless she needed a specific item larger. He also directed her to links on the college website and guided her through the process while she downloaded a free software program enabling her computer to read her computer screen to her.

Maria was both surprised and pleased that the college administration would make such accommodations and said she would like to keep Daniel as an advisor because she needed to practice her English skills. Daniel also recommended that Maria take the

developmental English course next term instead of the regular English class to practice her skills as well. But he reminded her that it would increase her costs to add this course and it would not count towards her major but it might help her in the future. After much discussion about what that meant, Maria agreed to take the developmental English course.

When the two advisors got around to discussing the felony conviction with Maria, they learned that she was considered a minor when she was convicted. Daniel explained this would probably not prohibit her from the licensing process for social work but he also gave her the name of a lawyer who had worked with the college's campus in California in the past. He could be trusted to help verify her status and perhaps even help expunge her record. Daniel also provided her with contact information for the California state licensing office for social workers to double check her eligibility. But if, after these conversations, Maria felt she could not earn a living in social work, she could certainly change her major or consider withdrawing from the college. Daniel also reminded her that it was critical she make these contacts and find out within the next several months so that she was not wasting her money and time in a degree that would not result in a career she wanted. Maria asked how Daniel knew all of these resources and he indicated that it was unfortunately quite common for online students to have these kinds of issues and he had done his homework prior to contacting her.

When the conversation finally drew to a close, both Daniel and Maria posted on their blogs that felt they had made a much stronger connection with each other, and Maria shared that she now felt she had a strong advocate in her corner for the remainder of her college career, which made her happy to continue with the college. Daniel felt he had

helped Maria find the resources she needed. But he knew this was just the beginning of dilemmas Maria would face as she moved forward. He hoped she was strong enough to keep going to completion of her goals regardless of the hurdles. But the trust in the relationship was also enhanced by this conversation, so he knew he could better help her and that made him proud of his efforts.

For all 8 of the students in the study, the advising worksheet and the webinar/podcast “made the education plan process much easier to understand” especially when they were able to view the process in action and not just read how to accomplish it. One advisor extended the process even further by encouraging her students to make a video or blog about their education plan and send it to her for review. Not all students did so with the exception of the computer and information science majors who all did this additional task and later reported using their plans as a way to show prospective employers their creativity and technology skills.

The Registrar shared that over half of the students at Virtual University, like Maria, had prior criminal histories that might prohibit them from being eligible to even enroll in some F2F colleges or to pursue certain degree fields because of licensing or security requirements of the profession. The admissions application asked for this criminal background information, but according to college leadership, the information was not used to preclude their enrollment but rather to assist in advising.

The Registrar also provided statistics on those with disability issues who were enrolled. This data revealed that, like Maria, nearly 30 percent of the students enrolled online had disabilities recognized by the Americans with Disabilities Act. But when the Disabilities Coordinator and advisors were queried, only three online students had come

forward within the last year with requests for disabilities recognition or requests for assistance. And of the eight students who participated in this study, none had initially indicated to the college that they had a disability even though four of the eight shared with me that they had disabilities ranging from vision issues to head injuries and learning disabilities.

One student's response to this question of disabilities summed up their feelings on keeping this issue secret until it became necessary to share their dilemmas:

I was not going to tell anyone about my disability until it became an issue for me in getting my assignments done. What difference would it have made? ...Well now I know that I would have saved myself a lot of trouble if I had let them know right away...It wasn't until my advisor asked me directly that I 'fessed up. And that changed my relationship with my advisor for the better. Once I knew she would not use this information to hurt me, I found myself sharing more and more with her.

From this statement, it appeared that the student felt her advisor might not be supportive of her and might actually make matters worse for the student if she knew about the student's disability issue. But that turned out to be unfounded in this case.

The policy regarding disabilities disclosures according to the college leadership was that Virtual University wanted students to initiate this conversation as they felt the need and this was evidenced in the application for admission as the document included a section for students to disclose their disabilities information but also included the following option: "choose not to disclose". Additionally, the advisors in the study said they often did not ask any questions about disabilities unless or until the student began to fail academically or it was brought to the advisor's attention in some other way. But

students in the study all said that they wished their advisors would have asked early as it would have helped them get the help they needed sooner. Thus there appeared to be the need for further study on this subject as privacy and support for difficulties faced by students appeared to be at odds with one another at times.

The Registrar also provided statistics that showed during the time of the study 90 percent of Virtual University students indicated on their applications for admission that they could speak, read and write English fluently. But advisors indicated this was rarely true as they often talked with students who had difficulty communicating in English.

Amongst the students in the study, only 3 felt they could speak, read or write English fluently even though all 8 had indicated they could do so on their application for admission. When asked why they did not share their English dilemmas at admission, students indicated they thought they might not be admitted if they were really honest about their issues. But all felt when they spoke to their advisors, that the advisor quickly surmised their issues and made recommendations to take the developmental English class in their first or second term to practice their skills. All in the study had done as suggested and indicated the trust they felt for their advisor grew after this advice proved correct.

Satisfaction, retention and meaning making as a result of education planning.

One advisor indicated the education plan helped students in “becoming more self-aware, evaluating their experiences, and using critical thinking skills to not only clarify life and career goals but to also make realistic decisions about their college career.” Thus self-actualization might be realized as a result of education planning.

But education planning was not without hurdles to overcome. For many students in the study, reviewing their education plans and related documents in their files revealed

the education planning stage was when they chose to show their vulnerabilities and share with advisors more details about themselves. This often included their past academic issues as well as life histories that sometimes included disability issues, language difficulties, brushes with the law and a multitude of other stories that shaped their values as well as their education goals and options.

Advisors e-mail trails with students regarding education planning showed they used this process to help students understand college processes and policies and find resources but also had to sometimes help students face harsh realities about unrealistic college and career goals. There appeared to be a fine line between critiquing student education plans and hurting students' feelings in the process. Advisor Daniel articulated it in this way: "students...often came with unusual stories and circumstances that required a careful approach to keep them from losing faith in the advising relationship and their ability to complete the goals they sought."

Sometimes that line was crossed, resulting in miscommunications and trust issues between advisors and advisees that threatened everyone's satisfaction and sometimes even their retention to the college. Some, like Daniel and Maria, were able to talk through the process to come to terms with what was possible to achieve but others severed their relationships as advisees felt they might be better understood and supported by another advisor and some dropped out of college for a while, only to return and try again with the same advisor.

Eventually, all of the students but one completed their education plans to not only their satisfaction but also that of their advisor. One student who did complete the education plan, Alberto Barronson, said that it was "the most meaningful thing I've ever

done with another person...outside of my family” but not everyone felt that way. One student felt it was more like a class assignment. Another student, Willow Begay, did not find the experience useful until she became a senior. Only then did she realize that the undergraduate research she completed as part of her education plan would lead her to a new career and graduate school while keeping her close to her family, which she had not thought possible before.

For the advisors, having students complete an education plan meant they would no longer be in control of the advising relationship, that students would be more autonomous. That was viewed as a benefit as it not only “made the relationships with students more enjoyable” according to Floria, but also allowed advisors to spend more time with the students who needed more guidance and were not as autonomous.

And all of the students and advisors echoed common sentiments in the group member check at the end of the study that they felt a “sense of accomplishment” and satisfaction in achieving this critical goal.

Milestone 3: Evaluating the need for co-curricular experiences to enhance the degree. For students in the study, the development of the education plan led many to the realization they would need to acquire other experiences and skills not available in classes online. But when the study began, Virtual University did not allow credit for co-curricular activities. The reasoning, according to the Assistant Dean was that the program had simply not developed far enough to be able to provide experiences such as internships and student leadership opportunities in a virtual manner. Advisors and the college’s leadership also said they understood online students might not be able to afford or have time for these usually non-paid experiences either because of other obligations.

How Shenonda brought co-curricular experiences and relationships to Virtual University. Shenonda Talbot, felt so strongly about providing out-of-class experiences to online students that she took a leadership role in the college to address it and ended up helping many students besides herself. Shenonda was a 42-year-old African American student at the start of the study who worked as a full-time secretary at nearby Historically Black College (HBC). She was a first generation college student with a high school diploma. She was also a busy single mom with three teenagers. She used to attend HBC, but she said she left because she could not manage her time well between school, work and kids.

Shenonda came to Virtual University because of a TV ad proclaiming people with busy lives could attend online at their convenience. So she began a degree in business. She was surprised though that Virtual University did not have out of class experiences. She firmly believed in them because she worked in Campus Activities at HBC and had personally witnessed the ways in which these experiences enhanced students' lives.

Shenonda, her advisor, Aggie Bigelow and her boss at HBC's Campus Activities Office organized a program where Virtual University students could participate in HBC co-curricular experiences (with some modifications to address their geography dilemmas) and HBC students could take an online course at Virtual University for a reduced price.

Both college administrations reported in 2011 that this was a "win-win" experience with minimal effort on the part of either college as hundreds of students from both campuses participated and made it work, including all 8 students in the study. Observations of these experiences showed that students e-mailed, Skyped, web cammed, instant messaged and called back and forth with others during organizational meetings,

events and experiences to accomplish many out-of-class experiences that would provide them with work experiences, leadership opportunities, community service experience and academic credit for their efforts.

Interestingly enough, 7 students in this study initially indicated they had no time to do so but eventually participated in various ways through this program. One student, Laurie Johnson, went to London for study abroad while earning college credit at HBC and eventually transferred to HBC for good as she indicated she liked F2F course-work better (See more about her story in negative cases below).

Another student in the study, Carmen Delgado-Vega, completed a co-operative learning project that was expected to result in a number of student organizations being created at Virtual University with assistance from staff at HBC and Virtual University but that had not come to fruition by the end of the study (See her story in negative cases below). Two other students in the study completed an undergraduate research project with a faculty member in Sociology from HBC, serving as virtual research assistants. And the others were able to find student organizations at HBC to join and eventually became leaders within those student organizations.

The impact of co-curricular and leadership experiences on satisfaction, retention and meaning making for advisors and students. The Director of Campus Activities at HBC reported that incorporating the Virtual University students helped both HBC and Virtual University students grow and learn as she said:

The program brought greater diversity and more complex and creative ideas for student groups than we ever thought possible...because [Virtual University] students were older, and more experienced in life and they brought that experience and

exposure to the world with them...which was good for our more traditional student population to see and emulate...and good for the Virtual University students' empowerment.

From this statement, it seems that students from both campuses were gaining insight into working with students unlike themselves and as a result Virtual University students were able to become role models as well as colleagues with other students.

According to the 2012 annual report for the college, the results of these co-curricular experiences included the highest satisfaction and retention ratings Virtual University had ever received from students who participated in these new opportunities. And this was evidenced as well in the stories shared by students in the study of how surprised they were to be able to find the time to participate virtually and how satisfied they felt as a result of these experiences. For example, Shenonda Talbot, the student who began this program was promoted to a new job, Virtual University Coordinator/Liaison at HBC, which had much positive meaning for her with the success of the program, the increased pay and the new responsibilities. But this was also tempered with the reality that a busy new job would also mean adjusting her schedule again to ensure she found the time to finish her degree.

Another student, Willow Begay, described her experiences in this way in her blog: Meaning making...hell yes! I get it now...I see why my advisor wanted me to get these experiences...I might actually be a good graduate school candidate now as I've done undergraduate research...online...wow! I never thought that might be possible for me!

It is clear from this statement that Willow at least could better understand the need to supplement class experiences to help her be a competitive candidate for graduate school and jobs. Which is in fact what happened as was evidence in Willow's case which will be addressed later in Milestone 5.

The advisors in the study also found new ways to network with faculty and staff from HBC for their own professional and personal development which according to advisors at the member check group meeting said increased their satisfaction and meaning making as well. One advisor, Floria Garcia, described the meaning making in this way:

It's different for us now...we can really give students an opportunity to succeed... Now we're talking about how to bringing more like this to the campus...It's been so motivating and exciting to see how the leadership and the students have responded. It makes me so happy and proud to work here!

From this comment, it is evident that advisor Floria found new ways to enjoy her job while helping students gain more diverse experiences and that kept her satisfied, and led to her being more involved with the college. It also led her to deciding to stay with the college after she completed her graduate degree online, something which she had been unsure about at the beginning of the study.

Milestone 4: Surviving personal and academic difficulties. According to academic advisors, not all students admitted to the college were prepared to be successful. This was said to sometimes be the result of poor time management, lack of self-discipline or any of the other issues that students faced while going to college. Students in the study agreed with the advisors but also indicated that online students

needed to draw on their self-motivation and organizational skills so much more than they did in F2F settings to keep up with accelerated courses.

Virtual University's website indicated that standards for satisfactory progress and good academic standing were similar to other colleges that were regionally accredited and a copy of the college's standards is contained in Appendix M. One difference noted from other colleges was a lower grade point average for satisfactory progress than perhaps other colleges. For example, satisfactory academic progress was earning a 1.75 grade point average or better for less than 30 hours, a 1.90 grade point average for less than 45 hours and a 2.0 for more than 46 hours towards the undergraduate degree. A check of many graduate school admissions websites however indicated that a 3.25 GPA or higher was a more competitive standard to meet entrance requirements.

The college also offered an online e-scholarship, academic honor society, and Dean's List for students who achieved a 3.5 GPA or above as well as a list of those not meeting minimum grade requirements each term. The Assistant Dean for the campus indicated students were placed on probation for not achieving the minimum GPA for the term or if their cumulative GPA dipped below the standard for the amount of hours they had completed at the college. While on probation students were provided with additional resources from the Dean's office staff as well as their academic advisors, including taking the student success course at a reduced cost, to retake failed courses for higher grades or access to other resources to address their individual issues.

Suspension from the college for one year resulted from students' continued inability to raise their GPA over several terms. After the year's suspension was completed, students could apply to the Dean's office to return but had to work with the Dean's office

staff to develop a plan of action to become more successful the next year. Also according to Dean's office staff, dismissal from the college for three years typically resulted from continued failure after re-enrollment from suspension.

A check of the Dean's List included nearly 300 students from Virtual University made the 3.5 GPA or above (roughly 4 percent of the December 2012 student population). A check of the probation, suspension, dismissal list provided by the Dean's office indicated that in December 2012, around 11 percent, or over 880 students were either on probation, suspension or dismissal from the campus for lack of satisfactory academic progress.

Sixty-four percent of students on the Dean's List in December 2012 were women, and 71 percent of the students facing probation, suspension and dismissal were also female which was similar to the gender ratios for the campus. However, when the lists were evaluated based on race or ethnicity, although African American students only represented 24 percent of the student population in December 2012, they represented 55 percent of the students on the probation, suspension and dismissal list for the same time frame. Additionally, the Dean's office shared that during the two years of the study (2010-2012), African American students, on average represented only 7 percent of the Dean's List students compared to 38 percent to 55 percent of the students on the probation, suspension or dismissal lists.

Hispanic students, the second largest minority population at Virtual University with an average enrollment of 19 percent were also found to represent only 5 percent of the Dean's List students compared to as many as 30 percent of the students on the probation, suspension or dismissal lists for between 2010 and 2012. And the third largest minority

group, Native Americans (4.3 percent) represented less than 1 percent of the Dean's List students and almost 10 percent of the probation, suspension and dismissal lists for the same two years.

Advisors worried that in addition to academic prowess issues, this higher rate of minority students on the probation list compared to the Dean's List might be the result of a lack of role models or appropriate supports at Virtual University for them. A check of the diversity of the campus indicated no advisors, faculty or staff at Virtual University were African American, four faculty and one advisor was Hispanic, and only two advisors were Native American out of a faculty and staff of over 800 (as confirmed by the Human Resources Department staff).

When majors were explored between the Dean's List students and those on the probation, suspension and dismissal lists for 2010 to 2012, no students majoring in the General Studies were on the Dean's List. On the other hand, 25 percent of the students on the probation, suspension and dismissal lists for the same years were enrolled in the General Studies program. No other degree program had as many students on the probation, suspension, dismissal list and all other degree programs were represented on the Dean's list for the same two years of the study. And this was also found to be the third most popular degree at Virtual University with an average of 20 percent of the student population enrolled in this degree between 2010 and 2012. According to the Registrar, the only other distinguishing feature of this degree was that active duty military represented nearly 70 percent of the students who chose General Studies as a major. And most of these students sought the hours for degree for career advancement but were like DeAngelo, not necessarily looking to complete the actual degree or concerned about their

actual grades in the courses. DeAngelo shared with me that active duty military would be competitive candidates for officers' training school so long as they achieved a "C" or higher in the 90 hours of courses.

The General Studies degree, according to advisor Sarah Thompson, is not really considered either a degree in science or liberal arts, instead it's like an interdisciplinary studies degree and sometimes serves as a way for students who have many prior college hours to earn a more generalized degree.

Another advisor, Floria Garcia, indicated the General Studies degree integrated coursework from across the curriculum. It is intended for the student who desires a liberal arts and science degree...but for whom there is not an appropriate major....But it attracts mostly active duty military because they are not always seeking a degree... but college policy requires them to choose a major at admissions so they choose the one that will allow them to have more freedom on their course choices.

Thus, the General Studies degree, which was more of an interdisciplinary studies major that was most selected by active duty military did not seem to be yielding academic success either.

Additionally, during the study, a large number of students withdrew each term with an average withdrawal rate per term being reported by the Registrar of between 51 and 67 percent of first year students dropping out, followed by approximately 10-30 percent of those in their second and succeeding years of online college coursework; but no breakdown by minority status or other identifiers could be obtained. But the Registrar

did indicate that no student on the Dean's List between 2010 and 2012 had withdrawn from the college.

Activities, interactions and relationships that impact those in personal or academic difficulties. As discussed, students came to Virtual University with varying academic and personal issues that impacted their academic progress. As first year students were the most at risk for failure (as confirmed by the Registrar's Office), the advisors indicated they developed a number of activities and resources to aid them. But according to advisors, the college definition of first year student was anyone who had not been to Virtual University before or those who had been gone from the college more than two terms thus these resources were recommended no matter what year students were in college.

Advisors and students also reported that not everyone accessed available resources in a timely manner or understood how to utilize them without further guidance from the advisors. Students in the study indicated they tended not to access resources unless or until they had a problem they could not solve on their own. A common set of personal and academic problems faced by the students was evidenced by the case of Alberto Barronson.

Alberto's problems. Alberto Barronson was 33-years-old. He was African American on his father's side and Black Brazilian on his mother's side. He was born in Brazil and moved to America in middle school but kept an accent as his parents spoke mostly Portuguese at home and he spoke English at school. Like Maria Rohas (a previous case), he reported he had trouble with the English language and the treatment he received because of his dark skin. Like so many others in the study, he left school at 16

and only earned a GED at his mother's insistence. He, his wife, and his four children aged 4, 10, 14 and 18 lived in a tenement style apartment building in St. Louis, Missouri. He and his wife (an African American) both worked in retail while he pursued the degree online.

Alberto said he had trouble being successful in college in the past because he spoke English with a thick accent that made it difficult to understand him sometimes. He shared he was also shy and needed time to think before he spoke as he translated things into Portuguese to understand and back into English to respond. As a result, he believed people thought he was not intelligent.

After his first three college experiences ended with him being suspended for poor grades, he decided to try an online college because he felt it was cheaper, and did not require him to use his voice or to be seen online. Alberto was assigned to Agatha Bigelow as an advisee. Agatha, or Aggie as she liked to be called, was a nine year veteran academic advisor. She was a White and Native American, 54- year-old with one 18-year-old son attending Virtual University and 7 other children -- all graduates from Virtual University. Aggie was not a first generation college student as her dad completed a tribal college degree. Aggie was not raised on the reservation, but spoke the language of her tribe and that was the primary language spoken at home. She often commented to students that she "understood the pull between two cultures."

Aggie shared that she was different from her peers in K-12 as she had dark skin and dark hair, lived in a very poor part of town and sometimes her English was as she said "pitiful." She also did not see her heritage described in favorable terms so she "often felt like an outsider." But she was deeply interested in nature and science so she fit in with

what she called “the science geeks” who helped her find her way and graduate from high school. Eventually she earned a bachelor’s degree in biology while working full-time and earning a partial American Indian scholarship. Her intention was to go on and get more education so she could work in a laboratory. But she “fell in love with a farmer, married, and began having children instead.”

When Aggie’s kids began to get older she realized they “had a successful farm but no money in which to pay for college,” so she took a job at a nearby college with the sole aim of having her children’s education paid for by someone else. She began as a secretary and was eventually promoted to advisor at Virtual University with the proviso she would need to complete a graduate degree in order to stay in the position. Thus, she began taking courses online with Virtual University while working the evening shift (11 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays). While she said she was not fast and efficient like some advisors, Aggie was described by her students and others at the college as extremely personable, talkative and helpful with student issues. Because she was an online student herself she indicated she “had much insight for students on how to survive online coursework and still be a good worker and parent.”

I was observing Aggie in her cubicle when she received an e-mail that was an early warning reminder of students in academic trouble that she advised. Aggie indicated that the early warning could be enacted by either an advisor or faculty member concerned about their students. The warning was about Alberto Barronson. She looked at his file and realized she had only talked with him once before, and she commented he had a lovely accent. She wrote an e-mail to him indicating she knew he might be in need of personal or academic assistance and to please contact her at his earliest convenience via

e-mail or phone. And at the bottom of her signature she posted a number of resources for Alberto to access at the college in case he might want to read those as well. He e-mailed her back within several hours with the following:

Hi, it's me Alberto. Yes, I am in trouble. English is not my first language (Portuguese is). I have [family] counting on me to support them and I am...about to be laid off...I've been to three prior colleges with nothing to show but a lot of debt and I am afraid [Virtual University] will be another one. I'm also failing both of my classes but I'm not sure why...If I stay....What should I do?

Aggie wrote back to him within 30 minutes with the following:

Hi Alberto, let's try to address your issues one at a time. Poor: I see that you applied for financial aid but never accepted the Pell grant and student loans offered. Do you understand the difference between loans and grants? Here is a link to the college financial aid webinar/podcast on paying for school... [but] if you are afraid of the debt you will have from accepting the loans, that's understandable but not taking the grant – that's money you do not have to pay back so consider taking it...Debt from prior colleges: perhaps you can make an arrangement with the prior colleges to avoid paying until you complete your education? Or perhaps you can negotiate a payment plan with them? Our financial services advisor for students can probably help you with this matter – here is a link to his web page and e-mail address. Lay-off status: Is the company providing any services or funding for training? Or are they helping you find another job? Contact their human resources office to be sure. You might also ask them if you are eligible for unemployment payments that may help you pay your bills until you get another job. You could also contact the state

unemployment office, I see you are in Missouri – here is a link to their contact information. They can also provide you with other ideas to help you get services while you look for a job and can help with job hunts. Class issues. Your instructors have contacted me already and let me know that you are losing valuable points by not posting to the discussion board each week. You lose 2 points every time you don't post. Think of the discussion board as the classroom and your posts are the attendance/participation. Is there a reason you are not posting? Also, you have posted two assignments after midnight central time on the nights they are due. If you look back at the syllabus, the instructors have indicated they will automatically lower your grades if you post after the midnight deadline. Is there a reason you are posting the assignments late? I also notice English is not your first language – as a member of the Sac and Fox Indian tribe... I know how hard it can be to switch between English and another language. Is this causing you some distress as well? Please e-mail or call me back so we can talk... or you have further questions.

Aggie also recommended Alberto take the orientation modules. She indicated the orientation modules included self-testing to assess their understanding of module information. Aggie asked Alberto to e-mail his scores upon completion so she could see what he understood.

Aggie also reminded Alberto that syllabi for each course offered during the next year were on the course enrollment page. Thus students could access a syllabus prior to enrollment to see the learning objective and gauge the level of work with class assignments. She directed Alberto to study those to determine what two courses to take together for upcoming terms given his knowledge of other obligations he had. As

Alberto became more proficient at utilizing this tool, she shared he should be able to better organize his time and develop a long term education plan to keep his stress to a minimum as well.

A third resource Aggie provided Alberto was to access the advising list serve that he was already enrolled in when he was admitted. She reminded Alberto that he could post questions and requests for assistance from other students if he felt more comfortable asking them for help instead of Aggie. She told him that many students used the “coffee shop” section in particular to share ways to manage one’s time, course assignments, study habits along with family and work obligations and this might be helpful to him.

A fourth recommendation Aggie made was for Alberto to consider taking the 3-credit hour student success course the next term, a course created and taught by advisors. And finally Aggie linked a series of webinars/podcasts posted on the advisor home page for current students’ access only. She explained that these were created by the advisors to help students accomplish certain tasks (like creating an education plan, choosing courses or accessing co-curricular activities through HBC). The advisor page was also linked to other free resources he might find useful (like how to calculate one’s GPA and potential GPA).

Aggie closed her e-mail with a reminder that this was a lot of information to take in all at once and that Alberto was always welcome to talk with her about any of these resources or other issues as she would be happy to help. She quickly got an instant message from Alberto that he would like to talk but his English was not so great so could they instant message instead. She wrote back to say yes, but also took the time to remind him that she was an online student who struggled sometimes with English and was a

parent of 8 children (who all had gone to Virtual University as well) and she sometimes felt overwhelmed with all that she had to accomplish. If he wanted to read more about how she dealt with these issues, she provided a link to her blog on the advisor home page or he could call or e-mail and they could talk about it all in their “broken English.”

Aggie offered to call him at a time that was convenient for him. But Alberto called the toll free number to reach her instead. She could tell by his voice that he was about to cry. In a soothing voice, Aggie told him she understood how hard this was for him – but she would do her best to help. They talked for three hours more about his issues and brainstormed some solutions for how to best help him succeed. Two terms later, Alberto was still a student at Virtual University and was now offering his advice to help others on Aggie’s advising list-serve as he had made the Dean’s list two terms in a row and felt he “could now be of help to someone else.”

The impact of personal and academic success resources, activities and interactions on the satisfaction, retention and meaning making for students and their advisors.

All but one of the students in the study felt connecting with an advisor made a difference in whether they would continue or become a drop-out of the college. They often cited resources that advisors provided as well, including the “coffee shop” talks between students on advisor list-serves and the advisor blog that shared advisor stories about their own struggles as students.

Alberto echoed the sentiments of most of the students in the study when he talked about his struggles with personal and academic issues and how his advisor helped him:

I am ashamed to say how close I was to leaving school and perhaps doing something bad to myself...Aggie... reached out to me and... helped me see it wasn't

hopeless...I could do this...Now I try to help others because I know how it feels to hit bottom and not know where to turn. Virtual University and the advisors mean the world to me, my family....my success.

Thus, for Alberto, his interactions with Aggie had much positive impact and meaning on his personal and academic success. Advisors shared that the idea behind the blog, list-serves and coffee shop postings were to help students connect with others at the college who might serve as resources and to share stories that helped them see they were not alone. They also used the list-serves to provide timely reminders of upcoming calendar events or webinars that would aid in their students' academic and personal skill improvement.

One advisor put it this way:

I know I'm seen as an authority figure to a lot of students...to the detriment of them coming to me for help as they don't want to admit to me that they are having problems. That's why I try to make sure they have other options for talking with others or accessing resources on their own time.

Another advisor had this to say:

All of these stories and resources are my way of closing the distance between the students and myself. I find the more I share about myself and encourage the students to do the same, the closer they seem to feel to me and the college so they invest just a little more into their studies because they see how important it is to the college community that they succeed.

Thus advisors recognized their role but also understood how their title and role might also keep students from seeking them out, hence the need to provide other alternative

resources and networking options like the advising list-serves. Advisors also indicated their satisfaction was often the result of seeing students get back on track and off probation and knowing they had something to do with that success.

Milestone 5: Assessing what's come before and determining what's next. A final milestone online students' moved through was their assessments of their learning to date. This was not just a look back at what they had accomplished so far but also a look ahead while determining what was next with regards to graduate school or work.

Activities, interactions and relationship changes. The process of assessing what came before and preparing for what was next often began as the result of what the advisors called the 90 hour degree audit. When students had earned 90 hours towards their degree, they completed a form declaring they were near graduation. This signaled that the student needed different types of assistance to be successful, but this did not always translate into a smooth transition for the student. Willow's case was a common one amongst students at Virtual University.

Willow Begay and the cultural dilemmas of earning a college degree. Willow was a 34-year-old Native American who lived on a reservation between Arizona and New Mexico. She was a first generation college student, a single parent to three children aged 9, 14 and 17 and a full time worker at a reservation radio station serving as both DJ and technician. While at Virtual University she pursued a double major of psychology and sociology. But she wasn't sure what she wanted to do with the degree at completion so she left her options open on her initial education plan.

Willow left high school at age 17 to have a baby and get married but that ended in divorce by age 25. Willow had also attended four other colleges before Virtual

University. She began at a tribal college. She said it was a good experience but as a residential college she had to leave her children in the care of relatives. But she missed them terribly so she withdrew after completing the first semester. Willow then transferred closer to home to a satellite location, and that worked for a while; but she said she spent more time on the road shuttling back and forth than in class, studying or spending time with her children. So she left the college altogether after another semester. Next she decided to try an online college with access from home, but the cost was too high and after two classes, she quit. Eventually Willow found Virtual University, a college that met her needs as she said it had a good psychology/sociology program, and would not cost too much while still allowing her to study from home.

From the very beginning, Willow had no illusions about how her tribe and family might react to her being a college graduate. She talked extensively about the fact that all had mixed emotions about her earning the degree because although it meant economic prosperity, it might also mean her departure from the reservation for a job. Willow indicated this was because employment on or near the reservation that required a college degree was practically non-existent. But she chose to pursue the degree anyway because she thought it was important for her family economically, and she wanted to “be a good role model to her kids about applying oneself to an education and potential career.”

When she thought she had earned 90 hours, Willow submitted her form for graduation. But she said she was surprised when she got the degree audit back. It looked like she had earned three hours less than expected and the Evaluations department staff indicated she had a missing transcript. She immediately sent an e-mail back to Aggie requesting assistance. She had taken a CLEP (College Level Examination Program) test

for English before she came to Virtual University and thought she had provided official test results to the college but those hours seemed to be missing. And she asked what transcript was missing?

Aggie e-mailed the evaluator and found that Willow's admissions application indicated she had taken a course at a now defunct tech school to earn her DJ and radio tech license. Aggie e-mailed Willow and instructed her on how to contact the state higher education department in New Mexico for a letter indicating the tech school was closed so a transcript was not available. She also let Willow know that the college had not received an official copy of her CLEP transcript and would need her to request another. Willow said she sent a new request for the CLEP test results right away, which gave her the 90 hours she expected. But she e-mailed Aggie back explaining that when she contacted the state the tech school was not closed but had been purchased by another group. They told her they could not find a transcript for her and would not provide a letter to that effect on her behalf. Aggie in turn tried to contact the school and got the same response, and finally the evaluator called the school and provided a follow-up letter about why the information was needed. After 6 months of back and forth e-mails and letters with the tech school, a letter finally came confirming a transcript could not be provided due to the change in ownership and loss of some records thus closing the case for the missing transcript according to Evaluations staff. But, given the college policy about not allowing students to remain active if they had an outstanding transcript, it was not clear how this transcript issue had been left unresolved for the past four years while Willow attended Virtual University.

The Director of Evaluations shared that online students were 3 times more likely than other students in the system to have transcripts from other colleges that needed to be evaluated. This was in contrast to the only 1 outstanding transcript on average needing to be evaluated from all of the other campuses in the system. She also indicated that nearly 30 percent of online students in any given year requested a re-evaluation of their 90 hour degree audit because they disputed the credits determined on the 90 hour degree audit. Thus between a large amount of transcripts to be evaluated and disputes of credit evaluations, the graduation process for some online students, like Willow, was a slow process.

Willow also received an e-mail from the Registrar's office indicating she had been randomly selected to take the Master Field Test for her major. She e-mailed Aggie about what the test was and why she had to do it. Aggie e-mailed back that the test was optional but would not only provide Willow with an exam grade that showed her knowledge of the sociological field but also provided the college with much needed information on how well their instruction had been. Willow took the test and received an e-mail from the test administrators that she had received the highest score possible on the exam. Aggie followed up with an e-mail congratulating her and asking why she still wasn't considering graduate school – a conversation that Willow shared they had started numerous times in the past.

Willow shared the following e-mail with Aggie

I don't think I can do grad school. I don't have a job yet and so I couldn't afford it but even if I could – you don't know what it's like out here...your tribe may encourage education but mine sees it as a betrayal as I need to leave the rez

[ervation] to get a job and they worry I will take my kids and go and never come back. If I could find somewhere around here to work I would but what can I do?

Aggie responded via e-mail:

As one Injun to another, you should be able to apply for graduate funding through the following links at the American Indian College Fund [a nonprofit source of funding for Native American college funding]. You should also consider going to an online college for graduate school so you can stay on the rez. And you might want to consider contacting the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs, a government office] to see if they have jobs for a social worker or in criminal justice as you would have Indian preference for jobs on the rez.

Two weeks later, Willow e-mailed Aggie with news:

I got a job on the rez! It's a social work job and they will pay for me to get my master's online in social work, sociology or psychology. So now I can stay here. Thank you, for making me take the Major Field Test because my score is what supposedly made me the best candidate. Also, I can't thank you enough for the recommendation!!!! Now can you tell me where the nearest place is I can walk through graduation? The fam/tribe all want to see me graduate now. Love ya...Willow.

The Assistant Dean indicated the Registrar randomly selected graduating seniors from all campuses in the system to take the Major Field Test. He shared that "online students tended to score slightly higher on the exam than all other campuses and this has been attributed not only to their intellectual abilities but also to the quality of teaching and academic advising they have received." He also said that the testing helped assure

others in the college system that Virtual University was providing good academic training for their students online.

ETS administrators who created and graded the exam confirmed via e-mail that between 2010 and 2012 Virtual University students “consistently scored higher than any other campus within the college system and often led as well when compared to similar institutions nationwide.” But Willow was the only student in the study who took the exam so no comparisons amongst the students could be made.

Additionally, a review of career advising between 2010 and 2011 indicated that Virtual University students initially did not have access to career services advisors. Instead they had access to a series of resume building links from the college’s website and advising assistance from their academic advisors who often said they “squeezed career advising into their already busy advising roles.” But it was not clear how well these resources worked in assisting graduating students to find jobs or apply for graduate school.

Discussion with the Director of Career Services for the system indicated that until late 2011, online students were not eligible to use the college system career services office compared to students at all other campus locations. This was said to be the result of the college not having the resources to aid students online who were so geographically spread out. Academic advisors and students in the study felt this was a disadvantage for online students compared to all other students in the system.

In late 2011, career services staff were hired to work exclusively with online students. This included offering real-time webinars on interviewing, resume writing, job hunting, and graduate school application preparation. The college also began to offer

virtual job fairs and provided assistance remotely to help students across the globe find jobs after degree completion.

No statistics were kept on placement assistance provided to online students prior to the new career services staff being hired. But after online career advisors were hired, the Director of Career Services indicated 65 percent of the students online were assisted in finding jobs within 6 months of graduation and another 11 percent were assisted in successfully gaining entry into graduate schools.

Satisfaction, retention and meaning making for graduates, advisors and those who have been involved in the assessment of online student learning. Near the completion of the study, advisors and students were gathered in person or via Skype as a group to complete a group discussion on the findings and do one final round of member checks on the meanings of the data collected. This included discussion of this milestone and its impact on them.

All of the students indicated how instrumental they felt advisors were in their personal and academic success. Students indicated they hated doing education plans and sometimes hated their advisors during the process but now understood its significance as it related to degree completion and why advisors were so insistent that students dig deeper into their values and goals. Most of the students also credited their academic advisors rather than career advisors with helping them find jobs or get into graduate school.

For advisors, this final milestone with students was bittersweet as they were happy for students to complete their goals but also sad to see students go as these had often been

lengthy relationships of 7 or more years with students in the study. One advisor summed up their feelings in the following manner:

I am happy to see them graduate and go on to bigger and better things but I am also sad to see the end of an era...some of these students have been my advisees for nearly nine years and it's hard to say goodbye.

A check with the Evaluations staff who organized commencement ceremonies for the system indicated that most online students (approximately 80 percent) chose not to participate in live ceremonies, but instead participated in the virtual graduation ceremony where they accessed a link to online graduation. This virtual ceremony included podcasts from the president of the college system and the guest speaker. Virtual University students also saw their names posted to the graduation rolls and invited friends and family to write in the guest book on their behalf.

During the group member check at the end of the study, most of the students said they chose not to partake of the live ceremonies because earning a college degree did not always mean a happy occasion for their family and friends. For some it was because the student had not found a job or been accepted by a graduate school yet and for others it was similar to advisors' emotions as it was a bittersweet moment of happiness in completing a desired goal but one that might also mean moving away from family and friends.

Within the student participant group, 7 completed a degree during the study, but only 3 had a job when they graduated and only 2 went on to graduate school. And within the advisor group, one of the four advisors retired and the other three remained at Virtual University at the end of the study.

The Director of Evaluations shared that online students were 3 times more likely than other students in the system to have transcripts from other colleges that needed to be evaluated. This was in contrast to the only 1 outstanding transcript on average needing to be evaluated from all of the other campuses in the system. She also indicated that nearly 30 percent of online students in any given year requested a re-evaluation of their 90 hour degree audit because they disputed the credits determined on the 90 hour degree audit. Thus between a large amount of transcripts to be evaluated and disputes of credit evaluations, the graduation process for some online students, like Willow, was a slow process.

Interview Results

During the study, advisors and advisees were asked to participate in a series of semi-structured interviews regarding their perceptions of distance advising (see interview protocols in Appendix F1 through F1 and F4) that were introduced in Chapter Two. The results below are grouped by subject matter from the findings.

Similarities and differences between F2F and distance advising. Everyone in the study had attended F2F colleges in the past and saw both similarities and differences between F2F and distance advising. Table 3 (located in Appendix F5) has a completed summary of the similarities and differences between the two types of advising.

Similarities between F2F advising and distance advising as reported by students and advisors in the study included the need to build a relationship between the student and their advisor that was based on trust, communication and ethical behavior as well. Also, both forms of advising used both oral and written communication as advisors in both settings spoke on the phone and e-mailed back and forth to one another.

From their experiences, advisors and advisees indicated technology was employed in both settings such as computers, e-mail and list-serve software as well as degree audit software to determine course completion for students. All reported information overload at times too, as there was much information shared in either college setting that students and advisors needed to read, comprehend and perhaps act upon. They further indicated that trust and personal sharing was enacted in both settings as it was predicated on the relationship between advisors-advisees rather than on the type or form of communication they used to enact the relationship or achieve advising.

Differences between F2F and distance advising were reported by advisors and advisees to include admission standards as their past F2F often had more stringent admissions requirements than Virtual University. Also everyone remarked in interviews that there appeared to be more non-traditional students at Virtual University than they had observed in F2F college settings. Orientation and workshops to further their skill sets were also accessed and attended differently as online students did not attend F2F orientation or workshops and these presentations of materials were available at all times on the website so students could return to the information time and again. And this was reported to be extremely beneficial to students as they admitted being slow to access and comprehend some of the information so it was helpful to be able to refer to it time and again.

Other differences between F2F advising and distance advising included the pace of the college coursework. All of the students and advisors had attended at least one college in their past that was based on a 16-week semester compared to the 8-week terms provided at Virtual University. This fast pace was sometimes seen as a benefit and

sometimes seen as a hindrance to students and advisors. For students, they liked only being able to take one or two classes at a time so they could concentrate on the course-work without too much distraction from other courses. But the fast pace of the courses also led to many reporting difficulties with keeping up at times as one student echoed a common sentiment “there never seemed to be a lull in the action and I had to stay focused all the time.” Even so, students reported they liked being able to enroll in the five terms offered per year, and most said they did not feel they were moving any slower towards graduation as they still managed to complete up to 30 hours per year.

Advisors reported some mixed emotions about the accelerated nature of the college terms at Virtual University. For advisors this meant they were advising a new crop of students at least five times per year. Some advisors reported liking the fast pace and the chance to interact with new students so often, but others felt the pace was sometimes too fast. For example Aggie said the pace “could be so hectic at times that she worried she was not providing as high quality interactions with her current advisees because of the more immediate needs of new students each term.”

Interviews also revealed that students and advisors felt communication without F2F interactions had both positive and negative aspects to it. Both groups cited the benefits of being able to have e-mail discussions no matter what time of day or night. And some students reported being surprised that they received responses back within a day, two at the most as well. Also many in both groups felt e-mail discussions helped them become better communicators because they found they had to be clear and concise with one another. Even so, students sometimes wanted more immediate answers and could not always get ahold of their own advisor and this was a source of frustration. They mostly

indicated not minding talking to other advisors, but did not want to have to do as DeAngelo described it “break in a new advisor” on what had transpired in the past because not everything advisors and advisees discussed was contained in their virtual files for various reasons.

For those students whose advisors had list-serves for their advisees, this additional source of communication was often reported as “equally good”, and sometimes “better sources of information” as students felt advisors did not always understand things from “the student view” even if they were graduate students at the college.

For advisors, communicating primarily by e-mail and phone was sometimes “overwhelming” because of the amount of e-mails they received as some reported several hundred e-mails per day and the “overwhelming crush of phone calls the final three days of enrollment” each term. Advisors felt they were assigned too many students to be able to provide the kind of service and advice they wanted to at times and advisors, like the students reported seeking support from within their own ranks at times just to “talk through issues and get another perspective.” Advisors also reported sharing the workload with one another eased the pressure of too many student requests and this team approach appeared to strengthen the relationships between advisors.

Advising is... In one set of the interview questions (contained in Appendices F2 and F3), students and advisors were asked to complete true-false statements about what they thought advising included and there were many questions for which everyone agreed were true statements. For example, all of the students and advisors indicated that advising was more of a process than a paper checklist, that it was impacted by their thinking, their group affiliations, and their career, physical and moral areas of their lives.

They also confirmed as a group that they felt collaborations with each other were helpful in providing direction for planning academic, career and personal growth (as espoused in the advising philosophy and advising outcomes documents located in Appendices J and K). More on the answers to true-false questions that had a difference in opinions between advisors and advisees are below.

Student success? Student interviews during the study indicated that success to them was more likely to be defined as a task or goal such as earning a high grade or getting closer to completing their degree and getting a new job. For advisors though, student success was more often measured by advisors in the form of personal growth they witnessed from students as they solved a difficult personal problem or returned to the college after dropping out.

Reports from students and advisors of who might aid in advising or helping support students' success was also noticeably different in their responses. Advisors said student success at the college included advisors, faculty, other students as well as family and friends outside the college. But students in the study did not include family and friends outside of the college as being involved in their success. Students shared that this was because they were often the first in their family or circle of friends to go to college and did not always feel supported or that advice or assistance would be helpful regarding their college going experiences.

Students also reported differences of opinion on whether faculty worked with advisors for the benefit of students' success. If students had not witnessed or been a party to faculty-advisor interactions they were more likely to say this statement was false, that faculty were not working with advisors for the benefit of students. Advisors also

reported that having ill-defined goals impeded student success but students reported they knew what their goals were, they just did not always understand how to enact it in college or how to describe it to their advisors.

Advisors who were interviewed also indicated they were both aware of and understood the characteristics of specific groups of students they advised, and how these characteristics influenced the potential success of the student being advised. But, students did not agree as they indicated that advisors did not always act as if they understood how having a criminal background, having a disability, having language barriers, being active duty military, being poor, being a different gender, being of a different race or being of a different ethnicity influenced students' perceptions about themselves and their potential for success.

When asked in the interviews if skills could be learned to be a better student and to aid them in persisting/being successful at the college, both advisors and students agreed this was a true statement. But whether advisors could teach these skills was less certain, even though they all taught a class entitled "Student Success" during the time of the study. Students reported feeling advisors could teach these skills but advisors sometimes reported they felt ill-prepared to teach certain skills and some advisors shared they lacked confidence in their abilities to teach online without further training.

Students and advisors were also asked if students were accustomed to being successful. Both advisors and students in the study indicated that students were not used to being successful. Thus, when student successes occurred, such as by achieving a high score, completing a particularly tough course or earning a scholarship, advisors reported that students sometimes failed to give credit to themselves and their accomplishments or

were perceived to sabotage their own efforts as it became more apparent they would be successful in college. And most of the students agreed with this assessment. Some reported it was because the more success they achieved in school, the further they felt themselves moving away from their families, their communities or their past lives. Several in fact reported it was a “scary” experience for them to be successful and they dropped out for a time as a result. One student in particular shared that she returned to the college two terms later because she eventually realized that she liked the feeling of success and wanted to role model it for her children to emulate. And all of the students in the study did return to the college eventually and most successfully completed college degrees.

Consumerism and profit concerns. Some members of the leadership team at Virtual University, including one of the Associate Deans and the Director of Administration for the campus shared with me in interviews that students were consumers who needed to be satisfied as they comparison shopped for lower tuition costs, attractive course-work and faster degree completions. The Director of Administration and the Assistant Director of Administration as well as the Assistant Dean who oversaw the campus also shared in interviews that students could be viewed as products as well, and that it was the job of faculty and staff at Virtual University to shape and mold these students into good job candidates. But when asked if students were admitted to the college because of profit motives, no one at the college felt this was the case and often referred me back to documents such as the mission, vision and values statement for the college system (see a copy in Appendix B) or to the awards listed on their website that they had won for their academic preparation of students. And when asked about the

finding in the 2012 Annual Report that Virtual University generated around 60 percent of the revenue for the entire system, not just the campus, I was told in interviews and provided documentation that there was a shared organizational structure for the system (see Appendix E for the organizational structure). This resulted in shared revenues as the campuses often supported one another. For example, the system had one financial aid office, one evaluations office and one registrar's office that supported all of the campuses needs. Additionally, although a little over 8,000 students were enrolled at Virtual University in degree seeking programs during the time of the study, the Registrar provided statistics that showed the college system had another 10,000 students at the time who took online courses but were doing so as supplements to their course loads as degree seekers through F2F campuses within the system. Thus, revenues were said to be both earned and spent system-wide.

However, in a regional accreditation review of Virtual University completed during the time of the study, the accreditation team indicated in their report that there was some evidence that profit motivations sometimes overshadowed educational goals for Virtual University compared to other campuses within the system. For example, students at the face-to-face locations in the system faced higher standards of admission than Virtual University (see Appendix M for admissions and continued satisfactory academic progress information). Admission at the main campus was classified as moderately selective and included a high school GPA of 2.5 or better, along with being in the 50th percentile for standardized tests such as the ACT or SAT. But associate degrees were not offered at the main campus, only bachelor and master degrees. Virtual University, on the other hand had a policy of open admission/open enrollment to any student regardless of

past academic issues so no minimum past GPA or test scores were required. This was found to be consistent with that of public community colleges offering associate degrees within the state as confirmed by a review of documents from nearby community colleges.

During the accreditation review, the college was also found to be slow in evaluating transfer credits for new Virtual University students compared to other campuses in the system. To be fair, the Evaluations department staff completed reviews for over 30 campuses, not just Virtual University. For every one transcript to be evaluated for students at the main campus, Virtual University generally had 3 prior transcripts to be evaluated per student. However, without timely awarding of prior credits by transcript evaluators, academic advisors at Virtual University were often not aware of past grade histories or courses taken by entering students. Students were also found to lack the understanding of this issue and the need to recall coursework that was sometimes more than ten years old, like in the case of DeAngelo Davidson. As a result advisors, like Sarah did with DeAngelo, sometimes mis-advised students on courses to take. In the accreditation report, this was found to result in nearly one half of the 8000 Virtual University students paying for and completing courses for which they had already earned credit compared to only 6 occurrences at the main campus which enrolled only 1000 students. Thus generating over \$2million from Virtual University unnecessary enrollments compared to \$13,000 for the main campus in unnecessary enrollments.

A second, but related issue found by the accreditation team was that new student admissions and enrollment policies put late admittance students at a disadvantage to achieve academic success while still generating profits for the college. In the accelerated 8-week terms, 16 weeks of information was covered in those 8 weeks. This meant that

more information was covered in each week than in a 16-week term, and the first week of class was no exception. Thus, like in DeAngelo's case, it was not uncommon to have assignments due by Wednesday or Thursday of the first week even though newly admitted students were allowed to enroll through that Friday. Consequently, if a student enrolled Wednesday or later, they might already be behind in assignments for the entire first week. College policy also required payment of tuition for the term prior to enrollment regardless of payment type (financial aid or otherwise), with the last day to earn a refund for dropping a class being Friday of the first week as well. While advisors were found to warn students of these issues and discourage new students from enrolling late in the first week or taking more difficult courses as a first term student, it was often to no avail. New students like DeAngelo, in their quest to begin online courses right away often disregarded this advice and sought permission to enroll from advisors' superiors and approval was generally granted. Thus, new students were found to have enrolled in a class on Friday, accessed the course that night and determined it was too difficult to catch up. But if they failed to withdraw before midnight that same night, they were not eligible for a refund of their tuition. Students in this situation tended to maintain their enrollment because there was no refund option and they often felt they could catch up at some point. But many never did, resulting in failing grades for nearly 60 percent of new students who enrolled on Thursday or Friday of the first week. And in my study, all of the students but one were admitted either the week before or the week the new term began. Four of the eight students were found to be mis-advised and took courses for which they had already earned credit. Additionally, three students were found to enroll late in the week and advised to wait for another term but ignored the

advice and enrolled any way. All three were placed on probation at the end of their first term due to failing or nearly failing grades. The accreditation team determined the college administration knew of the transcript evaluation and late admittance issues for several years but failed to resolve them. The end result was the academic success of new Virtual University students was in jeopardy while the college still earned tuition dollars as a result of their policies and practices.

Race, class, gender and other differences in the virtual space. Students in the study indicated they chose online because it offered a “new normal” college experience that, compared to F2F college experiences in the past better met their learning styles and their communication skills. It also meant the college experience did not overtake everything else in their life as they did not have to move to the campus for study. Students remarked that they liked that they could continue to be emotionally, fiscally and physically anchored to their jobs, their children and their communities while attending online.

Even so, students in the study were found to vary from their advisors as well as others working at Virtual University in terms of race, class and gender. With regards to race for example, Virtual University was quite diverse amongst its students at the time of the study with approximately 50 percent White students, 24 percent African American, 19 percent Hispanic and 4.3 percent Native American students (see Appendix D for more enrollment statistics). But a check with Human Resources for the campus revealed that out of the over 800 faculty and staff at Virtual University, there were no African Americans, and very few Hispanic or Native American faculty and staff. On the advising staff, there was one Hispanic and one Native American advisor and no African American

advisors. And both students and advisors remarked during the study that there were few role models for minority students at Virtual University as a result. (More complete demographics of study participants can also be found in Appendix A.)

With regards to social class, seven of the eight students' reported they grew up in homes that were poor and their mothers' had not completed high school compared to the advisors who all but one reported being raised in middle- or upper-class homes. Students also reported their low socio-economic status kept them from being able to attend or pay for college educations when they were younger, compared to the advisors who had all attended college right after high school.

Socio-economic status was also found to be relevant to student and advisor resources as well. For example, as previously indicated, advisors often had the latest technology and high speed Internet at their fingertips to do their jobs but students were often using old computers, dial-up connections to the Internet and less expensive versions of software that were not as comprehensive as those used by advisors. Students reported these choices were made as a result of their status as a poor or working-class individual at the time of the study. Thus, they could not afford to upgrade to faster, more useful technology.

Five of the students also reported they had faced cultural and gender stereotypes as they pursued educational opportunities in both high school and college. And seven of the students reported that families, friends and even faculty and staff had provided them with mixed messages at times about the value of education in their lives at their age, with their backgrounds, or their perceived maturity level. This was in comparison to only one

advisor indicating she felt cultural stereotypes and only one advisor reporting feeling gender stereotypes in pursuit of their educations.

From the individual case studies compiled, it also appeared that other differences impacted the learning environment and how individuals saw the world. It was also age, geographic location, disability status, language skills and criminal background, just to name a few differences that were found to impact the students' and advisors' learning styles, their self-esteem, their individual and group orientation as well as the ways in which they defined what it meant to be academically and socially successful.

The space was also isolating for students at times compared to advisors. For example, advisors rarely worked alone while students enacted the relationship and participated in the activities and interactions alone while others in the house were asleep. Students were also one amongst between 1500 and 2000 other students vying for attention and assistance from their advisors. And although there was evidence from employee training records and individual reports that advisors had been trained on the specific needs of different student populations, students still reported that advisors did not always understand their needs or backgrounds. Thus, while the space might have been virtual, differences in things such as race, class and gender were still evident and did impact students and their advisors online.

Negative Cases

Not everyone in the study performed as expected or predicted, and those cases are included below, along with an analysis.

Failure even with social capital and past academic success. First is the case of White female traditional aged student Laurie Johnson. Laurie was twenty-years-old,

English was her first language, she was a third generation college student, and she was a full-time student and part-time worker. She had also earned an associate's degree in a traditional face to face community college environment before attending the online program for her bachelor's degree in computer and information science.

By all accounts, Laurie should have been a successful student given her knowledge of higher education, the time she had available with few competing demands, and the resources available to support her. However, Laurie shared that she had trouble adapting to the online setting.

According to Laurie she started out on a positive note. She sought admission over a month before her first term of enrollment and she submitted all prior transcripts for evaluation as well. She also said her first advising session was both instructive and enjoyable, as Laurie had done her homework about what courses to take first. Thus, when her advisor, Sarah Thompson asked if she had taken the orientation modules online, she shared later that she lied and indicated she had done so because she figured it was going to be easier online than F2F so why bother, especially given her past success in college.

Laurie shared in her blog that she was used to sixteen week terms rather than eight week terms and as a result, she chose not to log in to her first two courses on the first Monday of the term as recommended by Sarah. She had decided to work part-time while attending online and said she decided to work the beginning of each week and spend the end of each week doing classwork. Thus she waited until Thursday of that week to start the course. She indicated she did this because she knew from prior experience in college that the first week of class was typically nothing more than a review of the syllabus and

some reading assignments. But in addition to not taking the orientation modules that would have addressed first day of class success tips; Laurie also failed to review the syllabus for either of her two courses until Thursday. Yes, she said she knew a copy of the syllabus was posted to the website and allowed students to review it before they even enroll for the courses, but she figured she would be fine waiting until Thursday to do so.

When she did access the course and the syllabus, Laurie indicated in her blog that she realized she was already behind as she had already missed points from two discussion postings that counted not only as attendance points but also towards assignments, and she had less than a day to complete a writing assignment due Thursday night – an assignment that was one-fourth of her grade for the course. But she indicated she felt she could overcome this by devoting all her time to the writing assignment Thursday. When asked about this first week's issues, she said she had good writing skills, and came to Virtual Campus with a 3.0 grade point average so she quickly pulled together the writing assignment and posted it by the midnight deadline.

Laurie wrote in her blog that her next critical error was when she assumed she would not need her books right away and so did not order her books until the day she logged in to her first classes. During a second review of the syllabus that day she realized she needed two books for a writing assignment due that Saturday. She contacted the textbook company and asked for expedited delivery which almost doubled her cost of books for the term and nearly depleted her financial aid – the aid she hoped to stretch for eight weeks. Her books arrived on Saturday but then she related that the amount of reading and reflection time she needed to properly address the assignment would take longer than one day. First she e-mailed the instructor and asked for more time. He

responded within an hour that he would need more of an explanation of the circumstances or he would need to deny the request for the extension. Laurie quickly shot back an e-mail about her week experiences to which the instructor told her that he could not extend her deadline for her lack of time management and poor planning. He did offer to give her a second chance at writing the paper after he saw her first writing though. Laurie said that this made her mad as she thought he was being unreasonable. So she decided instead to regroup by dropping his class and concentrating on the other class. She knew that by keeping one class she would still be considered half time and would not lose her financial aid. But she did not contact anyone at Virtual University until Monday of the next week to drop the course. Laurie instead opted to spend the weekend catching up on the other course and shipping the books back for the other class for a refund.

The following Monday, Laurie shared on her blog that she contacted Virtual University to learn how to drop the class. But while talking to her advisor, she also learned that she would not get any money back from dropping the course as she would have had to drop by the previous Saturday to earn a refund on the course. With this news, Laurie shared that she weighed her options with her advisor Sarah and decided to stay in both courses and suffer whatever academic consequences might occur. But then she remembered she had already sent her book back for the second class and that she had not posted the paper for the class on Saturday so she had to quickly post a paper to the class she had intended to drop and wait for the grade to be posted.

Laurie said her choices that first week continued to plague her throughout the next seven weeks as she was still enrolled in two courses. She had already lost some points for missing discussion postings and the late, poorly written paper earned an F...her first

as a college student. To regroup, she said she spent the rest of the term doing more work to try to increase her grades but she said this was difficult to do because she also needed to put in some extra hours at work to make up her budget shortfall from the expedited books.

At the half-way point of the term (4 weeks in), Laurie indicated that both of her faculty members reported her as a marginal student to her academic advisor through the early warning system. Sarah contacted Laurie via e-mail and left two messages for her by phone to check on her and to see if she needed any advice on how to improve. But because Laurie was so busy between work and school, she said she didn't respond to Sarah's requests to call or e-mail her until the end of the term.

By the end of the term, Laurie shared with Sarah in an e-mail that she was exhausted from studying and working more than she had expected, and she was never able to completely recover academically in either course and that was why she ended the term with a 2.0 grade point average. Because she had entered the college with a 3.0 from her prior coursework and she was now a junior, an e-mail from the Dean's office staff let her know that her first term grades put her on probation as they felt her grades had slid too much.

Laurie indicated in her blog that she was both embarrassed and angry about her first term results and blamed her instructors and advisor for not giving her adequate advice about how to prepare for the differences in online colleges compared to face to face colleges. When she did speak at the end of the term with her advisor, she said it ended in a shouting match over the phone when Sarah asked what Laurie might have done differently to find better success. Laurie said she chose not to respond to the question

and instead angrily requested another advisor. Laurie later said in a member check of her emotions that she felt she could not trust the first advisor, especially when the advisor seemed to be implying that Laurie was not being a good student.

With a new advisor, Aggie Bigelow, and a new term looming, Laurie said in her blog that she resolved to “redouble her efforts and get back on track with her newfound knowledge about the quick pace of online courses.” So she said she was surprised when the college dean e-mailed her that he would not let her enroll in two courses (full-time) until her grade point average improved. She immediately e-mailed Aggie, her advisor about her options. Aggie e-mailed back that she could appeal the decision if she felt strongly about it, and she e-mailed both the Dean and Aggie that she had decided to appeal as one course per term for the foreseeable future would severely slow her progress.

Laurie wrote an appeal letter explaining her situation to the Dean and in a webcam discussion with the Dean (that was taped); he indicated she was approved to take two courses in the next term. There was a proviso however, if her grades did not improve above a 2.0 in this next term that she could face suspension from the college for up to a year. Laurie said in the discussion that she felt she could overcome her grade issues and decided to take two classes. The Dean also recommended that she speak with Aggie about how to best improve her grades. But Laurie said later in a member check discussion with me that she had always been a good student and thus did not utilize the advisor for guidance or even talk with Aggie about courses to take to improve her grades.

Unfortunately, Laurie’s father died during her second term of enrollment. His funeral was in another town, and she blogged that while she was away for the funeral she

had limited Internet access and thus failed to complete several assignments for the two new classes. She also indicated that she suffered from depression after the funeral and did not complete all her assignments for the next several weeks, resulting in a failing grade in one class and a D in the other class at week 4 (the halfway point) of the term.

Laurie was contacted again by her advisor by e-mail and phone at week four as the early warning system had been enacted by her faculty due to her poor grades. Instead of talking to Aggie or anyone else at the college about her situation, Laurie decided instead that “Virtual University was not to her liking.” In a phone interview with me, she blamed the Virtual University faculty and staff for her failing grades in classes that in her opinion were too much work to be completed in just 8 weeks. When asked what her plans were, she said she needed to make a fresh start at another college. She withdrew from her classes at week six so her second set of grades would not count. She opted instead to enroll in another college at a later date, one that did not include online options.

After her withdrawal, Laurie also completed an exit survey for this study that included a section on her experience with the college. She wrote that the college had failed her as she felt she had been given “bad advising and poor instruction.” Laurie indicated the proof of her argument was that she had been a good student prior to enrollment at Virtual University.

Thus, Laurie’s past should have predisposed her to be successful in college to graduation. But prior successful academic experiences in a face to face college setting may not always translate to a successful online experience. Laurie’s case revealed that the accelerated nature of online learning coupled with not seeking help quickly enough or utilizing the resources or advisors to her full benefit kept Laurie from being able to

translate her F2F success into online success even though she came to the college with strong social capital.

Success without the aid of advising. The second negative case is that of Carmen Delgado-Vega, a 32-year-old Hispanic/White female who had four kids ages 7, 8, 12 and 15. Carmen came from a poor background like most of the minority students in Virtual University. She earned a GED rather than a high school diploma, her parents had no prior college and she had attended three prior colleges prior to attending online. Thus, Carmen's past predisposed her to be at risk for failure to be retained in college to graduation.

What made Carmen even more remarkable was that with the exception of her initial discussion with an advisor when she first enrolled at the college, Carmen did not utilize any advice from her advisor for her entire four years of enrollment with Virtual University, nor did she talk with too many others at the college.

To hear Carmen tell her tale, she believed that her success was because she was a strong reader. This led to good grades (As and Bs) at her prior colleges that were confirmed by looking at her transcripts. She also earned similar grades with Virtual University. She remarked that she did not drop out from these prior schools because of lack of academic skill but rather because she had too many conflicts on her plate with a full time job and a family. She, like many others in Virtual University, decided to attend online because it looked like it offered more flexibility. But she could tell right away when she read the website that "it was not going to be easy." She said she did not read everything on the website or access resources at the college as suggested by her advisor, only the things she needed at the time she needed them. But of all of the students in the

study, she was the only one to have taken the entire orientation modules and to have read the college catalog. And those two things, coupled with reading the college newsletters that were published each month online, led her to know more about her options and deadlines according to Carmen.

Carmen also had less college to complete at Virtual University (60 hours) compared to the other students in the study (who on average needed 70 or more hours to complete a bachelor's degree according to their transcripts). Carmen also took her time, with only one class per term as was confirmed by her transcript. She indicated that by suspending her desire to finish so quickly and by taking one class per term she felt like she was "able to concentrate on one subject at a time for 8 weeks and then move on to another subject without...studying a conflicting subject at the same time." By doing school in this fashion, she still "earned half-time financial aid, still earned 15 hours per year and still had time for her children and work without exhaustion." But when queried if they would do the same as Carmen, the other students in the study indicated they probably would not do it her way because their financial status was such that they needed to graduate and move on to a new job faster than Carmen's pace would allow.

It could also be that Carmen's choice of being a business major also helped, as extracurricular activities, leadership experiences and other experiences to enhance her knowledge and competitive edge were not necessary. Carmen worked for a retail store as a clerk and was paid to attend college. After she completed her college degree, she earned a promotion at the retail store because of past experience as well as her degree. So in her case, the fit between her post-college career and her pre-college and during

college experiences may have helped her to be successful in the long run even without advising assistance beyond the first term.

Summary

Virtual University was an asynchronous online college experience that offered many associate and bachelor degree options for students seeking to enroll. The college was found to be quite diverse in who was attracted to the college as they were often adult and minority learners.

Participants in the study were a diverse group as well. The eight students were mostly adult women and minority students who came from poor backgrounds with teen mothers who had not completed college. They were also the first generation in their family to attend college, the primary language spoken at their childhood home was not English, and they reported racial/ethnic backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in American colleges, including African Americans, Hispanic or Native Americans. They were also typically 30 years or older and had children at home as well as full-time jobs while they attended college online. And all sometimes reported doubts whether they could be successful at finishing their undergraduate degrees.

Unlike the students in the study, none of the four participating academic advisors were from poor families. They did not grow up with mothers' who had not finished high school and only Floria Garcia was a teen parent. Additionally, none of the advisors came from single parent households and none were first generation college students.

What the academic advisors did have in common with the online students was that most were women as well as being parents, and many were pursuing degrees online. There were also two advisors who grew up speaking languages besides English at home.

The advisors also enjoyed communicating in writing, just like the students. Virtual University advisors tended to identify themselves as predominantly White full-time professional advisors but like the students, they were older as their ages ranged from between 28- and 55-years-old. But, all of these similarities did not keep students from seeing and reporting that advisors sometimes did not understand the needs of the students, either because of race, social class, gender, or other factors.

Students and their advisors engaged in many activities and interactions throughout their tenure at Virtual University. These included at least five common milestones which every student in the study faced and for who most worked through with the aid of their advisors. The milestones included: being admitted to the college, developing an education plan, exploring co-curricular experiences to supplement the core curriculum, dealing with personal and academic issues, and finally completion of the degree.

Initial interactions between advisors-advisees tended to be prescriptive or directive in nature and later became more developmental as advisors and advisees worked to develop a shared relationship. The first challenges for the advising relationship often came as a result of most new students being admitted either right before or during the first week of classes with both transcripts and admissions application information not being available for advisor review. Thus, nearly half of the first advising meetings online resulted in advisors feeling they gave poor advice on courses to take and resources to access , students feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information provided, and students being mis-advised on at least one course to take that they had already completed prior to enrollment at Virtual University. Thus feelings of fear, failure and dissatisfaction with the decision to enroll online were felt by many of the students in the first term.

Once students selected a major and prior course work was evaluated for credit, the degree audit and related paperwork showing what coursework remained was completed by the advisor and students were directed to develop an education plan based on an assessment of their activities, interests, values, and life and career goals. For the students, creating the education plan was sometimes difficult because it often required sharing personal and sometimes painful stories about their past, which sometimes included language difficulties, disability issues, and criminal backgrounds. Advisors found though that they needed to do research on certain issues brought up in education plans in order to provide students with useful support. And having the education plans reviewed by advisors was sometimes an emotionally charged experience for students and advisors as the educational plans were intensely personal and advisors were not always careful about students' feelings in their critiques. This was also a time of much frustration coupled with satisfaction as students took more control of their own learning. If handled well, it often brought them closer to one another and students became even more invested in the advising relationship and in their education. But it did not always work out that way as students and advisors sometimes found themselves at an impasse. As a result, students either requested a new advisor with whom they felt more supported or students sometimes departed the college making both student and advisor feel like they failed in the relationship and in the student's college success.

The development of the education plan often led to the realization that students would also need to acquire certain experiences and skills that might not be available through their classes online. But not every student could afford to make this a priority due to their busy schedules or their economic situations. At the beginning of the study, no

co-curricular activities were available. But at the behest of one of the students in the study, opportunities for undergraduate research, study abroad, student organization membership, and leadership experiences were developed in cooperation with another college for those who had time to participate. The results of these co-curricular experiences included the highest satisfaction and retention ratings Virtual University had ever received in their student assessment efforts. The advisors also found new ways to network for their own professional and personal development.

Advisors indicated they knew many of the students enrolling for their first year were not prepared for the academic rigor and accelerated terms of Virtual University. Adult women and minority students, the majority populations were often the most likely to be ill-prepared, to withdraw or to find they were not meeting satisfactory academic standards at the college even though the minimum acceptable grade point averages were set at a lower rate, especially in the first few hours of earned credit. Advisors created resources that they hoped would help keep students from dropping or taking extended breaks. Resources included: orientation modules; webinars and podcasts for skill assessment and improvement; online tutoring for English and math courses; and education planning resources. One particularly helpful resource was the ability of advisors to log in to courses with the student and see everything the student saw in their online courses, including responses from professors. Advisors could then see what issues the student had and provide advice on how to resolve class issues, or suggest skills and tasks students needed to improve upon. But students did not always access resources in a timely manner or understand how to utilize resources without additional guidance and

thus some continued to withdraw from the college for academic as well as personal reasons.

Other problems students faced online included feelings of isolation or confusion at times. Advisors did their best to try to combat these feelings and personalize the virtual world for students by sharing stories or encouraging students to connect with others through their classes, other offices and the advising list-serve populations. When students took this advice, this seemed to reduce feelings of isolation and confusion as they talked with others and made friends. Students also remarked that they were surprised how many students were similar to themselves in their life histories and past academic difficulties, which made them feel like an insider rather than an outsider. Once they felt more like insiders, students also began to reach out to other students online who struggled. Thus relationships and interactions appeared to aid students in feeling less isolated or confused, even if the interactions did nothing to help resolve problems.

Online students were found to take between 7 and 9 years to complete their degrees due to a number of circumstances, including being part-time, working full-time and occasionally taking a break from their studies. The process of assessing what's come before as well as preparing for what's next often began with students filing for graduation and having a final degree audit completed.

Advisors felt their role in this final push was to provide resources for graduate education and/or work, write recommendation letters and encourage students to complete courses and paperwork on time. While advisors helped students find jobs and graduate schools at the beginning of the study, this duty was transferred to career advisors at the

main campus over time, thus relieving online advisors of some of their heaviest workload besides working with first year students.

Students in the study were found to have multiple transcripts that needed to be evaluated for credit thus causing a potential slowing of not only accurate and timely advising but also degree completion. When graduation came around, most participated in a virtual graduation ceremony rather than traveling to a live graduation ceremony at one of the campuses in the system. This was sometimes because earning a college degree was not necessarily a happy occasion for the family and friends of the graduate. For some it was because the student had not found a job or been accepted by a graduate school and for others, it was a bittersweet moment of completing a desired goal that might move them further from their family and friends.

The graduates in the study indicated they hated doing the education plans but now understood its significance to their goals. Most credited their advisors with not only keeping them in school and helping them find ways to be academically and personally successful but also helping them find jobs or get into graduate school. But it had not been an easy process as students in the study indicated they were neither used to being successful nor did they always welcome their college success. And students sometimes felt conflicting emotions about what college success meant in their lives as well as sometimes finding that advisors did not understand their unique needs as students who came from a different race or ethnicity, gender, social class or life circumstances.

In the next section, I will discuss the findings as well as their implications for action and further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In this, the final chapter of the study, I will discuss the case and the implications of the findings from Chapter Four. First, initial and supplementary analyses of the findings will be discussed, followed by conclusions and implications of the study for research and actions will be discussed.

The primary purpose of this case study was to explore what was occurring at one postsecondary distance education institution where undergraduates earned their degrees completely online and worked with academic advisors without ever meeting face-to-face. This study utilized evidence gathered over a two year period using qualitative ethnographic methods. The case was informed and shaped as a result of observations of a number of advising relationships at the institution, as well as interviews and a review of blogs, the college website and other documents available during the time of the study.

Individual cases were presented in Chapter Four (and Appendix G) to aid in illustrating the case of distance advising as a teaching and learning experience that encompassed a student's entire academic career as an undergraduate. Individual cases also served to show different perspectives on the issues at five different milestones common to each of the students in the study, including: admission and initial enrollment online; development of an educational plan; exploration and evaluation of skills and experiences to supplement coursework; personal and academic issues; and determination of what was next, graduate school or work.

Initial and Supplementary Analyses of the Findings

So if the advisor and advisee never meet, could a positive working relationship be

developed? The answer is a qualified yes. Critical milestones like the first interaction at admittance did not always engender trust at the start of the relationship often because of the unintended consequences of policies and practices as well as the differences between students and their advisors as a result of race, class, gender and knowledge of the college environment. But as time and other milestones came about like the lengthy discussions associated with educational planning and the sometimes painful discourse associated with students' personal and academic issues throughout their tenure at the institution, positive relationships often developed.

The findings of the case revealed it was these continuing interactions over time that made both advisor and advisee appreciate one another and the roles they played in one another's lives. Thus by the time students were preparing for graduation, it was both an exhilarating and bittersweet moment for both students and their advisors in the study. As Virtual University students often completed their degrees at slower paces than in traditional F2F college settings, it was not uncommon for students and advisors to have seven to ten years of interaction and relationship building prior to graduation thus there was a lot of time in which to develop trust and shared responsibility for student success.

Positive relationships have been found in other studies to contribute to the economic success and positive academic reputation of the college as well as contributing to satisfied and successful graduates (Hunter & White, 2004; Khatib, 2004; Schilling Ross, 1999; Skorupa, 2002). Students in the study were found to be similar to the literature in that the more satisfied they were with their relationship with the advisor in particular, the more academic success they sought, the less likely they were to drop out and the more likely they were to report their positive feelings for the college as well.

For both students and their advisors, the study revealed that the two most critical areas to success included attitude/motivation and knowledge and in both cases, more training or educational opportunities led to more investment in the process because their satisfaction increased as they felt more prepared to tackle the challenges ahead of them. Thus, as satisfaction with the learning and resources increased so did the relationship development. And this impacted not just student retention but also advisor retention.

For students, goal completion was ultimately realized by higher grade point averages, an awakening of self-worth and self-advocacy as well as retention to graduation. For advisors, goal completion was complex but still similar – to see more of their students succeed and to be recognized by the organization that advisors were critical in the success of their students. Whether that included being listened to by college leadership for the good of students was different for each advisor, but in conversations with advisors, it was a critical piece in the meaning making of all involved.

Early theorists recognized the connection between academic advising relationships and student academic success (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993) as well as assisting students in their growth and human development (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972) but these were relationships predicated on face-to-face meetings with one's advisor (Cain, 2002; Curry 2003). In reviewing the case findings of interactions, activities and relationships enacted online between advisors and advisees at Virtual University, similar connections were witnessed, along with many signs of advisors helping students in their growth and development. Consequently, there were some similarities between face-to-face advising and distance advising observed at Virtual University. But as the communication medium was different in the online advising relationship, it was sometimes enacted differently.

When it comes to offering academic advising services to students at a distance, concerns have been reported that students would not trust their advisors and thereby would not share as much personal information that was beneficial to assisting the students (Cain & Lockee, 2002; Hill, 2007; Morris & Miller, 2007; Ruth, 2005; Steele, 2005; Tuttle, 2000). But at Virtual University, students and advisors often commented on the trust, admiration and respect they had for one another. But like any other relationship, whether F2F or online, it required time and attention to develop. In the case study, evidence revealed that once trust was established, students and advisors shared an incredible amount of personal information with one another. In fact, it sometimes seemed that because students and advisors did not have to look into one another's eyes, that they appeared to be freer at sharing their thoughts, opinions and personal stories even more so than what I ever witnessed or experienced myself as an advisor in a face-to-face setting. Students and advisors both confirmed this perception as well.

Students and advisors at both F2F and online colleges also faced occasional information overload as they were bombarded with more information than they could process at one time. Students and advisors in both types of settings also bring varying types of social capital that either prepares them for college or not. Advisors in the study who failed to recognize their students' heightened risk for failure, like that witnessed between Sarah and DeAngelo, impacted how they communicated with one another, how information was shared and how relationships were enacted similar to findings from other studies (Clopton & Finch, 2009; Holland, 2010; Karp, et. al, 2008; Smith, 2007; Vivian, 2005). Another similarity between F2F and online college settings that was confirmed in

this study was that, students varied greatly in their motivation, academic achievement or satisfaction with the college, with their courses and with their advisor.

A number of researchers have found no significant difference in motivation, academic achievement or satisfaction of distance education students compared to face-to-face students (Bernard, Abrami, Lou, Borokhovski, Wade, Wozney, Wallet, Fiset, & Huang, 2004; Dickey, 2004). This was often the case at Virtual University as well.

The differences between F2F and online advising included the requirements for admission depending on the selectivity of the institution. This was because Virtual University was more similar to a community college with open admission/open enrollment policies but perhaps less similar to more traditional F2F that did not offer associate degrees. Additionally, online colleges tend to attract more adult learners over the age of 30 and minority students than most residential campuses and colleges (NCES, 2002; NCES, 2011) and this was true for Virtual University as well.

For online colleges like Virtual University, orientation and first contact with newly admitted students varied as well. Unlike F2F colleges, Virtual University did not offer a face-to-face orientation option for students and their families to investigate the college. While anyone could access the orientation modules online from the homepage of Virtual University's website, only current members of the student, faculty and staff could access courses and advising list-serves online thus making it more difficult to share with one's friends and family what an online college experience was all about.

Although interactions via e-mail, phone and fax have often been found to be a part of F2F college advising (Lipschultz, 1999), they were not the primary mode of communication as face-to-face visits and oral communication dominated this kind of

advising (Lynch & Stuckey, 2000, 2002). In comparison, distance advising at Virtual University was enacted via the phone, but was primarily text based and as a result required more written communication than oral.

As for the pace of interactions within each term, most F2F advisors have 16 weeks in which to communicate with their advisees for the term (Lynch & Stuckey, 2000). Virtual University advisors and students on the other hand faced a faster paced with only 8 week terms. The advising workload for each advisor was also often much higher at Virtual University as well, with sometimes as many as 1500 to 2000 students assigned to an advisor online compared to lower raters (perhaps closer to 500 advisees) for F2F advisors (Lynch & Stuckey, 2000, 2002). Thus, the pace and large advising load dictated online advisors develop templates from which to provide responses to common student concerns over e-mail as well as list-serves and other resources such as team advising being employed to make sure individual students needs were addressed in a timely manner.

Compared to F2F advising reported in other studies (Lynch & Stuckey, 2000, 2002; Morris & Miller, 2007), Virtual University's fast pace made it necessary to have much more directed conversations when advising online students regarding their feelings and emotions as it was not always apparent how they were perceiving interactions, directions and the relationship. Additionally, it was incredibly important to impress upon students the adherence to advice on timelines for courses, completing assignments, enrollments, as well as deadlines for financial aid being accelerated and the impact of poor time management.

The results of this study also revealed that the decision to offer degrees online was based in part on the college leadership's desire to increase student enrollment for those

who might not otherwise have an opportunity to attend the college face-to-face. This was confirmed by a large enrollment increase between 2010 and 2012 from 3400 to over 8000 diverse students attending online with no F2F interaction. Enrollment statistics (Appendix D) confirmed that many adult learners and minority students were represented in this increased enrollment. Students in the study also confirmed they might not have otherwise enrolled at the college if face-to-face coursework had been the only option. A second goal of online offerings according to college leadership was to increase college revenue as well. From study findings it was confirmed that Virtual University generated around 60 percent of the revenue collected for its entire campus system by 2012. Thus, the college leadership appeared to have achieved their goals of increasing diverse learners online while increasing revenue at the same time.

But case study findings indicated increasing access, enrollment and revenues did not always lead to student success for the online students. Access was granted regardless of past academic competence as a part of the college's open admissions policy. But once enrolled, students in the study struggled to find their footing as was evidenced by term drop-out rates as high as 51 to 67 percent of first year students and a much larger amount of students on probation (11 percent), compared to those who were on the Dean's List (4 percent). Results also indicated that being a minority student or general studies major were particularly problematic online. For example, African American students represented 24 percent of college's enrollment but represented as many as 55 percent of the students on academic probation. Also students majoring in general studies, an interdisciplinary studies degree, were not represented on the Dean's List for the entire two years of the study but represented 25 percent of the students on the probation list for

the college for the same time frame. Students in the study also dealt with a variety of issues that negatively impacted their education including: lack of academic competence; poor English language skills, disabilities or other issues that sometimes inhibited their learning and communication skills online. They also reported a lack of time to commit to their studies part-time while attending to their already busy lives as parents and full-time workers. Thus, academic success was found to be uneven amongst the students as access did not always translate into success.

Mitchell, Wood and Witherspoon (2010) found that for diverse students like those in the study, that their success in college was not just predicated on the students and their backgrounds but could also be negatively impacted by organizational structures in the college setting that sometimes disadvantaged them. This was found to be the case at Virtual University as well. For instance, services available to students at the other campuses within the college system included the opportunity to participate in student organizations, undergraduate research and study abroad as well as having access to career advisors trained to support their work and graduate school aspirations. But students attending online were not afforded these opportunities initially even though everyone at the college agreed these were beneficial services.

Research on out-of-class experiences (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1992; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991) confirm college member beliefs, that outside of class experiences can be highly beneficial to students. Students who have participated in experiences such as undergraduate research, study abroad, and student organizations have been especially beneficial in not only development of thinking and decision making, but also interpersonal communication as well as the practical application and skill attainment

(Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994). Additionally, career counseling has been found to be critical in aiding students find employment after college (Teng, Morgan & Anderson, 2001). And this has been found to be especially important for minority and older students as it is important to be sensitive to their unique needs while also providing these more experienced workers with an understanding of the most current practices associated with resumes, interview techniques and possible employment options (Teng, et. al., 2001). All areas which are premised on the advisor having kept current on these topics, which might not be as feasible for advisors who career guidance is an addition to their job rather than the primary focus of their job, like advisors at Virtual University.

Even so, at the beginning of the study, college policies barred students online from utilizing the services offered at the F2F campuses in the system. Administrators justified this by indicating that students online were so geographically separated from the college that it was impractical to offer these opportunities and services to them all. When queried, the college leadership also opined that students online would not participate in these programs due to lack of time or interest.

But the college leadership were proven incorrect in their opinions over time as one student in the study spearheaded co-curricular opportunities for students online with another college that resulted in hundreds of students each term participating virtually, including all of the 8 students in the study. Also when the college finally hired virtual career advisors in late 2011, students online quickly began to utilize their services. In fact, in their first year alone 76 percent of the graduating students online were found to use career services to help search for jobs or apply for graduate school. Thus, regardless of geographic separation and time issues felt by students, they still found time to utilize

these services. It might be that, as one student in the study indicated, that when advisors indicated the importance of career advising and co-curricular opportunities, that their assertions were not taken seriously because this was not confirmed or reinforced by the leadership of the college. Because, as students shared, the important opportunities were the ones made available at the college. So when opportunities were made available to online students, it signaled to them a greater importance to partake of these services. Thus in online college settings where services have sometimes not caught up with academic offerings, this may be communicating more than is intended for students about what is needed or important to support their success.

The case study also revealed that lack of student success was sometimes the result of policies and practices instituted on students' behalf that in fact had a negative effect on student success while positively affecting the bottom line of the college's revenues. This was confirmed in a regional accreditation review of the college completed during the time of the study. The accreditation team indicated that there was some evidence that profit motivations sometimes overshadowed educational goals for Virtual University compared to other campuses within the system. For example, students at the face-to-face locations faced higher standards of admission than Virtual University. Admission at the main campus was classified as moderately selective and included a high school GPA of 2.5 or better, along with being in the 50th percentile for standardized tests such as the ACT or SAT. But associate degrees were not offered at the main campus, only bachelor and master degrees. Virtual University, through its policy of open admission/open enrollment had no GPA or test score requirements. But the Evaluations department staff was found to be slow in evaluating transfer credits for new Virtual University students

compared to other campuses in the system. To be fair, the Evaluations department staff completed reviews for over 30 campuses, not just Virtual University. Thus for every one transcript to be evaluated for students at the main campus, Virtual University generally had 3 prior transcripts to be evaluated per student. However, without timely awarding of prior credits by transcript evaluators, academic advisors at Virtual University were often not aware of past grade histories or courses taken by entering students. Students were also found to lack the understanding of this issue and the need to recall coursework that was sometimes more than ten years old, like in the case of DeAngelo Davidson. As a result advisors sometimes mis-advised students on courses to take. In the accreditation report, this was found to result in nearly one half of the 8000 Virtual University students paying for and completing courses for which they had already earned credit compared to only 6 occurrences at the main campus which enrolled only 1000 students. Thus generating over \$2million from Virtual University unnecessary enrollments compared to \$13,000 for the main campus in unnecessary enrollments.

A second, but related issue found by the accreditation team was that new student admissions and enrollment policies put late admittance students at a disadvantage to achieve academic success while still generating profits for the college. In the accelerated 8-week terms, 16 weeks of information was covered in those 8 weeks. This meant more information was covered in each week than in a 16-week term, and the first week of class was no exception. Thus, like in the case presented on Alberto, it was not uncommon to have assignments due by Wednesday or Thursday of the first week even though newly admitted students were allowed to enroll through that Friday. Consequently, if a student enrolled Wednesday or later, they might already be behind in assignments for the entire

first week. College policy also required complete payment of tuition for the term prior to enrollment regardless of payment type (financial aid or otherwise), with the last day to earn a refund for dropping a class being Friday of the first week as well. While advisors were found to warn students of these issues and discourage new students from enrolling late in the first week or taking more difficult courses as a first term student, it was often to no avail. New students like DeAngelo, in their haste to begin online courses often disregarded this advice and sought permission to enroll from advisors' superiors and approval was generally granted. Thus, new students were sometimes found to have enrolled in a class on Friday, accessed the course that night and determined it was too difficult to catch up. But if they failed to withdraw before midnight that same night, they were not eligible for a refund of their tuition. Students in this situation tended to maintain their enrollment because there was no refund option and they often felt they could catch up at some point. But many never did, resulting in failing grades for nearly 60 percent of new students who enrolled on Thursday or Friday of the first week.

In the case study, all of the students but one were admitted either the week before or the week the new term began. Four of the eight students were found to be mis-advised and took courses for which they had already earned credit. Additionally, three students were found to enroll late in the week and advised to wait for another term but ignored the advice and enrolled any way. All three were placed on probation at the end of their first term due to failing or nearly failing grades. The accreditation team determined the college administration knew of the transcript evaluation and late admittance issues for several years but failed to resolve them. The end result was the academic success of new Virtual University students was in jeopardy while the college still earned tuition dollars

as a result of their policies and practices. Thus, what can be taken from this situation is that college leaders have an obligation to weigh educational as well as financial decisions regarding college operations carefully as there may be unintended consequences for students and the college as a result.

Further evidence found in the case study was that the policies and practices could also disadvantage one group of students while privileging another. This was reflected in the policy that students from the F2F campuses could utilize the advising services at Virtual University when their campuses advisors were not available at night or on weekends. Findings indicated that as many as 30 percent of the night and weekend calls on average per week were from students not at Virtual University. However, online students were not in turn allowed to avail themselves of advisors on the other campuses. Given the difficulties online students in the study reported in connecting with their advisors as a result of the geographic separation, having F2F students competing with online students for advisors who were supposed to be dedicated to online students seemed to further communicate to students online that their academic success was secondary to that of F2F students in the system as well, which also led to online student dissatisfaction.

Student satisfaction and academic success have been found to positively impact higher levels of student retention to degree completion (Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004; Sutton & Sankar, 2011) in prior studies. Thus, policy decisions that disadvantaged online students in favor of F2F students may have inadvertently led to higher withdrawal rates from online students as a result. But this possible outcome could not be confirmed in the study.

Using the COI model as a lens for viewing distance advising. This case study employed the COI model (Garrison, et. al., 2000, Garrison, et. al, 2001) to investigate the educational interaction between advisors and their students online because advising can be viewed as a form of teaching and learning. Recall from Chapter Three that the model stipulated three overlapping parts to an educational experience: (1) cognitive presence, (2) social presence and (3) teaching presence. And how those were exhibited in the case study are below.

For cognitive presence to occur, a triggering event had to occur such as when, in the case study, students were admitted to Virtual University. This led to the need for students to work with advisors to explore which courses to take and what academic skills needed to be improved. This also entailed reading of resources such as degree audits or the undergraduate catalog for further knowledge attainment. And in most of the students' cases this led to further integration of knowledge from multiple sources as students developed education plans and sought co-curricular experiences to enhance their coursework and prepared them for resolution as they graduated and moved forward with career or further education goals. However, the case study revealed that cognitive presence was not enough to guarantee retention to satisfactory completion of a course, or a degree, even with a competent advisor working alongside the student. At Virtual University, advising interactions and activities online also required both social presence and teaching presence to occur as well.

Social presence represents the social aspects of the learning process and has been found occur in past studies (Garrison, et. al., 2000; Garrison, et. al, 2001) to need open communication as was exhibited in the case of Maria Rohas. When Maria shared with

Daniel that she had a criminal record and could not speak English well, she was exhibiting open communication. Additionally, the second aspect of social presence was witnessed in Maria's case when she found that advisors Daniel and Floria, along with the Disabilities Coordinator were all working together to aid in her success through collaboration, thereby exhibiting a form of group cohesion to a common goal.

Additionally, teaching presence was witnessed in the case study where advisors set the curriculum such as in Alberto's case when advisor Aggie explained the orientation modules to him and had him not only complete the modules but also provide her with the scores from his self-tests at the end of each module so that she could "grade" his academic competence and reading comprehension. She also facilitated discourse with Alberto during their discussion of his issues in his classes to aid him in moving toward deeper learning about how to take the feedback from instructors and turn it into better postings and higher grades in the classes as a result. Meaning that just as they would do in the classroom, or a face-to-face advising session, the advisor helped the student focus and resolve issues through constructive exchanges (Akyol & Garrison, 2008).

When used in conjunction with cognitive presence goals, social presence and teaching presence have been found to aid students online in finding satisfaction (Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Arbaugh, 2008), and feeling a sense of community or common purpose (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes & Fung, 2004), all to aid in furthering quality interactions (Ling, 2007). In the cases observed at Virtual University, when students and advisors collaborated effectively, academic success and retention to goal completion were witnessed. For example, in Alberto's case, he collaborated with Aggie to resolve his personal and academic issues. Once possible solutions were developed for his problems,

Alberto and Aggie reported satisfaction and a common purpose between them and Alberto became a successful student as was evidence by his 3.5 GPA in later terms.

As was witnessed in the case studies of individual interactions between advisors and advisees, intentional interactions and activities appeared to strengthen the student's feeling of connectedness and shared meanings to and with advisors, and other students, as well as with the institution. An example of this was Alberto's decision to reach out to other peers on the advising list-serve as he indicated he wanted others to be successful at the institution as well.

In addition, with these intentional actions, a sense of community or feeling like an insider at Virtual University was reported by advisors and students alike. This connected feeling seemed to improve as a result of their continued interactions and satisfaction. But, without interactions that were satisfying, students and advisors reported feeling disconnected and dissatisfied with one another. Examples of this include when Sarah and DeAngelo quarreled over enrollment issues. Each felt the other to blame for DeAngelo's enrollment issues. For DeAngelo he felt he might drop-out because he was so frustrated and dissatisfied. As for Sarah, her response was a similar situation as she decided to retire soon after. But with communication between DeAngelo and Floria, he reported feeling more like an insider and stayed on to degree completion. Thus, like in the distance classroom, satisfaction led to less attrition and more relationship building just as Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000; 2001) found. This supporting discourse enhanced students' cognitive presence as they began to reflect more deeply on their educational goals and to integrate these new meanings into their application of knowledge to be more socially and academically successful in the virtual environment

and complete their goal of graduation. Thus, academic advising without face-to-face interactions appears to be not only a process that requires cognitive presence, but also teaching presence and social presence in which to further the relationship and achieve the tasks and goals of both students and advisors. And Table 4 (located in Appendix F6) illustrates further evidence of teaching, social and cognitive presence exhibited in advising activities, interactions and relationships witnessed as well as advisor and advisee perceptions. But what the COI model by itself lacked was an explanation of how peer, family and professional support impacted the understanding of and meaning making from relationship development or the tasks and goals in distance advising.

Communication and feelings of support have been found to vary tremendously from individual to individual because of their gender, race/ethnicity, generational status as a college student, and their socioeconomic status (Holland, 2010). And communication that is both formal and informal may aid in reducing feelings of frustration, isolation and alienation (Holland, 2010). Thus, a drawback of the COI model was that while recognizing the need for social capital as a resource in the learning process, the model did not allow for it to be an integral part of the process for learners. Thus, in the next section I will address the second framework from which to view the distance advising relationships witnessed at Virtual University– that of social capital.

Using social capital theory as a lens for viewing distance advising. By employing the social capital they have from their parents, friends and others, academically prepared students use connections within their and their family’s social network that support their efforts (Putnam, 2000). The result is that they are more likely to engage with the community, learn to trust those around them and seek out help when needed (Bourdieu,

1985; Putnam, 2000). Table 5 (located in Appendix F7) illustrates more fully the evidence of social capital that was exhibited in advising activities, interactions and relationships at the college that were observed by me as well as how students and advisors reported it in their interviews. Bu this section highlights some of the ways in which social capital was exhibited in the case study.

Students in the study did not appear to have a well-developed social network with regards to the education system from family or friends outside of the college. This was based on their interviews in which students often described only advisors, other students at the college and sometimes faculty as beneficial to their success in college. All of the students in the study were first generation college students and often explained that because they were the first generation, they reported having little knowledge of how to be successful in college. They also reported that family and friends were of little use when it came to this goal of furthering their education. Some students, like Maria and Willow reported that their families and communities were also not supportive of this goal as they feared college completion would take the students away from them in the long run. Thus, the case study found students often relied on advisors and those on the advising list-serves to provide the resources and advice they needed to be successful online. But it was certainly not a perfect fit as many students reported that their advisors did not always know or understand the unique needs of these diverse students, nor were there very many role models amongst the advisors.

Thus, students lacked social capital. And as a result, their first interactions with advisors, revealed that students often failed to interpret the meanings or implications of the guidance given them. It wasn't because they did not want to understand or be

successful, it was because at-risk students such as adult women, African American, Hispanic and Native American students were not generally those whose social networks included high social capital regarding educational pursuits (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

Social networks have been found to be socially constructed and require time and attention to be of any use to the individual (Bourdieu, 1985; Portes, 1998). In order for social capital to be shared, one must have socialized with others that had the social capital sought, like that of an advisor. The types of social capital one can extract from such a social network has been found to include valuable information that may help a less knowledgeable student succeed (Dika & Singh, 2002; Portes, 1998).

Afshar (2009) confirmed that advisor attitude that was positive in nature could increase student satisfaction and that was witnessed in the cases of Aggie and Floria's interactions with students but only to a point. If the advisor lacked knowledge about the institution or did not know how to help the students resolve issues but instead focused on blame like in the case of Sarah and DeAngelo with regards to his enrollment in difficult courses, the advisor was found to be less trusted as well as having satisfaction from the student being reduced. Harrison (2009) also confirmed that when advisors exhibited caring behaviors that were considered authentic and true by the student, both satisfaction and the relationship improved between students and their advisors even if one had less social capital.

From the study, it was learned that advisor relationships with students who lacked social capital could be helpful if they were able to develop supportive and trusting relationships that encouraged students to access all of the social capital resources the advisor knew about and could help them access (Dika & Singh, 2002). But without that

support and trust, students were found to be more likely to disregard advisors. And this was witnessed in the case of Aggie and Laurie, where Laurie did not take her advisor's advice. This resulted in not only academic distress for Laurie but eventually resulted in her ultimately drop out of the college without a degree.

Using Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) framework for social capital in intellectual organizations, structural, relational and cognitive dimensions of social capital were found to be on display in students' relationships and interactions with advisors at Virtual University. For example, 3 of the advisors in the study added all of their new advisees to their advising list-serves. The list-serves not only allowed advisees to have periodic reminders of calendar events and resources that were updated to the college's homepage but advisors also provided guidance on how and when to use these resources effectively and efficiently. Another benefit of the list-serves was found to be the result of immediate access to other students at Virtual University. The list-serve served as an example of how network ties to others at the college allowed for more access to resources by students who lacked social capital on their own. Additionally, when the network configuration provided by the advisor included access to the list-serve, it was found to provide for more accessibility to other resources and expanded the possibilities of students in the study getting questions answered quickly even if their advisor was unavailable. This was because list-serve members, like Alberto, were also found to be sharing their own experiences and resources. The result of adding the list-serve was more work for the advisor to monitor, but it served an important function -- to increase the resources available to students compared to those students who only connected with their advisor. It also aided students when advising services were not available. Students also reported

feeling more like insiders or that they belonged to a community as a result of these additional relationship avenues beyond just the advisor. This is important because research on college students' help seeking behaviors have indicated they often seek more advice from informal resources (like other students) before contacting their advisors (Alexitch, 1994; Knapp & Karabenick, 1988; Tinsley, de St. Aubin & Brown, 1982). But because of the physical isolation of being online and the structure of Virtual University, students did not have ways to mingle with other students outside of class as they were not able to "walk" through the halls of college in the same way. Thus, without initiating it on their own, those with less social capital appeared to need a virtual way to develop informal relationships that would be similar to sitting next to and talking to a student or walking with them to and from class.

The more connected they felt, the more Virtual University students appeared to invest in their studies and other activities associated with the college such as when Alberto became a leader on the advising list-serve to newer students, or when Shenonda connected her work at HBC to her attendance at Virtual University. This has been found to lead to more investment in academic planning and academic success in other studies (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Harrison, 2009; MacArthur, 2005; Smith, Dai & Szelest, 2006) as well. Student satisfaction and academic success in turn, have also been found to positively impact higher levels of student retention to degree completion (Harrison, 2009; Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004; Sutton & Sankar, 2011). This was also found to be the case with students from Virtual University as the students who participated in the list-serve communities and out-of-class experiences were less likely to drop out or stop out and graduated sooner than the students who were not advising list-serve participants.

However, this could also be the result of other factors, including how many other responsibilities students had outside of their dedicated school time as well as personality types as students who participated in the list-serves also described themselves as “talkative” and e-mails trails indicated they were interacting more often with other students, the advisors and me.

The relational dimension to social capital also appeared to be at work in the advisors and students interactions and relationships at Virtual University as well. Relationships took time and interaction to develop and they have been found to develop through trust that the information and the informant were credible (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In the case of Maria and her advisor Daniel, Maria initially chose to keep quiet about her language issues, her past criminal history and her physical disability until it was absolutely necessary. Even when Daniel tried to initiate other conversations, she resisted because she said she was not sure she could trust him. Maria indicated it wasn't until he asked Floria, an advisor who spoke Maria's language to get involved that Maria felt comfortable to share more details about her situation. Once she was able to see Daniel was not going to make light of her issues and was a good resource to aid in improving her situation and dilemmas as well as answer some questions about the social work field, she felt she could trust him.

The final dimension of social capital the cognitive dimension (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), includes not only a common language that advisors and advisees must develop in order to better understand one another and show respect to one another's backgrounds, but also shared narratives that both advisors and advisees might use to help each other

understand one's past and how present knowledge is filtered through these experiences and backgrounds.

Aggie and Alberto's case is a good example of the cognitive dimension of social capital. Aggie showed Alberto they had shared narratives when she provided him with details of her own personal story and language issues. She also used her e-mails to Alberto to help him understand the common language of the college – such as understanding the differences between grants and loans and how the discussion board in an online class could be seen as the virtual classroom and the discussion board was where he enacted his participation/attendance. Aggie also shared that she was the parent of 8 children and struggled as an online student as well. By communicating all of these things to Alberto and encouraging him to respond in kind, Aggie was helping the relationship along as she helped him understand they had things in common through shared narratives and a common language of parents who were also online students. As a result she increased his knowledge of the online college setting.

Thus, just as Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) found, Virtual University advisors could be conducive to the sharing of social capital for their advisees through their development of relationships over time and space. This is because social capital is assumed to be a by-product of activities engaged in for other purposes, like accomplishing education plans. It might also be shared as the result of organizational design, configuration of relationships and resources that work to enhance student success. Thus learning to be a successful student at Virtual University as measured through the COI model could be viewed as the primary goal and social capital accumulated by students and their advisors could be viewed as the by-product of intentional advising activities and interactions.

The case study also confirmed that Virtual University advising relationships could be conducive to the development of social capital so long as interactions continued over time and were strengthened and maintained as a result. At Virtual University, like in Nahapiet and Ghoshal's (1998) study, relationships only increased social capital with continued use and were especially valuable when they connected individuals with a number of people in the network, not just one person – through sustained interaction, conversation and social opportunities either by design or accident – as they brought members together to accomplish tasks. A good example of this was when Shenonda Talbot worked with leaders at Virtual University as well as the college where she worked to bring co-curricular experiences to Virtual University students.

But social capital is less likely to be transferred when individuals have other resources they are able to access (Nahapiet & Ghoshal). This is especially true when some students have other forms of social capital and some do not. Those who have other forms of social capital to aid them in their college education – like being a second generation college student might not need to rely on the advising relationships so much to support them. This was true of Carmen's case who received her best assistance and exposure to social capital from her work relationships instead of Virtual University advisors. But that also means that those with more social capital sometimes did not share all they knew with others who might need their advice and guidance, which was witnessed by the fact that Carmen had social capital but did not share it with others on the advising list-serve as she never accessed the list-serve while she was a student. Thus it would be important for advisors to encourage those with more social capital to share what they know to not only help others but to also keep those with more social capital

connected to the online advising community and thus not feel so isolated, frustrated or alienated from the group. Because Carmen did not interact much with the Virtual University community she was perhaps less interested and invested in advising relationships.

Norms, identity and trust are facilitated by network closure that keeps nonmembers (such as family and friends outside the college) from accessing what members share and this also aids in sharing social capital as well (Nahapiet & Ghoshal). The unique codes and language learned within the Virtual University advising community assisted advisors and advisees in feeling they belonged to the community. It made those within the advising community feel they were an insider but by the very nature of being an insider, means there will be outsiders – such as family members or others who may not feel the same about students' connections to the college and its members and may feel threatened by this kind of relationship. This is where it might be difficult for adult women and minority students who may find they have to choose between their family and cultural norms and expectations and their college community norms and expectations. It would therefore be important for advisor and others in the advising network to help students see how they might belong to more than one social network at cross purposes and help them effectively deal with these issues while accomplishing one's goals. Willow's case was a good example of a student who felt she had to choose between her reservation ties and her career but through conversations with her advisor realized there might be another route available that did not for an either-or scenario. Thus, the examples of cases and situations above indicated that the distance advising relationships at Virtual University were not simple matters but rather complex relationships that involved completing a

number of tasks and goals as they learned how to function successfully in the college environment. When viewed through the lens of the COI model, advisors used activities and interactions with students to create teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence that were both directed using prescriptive advising and facilitated using developmental advising methods. But relationships did not develop nor were tasks and goals completed effectively or efficiently without advisors sharing their social capital with students. And how this was enacted was by the way the structure of the network ties and connections were organized as well as how relationship norms, trust, obligations/expectations and identity with the group were viewed as well as the ways in which social capital was shared through common language and shared stories or narratives helped increase and influence knowledge attainment.

Conclusions

Distance advising relationships in the case study were not simple matters but rather complex relationships that involved completing a number of tasks and goals as advisors taught students how to function successfully in the virtual college environment. When viewed through the lens of the COI model, advisors directed or facilitated learning (teaching presence) through activities and interactions that enabled individual and group identities to be formed online (social presence) to construct knowledge (cognitive presence) that would enable students to be successful to degree completion. These activities and interactions included times where the advisor was in control of the relationship (prescriptive advising) and times where shared responsibilities between advisors and students (developmental advising) most benefitted the accomplishment of goals and tasks and relationship development.

Further, the study revealed that relationships did not develop nor were tasks and goals completed effectively or efficiently without advisors sharing their social capital with students. This was best accomplished when network ties and connections provided for interactions with more than just the advisor (such as through the use of list-serve communities). These informal social networks helped students understand the norms, obligations, and expectations of being a college student and reduced feelings of anxiety and isolation, especially when advisors were unavailable or not helpful.

Students who participated in list-serve communities as well as interacting with advisors were found to gain valuable information and resources (social capital) as a result of developing common language and shared stories or narratives. And the social capital they gained as a result helped increase and influence their knowledge and goal attainment.

The case study also revealed that positive relationships could be developed even without F2F interaction but they needed time and continuous maintenance to stay effective. Also, because students were more likely to be part-time, the distance advising relationship was also elongated, sometimes to more than seven years from admissions to graduations.

For students, goal completion was ultimately realized by higher grade point averages, an awakening of self-worth and self-advocacy as well as retention to graduation. For the advisor, goal completion was often the result of seeing more of their students be successful and to be recognized by the organization that advisors understood and aided student success.

Compared to F2F advising, distance advising utilized a different communication medium online, and this impacted the ways in which resources were provided. The accelerated pace of the college terms and the amount of students advised by one advisor also varied from F2F advising as advisors online worked with thousands rather than hundreds of students per 8-week term. Accommodating so many students was made possible because there was no need for F2F appointments to communicate. But to address common questions, online advisors developed templates for e-mail responses.

The case study also revealed that advising online, when viewed through the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison, et. al., 2000; Garrison, et. al, 2001) was indeed a form of teaching and learning. Through appropriate facilitating and directing from the advisor, intentional individual interactions and activities between advisors and advisees appeared to strengthen feelings of connectedness and shared meanings to each other and to the institution all the while furthering knowledge acquisition and application. But, without interactions that were satisfying in some way to the individual, students and advisors reported feeling disconnected and dissatisfied with one another as well as the college.

Students in the study did not appear to have a well-developed social network amongst family and friends outside the college who could provide needed guidance on college structures or strategies for success. Instead, students often relied on the social capital of advisors and those on the advising list-serves to be a new social network that could provide the necessary resources and advice for their success as students. But it was certainly not a perfect fit as many advisors did not always know or understand the unique needs of these diverse students, even with training on diverse student populations and

their needs. If they were able to develop supportive and trusting relationships that encouraged students to access all of the social capital resources the advisor knew about and could help them access then student success followed. But without that support and trust, students were more likely to disregard advisors and sometimes failed as a result.

College leadership indicated they trusted and valued advisor knowledge on students and student success but when it came to policy decisions, advisors opinions were sometimes overlooked or overruled. This was found to be due in part to the leadership's desire to provide what the student "customers" wanted while also adding to the college coffers. Unfortunately, these decisions proved costly for students sometimes in terms of their time, money, ability to succeed in classes and in terms of adequate preparation for future endeavors in and beyond college. This also negatively impacted relations between advisors and advisees as advisors were seen as hindering students rather than serving as knowledgeable advocates for student success.

Online student enrollment was highly profitable to the college leadership in its efforts to find ways to support its continued operation. But, the college leadership also tried to balance those goals with also wanting quality educational experiences for diverse students. Winston (1999) referred to this dichotomy as the "trust market" (p. 14) whereby the college is trusted to place some values above profit. However in their haste to provide the most services they could to and for the most students they could, online students were sometimes disadvantaged. The college system included 30-plus campuses and with Virtual University being the newest, they sometimes failed to understand the differences between F2F operations and virtual operations. Thus they relied on policies and practices that worked well for them in F2F settings and were surprised that these did

not always have the same effect online. As online colleges have not been in existence that long, there was much less information available to them regarding how to organize for success.

Online students at Virtual University Diverse students sometimes lacked academic competence, had attended many campuses before, and often had difficulty managing their time. They also sometimes came to Virtual University with poor language skills, criminal backgrounds and even disability issues more prevalent than those enrolled at the F2F campuses in the system, and more geographically isolated from the college. Thus, increased enrollment of these diverse students at Virtual University also saw an increase in isolation, alienation and frustration as well as increases in drop-out rates and a much larger amount of students on probation.

Organizational structures, policies and practices in the college did not adequately prepare admissions staff, advisors, transcript evaluators, career advisors, or those who managed outside of class experiences to address these needs when the campus was created. As a result, the college often played catch up, trying to add services, train staff and address policies and practices as time and further assessment allowed.

Unfortunately, in the process this conveyed mixed messages to everyone in the system about the value and quality of online experiences compared to F2F experiences. All of which sometimes had negative impacts on the quality of advising provided to students, the relationship development between advisors-advisees, and the success enjoyed by online students.

Implications for Action and Research

Case studies like Virtual University have been said to assume the likelihood of transferability to other settings (Yin, 2003), but as the case study is time, place and individual contingent, conclusions from the study can only be applied to this case and may not represent the perspectives of other advisors and students in Virtual University. However, by providing detailed descriptions of the case as well as suggestions for further implications and directions to take research, readers can evaluate the case and determine for themselves if there are enough similarities to other settings to be transferable from this case study. Thus it is hoped that the case study may serve to add to the knowledge we have about distance advising that might not otherwise be known. Below are some recommendations for both actions and research.

Advising appeared to be best at Virtual University when it included both individual and team advising structures to support students and advisors in this 24-hour a day, 7 day a week online learning environment. Students repeated again and again in the study that they liked teams but that they did not want teams to replace individual advising. But some sort of compromise between individual and group attention could perhaps better address the needs of immediacy and isolation for students at Virtual University as well as other online college settings if students had access and contact with others at the institution besides their assigned advisor.

Also, the idea of having peer leaders from amongst the students in the online setting to reduce isolation was a common topic amongst both advisors and students at Virtual University. Peers could act as an additional resource to newer students in an online college so long as they were trained and encouraged to be positive leaders. This would

also serve as an additional way to provide connections to others at the institution and leadership experiences for students in Virtual University.

College leaders have an obligation to weigh educational as well as financial decisions regarding college operations carefully as this case study revealed that there may be unintended consequences of employing F2F policies and practices to online environments. Open enrollment/open admissions policies may attract students online that are geographically separated from the campus. But campus leaders hoping to develop online degree programs need to determine carefully if admissions policies that vary from their F2F locations serve their purposes and can be supported by their current structure or what would need to be added to make it so as policies like open admissions/open enrollment attracts a different type of student than more selective admissions policies do. Also, where will the college leadership draw the line between access and timing of first enrollments given that online learners have often attended quite a few colleges and credits will need to be evaluated in a timely fashion? Additionally, as enrollment continues to grow, student populations' change and technology moves forward, processes will need to be in place that allow for continual re-evaluation of services and find new way in which to address these changes without affecting the quality of services and relationships. College leaders will also want to determine who will be involved in the decision-making regarding policies and practices. This is especially critical given that in most online college environments, advisors may be the only administrator who "sees" students from admissions to graduation and thus may be extremely useful in helping provide assessments of current and future needs for students.

Adult, minority, disabled, first generation and military students who work and have children are currently amongst the majority student populations when it comes to online colleges. Some are up to the challenge of college and some are not. The ones who find continued success are those who not only learn and practice academic skills but who also know how to navigate their way through the college environment with the minimum in delays and challenges. For college leaders thinking of starting or expanding online degree completion programs, some sort of assessment of student readiness for online learning might be in order so as not to further disadvantage these populations by admitting them but then not supporting them fully to succeed.

If I had to complete this study again, I would do a number of things differently. For example, I would reduce the student population from 8 to perhaps 4 students as the information gained from 8 students was sometimes redundant and slowed the process down as I combed through so much information, particularly from their blogs regarding their interactions. Additionally, I would not choose advisors based on their ability to exhibit a learning focus but would instead randomly select advisors and I would also solicit opinions from advisors not in the study as a part of the process to triangulate my findings and confirm opinions were more representative of all of the advisors in the setting. I might also employ a mixed-methods case study rather than qualitative study as well as I would like to have known more about demographics and opinions on true-false questions from amongst the larger population represented online. I would then randomly select advisors and students who participated in the initial survey to complete interviews and observations. I would also consider incorporating college leadership into the study in some fashion in order to better understand decision-making for online colleges.

As there is little prior research in this area as well as some perception issues about what happens in a F2F advising relationship compared to one that is at a distance, the need for new models and theories of how relationships can be advanced without F2F interaction are crucial not just to advance the distance advising relationship but to also address critical learning and socialization that must occur in order for advisors and advisees to come together for student success. And we must also further explore decision-making and services offered online in order to better understand how to organize for both student success and revenue generation.

Distance education does not appear to be going away and as a result, distance advising is likely to remain a critical step in the retention and completion of students in colleges. If new or strengthened methods could be advanced, it would be most beneficial for not only the student, but also the advisor and the institution. Particularly important is how we help students who obviously want to further their educations but for whom the traditional models of both education and advising may not work for them. Research could aid in stripping away the structures that constrict certain students from achieving and allowing students to concentrate more on their educational pursuits and less on the navigational road blocks implemented at the college level. I am not advocating that everyone should earn a college degree or that they should do so online, but rather the opportunities should not be predicated on how much hurdles a student is willing to overcome outside of the educational process.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1: Advisor Demographics in Study

Race/Ethnicity	
White	2
Hispanic	1
Reporting two or more races	1
Races included: White/Native American	
Age	
30+ years old	3
24-29 years old	1
Gender	
Female	3
Male	1
Employment Status	
Full-time advisor	4
Part-time advisor	0
Years as Advisors	
10+ years	2
3 – 9 years	2
Children/Dependents	
Had children	3
Did not have children	1
Children under 10 years old	1
Children 11-17 years old	0
Children over 18 still at home	1
Generational Status	
1 st generation college student	0
2 nd generation college student	2
3 rd generation college student	2
Education	
Master's degree (Political science) completed	1
Pursuing master's (Business, library/information science)	2
Bachelor's degree completed	4
Political science	
Biology	
Communications	
Business	

Table 2: Student Demographics in Study

Race/Ethnicity

White	1
African American/Black	2
Hispanic	1
Native American/Alaska Native	1
Reporting two or more races	2
Races included: African American/Hispanic White/Native American)	
Age	
30+ years old	6
24-29 years old	1
17-23 years old	1
Gender	
Female	6
Male	2
Employment Status	
Full-time worker	7
Part-time worker	1
Children/Dependents	
Had children	7
Did not have children	1
Children under 10 years old	5
Children 11-17 years old	6
Children over 18 still at home	2
Generational Status	
1 st generation college student	7
2 nd generation college student	1
Past Education	
Had attended 2 or more colleges before	8
Had completed an Associate's degree	1
Present Degrees Being Pursued	
Associate Degrees*	7
Computer/Information Science	1
Business	3
General Studies	2
Humanities	1
Bachelor's Degrees*	8
Computer/Information Science	1
Business	3
General Studies	2
Humanities	2

*Note that students were able to pursue both an Associate's degree and Bachelor's degree at the same time and all were doing so at the time of the study except one who finished her associate's degree prior to the start of the study but was still pursuing the bachelor's degree when the study began.

APPENDIX B: MISSION, VISION AND VALUES STATEMENT FOR VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

Obtained from Virtual University's Undergraduate College Catalog, 2011

[Virtual University] improves the lives of diverse undergraduate and graduate learners through exemplary teaching. The liberal arts and sciences and professional programs of the College embrace and profess the values of:

- Student-centrism
- Life-long learning
- Ethics and citizenship
- Flexibility and innovation
- Quality and improvement
- Civility and respect
- Environmental and fiscal stewardship

Vision: a model institution

Approved by the Board of Trustees May 1, 2009

APPENDIX C: DEGREES OFFERED AT VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

(from the college's website, as of 2012)

Associate in Arts

Business Administration Department

- Associate in Science in Business Administration
- Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration
- Bachelor of Science in Business Administration
- Master of Business Administration

Computer and Management Information Sciences Department

- Associate in Science in Computer Information Systems
- Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Systems
- Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems

Criminal Justice Administration Department

- Associate in Science in Criminal Justice Administration
- Associate in Science in Fire Service Administration
- Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice Administration
- Master of Science in Criminal Justice

General Studies

- Associate in General Studies
- Bachelor of General Studies

History and Political Science Department

- Bachelor of Arts in American Studies
- Bachelor of Arts in History
- Master of Arts in Military Studies

Human Services

- Associate in Science in Human Services
- Bachelor of Arts in Human Services

Psychology and Sociology Department

- Bachelor of Arts in Psychology
- Bachelor of Arts in Sociology

Science Department

- Associate in Science in Environmental Studies

APPENDIX D: VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY ENROLLMENT STATISTICS

(taken from August 2012 enrollment data)

Program Enrollments

Business	25%
Computer & Information Sciences	24%
General Studies	20%
Humanities	15%
Social Sciences	10%
Science, Math, Ag	14%

Race/Ethnicity

Percentage of Students

White	48 %
African American/Black	24%
Hispanic	19%
Native American/Alaska Native	4.3%
Reporting two or more races	4%
Asian American	1%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders	.3%

Age

Percentage of Students

30+ years old	62%
24-29 years old	25%
17-23 years old	13%

Gender

Percentage of Students

Female	69%
Male	30%
Chose not to identify	1%

Employment Status

Percentage of Students

Full-time worker	62%
Part-time worker	30%
Unemployed	8%

Children/Dependents

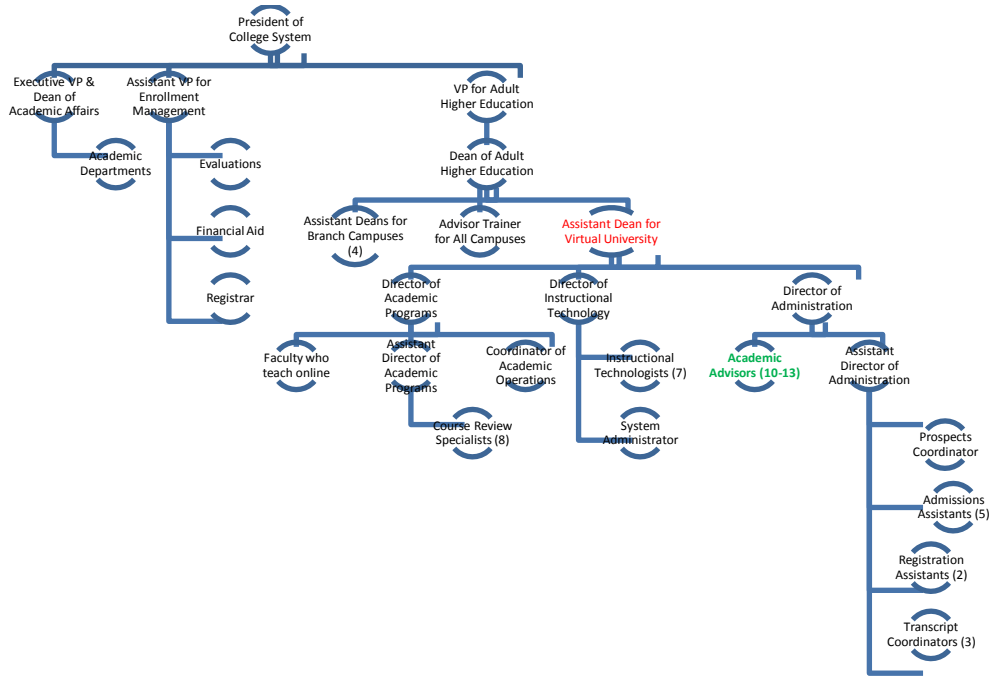
Percentage of Students

Have children	78%
Do not have children	22%

Children under 10 years old	69%
Children 11-17 years old	45%
Children over 18 still at home	6%

Note these numbers do not add to 100 due to multiple children in families

APPENDIX E: ORGANIZATION CHART FOR VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY AND OFFICES FROM THE MAIN CAMPUS THAT SUPPORT VU



APPENDIX F: INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Hi,

I am Angie Jacobs, a former academic advisor with the [Virtual Campus]. I am writing to ask you to participate in a research study that I am doing for my dissertation with the University of Missouri. The study pertains to academic advising in an online college setting where students do not set foot on the campus. Participant responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Your participation is completely voluntary and will have no impact on student grades or your relationship with the college as a student or an employee. Your participation should take approximately 60 minutes. And as a thank you, participants who choose to complete the survey online (or via taped in person or on the phone interview) will be placed in a drawing to receive a \$10 coupon redeemable at the college bookstore either in person or online.

If you would like to participate in this research project right now, please connect to the survey link below or follow the directions below to complete an in-person or phone interview:

Link

For more information about this study or if you would like to complete the survey but would prefer to do so via a taped in-person or phone interview, feel free to contact me directly: Angie Jacobs at 303 Douglas Drive, Ashland, MO 65010 or via email: acjnp6@mail.missouri.edu, or phone: 573-673-1919.

Thank you!

Angie

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! You are being asked to participate in a research study that pertains to academic advising in an online college setting where students do not set foot on the campus. Participant responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Your participation is completely voluntary and will have no impact on student grades or your relationship with the college as a student or employee. Your participation should take approximately 60 minutes.

If you choose to participate, it is important that you respond to questions as honestly as you can. None of the questions measure mental disorders, and there are no right or wrong answers to any questions. Because your answers to some questions might change somewhat from day to day, I would like you to use your most recent interactions between students and academic advisors for your frame of reference for answering questions. In other words, answer questions in accordance with how you have typically felt during this advising interaction.

This informed consent statement will be retained in my files, but your name will not be connected in any way with the questionnaire data. The questionnaire includes only demographic information that cannot and will not be used to identify you. Your personal responses will be held in the strictest confidence throughout the research project. There will be no penalty if you choose not to participate or if you discontinue participation.

The results of this project will be used as part of my dissertation research and may be part of future presentations on the subject and the results may be published. The benefits of this research include aiding educators in understanding how to utilize technology and communication skills for meaningful and positive interactions with college students about their academics. The risks might include the possibility of a participant's identity or answers becoming public. To minimize this risk, each participant has been assigned a unique code number rather than name or other identifying features and information completed online will not track e-mail addresses from responses.

As a thank you, participants who choose to complete the survey will be placed in a drawing to receive a coupon redeemable at the Columbia College bookstore, and no University of Missouri funding will be used to fund this thank you gift.

For more information or for questions about this study, feel free to contact me, Angie Jacobs at 303 Douglas Drive, Ashland, MO 65010 or via email: acjnp6@mail.missouri.edu, or phone: 573-673-1919.

If you are willing to participate in this research project, please [click here](#) to begin the survey.

If you wish to complete a phone interview or in person interview instead of the online survey please provide your phone number, time zone and the best time to call you below so that we can make other arrangements:

Name:

Phone number:

Time zone:

Best times to call:

Note that if you choose to have a phone or in person interview that I will be recording the interview. I will transcribe the information and then destroy the tape. The transcript will be assigned a code number as an identifier rather than your name or other identifying features to protect your identity to the same level as those who complete the survey online.

APPENDIX F1: INITIAL ADVISOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Academic Advisor Survey to be used with academic advisor only

1. What is your title?
2. How many years have you been in academic advising?
3. What kinds of degrees/training do you have (list all training and academic degrees you are pursuing or have completed)
4. What is your definition of academic advising?
5. What is the purpose of academic advising?
6. What is your role in advising?
7. What is the student's role in advising?
8. Who else, if anyone is involved in the advising process (such as administrators, instructors, etc.)?
9. List all whom you think might have a role in the process from the institution.
10. List all whom you think might have a role in the process on the side of the student.
11. Do you think you play an important role in the success of students in your college? If so, how, if not, why not?
12. Estimate how many students you advise per term (use the most recent term or terms to estimate).
13. Estimate how many students you are responsible for advising each term, even if not everyone contacts you or is contacted by you during the term.
14. Does your advising load impact your ability to provide timely and correct advising according to your definition of an advisor's role? In what ways is it impacted?
15. Do you use any theories, credos or standards by which you operate to support your relationship?
with those you advise? If so, please describe or explain what and how do you use it/them?
16. Is communication an important part of the academic advising relationship? If so, how do you best communicate with students? If not, why not?
17. What are the pitfalls of communicating without face to face contact in the advising relationship?
18. What are the benefits of communicating without face to face contact in the advising relationship?
19. What kinds of questions do you get from students you advise? Please provide an example or most common topics.
20. What kinds of resources do you direct students to when advising them?
21. What kinds of actions or activities do you direct students to take or complete as a result of advising discussions?
22. What kinds of actions or activities do you do as the result of advising discussions or to complete your job?
23. Tell me about an experience where you felt was successful when working with a student you advise. Why do you think this was a successful experience? What made it so?
24. Tell me about an experience where you felt was unsuccessful when working with a student you advise. Why do you think it was an unsuccessful experience? What made it so?
25. In your opinion, how is advising online (by phone and email) different than advising face to face?
26. In your opinion, how is advising online (by phone and email) similar to advising face to face?
27. Are there certain topics that are better approached by phone? Please list and explain why.
28. Are there certain topics that are better approached by email? Please list and explain why.

29. In your opinion, what does “student success” mean to you?
30. In your opinion, what does “student success” mean to your students?
31. If you could strengthen the relationship between you and your advisees, or improve the success of your students, what would you do to make that happen? Please be specific.
32. If you could improve the advising operations to better serve the relationship between you and students, or improve the success of your students, what would those improvements include?
33. Think of the Virtual University as a community.
34. What does “community” or “learning community” in the Virtual University mean to you?
35. What do you think “community” or “learning community” in the Virtual University means to the students you advise?
36. What sort of relationships do you like to develop with the students you advise?
37. Are you able to develop this relationship with all students you advise? Why or why not?
38. What sort of relationships do you think the students you advise would like to have with you?
39. Are these relationships achievable? If so, how, if not, why not?
40. Do you think students feel a sense of community in online learning? Why or why not?
41. Do you feel a sense of community in online learning? Why or why not?
42. Have you ever heard of the term “developmental advising”? Y N
43. Here is a brief definition of “developmental advising”:

Advising can be considered a form of teaching. “This concept of advising was organized around two principles: (1) Higher learning provides an opportunity for developing persons to achieve self-fulfilling lives, and (2) teaching includes any experience that contributes to individual growth and can be evaluated” (Susan Frost, 1991).

Do you believe academic advising is teaching? Why or why not?

44. Those that use developmental advising theories say advising includes the following:
 - a. developing competence by increasing the social, intellectual or physical skills of the advisee so that the student can handle and master certain tasks.
 - b. developing autonomy by working through or confronting an issue or a series of issues that ultimately aid the student in recognizing and practicing their own independence
 - c. developing purpose by thinking about, assessing and clarifying one’s interests, lifestyle preferences, career choices and educational pursuits that will help in achieving students’ purposes and using those factors to help develop a coherent direction for their lives.

Do you think you employ any of these strategies (a, b, and c above) when you advise students? If so, which ones, if not, why not?)

45. Advising is... (answer true or false)
 - a. Advising is...a process, not a paper checklist. It is a continuous and cumulative relationship with both direction and purpose T F
 - b. Advising is...impacted by the cognitive, affective, career, physical, and moral areas of students’ lives. These are all legitimate concerns that impact students’ lives and impact their college experiences, goals and objectives T F
 - c. Advising is...setting goals collaboratively between the student and advisor, to help provide direction for planning academic, career and personal growth. T F

- d. Advising is...a series of caring interactions where the advisor is responsible for the initial relationship but both student and advisor contribute to sustaining the relationship. TF
- e. Advising is...the collaboration between faculty and advisors for the maximum benefit of the student. T F
- f. Advising is...not just about relationships with advisors, it is also about the use of all available resources (such as faculty and other campus resources). T F
- g. Advising is a relationship that focuses on the needs of students. T F
- h. Successful advisors are aware of the characteristics of specific groups of students and how these characteristics can influence the need for advising. T F
- i. Successful advisors encourage students' involvement through academic planning. T F
- j. While not all advising techniques are effective for all academically deficient students, for most, a trusting student-advisor relationship can be a first step toward success. T F
- k. Advisors who encourage underprepared student to view themselves as having control over their chances of success can help them become independent learners. Then these students can begin to take responsibility for their academic futures. T F
- l. In many cases, advisors of underprepared students should consider assuming responsibility for sustaining the advising relationship at first by contacting students frequently and encouraging them to succeed. T F
- m. Academic and social integration are the keys to the persistence of freshmen or students new to the college. T F
- n. Students can be taught the skills they need to persist in college. T F
- o. Academic advisors can teach skills or strategies to students to persist in college. T F
- p. Academic advisors can teach skills or strategies to students to be successful in college. TF
- q. Many underprepared students enter college with inappropriately defined academic and career goals that impede their success. T F
- r. Many minority students enter college with inappropriately defined academic and career goals that impede their success. T F
- s. Minority students and other underprepared students often are unaccustomed to success. TF
- t. Effective advisors can aid minority and other underprepared students to increase their chances of success by encouraging them to investigate their strengths. T F

Any additional comments you would like to make?

Would you be interested in allowing me to view your actions/interactions further with regards to the distance advising relationship? (explain this would entail me watching them while they interact/work and that it requires permission from both people in the interaction process. The purpose is to view the actual process)

Would you be interested in keeping a journal or blog about your interactions right after they occur? Explain the purpose is to gauge their perceptions of what occurs, what works/doesn't work, how they feel

about the interaction and the relationship, whether it moves them forward on their goals. They can also include their thoughts on their interactions on the advising list-serve and the relationships they form as a result but that as this is highly personal interactions with students that they should not include names or extremely personal information that would identify the other, just a general overview of what occurred and their perceptions on the relationship, the interactions, the learning occurring.

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX F2: INITIAL STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Survey Questionnaire

(To be completed with students only)

1. Gender: M F Choose Not to Respond
2. Age: empty space for student to insert number
3. Student status
 - a. Full – time Student (6 hours + per term)
 - b. Part – time (less than 6 hours per term)
4. Employment Status (identify all that apply):
 - a. full-time employee
 - b. part-time employee (1-20 hours per week)
 - c. part-time employee (21-39 hours per week)
 - d. not employed
5. Military Service:
Yes (if yes, what branch: _____)
 - a. Active Duty b. Veteran
 - c. Years of service _____
6. Marital Status:
 - a. Married b. Single c. Divorced d. Widowed e. In a Committed Relationship
7. Do you have children? Yes – how many _____
 - a. How many are under the age of 18?
 - b. Are there other dependents in the household? Yes, provide relationship (cousins, etc.) and ages
8. I would consider myself (check all that apply):
 - a. Caucasian b. Black/African American c. Hispanic
 - d. American Indian e. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander f. Other: _____
 - g. Prefer not to share
9. I am the first member of my family to attend college Yes No
10. I will be the first member of my family to graduate from college Yes No
11. I have attended how many other colleges besides this college
 - a. 0 b. 1 c. 2 d. 3 e. 4 f. 5 g. 6 or more colleges
12. How did you choose to enroll in this college? Did anything special draw you to it?
13. how comfortable are you with technology?
14. Do you have access to a computer 24 hours a day? If not, how many hours a day/week?
15. What are the benefits to taking online courses?
16. What are the drawbacks to taking online courses?
17. How many hours of credit do you take per 8 week term?
18. The amount of credit hours I have earned with this college is
 - a. 0-30 hours b. 31-45 hours c. 46-60 d. 61-120+ hours
19. The amount of credit hours I have earned from all of my colleges' attendance is
 - a. 0-30 hours b. 31-45 hours c. 46-60 d. 61-120+ hours
20. I estimate my cumulative grade point average (meaning the grade point average for all your completed courses) at this college to be:
 - a. Below 1.75 b. 1.76 to 1.9 c. 2.0 to 2.5 d. 2.6 to 2.9 e. 3.0 to 3.4 f. 3.5 to 4.0
21. My grades are a good representation of how much I know/am learning. Why or why not?
22. Majors:
 - a. My major is _____
 - b. I have changed my major _____ times in college
23. Choose one of the following:
 - a. I pay for all of my schooling out of my own pocket or through family resources

- b. I receive some federal financial aid/loans
 - c. I am completely funded by federal financial aid/loans
 - d. I receive some aid or scholarships from the college
 - e. I am completely funded by aid or scholarships from the college
24. I estimate the amount of financial aid/loan money I will have to pay back to be:
-
25. Choose one of the following:
- a. I own the place I live in
 - b. I rent the place I live in
 - c. I live with others who pay for the place I live in
26. I most often enroll in classes with the college
- a. As soon as enrollment begins
 - b. Two weeks or more before classes begin
 - c. One week or less before classes begin
 - d. During the first week of classes
27. Outside of class, how many hours in an average week do you study?
- a. Over 20 hours b. 16-20 hours c. 11-15 hours d. 6-10 hours e. 0-5 hours
28. Compared to other college students how important is it for me to be successful academically?
- a. Much more important b. Somewhat more c. About equally d. Much less important
29. I learn on my own:
- a. Very much b. Quite a bit c. Some e. Not at all
30. I find information I need regarding classes or college in general:
- a. Very much b. Quite a bit c. Some d. Not at all
31. I apply ideas from various sources to help me learn:
- a. Very much b. Quite a bit c. Some d. Not at all
32. I explain information to others:
- a. Very much b. Quite a bit c. Some d. Not at all
33. What is the purpose of academic advising?
34. I know who my academic advisor is T F
35. I have an assigned advisor but I use others as necessary to get the information I need in the time I need it. Y N
36. I contact my advisor before I enroll in classes
- a. Very much b. Quite a bit c. Some d. Not at all
37. What is your role in academic advising?
38. What is the role of your academic advisor?
39. Who else, if anyone is involved in the advising process (such as administrators, instructors, family, etc.) ?
- a. List all whom you think might have a role in the process from the college.
 - b. List all whom you think might have a role in the process on behalf of you as a student
40. Do you think academic advisors play an important role in your academic success? Why or why not?
41. Do you think you receive timely and accurate information from advisors?
42. What are the benefits of communicating with advisors via email and phone compared to face to face visits?
43. What are the pitfalls of communicating with advisors via email and phone compared to face to face visits?
44. What kinds of questions do you ask of advisors?
45. What kinds of actions or activities do you do as a result of advising discussions or information/e-mails sent to you?
46. Are there certain topics better approached on the phone or via email? Please provide examples.
47. What does “student success” mean to you?
48. If you could strengthen the relationship between you and your advisor, what would you do or

want advisors to do to strengthen this relationship?

49. Do you think advising is a form of teaching and learning? Why or why not?

50. Some say advising includes the following:

a. developing competence by increasing the social, intellectual or physical skills of the advisee so that the student can handle and master certain tasks.

b. developing autonomy by working through or confronting an issue or a series of issues that ultimately aid the student in recognizing and practicing their own independence

c. developing purpose by thinking about, assessing and clarifying one's interests, lifestyle preferences, career choices and educational pursuits that will help in achieving students' purposes and using those factors to help develop a coherent direction for their lives.

Do you think your advisor uses any of these strategies (a, b, and c above) when advising you? If so, which ones, if not, why not?

51. Advising is... (answer true or false)

a. Advising is... a process, not a paper checklist. It is a continuous and cumulative relationship with both direction and purpose T F

b. Advising is... impacted by the cognitive (define) , affective (define), career, physical, and moral areas of students' lives. These are all legitimate concerns that impact students' lives and impact their college experiences, goals and objectives T F

c. Advising is... setting goals collaboratively between the student and advisor, to help provide direction for planning academic, career and personal growth. T F

d. Advising is... a series of caring interactions where the advisor is responsible for the initial relationship but both student and advisor contribute to sustaining the relationship. T F

e. Advising is... the collaboration between faculty and advisors for the maximum benefit of the student. T F

f. Advising is... not just about relationships with advisors, it is also about the use of all available resources (such as faculty and other campus resources). T F

g. Advising is a relationship that focuses on the needs of students. T F

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i. Successful advisors encourage students' involvement through academic planning. T F

j. While not all advising techniques are effective for all academically deficient students, for most, a trusting student-advisor relationship can be a first step toward success. T F

k. Advisors who encourage underprepared student to view themselves as having control over their chances of success can help them become independent learners. Then these students can begin to take responsibility for their academic futures. T F

l. In many cases, advisors of underprepared students should consider assuming responsibility for sustaining the advising relationship at first by contacting students frequently and encouraging them to succeed. T F

m. Academic and social integration (define) are the keys to the persistence of freshmen or students new to the college. T F

n. Students can be taught the skills they need to persist in college. T F

o. Academic advisors can teach skills or strategies to students to persist in college. T F

p. Academic advisors can teach skills or strategies to students to be successful in college. T F

q. Many underprepared students enter college with inappropriately defined academic and career goals that impede their success. T F

r. Many minority students enter college with inappropriately defined academic and career goals that impede their success. T F

s. Minority students and other underprepared students often are unaccustomed to success. T F

t. Effective advisors can aid minority and other underprepared students to increase their

chances of success by encouraging them to investigate their strengths. T F

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Thank you for participating in this survey!

APPENDIX F3: SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS: COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

To be used on the phone, via e-mail and in person. Always explore beyond the initial question

(Teaching Presence Element: Design and Organization)

T1: How do advisors communicate important topics? What might those include?

T2: How do advisor clearly communicate important goals? Examples?

T3: How do advisors provide clear instructions on how to participate in learning outcomes for advisees? Examples?

T4: Do advisors clearly communicate important due dates/time frames for learning outcome completion? How?

T5: Do advisors clearly communicate what forms are necessary to complete as a student? How is this information communicated?

For the items above, please feel free to expand on your thoughts on this below:

(Teaching Presence Element: Facilitation)

T6: Are advisors helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on topics and help students to learn? Why or why not?

T7: Are advisors helpful in guiding students toward understanding advising topics in a way that helps student clarify their thinking? Why or why not?

T8: Do advisors help to keep advisees engaged and participating in productive dialogue? If so how? If not, what would help?

T9: Do advisors help keep advisees on task in a way that helps students to learn? How so or if not, why not?

T10: Do advisors encourage advisees to explore new concepts and ideas about their education and career goals? How?

T11: Do advisors' actions reinforce the development of a sense of community amongst advisees? How?

(Teach Presence Element: Direct Instruction)

T12: Do advisors help to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that help students to learn and grow? How?

T 13: Do advisors provided feedback that help students to understand their strengths and weaknesses? How?

T14: Do advisor provided feedback in a timely fashion?

For the items above, please feel free to expand on your thoughts on this below:

(Social Presence Element: Affective Expression)

S1: Do advisors/advisees feel that getting to know each other online gives them a sense of belonging ? How so or why not?

S2: Do advisors/advisees feel that they are able to form distinct impressions of one another in the online setting? How so or why not?

S3: Do advisors/advisees feel that online forms of communication (primarily e-mail, phone and fax) are an excellent medium for social interaction with one another? Why or why not?

For the items above, please feel free to expand on your thoughts on this below:

(Social Presence Element: Open Communication)

S4: Do advisors/advisees feel comfortable conversing through the online mediums (phone, e-mail, fax primarily)? Why or why not?

S5: Do advisors/advisees feel comfortable participating in online discussions? Why or why not?

S6: Do advisors/advisees feel comfortable interacting with others in the online setting? Why or why not?

For the items above, please feel free to expand on your thoughts on this below:

(Social Presence Element: Group Cohesion)

S7: Do advisors/advisees feel comfortable disagreeing with advisors or other advisees while still maintaining a sense of trust? Why or why not?

S8: Do advisors/advisees feel their point of view is acknowledged by others? Why or why not?

S9: Do advisors/advisees feel their point of view is valued by others? Why or why not?

S10: Do advisors/advisees feel online discussions helped to develop a sense of collaboration?

For the items above, please feel free to expand on your thoughts on this below:

(Cognitive Presence Element: Triggering Event)

C1: Do problems posed increase advisor/advisee interest in the issues and how to resolve them? Why or why not?

C2: Do advising activities and interactions pique their curiosity? Why or why not?

C3: Do advisors/advisees feel motivated to explore questions further? Why or why not?

For the items above, please feel free to expand on your thoughts on this below:

(Cognitive Presence Element: Exploration)

C4: Do advisors/advisees utilize a variety of information sources to explore problems posed during the student's college career? Why or why not?

C5: Do advisors/advisees engage in brainstorming and finding relevant information to resolve issues during the student's college career? Why or why not?

C6: Are online discussions felt to be valuable in helping advisors/advisees appreciate different perspectives during the student's college career? Why or why not?

For the items above, please feel free to expand on your thoughts on this below:

(Cognitive Presence Element: Integration)

C7: Do advisors/advisees combine new information from advising interactions/activities with that already learned? Do these help advisors/advisees answer questions raised in advising activities?

C8: Do advising activities/interactions help advisees construct explanations/solutions to their problems?

C9: Does reflection on advising activities/interactions help advisees understand fundamental concepts necessary to be successful in college?

APPENDIX F4: THIRD INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS: SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social Capital Interview Protocol for Advisors and Advisees

Background:

- B1: Tell me a little bit about yourself.
B1a: race, ethnicity, sex, perceived social class
B1b: where from
B1c: single, married, divorced, separated, etc.
- B2: How old are you if you wouldn't mind sharing. And age range would be fine as well (ex: 30s)
- B3: What is your role at the college (student or staff).
B3a: If student – what is your major and how many hours have you earned?
B3b: If staff – what is your title and how many years have you been in this role?
- B4: Did your family speak any other languages besides English at home when you were a kid?
B4a: What languages might those include?
- B5: What did/do your parents do for a living?
B5a: Have you ever lived on welfare, received food stamps or other forms of government assistance as a child?
B5b: Have you ever lived on welfare, received food stamps or other forms of government assistance (outside of student financial aid) as an adult?
- B6: Did your parents or siblings go to college?
B6a: Did they graduate?
B6b: Did you earn a high school diploma or is it a GED?
B6c: Did you go right to college from high school or was that later on? Why?
- B7: Do you work? (full or part-time)
B7a: How does this impact your schooling?
- B8: Do you have dependents that are supported by you? (children and other family members)
B8a: How many?
B8b: How does this impact your schooling?
- B9: How many colleges have you attended/worked at prior to this one? (seeking numbers)
B9a: Where they public or private colleges? (tech, CC, 4 yr)
B9b: What was your major?
B9c: How many hours have you earned from past colleges?
- B10: Why didn't you stay at that/those college(s)?

Structural:

- ST1: What drew you to the present college?
ST1a: Where do you access the college website (location – like home, office, public library)
ST1b: What kind of computer do you use (laptop, desktop, mobile phone)
ST1c: Do you have access to computer/technology all of the time (24 hours or is it limited)
ST1d: What is the primary mode you use to communicate with advisors/advisees (e-mail, phone, webcam, advising list-serve, fax, Skype, any other...)
ST1e: How often do you communicate with advisors/advisees in any given 8-week term on average?
ST1f: If you had to choose between faculty, staff and students, who would you say of the three groups do you feel most connected to? (can rank the three)
ST1g: Was price and/or financial aid (students), pay/benefits (advisors) a factor in deciding to be at this college? Why or why not?
ST1h: Do you feel satisfied with your choice to be at this college? Why or why not? (please explain)
- ST2: How would you describe your relationship with faculty and staff at the college?
(comfort level, supportive, feel connected, feel like an outsider, etc.)
- ST3: Is there any one person or group you feel especially connected to?
- ST4: Do you ever feel isolated from others in the college?
ST4a: If so, when and why do you think that is?

- ST5: Do you feel like you have access to resources at the college as you need them to complete tasks?
 ST5a: Why or why not?
- ST6: Have you been able to use information gained from others to be successful at the college?
 ST6a: Please give an example.
 ST 6b: Is this information timely for your use/application?
- ST7: Are there any policies, procedures or practices at the college that negatively impact you?
 ST7a: Please give an example.
 ST7b: If you could change any of these policies, procedures or practices what would you change and why?
- ST8: Do your relationships and/or interactions with others at the college help clarify confusing or ambiguous information?
 ST8a: Please provide an example.
 ST8b: Why do you think this helps or hinders clarity?
- ST9: In your relationships with others at the college, is a difference of opinion acceptable and encouraged?
 ST9a: why or why not?
- ST10: Would you say you are able to rely on information from others at the college to complete your goals and tasks?
 ST10a: why or why not?

Relational:

- R1: Do you feel you can trust people at the college to support you, your goals and/or ideas?
 R1a: why or why not?
- R2: Do you allow yourself to open up and be vulnerable with anyone at the college (like sharing highly personal information, fears, concerns, etc.)?
 R2a: why or why not?
- R3: Do you share information with others to help them succeed?
 R3a: Why or why not?
- R4: Do you think members of the college community are willing to listen to new ideas, criticism or tolerate things that don't always go as planned?
 R4a: Please provide an example.
- R5: Do you think failure helps people learn (like learning from one's mistakes)?
 R5a: why or why not?
 R5b: Do you think others at the college think as you do? Why or why not?
- R6: Do you feel a personal obligation to help others succeed at the college?
 R6a: if yes, who are you obliged to help succeed?
 R6b: How would you help them?
- R7: Do you feel the need to cooperate with others at the college?
 R7a: who might you cooperate with the most? The least?
- R8: Does anyone motivate you to succeed at the college? Who? Why?
 R8a: Do you motivate anyone to succeed at the college? Who? Why?
- R9: Do you see yourself as part of any group(s) at the college?
 R9a: Why or why not?
 R9b: Name the groups.
- R10: Do you have minimum expectations of how others in your selected group(s) behave?
 R10a: Why or why not?
 R10b: Give an example of minimum expectations
- R11: How are people at the college that you interact with similar to you? Please explain.
 R11a. How is this exhibited in your interactions or relationships with them?
 R11b. Does this make it easy for you to communicate with them? How so or why/why not?
- R12: How are people at the college that you interact with different from you? Please explain.
 R12a. How is this exhibited in your interactions or relationships with them?
 R12b. Does this make it difficult for you to communicate with them? How so or why/why not?

Cognitive

- CG1: Do you think using the right language or behavior helps you gain access to the right information or people at the right time? (like speaking a certain way gets you faster, more cooperative action from others)
- CG1a: Why or why not?
- CG1b: Please give an example of how your language or behavior helped you gain access to the right information at the right time.
- CG2: Do you think your word choices or language impact the way you are treated in the college?
- CG2a: How so?
- CG2b: Please give an example.
- CG3: Have you learned any valuable skills since you have been in the Virtual University?
- CG3a: why or why not?
- CG3b: Who might have taught you?
- CG3c: Examples.
- CG4: Do your relationships and interactions outside the classroom with people at the college help you learn or otherwise be successful at the college or in life?
- CG4a: Why or why not?
- CG4b: In what ways – please provide examples
- CG5: How do you define academic success?
- CG6: How do you define personal success?
- CG7: Have your relationships at the college helped you achieve academic or personal success?
- CG7a: In what ways, please explain.
- CG8: Do you share stories, myths or experiences with others at the college?
- CG8a: If so who and what do you share?
- CG8b: If not, why not?
- CG9: Do others share stories, myths or experiences with you at the college?
- CG9a: Why do you think they do that?
- CG9b: Is it helpful to you?
- CG10: Do you feel connected to the college through your relationships and interactions?
- CG10a: Why or why not?
- CG10b: With who?
- CG10c: Are there some you would like to connect with and have not been able to do so?
- CG10d: Why do you think some people don't connect with you?

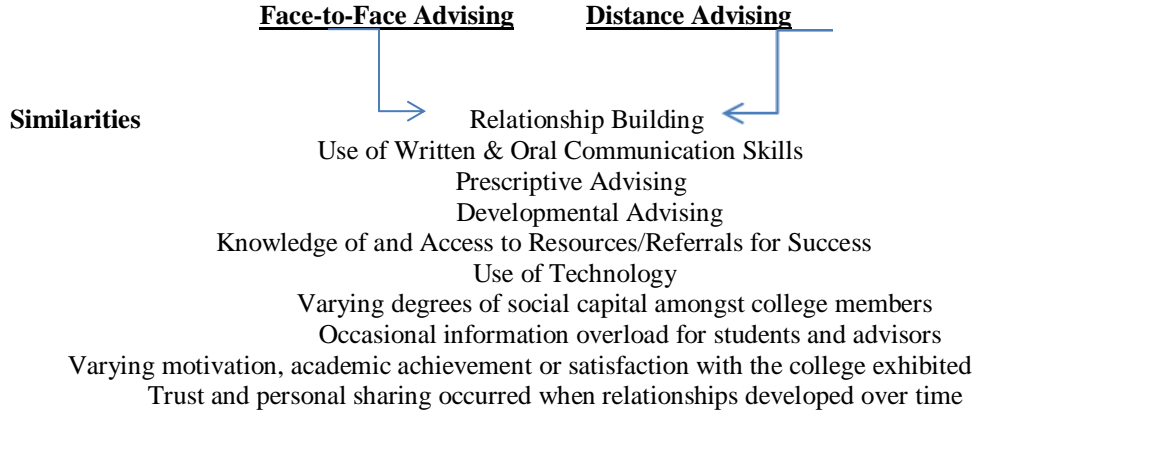
General:

- G1: Do you feel you have the time to develop and cultivate relationships with others at the college?
- G1a: Why or why not?
- G2: What activities do you engage in through the advising process, either with students or staff?
(such as discussing class selection, educational goals, etc.)
- G3: Do you feel you belong to any communities at the college?
- G3a: If so, please name or define them.
- G3b: If not, why do you think you don't belong?
- G4: How often do you connect/interact with others from the college via the phone, e-mail or advising list-serve outside of class time? (one a week, more often, less often)
- G4a: When you interact, what do you talk about?
- G5: Do you feel supported to be successful at the college by people at the college?
- G5a: By who?
- G5b: How does that support manifest itself? (talking, money, etc.)
- G6: Do you feel supported to be successful at the college by others in your social circle?
(family, friends, etc.)
- G6a: By who?
- G6b: How does that support manifest itself? (talking, money, etc.)
- G7: Do you think some people are excluded from being members of the college community or from gaining access to resources in a timely manner?
- G7a: Why or why not?

- G7b: How does it manifest itself or how have you observed it?
- G7c: Do you think it serves a useful purpose to exclude some from these resources? If so, what, if not, why?
- G8: Will you stay at the college to your goal completion? Why or why not?
- G9: Would you recommend this college to others? Why or why not?
- G10: Do you like the advising relationship being at a distance? Why or why not?
- G10a: Would you make any changes if you could and what might those be?
- G11: Do you know a lot about others who are on the advising list-serve with you? Why or why not?
- G11a: what kinds of things do you know about those on the advising list-serve?
- G11b: How many people do you think are on the advising list-serve?
- G12: If you have an advising problem and need a solution right away, do you prefer to use the phone, e-mail, instant message or another source (name0? Why?
- G13: Do you have anything you would like to share, expand on, or add?

Thank you for your time!

**APPENDIX F5: Table 3: Face-to-Face Advising versus Distance Advising:
Similarities and Differences**



	<u>Face-to-Face Advising</u>	<u>Distance Advising</u>
Differences	<p><u>Admissions</u> Requirements vary depending on selectivity</p> <p><u>Student populations</u> Mix of traditional and non-traditional students</p> <p><u>New Student Orientation</u> Weeks to months before first enrollment Face to face with student/family</p> <p><u>Interactions</u> Primarily oral communication</p> <p><u>Workshops to Further Skills</u> Primarily taught face to face</p> <p><u>Pace</u> 16-week semesters</p> <p><u>Advising Workload</u> Several hundred advisees</p>	<p><u>Admissions</u> Open admission regardless of past academic prowess, criminal background</p> <p><u>Student populations</u> Predominantly non-traditional students</p> <p><u>New Student Orientation</u> Access available anytime to anyone available through home page</p> <p><u>Interactions</u> Primarily written communication</p> <p><u>Workshops to Further Skills</u> Primarily taught through videos and Webinars/Podcasts</p> <p><u>Pace</u> 8-week terms</p> <p><u>Advising Workload</u> Several thousand advisees</p>

APPENDIX F6: Table 4: Community of Inquiry Model: Evidence of Teaching, Social and Cognitive Presence in Advising Activities, Interactions and Relationships

(adapted from Shea, et. al, 2010)

Teaching Presence

The advisor *designed and organized* interactions, learning activities and resources that

- Communicated important goals, topics and outcomes for the advising relationship like education plans
- Provided instructions on how to participate in learning activities through such things as webinars, podcasts, videos and discourse
- Communicated important due dates/time frames for learning outcome completion through e-mails, as well as list-serve and newsletter postings
- Communicated what forms and activities were necessary to complete as a student via discourse and resources

The advisor *facilitated discourse* and avenues for discourse that

- Identified areas of agreement and disagreement and helped students learn from these agreements and disagreements that were especially noticeable in crafting education plans
- Guided students toward understanding advising topics and helped students clarify their thinking by employing what they knew about students and their life and career goals as well as the institution
- Engaged advisees in productive dialogue on the phone and in e-mail
- Kept advisees on task in ways that helped further learning through such things as orientation modules, student success course enrollment, list-serve reminders
- Encouraged advisees to explore new concepts and ideas about their education and career goals through campus as well as other outside resources like the Occupational Outlook Handbook for career descriptions
- Reinforced contributions amongst and between advisees as well as with advisors through the list-serves and participation in such things as the co-curricular activities

The advisor provided *direct instruction* by

- Focusing discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped advisees learn and grow such as entering virtual classrooms with students to provide an additional perspective on assignments and student skills
- Providing feedback that helped students to understand their strengths and weaknesses in the academic realm and in preparation for employment
- Providing feedback in a timely fashion, especially on critical matters within 24-48 hours
- Providing stories and examples for illustration purposes by phone, on list-serves and even through advisor blogs
- Working side by side with advisees to accomplish tasks, activities and interactions as necessary

Social Presence

Advisors and advisees exhibited *affective expression* (emotions) as they

- Got to know each other online and felt a sense of belonging to the relationship and to the community

- Disclosed personal information, values , attitudes and beliefs that helped form distinct impressions of one another in this virtual world

Advisors and advisees practiced open communication that

- Promoted vulnerability, friendliness and approachability while conversing through the online mediums (phone, e-mail, list-serves and fax primarily)
- Fostered participating in online discussions by employing things such as coffee shop discussions in advisor list-serves , encouraging participation in co-curricular experiences and activities and faculty conference calls
- Encouraged interacting with others in the online setting beyond just the advisor/advisee relationship

Advisors and advisees felt group cohesion as they

- Disagreed with one another while still maintaining a sense of trust over time
- Recognized their individual points of view were acknowledged and valued by others
- Participated in collaborative online discussions and other interactions

Cognitive Presence

Triggering events caused advisors and advisees' activities and interactions to

- Increase interest in the problems posed and how to resolve them
- Piqued curiosity
- Motivated them to explore questions further through other sources such as career advisor training

Exploration of problems posed and activities/interactions employed aided advisors/advisees to

- Utilize a variety of information sources for options
- Brainstorm and determine possible solutions
- Appreciate different perspectives

Integration of ideas and meaning making in problem solving was achieved when activities and interactions led to

- Combining new information with that already learned to reflect on and answer questions raised
- Finding appropriate resources to address predicaments
- Helping advisees and advisors construct explanations or solutions to choose from

Resolution was exhibited when

- Advisees and advisors described ways to test and apply the knowledge and skills they learned from advising interactions and activities
- Advisees and advisors developed solutions to their problems that could be applied to other situations beyond the immediate issue
- Advisees and advisors could apply the skills and knowledge they have learned from advising interactions and activities to their work or other non-academic related activities

APPENDIX F7: Table 5: Social Capital: It's Dimensions and How it is Exhibited in Advising Interactions, Activities and Relationships

(adapted from Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998)

Social Capital Dimensions

Structural:

Network ties such as those organized by advisors for advisees provided access to resources

- Access to valuable information such as prior transcript information, and knowing who can use it such as advisors as well as evaluators
- Timing through early access to information often increases the value of the information shared
- Referrals are the processes for information to be shared and endorsed by people in the network

Network configuration impact the accessibility of resources to members

- Weak ties impede transfer of information like when advisors could not view transcript information for students in the initial course selection phase after admittance or students could not grasp the significance of the accelerated pace of courses
- Thus relationships and interactions are important when the meaning of information is ambiguous, confusing or incomplete

Appropriate organization or the ability to transfer social capital from one setting to another

- This is the means by which family knowledge, personal relationships and affiliations impact the individual in other settings like when Shenonda's affiliations to the HBC helped enable the OC to have co-curricular experiences through the HBC
- Organizational structure can inhibit rather than enable learning as was witnessed by the Virtual University when co-curricular experiences were not an option as Virtual University leadership thought these experiences could not be organized in the virtual environment
- Diversity of opinion and meaningful communication has to share context for when to use and apply knowledge such as when Shenonda and other students helped Virtual University and HBC faculty and staff see that virtual participation in undergraduate research was possible

Relational:

Trust, where actions will be viewed as appropriate and will encourage social exchange and cooperation

- When people have high trust, they are more willing to engage in interactions and to be vulnerable, to be open to new ideas and to help themselves and others such as when Willow shared her dilemmas with being caught between the reservation culture and her desire to work in her chosen career field. She trusted Aggie could understand the issues as a Native American herself. By being open to new ideas from Aggie, Willow was able to find a way to incorporate both her life and her career together

Norms, which signify consensus in the social system of what is acceptable

- A willingness to be open to new ideas, criticism and tolerate failure can actually enhance intellectual learning. This was witnessed in cases such as Maria's where she opened herself up to Daniel when he asked her to develop an education plan. By listening to the ideas proposed by Floria, Daniel and the disabilities coordinator, she was able to enhance her intellectual learning by taking their suggestions on how to reduce her visual disability barriers online and how to increase her English language skills

Obligations and expectations are observed when a commitment or duty is recognized and viewed as a credit slip for future

- Cooperation that goes beyond contractual obligations and self-interest – where one feels a personal obligation to help self and others. This was witnessed by Alberto's case as he was originally failing his courses and having issues other areas of his personal life. Aggie went above and beyond the traditional resources provided to a student in these situations as she gave him and other students an opportunity to witness her struggles online through her blog as well as looking into other resources Alberto could use to resolve his personal issues. After he became a more successful student, he began to post his suggestions to other students on the advising list serve as he felt he had a duty to share what he had learned from his experiences with Aggie and the college

Identification, where individuals are able to see themselves as part of a group

- Enhances concerns for collective processes as the advisors not only provided each other updates on the virtual student files about each student but they also worked with one another to determine the best courses of action when students were in trouble such as when Daniel asked Floria for advice on how to deal with Maria's issues and Floria volunteered to act as Spanish interpreter and additional resource to both Daniel and Maria as a result
- Increases chances of motivating self and group and increases frequency of cooperation. This was witnessed when students on advising list-serves began to post peer to peer advice (such as Alberto's case) and the group even named their list-serve as the "non-trads" to represent that they all had something in common – a collective identity as they were either non-traditional students or they were traditional students seeking college through a non-traditional experience via online learning. The group even designed t-shirts and organized themselves as the first virtual student organization at Virtual University.

Cognitive:

Shared codes and language provides the means to discuss and exchange information

- Discuss information, ask questions. This was exhibited in the case where Aggie helped Alberto understand such things as the differences between grants and loans and how to visualize the discussion board as a classroom where he needed to speak up and post information in a timely manner
- Using the codes and appropriate language helps gain access to the right information, the right people at the right time to further intellectual development. This was exhibited when advisors and advisees discussed mutual expectations for the relationship that included the etiquette and behavior they would employ with one another in e-mails and phone conversations. Another example is the case of Maria and Daniel where he gave her contacts to help determine if her past criminal background would hinder her future employment in social work settings as well as connecting her with the disabilities coordinator to aid in her relationships with faculty as a visually impaired student
- Language also has an influence on perceptions, frames of reference, as we observe and interpret the environment such as was observed in Willow's case where Aggie used the phrase "one Injun to another" and they referred to the "rez" and "tribe/fam" to discuss Willow's concerns about future employment, they were both using common frames of reference as Native Americans
- Knowledge advances through new concepts and narrative forms such as Aggie's use of a blog at Virtual University to help graduate and undergraduate students see her struggles as well as triumphs as an online student who was also working full-time. Or how Ashwin used her experiences as a disabled student to examine and explore how to be a successful student online and shared resources such as disability product reviews through her blog with the disabilities coordinator's office

Shared narratives including myths, stories, metaphors to create communities, exchange and preserve meanings

- Insignificant details in stories and other exchanges can help with practice and tacit experience to improve practice. This was often witnessed by advisors trying to personalize their experiences with advisees by sharing things they had in common such as Aggie sharing her experiences as a parent, online student, Native American, full-time worker
- Shared narratives increase the community knowledge such as when the three advisors developed list-serves for their students. Daniel in particular developed a primary list-serve that he monitored and posted to as well as a coffee shop secondary list-serve that he encouraged students to use to voice things about him and the college (positive or negative)

APPENDIX G: THE CASE OF ASHWIN ROGERS, DISABLED STUDENT

Ashwin Rogers, one of the students in the study but not featured in the case studies, educated me on what it was like to be visually impaired online. Her case is presented below.

Ashwin Rogers was 31, half Cherokee Indian and half White. Ashwin had a GED, spoke Cherokee at home, was poor, and the first in her family to attend college, but she was also legally blind.

While sitting in her home one day observing Ashwin's skills at connecting with her advisor online, we began to talk about how her blindness impacted her college going. Ashwin shared that she had tried residential campuses where she could live at school. But there were other issues as she could neither see the food, nor find braille lists for the prices for dining hall meals. She also found it difficult to get around campus alone as many campus buildings would provide braille writing inside to help her navigate but finding the building was a different story. She shared she had to count steps to navigate and sometimes got lost. The library was also a challenge as braille signs were often not updated. And although librarians and instructors did their best to provide assistance, she faced additional limitations as presenters in classes either wrote on the blackboard or provided PowerPoint presentations she could not immediately view so she felt left out of some discussions. In the end she needed to have a personal attendant help her and this increased her cost of going to college in a face-to-face setting. However, with the right technology, and a seeing-eye dog aptly named Freedom, Ashwin indicated she felt she could participate more fully online for a lower emotional as well as financial cost.

The day I sat with her, I marveled at the way Ashwin and Freedom worked in tandem to get ready for her classes and advising discussions. Freedom turned on the light in the dining room for my benefit, and nuzzled the power cord that turned on Ashwin's computer, then he got two bottles of water out of the fridge for us to drink. Meanwhile Ashwin used voice commands directed at her computer to post a completed paper for class and navigated to the e-mail system where a computer generated voice read e-mails to us. Freedom brought the phone to our table and she touched the braille keys to call her advisor and the three of us discussed Ashwin's relationship with her advisor and other students. Daniel Edwards, her advisor discussed how Ashwin was a model student with a bright future as an advocate for the disabled. Most of his interactions with her were over e-mail and they shared this was so Ashwin could keep a record to refer back to if necessary later. Both agreed that because of the text-based content online she rarely needed additional assistance except for viewing videos.

While Daniel and I talked on the speaker phone, Ashwin directed her computer to the college homepage for the disabilities services office and I saw that Ashwin was employed by the college as an online blogger. A review of the blog indicated most of her writing was spent discussing her disabilities, how she managed her school work and life, as well as product reviews by Ashwin and other students with different disabilities. They tried new technology and shared their critiques on the blog or shared other ideas that would aid Virtual University students with disabilities to be successful. Ashwin shared that for her as well as some other disabled students, experiences like Virtual University "were a godsend because they have kept us going... and kept us from being housebound in the virtual sense... we could stay connected to others...and engaged with the world...so that

social presence you're always talking about...I feel like I have it...even though I've never met these people.”

A check with the Registrar indicated that around 30 percent of the student population for Virtual University between 2010 and 2012 self-identified as disabled, including. The college's policies included asking prospective students to identify their disabilities on the application for admission but this did not preclude their admission. According to both the disabilities coordinator for the college and advisors, although this was valuable information to have, it was not always provided to them in a timely manner, which sometimes led to students not getting their needs met in a timely manner. But students in the study indicated they liked the policies as they were written as they did not want to share their disability issues unless or until it was causing issues in their school work, otherwise, it was not the business of the college to know they were disabled and this was considered one benefit to being disabled online – that no one knew unless you told them.

APPENDIX H: VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY CLASS SCHEDULE

(taken from the 2011-2012 undergraduate catalog for Virtual University)

2011-2012 Academic Calendar August Session (11/51)

August 15 – October 8, 2011

Mon Jul 4 Registration begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Jul 6 Registration begins for returning juniors
Thurs Jul 7 Registration begins for returning sophomores
Fri Jul 8 Registration begins for returning freshmen
Fri Aug 12 Last day to register/add graduate classes
Mon Aug 15 Classes begin
Fri Aug 19 Last day to register/add undergraduate classes
Mon Aug 22 Last day to drop classes without academic record and financial liability
Mon Sep 5 Labor Day Holiday: Offices Closed
Mon Sep 19 Registration for October Session begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Sep 21 Registration for October Session begins for returning juniors
Thurs Sep 22 Registration for October Session begins for returning sophomores
Fri Sep 23 Registration for October Session begins for returning freshmen
..... Last day to withdraw from classes with grade of W
Sat Oct 8 Classes end

October Session (11/52) October 24 – December 17, 2011

Mon Sep 19 Registration begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Sep 21 Registration begins for returning juniors
Thurs Sep 22 Registration begins for returning sophomores
Fri Sep 23 Registration begins for returning freshmen
Fri Oct 21 Last day to register/add graduate classes
Mon Oct 24 Classes begin
Fri Oct 28 Last day to register/add undergraduate classes
Mon Oct 31 Last day to drop classes without academic record and financial liability
Fri Nov 11 Veteran's Day Nov 24-25
Thanksgiving Break: Offices Closed
Mon Nov 28 Registration for January Session begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Nov 30 Registration for January Session begins for returning juniors
Thurs Dec 1 Registration for January Session begins for returning sophomores
Fri Dec 2 Registration for January Session begins for returning freshmen
..... Last day to withdraw from classes with grade of W
Sat Dec 17
Classes end

January Session (11/53) January 9 – March 3, 2012

Mon Nov 28 Registration begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Nov 30 Registration begins for returning juniors
Thurs Dec 1 Registration begins for returning sophomores
Fri Dec 2 Registration begins for returning freshmen
Fri Jan 6 Last day to register/add graduate classes
Mon Jan 9 Classes begin
Fri Jan 13 Last day to register/add undergraduate classes
Mon Jan 16 Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday observance; offices closed
Tues Jan 17 Last day to drop classes without academic record and financial liability
Mon Feb 13 Registration for March Session begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Feb 15 Registration for March Session begins for returning juniors
Thurs Feb 16 Registration for March Session begins for returning sophomores
Fri Feb 17 Registration for March Session begins for returning freshmen
..... Last day to withdraw from classes with grade of W
Sat Mar 3 Classes end

March Session (11/54) March 19 – May 12, 2012

Mon Feb 13 Registration begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Feb 15 Registration begins for returning juniors
Thurs Feb 16 Registration begins for returning sophomores
Fri Feb 17 Registration begins for returning freshmen
Fri Mar 16 Last day to register/add graduate classes
Mon Mar 19 Classes begin
Fri Mar 23 Last day to register/add undergraduate classes
Mon Mar 26 Last day to drop classes without academic record and financial liability
Mon Apr 23 Registration for June Session begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Apr 25 Registration for June Session begins for returning juniors
Thurs Apr 26 Registration for June Session begins for returning sophomores
Fri Apr 27 Registration for June Session begins for returning freshmen
Last day to withdraw from classes with grade of W
Sat May 12 Classes end

June Session (11/55) May 28 – July 21, 2012

Mon Apr 23 Registration begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Apr 25 Registration begins for returning juniors
Thurs Apr 26 Registration begins for returning sophomores
Fri Apr 27 Registration begins for returning freshmen
Fri May 25 Last day to register/add graduate classes
Mon May 28 Memorial Day Holiday: Offices Closed Classes begin

Fri Jun 1 Last day to register/add undergraduate classes
Mon Jun 4 Last day to drop classes without academic record and financial liability
Mon Jul 2 Registration for August Session begins for graduate students, seniors, military members, post-baccalaureate and new students
Wed Jul 4 Independence Day Holiday: Offices Closed Registration for August Session begins for returning juniors
Thurs Jul 5 Registration for August Session begins for returning sophomores
Fri Jul 6 Registration for August Session begins for returning freshmen Last day to withdraw from classes with grade of W (ends close of business)
Sat Jul 21 Classes end

APPENDIX I: FERPA GUIDELINES

(as posted by Virtual University to their website, June 12, 2011)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords students certain rights with respect to their education records. These rights include:

The right to inspect and review their education record within 45 days of the day the College receives a request for access.

Students should submit to the Registrar or Vice President and Dean for Academic Affairs written requests that identify the record(s) they wish to inspect. The student will be notified of a time and place where the records may be inspected.

The right to request the amendment of that part of a student's education record that the student believes is inaccurate or misleading.

The student should write to the Registrar clearly identify the part of the record he/she wants changed and specify why it is inaccurate or misleading. If Columbia College decides not to amend the record as requested, the College will notify the student of the decision and advise the student of his or her right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the student when notified of the right to a hearing.

The right to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained in the student's education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent.

One exception, which permits disclosure without consent, is disclosure to school officials with legitimate educational interests. A school official is defined as a person employed by

the college in an administrative, supervisory, academic or support staff position (including law enforcement unit and health staff); a person or company with whom the college has contracted (such as an attorney, auditor or collection agent); a person serving on the Board of Trustees; or a student serving on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee, or assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks. A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility. Upon request, the college discloses education records without consent to officials of another school in which a student seeks or intends to enroll.

The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by the college to comply with the requirements of FERPA.

The name and address of the Office that administers FERPA is:

Family Compliance Office

U.S. Department of Education

400 Maryland Avenue, SW

Washington, DC 20202-4605

APPENDIX J: PHILOSOPHY OF ADVISING

Academic Advising Philosophy at Virtual University

Academic advising is integral to fulfilling the *teaching and learning mission of higher education*. Through academic advising...

- students learn to become members of their higher education community
- students learn to think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students
- students prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and global community

Academic advising engages students beyond their own world views, while acknowledging their individual characteristics, values and motivations as they enter, move through, and exit the higher education institution

Regardless of the diversity of the institution, students, advisors and organizational structures, academic advising has 3 components

1. Pedagogy (how advising does what it does)
2. Curriculum (what advising deals with)
3. Student Learning Outcomes (the result of academic advising)

Pedagogy: A teaching and learning process based on advisor/advisee interactions that incorporates preparation, facilitation, documentation and assessment

Curriculum: Theories most often utilized include social science, humanities and education theories

Methods, strategies and techniques: These vary but goal remains the same: develop relationships that include mutual respect, trust and ethical behavior

Topics covered: Ideals of education; pragmatics of enrollment; institutional mission, culture and expectations; meaning, value and interrelationship of the institutional curriculum and co-curriculum; modes of thinking, learning and decision-making; selection of academic programs and courses; campus and community resources, policies and procedures; transferability of skills and knowledge

Learning outcomes expected:

- Craft coherent educational plan based on assessment of activities, interests and values
- Use complex information from various sources to set goals, reach decisions, and achieve those goals
- Assume responsibility for meeting academic program requirements
- Articulate the meaning of higher education and intent of institution's curriculum
- Cultivate the intellectual habits that lead to a lifetime of learning
- Behave as citizens who engage in the wider world around them

Note: Information provided by Advisor-Trainer August 2, 201

APPENDIX K: ADVISING OUTCOMES

Outcomes Expected of Students Enrolled in [Virtual University]

Personal growth: Develop communication, decision-making, and problem-solving skills

- Define your short-term and long-term goals after reflecting on your values, interests, strengths, and challenges
- Articulate your goals during advising sessions
- Describe the connection between your goals and your values, interests, strengths, and challenges
- Discuss problems you face by assessing what caused them, what can be done to resolve them, and how to avoid them in the future
- Understand how to achieve balance in: academics, family, work, recreation and social activities
- Use advising and other sources of information to make meaningful changes in your life

Resource identification: Develop skills in locating and effectively using information and resources that help you achieve your goals

- Identify websites, campus offices, and faculty or staff you can consult with questions
- Use information from college resources to assess progress towards achieving goals (e.g., degree audits, education plans, information from faculty and staff)
- Knowledge of departmental and college processes and policies

Curriculum integration: Understand the relationship between your classroom experiences and your academic, career, and personal goals

- Understand how your classes can help you explore and select a major
- Explain how your major curriculum helps you achieve your goals
- Describe how college requirements help you achieve your goals
- Schedule courses so you graduate in a timely manner based on your educational plan
- Connect your educational plan to your career goals
- Know what you can do with a chosen major
- Articulate personal strengths and weaknesses and be prepared for life after college

Advisor Outcomes You Can Expect at [Virtual University]

Responsibilities of the Academic Advisor: *Competent advising is a teaching and learning process that requires resources, just as competent classroom instruction does.*

Academic advising is critical to the success of students at [Virtual University]. The academic advisor nurtures a collaborative relationship with each student based on a sharing of responsibilities. Relationships are developed to guide you toward accepting responsibility for your personal growth, resource identification and curriculum integration in order to assist in your learning and academic decision-making.

You should expect your advisor to:

Meet your needs by demonstrating professional, friendly, and courteous service in all aspects of student life

Maintain high professional and academic standards

- Serve as role models in the development of leadership skills
- Respect diversity and treat all students fairly
- Be available to students and helpful with student problems
- Communicate clear learning objectives and expected outcomes
- Provide timely feedback in the assessment of learning outcomes
- Stay current in subject matter
- Practice effective teaching/learning strategies that promote critical thinking

Responsibilities of the academic advisor include, but are not limited to:

Guide you through a *self-assessment* process, *documenting and facilitating* as necessary as you explore and refine your career goals by

- Regularly scheduling sufficient time to adequately meet your advising needs
- Maintaining an advising file containing appropriate documentation regarding your advising
- Support you in the following ways (*facilitation*):
 - Helping you define and establish realistic educational and career goals and objectives consistent with your abilities, interests, and limitations
 - Assisting you in understanding the nature and purposes of a college education
 - Discuss and reinforce linkages and relationships between the instructional program and potential occupations/careers
 - Aid you with college processes and procedures related to academic advising, including privacy, reasonable access, and appropriate record keeping
 - Help resolve academic difficulties when appropriate
 - Help you learn to take responsibility for your own actions and decisions

Interact effectively with you to help you develop the ability to take responsibility for decision-making and for your learning progress

Advisors will *facilitate* this relationship to in the following ways:

- Develop and nurture positive interpersonal communication and counseling skills with you
- Be available and approachable, demonstrating concern for and interest in you
- Listen constructively; attempt to hear all aspects of your expressed problems
- Provide sensitive, timely responses that encourage you to accept your responsibilities
- Strive to understand your concerns from your point of view
- Demonstrate respect for the opinions of others
- Be familiar with your needs and thus personalize the advisement process whenever possible
- Act as an advocate for you, as appropriate
- Nurture you and others while maintaining established and appropriate boundaries

Assisting you in choosing programs, selecting and scheduling courses, and accessing resources to support your decision-making

Your advisor will be *prepared* in the following ways as they will:

- Be knowledgeable of the most current college programs, educational options, and requirements in sufficient detail to provide you with accurate, usable information
- Know the career and transfer programs available at the college and know the requirements of programs for completion
- Know general course content (overall from catalog) and any special information about the courses (e.g., prerequisites) including honors and developmental courses
- Understand the intricacies of transfer between institutions within our system of college locations where applicable and make appropriate referrals to enable you to achieve their goals
- Be knowledgeable of the most current institutional policies and procedures in sufficient detail to provide you with accurate, usable information

Know the registration procedures and paperwork required
Adhere to the specific policies and procedures and overall values of the college
Develop good working relationships with college personnel critical to your success including but not limited to those in admissions, financial aid, academic departments, the registrar's office, disability services, tutoring, counseling, and career services
Be familiar with the many resources of the college and refer you when referral seems to be the best student-centered response
Seek to understand and modify barriers to your progress; identify ineffective and inefficient policies and procedures, and work to affect change that is in the best interest of learning

Advisors will increase their own knowledge of the advising process, developing and enhancing the conceptual, interpersonal, and other skills important to academic advising as a professional who works with you. As a result, they may be unavailable at times to attend to their own preparation as a professional but you will still be supported by a team advisor during advising hours

Advisor preparation and role modeling for you of professional behavior will include the following *preparation*:

Seeking opportunities to grow professionally by identifying appropriate workshops, classes, literature, research publications, individuals and groups, both inside and outside the institution, which can keep their interest high, hone advising skills, and advance expertise within academic advising.

Willingly and actively participate in advisor training programs, both initially and in-service

Share their advising skills and learn from colleagues who also are actively involved with advising

Continually attempt to improve both the style and substance of their advising roles and responsibilities

Note: Provided by Advisor-Trainer from Virtual University, August 2, 2010

APPENDIX L: DEGREE AUDIT EXAMPLE

Degree Audit Legend

Use this chart to learn the names of all the parts of the Degree Audit

- **Area** refers to any set of Degree Requirements on your audit. You may hear references to the General Education Area, the Major Area, or the Minor Area, to name a few. Area is a general concept, in that you will never see any one Area named or numbered on your audit.

For example: the General Education Area consists of parts one and two of the General Education Requirements. Parts one and two are Degree Requirements, and both of them together make up the General Education Area.

- **Degree Requirement** refers to any set of credits or courses that must be completed in order to meet the overall requirements of your degree. Several Degree Requirements may fall within an Area. **Degree Requirements are numbered on your audit (1:, 2:, 3:, etc.).**
- **Sub-requirements** refers to any set of credits or courses that must be fulfilled in order to complete the Degree Requirements to which they apply. Some Sub-requirements must all be fulfilled in order to complete the Degree Requirement in which they are housed, and some Sub-Requirements are part of a bank, of which you may pursue one in order to complete the Degree Requirement. **Sub-requirements are lettered on your degree (A:, B:, C:, etc.).**
- **Section** refers to any set of credits or courses that must be fulfilled in order to complete the Sub-requirement to which they apply. Sections are sometimes labeled with "GROUP" names, but most often they are named for the type of course they require (e.g. "COMPLETE 3 HOURS FROM...").

Note: Status refers to completion of degree requirements, sub-requirements, and sections but not individual course or credit requirements.

Degree Audit Example

<p>Area An Area is a set of Degree Requirements. This is the Major Area. For this degree, the area contains the Major Requirements (44), the Major Area Electives Requirement (45), and the additional Management Major (46)</p>	<p>***** B.S. Bachelor of Science in Business Administration ***** Credits: 21 Complete both sub-requirements: 1) A. Major Prerequisite: > A minimum of 12 semester hours in the major must be earned with Columbia College. A minimum of a semester's hours of upper level coursework (junior/senior level) > in the major must be earned with Columbia College. Credits: 9 1) A minimum of 12 SEMESTER HOURS IN THE MAJOR MUST BE EARNED WITH COLUMBIA COLLEGE. Credits: 9 Required: 12 Remaining: 3 MGMT-130 INTRODUCTION TO BUSINESS... 11/53 A 3 MGMT-136 PRINCIPLES OF MANAGEMENT... 11/54 A 3 MGMT-254 BUSINESS COMMUNICATION... 11/55 A 3 1 credits needed</p>
<p>Degree Requirement The Major Requirement is the 4th overall Degree Requirement for this student's B.S.B.A.</p>	<p>2) B. Minimum of 4 semester hours of upper level coursework (junior/senior level) in the major must be earned with Columbia College. Credits: 3 1) A minimum of 4 SEMESTER HOURS OF UPPER LEVEL COURSEWORK (JUNIOR/SENIOR LEVEL) IN THE MAJOR MUST BE EARNED WITH COLUMBIA COLLEGE. Credits: 3 Required: 4 Remaining: 1 MGMT-136 PRINCIPLES OF MANAGEMENT... 11/54 A 3 MGMT-254 BUSINESS COMMUNICATION... 11/55 A 3 1 credits needed</p>
<p>Sub-Requirement There are two sub-requirements for this Degree Requirement, marked A and B.</p>	<p>2) C. Major Area Core > Complete the following core courses with a minimum grade of C. Credits: 18 > COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING CORE COURSES: Credits: 18 Required: 18 Remaining: 0 ACCT-280 ACCOUNTING I (FINANCIAL)... 02/11/07 --- 3 *FT ACCT-281 ACCOUNTING II (MANAGERIAL)... 1 course needed ECON-292 MICROECONOMICS... 1 course needed ECON-294 MICROECONOMICS... 06/11/07 --- 3 *FT FINC-284 PERSONAL FINANCIAL PLANNING... 1 course needed MGMT-254 BUSINESS COMMUNICATION... 11/55 A 3 MGMT-265 BUSINESS LAW I... 1 course needed MGMT-280 PRINCIPLES OF MANAGEMENT... 11/54 A 3 MGMT-286 INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS... 1 course needed MGMT-288 BUSINESS ETHICS... 1 course needed MGMT-293 BUSINESS INFORMATION SYSTEMS... 07/11/07 --- 3 *FT MGMT-299 BUSINESS FINANCE... 1 course needed FINC-350 MANAGEMENT FINANCE... 1 course needed MGMT-479 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT... 1 course needed OR MGMT-211 COMPLETE MGMT-299 OR FINC-350 MGMT-290 STATISTICS I... 12/11/06 --- 3 *FT</p>
<p>Section The sub-requirement has sections named "GROUP 1", and "GROUP 2", but most sections are named for the type of courses they require. For consistency's sake, they are referred to as sections throughout this documentation.</p>	<p>2) D. Electives for B.S.B.A. > Complete 12 semester hours of Business electives. Credits: 12 > COMPLETE 12 HOURS FROM ACCT, MGMT, ECON, FINC, ECON OR CHEM Credits: 12 Required: 12 Remaining: 0 MGMT-136 INTRODUCTION TO BUSINESS... 11/53 A 3 ECON-292 MICROECONOMICS... 02/11/07 --- 3 *FT FINC-144 LOWER LEVEL FINANCE ELECTIVE... 12/11/06 --- 12 credits needed</p>
<p>Status Indicates completion status for overall degree requirements, sub-requirements, and sections of sub-requirements, but NOT the status of individual courses.</p>	<p>2) E. Major Area Core > Complete 8 hours in the following courses: Credits: 8 MGMT-219 CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT... 1 course needed MGMT-261 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT... 1 course needed MGMT-262 ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR... 1 course needed</p>
<p>Credit Needed Also sometimes called "Course Needed". Depending on what is modifying, A would have leads to the number of credits/courses needed. This is the only place you would see on the degree audit.</p>	<p>2) F. Management Major Requirements Credits: 5 > COMPLETE 5 HOURS OF UPPER-LEVEL MGMT COURSES Credits: 5 MGMT-130 PRINCIPLES OF MANAGEMENT... 11/54 A 3 MGMT-254 BUSINESS COMMUNICATION... 11/55 A 2</p>
<p>Credit Completed Indicates your total number of completed hours for the requirements so far. This student completed 9 hours total.</p>	<p>***** ***** *****</p>

**APPENDIX M: VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY'S DEFINITIONS AND POLICIES
FOR GOOD ACADEMIC STANDING AND SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC
PROGRESS FOR UNDERGRADUATES**

- Good Academic Standing: In order to be in good academic standing a student cannot be on academic probation academic continued probation, academic suspension, or academic dismissal
- Satisfactory Progress: A student's grade point average is calculated using grades received from [Virtual University] course work. The following criteria constitute satisfactory progress:

Total Semester Hours Completed	Required [Virtual University] Grade Point Average
0-30	1.75 or better
31-45	1.90 or better
46-120	2.0 or better

- Dean's List: The Dean's List is an honor accorded to students who achieve academic distinction. Students may be named to the Dean's List if they complete a minimum of 12 semester hours of [Virtual University] coursework in two consecutive sessions (with a minimum of six semester hours of credit in each session) and combined GPA of 3.5 or higher
 - Eligibility Restrictions:
 - A grade of incomplete eliminates a student from Dean's List consideration.
 - A grade given to replace an incomplete cannot be applied to Dean's List requirements.
 - Developmental English, Beginning Algebra, and Intermediate Algebra] do not apply when determining Dean's List eligibility.
 - Courses taken by students as pass/fail or satisfactory/unsatisfactory are not included in the minimum six semester hours in two consecutive terms
- Repeating a Course Policy: A course may be repeated in order to improve a grade. A grade awarded the second time a course is taken...is used to determine the final course grade and quality points, but this grade cannot be used for purposes of Dean's list recognition
- Probation: A student is placed on academic probation for one session when his or her GPA falls below the criteria for satisfactory academic progress. A student on probation...must comply with any requirement or condition imposed by the academic progress committee
- Suspension: A student is suspended for two sessions when, after a period of probation, he or she fails to comply with any condition and/or requirement imposed by the Vice President [of the college system] or fails to attain an appropriate standard of satisfactory academic progress
- Dismissal: A student is academically dismissed when, after having been readmitted to the college following any period(s) of suspension, he or she fails to comply with any condition and/or requirement imposed by the Vice President [of the college system] and/or fails to attain an appropriate standard of satisfactory academic progress. A student may request re-admission to the college after a three-year period has elapsed from date of dismissal
- Readmission: Students having interrupted their attendance at [Virtual University] because of unsatisfactory progress or conduct may be readmitted when the following conditions are met:
 1. The student must apply for re-admission after the period of suspension is completed
 2. The cause of the unsatisfactory progress or conduct must have deemed to be removed

Note: Posted on the college website, August 25, 2012

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VITA

I was born in Kansas but throughout my childhood as well as adulthood have been fortunate enough to have been a world traveler living in Europe and the Philippine Islands as well as around the United States including time spent in various student affairs and academic affairs positions in Alaska, Arkansas, Missouri, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming. I have worked as both an independent consultant and online blogger writing and investigating what aids or hinders both access to and success in college for diverse student populations.