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African American Student Retention: A Study of the Effects of an Intrusive Advising Intervention at a Career College

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AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT RETENTION: A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF
AN INTRUSIVE ADVISING INTERVENTION AT A CAREER COLLEGE

by

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This case study integrates mixed methodologies to examine the retention effects

of an "intrusive advising" intervention using two groups of at-risk, first-time, first-year,

African American students enrolled in a predominantly-White, career ("proprietary")

college. By design, the study uses data from mixed sources to respond to the overarching

research question, "How does intrusive advising influence the retention of African

American students who are at risk of attrition?"

Quantitative data was collected and analyzed using a quasi-experimental research

design methodology. Qualitative data was collected and analyzed from focus groups,

personal interviews, and field notes as a means to provide deeper understanding of the

researchable problem than either research approach could have accomplished in isolation

from the other. In the context of this study, the quasi-experimental design sought (a) to

determine to what extent a difference in retention existed between two groups of

students—one receiving "intrusive advising" (the treatment) and the other exposed to a

standard advising practice of the college; and, (b) if a difference exists, to determine how

much of the variance between the two groups could be explained by the intrusive

advising intervention.

In review of the descriptive statistics, retention differences were observed.

Additional analysis, however, revealed no statistically significant differences between the groups. Grade point average and attendance were found to be strong predictors of retention. The qualitative methods adopted for this case study relied on conversations with a subset of students (from each group) who were invited to interview and focus group sessions designed to capture students' descriptions of their first year experiences in relation to their goals for attending this institution of higher education. Results from these qualitative conversations present compelling evidence regarding the importance they placed on the value of the intrusive advising relationship in the context of their ability to persist.

Taken together, results from all data sources informing this case study confirm the merits of the procedural and policy recommendations offered to this career college and other higher education policy makers seeking to respond to issues of access, retention and persistence among at-risk student populations.

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like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. *Whatever he does prospers.*" During the times when I questioned my ability to conceptual and carry out this commission, I heard your voice clearly through the prophet's writing in the book of Habakkuk (2:2-3), "Then the LORD said to me, Write my answer plainly on tablets, so that a runner can carry the correct message to others. This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed." To this I say, "Amen." Special thanks to Bishop and First Lady Nathaniel Wells, Jr. Thank you for teaching me to, "See it before you see it!"

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you in your futures, and you both look fabulous! I love you dearly and I believe you can

be anything you choose to be—choose wisely, and choose Christ.

DeAnna R. Burt

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CHAPTER ONE

There is no lack of published materials addressing the topics of persistence and

retention throughout higher education (Astin, 1999; Hebel, 2007; Lee, 1999; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Student retention has been a growing topic of interest among

educators as more institutions of higher education open their doors to a broader student

population (Altbach, Berdahl & Gumport, 2005). Retention among minority students, in

particular, has gained increasing attention. Cook and Cordova (2007) reported a dramatic

increase (49%) in the number of minority students participating in higher education between

1994 and 2004. Yet, despite these gains in college entrance, this population of students

continues to lag behind its Caucasian peers in the rate at which they complete a college

education (American Council on Education, 2006). In 2003, less than 40% of minorities

graduated from college compared to nearly 60% of Whites (NAACP, 2005; White, 2006) and

the gap in enrollment and completion rates are even more disturbing among some categories

of racial and ethnic minorities, particularly members of these groups who are underprepared

for higher education (McPherson & Schapiro, 1998; White, 2006).

Trends among Academically Underprepared Students

With the increase in enrollment, more students are enrolling with less than adequate

academic preparation to be successful (Horn & Berger, 2004; Tinto, 1993). Findings from

multiple sources provide evidence that African Americans (also referred to as "Blacks" in

this study) enter higher education with low high school grade point averages (GPA), a need

for remedial education in one or more subject areas, and as first-generation college students

(Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Richardson & Skinner,

1992). The reality of their struggle has policy implications in that several sources of

financial assistance for these students are conditional upon students' abilities to maintain adequate academic progress toward degree completion within a predetermined timeframe (U.S. Department of Education: Financial Aid, 2009). These persistence struggles and risk factors among African American students are of particular interest to institutions of higher education that have embraced an *open-enrollment* admissions philosophy that often attracts a greater proportion of academically underprepared students because of relaxed entrance criteria in support of a desire to promote broader access to education (Roman, 2007; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006).

Often found among open-enrollment institutions are career colleges (commonly referred to as "proprietary" or "occupational" colleges and universities), which offer focused education and training leading to job placement in a relatively concise timeframe and in fields where employment demand is high (Career College Association [CCA], 2006; Imagine America Foundation, 2007). The Career College Association (CCA) claims that its member institutions ". . . educate and support nearly 2 million students each year for employment in more than 200 occupational fields" (CCA, 2006, p. 1). Many of these independent colleges and universities (mostly private and for-profit) offer one-year certificates and two-year associate degrees—with a select group offering four-year and graduate degrees—with moderate requirements in liberal arts subjects. However, with such focused missions (and commonly a dependence on tuition as a primary source of revenue) comes the need to better define and develop effective retention initiatives that motivate and engage students to persevere toward their career goals.

Similar to community colleges, several not-for-profit career colleges tout their open-enrollment (*open admissions*) philosophies as being responsive to the need for more

inclusion of students with varying degrees of ability and academic preparation (Roman, 2007; Zafft, Kallenbach & Spohn, 2006). In their efforts to serve a broader population of students, career colleges often attract students who match an *at-risk* profile in terms of being a racial- or ethnic-minority, qualifying for needs-based financial assistance, having graduated with a low high school grade point average, requiring remedial education, and being a first-generation college student (Horn & Berger, 2004; Imagine America Foundation, 2007; Warburton, Bugarin & Nunez, 2001; White, 2006).

African American students at other 2- and 4-year institutions may benefit from a variety of federally funded interventions directly targeted to reverse the effects of these at-risk characteristics (e.g., TRIO programs), but , as a group, career colleges are not among the list of institutional participants of these programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Therefore, these institutions must develop their own contextually aligned approaches to support at-risk African American students. Because of their open admissions policies and the increasing numbers of minority students they serve nationally, career colleges are important laboratories for retention research. They are, however, a severely under-studied group of institutions particularly in the area of advising interventions commonly implemented in an effort to reverse persistence struggles among at-risk students (CCA, 2006; Imagine America Foundation, 2007; Kinser, 2006).

"Intrusive" Advising

Countless publications point to the importance of effective advising on retention during students' first year of college (Brock et al., 2007; Earl, 1987; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Holmes, 2002; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Payne, 2007). First year students encounter many challenges when attempting to

adjust to academic life, and their challenges are compounded if they are classified as *first-generation* college students (Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Consequently, these students often turn to their academic advisors for guidance in order to "navigate day-to-day campus life" (Sickles, 2004, p. 1). Their advisor, therefore, may become their primary conduit to access campus and community resources that have the potential to increase their persistence toward degree completion.

The *intrusive* model of advising takes a holistic approach to addressing a student's complex needs and is described as "action oriented by involving and motivating students to seek help when needed" (Earl, 1987, p. 24). Researchers predicate the effectiveness of intrusive advising on the fact that the advisor will seek to assist and learn about each student in order to predict his or her needs over time—getting to know the student and how to respond to his or her holistic situation (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Holmes, 2002). From a review of the literature, there is considerable evidence supporting the merit of intrusive advising as an effective intervention with diverse first year students enrolled in a variety of institutions, but the literature is lacking in its conversation about the merits of this advising approach within a career college setting (Habley, 1995; Holmes, 2002; Sickles, 2004; Thomas & Minton, 2004). This gap in the literature is relevant to the problem outlined within this study. We know intrusive advising works toward increasing rates of retention among at-risk, first-year, minority students, but we have not studied the effectiveness of this intervention in a setting that has become a locus of opportunity for minorities—the career college (Imagine America Foundation, 2007; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006).

Institutions of higher education are encouraged to listen to their minority students and develop a "coordinated agenda" for retention that replaces the fragmented efforts that have

characterized past retention efforts (Kezar & Eckel, 2007, p. 20). Across the country, institutions are endeavoring to increase minority student enrollment, but they are showing few gains in retaining these students once they enroll (Field, 2007; Kezar & Eckel, 2007; Schmidt, 2006). In order to counteract these adverse trends, institutions committed to organizational learning are encouraged to: (a) use data collection and analysis to examine what is going on among minority populations of students; (b) listen to what their minority students have to say about their experiences; (c) put what they are learning into action; (d) view controversy as an opportunity to enhance organizational learning; and, (e) consider their campus climate when implementing policy and organizational change in response to the needs of their minority students (Kezar & Eckel, 2007). The design of this study responds to these collective recommendations to promote persistence and retention among minority students enrolled in higher education.

<div align="center">Statement of the Research Problem</div>

When reflecting on the introduction to this study, general issues affecting retention and persistence among college students have been widely studied and much has been concluded about the factors that affect their persistence (Hebel, 2007; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Wirt et al., 2004b). The research even reveals quite a bit about these issues as they pertain to some minority populations of students—more specifically, African American students (ACE, 2006; Cook & Cordova, 2007; NAACP, 2005). There has also been considerable research published with an intent to clearly associate faculty as a crucial component within a campus' retention initiatives to help respond to issues of persistence among minority students (Kuh et al., 2005; Latiker, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research also informs us that a variety of advising models have been developed and

implemented to reverse negative persistence trends that are evident among first-generation

minority students struggling to complete their collegiate-level degrees in a variety of public

school settings (Earl, 1987; Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000; Heisserer & Parette, 2002;

Sickles, 2004). Such research suggests that academic advisors and mentors—*non-faculty*—

play an integral role to encourage persistence among African American students and, in

particular, those enrolled in predominantly-White institutions (Gilliam & Kritsonis, 2006;

Lee, 1999). Despite the abundance of evidence provided within these research findings,

there is still quite a bit to learn about persistence struggles among at-risk, African American

students toward degree completion within certain higher education settings such as a

predominantly-White, private, not-for-profit career college with an open admissions policy.

A mere effort to extrapolate prior research about this kind of setting would be insufficient.

Although career colleges (like community colleges) seek to educate students for skilled labor

in their local markets, career colleges are becoming a locus of opportunity for greater

proportions of minorities—graduating far more disadvantaged and nontraditional students

than community colleges while relying on tuition as a primary revenue stream (Rosenbaum,

Deil-Amen & Person, 2006). Unfortunately, researchers have rarely studied career colleges.

Interestingly, when reflecting on the plethora of literature regarding the dismal

persistence and retention rates among African American students at predominantly-White

institutions and how these trends are negatively contributing to low graduation rates

nationwide, it becomes evident that studies have not accounted for the influence of academic

advisors employed in career college settings. This void in the literature provided an

opportunity to investigate the potential impact of an intrusive model of advising among a

sample of at-risk, first-time, first-year African American students enrolled in one

predominantly-White, private, not-for-profit career college. Such an opportunity allowed an investigation into the potential effects of this intervention that was designed to increase academic retention and success (as defined by the mission and institutional outcomes of the institution) among a subset of students enrolled in one institution providing--the setting for this case study. The literature, also, appeared to be deficient in that it more commonly excludes the perspective of students as active participants within studies on the topic of persistence and retention. In contrast, this case study encouraged and provided a forum for students to become engaged participants; allowing them to describe their first year experience at one of these private, career colleges.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study and Research Questions</div>

This case study used mixed methods research to examine the persistence and retention effects of an intrusive advising intervention with an at-risk group of first-time, first year, African American students enrolled in a career college. By design, the study integrated complimentary techniques from the traditions of quasi-experimental research design and the case study tradition of qualitative research in an effort to reveal deeper understandings of student persistence and retention than either approach could have accomplished in isolation from the other. In the context of this case study, the quasi-experimental design sought: (a) to determine whether there was a difference between two randomly selected groups of students—one receiving intrusive advising and the other receiving the standard advising practice; and, (b) if a difference existed, to determine how much of the variance between the two groups could be explained by the intrusive advising intervention. From the case study tradition of qualitative research, a subset of students were invited (from each group) to voluntarily participate in interview and focus group sessions during their first academic term

(quarter). The goal of those conversations with students was to allow them to explore and describe their first year experience (including their experiences with their academic advisors) in relation to their reasons for enrolling in this institution of higher education. The study uses their interview responses as a means of data triangulation in response to the research questions.

A single research question, "How does intrusive advising influence the retention of African American students who are at risk of attrition?" guided this case study and was answered via the use of mixed-methodologies—quantitative and qualitative. The sources of data for this study are many and, together, created the potential to provide an adequate response to this overarching question for the case study.

The following quantitative questions were answered through the experimental design:

1. To what extent is there a difference in retention (quarter-to-quarter retention, attendance, and GPA) between two groups of African American students – those who receive the institution's standard advising approach, and those who receive an intrusive advising approach?

2. How much (if any) of the variance between the two groups can be explained by intrusive advising?

The following qualitative questions were answered using interviews and focus groups:

1. Why did these students (in the intrusive advising and standard advising groups) enroll with this institution? How do they describe their goals as they relate to their reasons for enrolling?

2. How do at-risk, first-year African American students (in the intrusive advising and standard advising groups) describe their experiences since enrolling with this college?

a. How do they describe their experiences with academic advisors, peers, instructors, and other employees and services of the college?

b. How do they describe any influence from external relationships (e.g. with family, friends, and community resources) in light of their goal(s) and other reasons for enrolling with this college? What level of importance do they attach to these influences in the context of their goals and reasons for enrollment?

3. What does the combination of the quantitative and the qualitative findings suggest as recommended approaches to a career college seeking to increase academic persistence and retention among their first-year, at-risk African American students?

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the following terms are used to explore the first year academic experience among generally at-risk African American students enrolled in the study site. These terms and associated definitions have been added to aide the readers understanding of the context within which this study is conducted.

1. *Retention* is being defined as a student's enrollment during a subsequent term (winter or spring) within the timeline established for this study (fall 2008 through spring 2009). A retained student, in this context, would be one who continues enrollment in courses toward his or her degree during a subsequent term (either winter or spring). Retention, in the context of this study, is the outcome of institutional programs and initiatives (e.g. intrusive advising) that set conditions by which a student can be encouraged to finish his or her degree. This definition

of retention takes into account that a student might *stop out* (Tinto, 1993)—

voluntarily or involuntarily (e.g. academically dismissed)—within this timeframe.

2. *Persistence* speaks to the innate characteristics of a student or the product of a

student's environmental and social conditions that encourage his or her progress

toward the completion of his or her associate's degree. When comparing

persistence with retention for this study, persistence has less to do with the direct

(and intentional) influences instituted by the study site to encourage a student to

continue enrollment toward degree completion. This definition aligns with that of

Astin's (1975, 1985, 1999).

3. *Academic advisors* are employees whom the college has assigned to students for

the purpose of academic and/or career guidance. In addition to academic

advising, they may have other responsibilities in support of students; such would

be the case for deans and department chairs serving as academic advisors with

this study site.

4. The *intrusive advisor* is an individual hired by the study site (and, given the title

of "Minority Student First-Year Advisor"). He or she is charged with the

proactive engagement of his or her advisees in order to encourage their success

(retention) throughout their first year of college. The intrusive advisor is

deliberate with his or her efforts to help students navigate their first year

experience, and does not wait for students to approach him or her but (instead)

seeks them out to assist in a variety of ways.

5. In contrast to the intrusive advising, the *standard advising practice* of this study

site follows a *prescriptive* or *developmental* model of advising (Crookston, 1972).

Compared to an intrusive advisor, a standard advisor commonly *responds* to a student's request for help. The standard advisor may allocate limited resources (e.g. a standard letter or E-mail message to all advisees) in order to initiate contact with advisees during their first year, but more often waits for the student to seek his or her assistance.

6. An *at-risk* student within this study is one that matches a participant profile of being a first-time student with full-time status, African American, pursuing an associates degree with the study site, testing into at least one developmental course, and having a low high school GPA or having earned a GED. A more detailed description of this criterion can be found within the subsequent pages of this study.

7. A *developmental* or *remedial* course is one that is required of a student who demonstrates a need for academic remediation in the area of reading, writing, or math (Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000). The study site views this category of course as fundamental to a student's potential for success and is, therefore, required to be completed successfully within the student's first year of enrollment.

8. A *first-time* student is a student who has not attended college before. He or she did not transfer from another institution, and never attended the site for this study prior to fall 2008.

9. In the context of this study, a *full-time* student is one describes as matching the full-time college student criteria until Title IV (financial aid) legislation in the United States.

10. The *"study site," "site for the study"* or *"this site"* are terms used throughout this study to refer the institution that served as the location for this study. A reference to the institution's name has been withheld intentionally to encourage anonymity.

11. The term *open admissions* or *open enrollment* refers to the limited entrance requirements for prospective students. Similar to community colleges, the study site requires a prospective student to have (a) completed high school, (b) earned a GED, or (c) demonstrated the ability to benefit via a placement exam such as COMPASS™. It does not use ACT™ or SAT™ scores to make admissions decisions, although such scores could be used to determine placement into developmental courses (in the absence of other testing mechanisms).

Synopsis of the Methodology

A two-phased concurrent mixed methods research design was used to respond to the questions posed in this case study (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The overarching methodology is a case study that integrates quasi-experimental design. The quasi-experimental design used archival records of 44 fall 2007 cohort students (the control group) who received the standard advising practice of the study site. The treatment group was comprised of 44 consenting students from the fall 2008 cohort who agreed to receive intrusive advising (the intervention). Interviews and focus groups--from the case study tradition of qualitative research (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002)--were used to capture students' experiences during their first term of enrollment. This qualitative data was linked with participants' retention (quantitative) data, and their conversations were analyzed and interpreted in light of how they described their retention and persistence.

The sample for this study included students enrolled (or previously enrolled) in one predominantly-White, private, not-for-profit, career college (also referred to as "the study site" or "this site") who were: (a) first-time, full-time African American students, (b) pursuing associates degrees with the college, and (c) who test into at least one developmental (remedial) course upon entrance to the college. Furthermore, these students must have: (a) entered the college with a high school GPA of 2.69 or lower, (b) have earned a General Education Degree (GED), or (c) have tested into at least two developmental education courses (in the absence of a high school GPA or record of a GED). These criteria applied to members of the control group (from the fall 2007 cohort) and the treatment group (from the fall 2008 cohort).

Using this criteria, 152 ($n = 152$) students qualified for participation. Of the 152, 44 ($n = 44$) consented and they were randomly and equally assigned ($n = 22$) to one of two groups. The groups were then randomly selected (by the flipping of a coin) to determine which would receive the treatment. Qualitative conversations (during the students' first academic term—fall quarter) provided evidence that several control group members "crossed-over" and received the treatment (intrusive advising) during the fall quarter. A decision was, therefore, made to merge the groups into a single treatment group ($n = 44$) during the next (winter) quarter and to form a new control group from archival records. The *modified* treatment group ($n = 44$) was, therefore, based on all the consenting students volunteering to receive intrusive advising as an intervention during fall 2008. Students were notified by mail of this change.

A *new* control group was formed the next quarter by randomly selecting 44 ($n = 44$) subjects from the fall 2007 cohort—one year preceding this study. These subjects were

selected using the same criteria as the treatment group. Student records were extracted from an archival student records' database maintained by the study site. A total of 144 ($n = 144$) subjects met the selection criteria (as outlined in this study), but only 44 ($n = 44$) records (subjects) were randomly extracted to form a *new control group*.

All registered students of the site have access to counseling and academic advising staff who are willing to assist students with their academic and career inquires, *at the student's request*. Commonly, students' requests require the involvement of employees (faculty and staff) in other departments (and, locations) of the college which has left students of this institution feeling like they receive the "*run around*" when help is needed. Under this standard advising practice, *students* would be expected to *initiate* their own requests for assistance and to navigate their way to receive adequate support from employees throughout the college. With the *intrusive* model of advising, the *advisor* was expected to *initiate* frequent contact with her pre-assigned first-year advisees, to monitor their academic progress, to offer them academic and career guidance, and to place each advisee in direct contact with other departments (including offering to escort the student to that department), as needed. This advisor served as the liaison for the student throughout his or her first year. This intrusive approach to advising served as the treatment.

Quantitative data was collected at the start of the students' second academic quarter (fall-to-winter retention) and at the start of their third academic quarter (winter-to-spring retention). I delimited data collection to three academic terms (fall, winter, and spring) based on research findings provided by the study site indicating a premature departure of first year students during their first two academic terms (fall and winter)—with most leaving prior to the start of their second term of enrollment (winter). At the end of each academic period,

parametric statistics were used to measure the retention difference between the two groups of participants and to test for the effect size of the intervention—intrusive advising (Glass & Hopkins, 1996). By nature of my role as an academic administrator of this study site, I had full access to students' electronic academic records for the purpose of a secondary data analysis of their term-to-term retention trends, end-of-quarter GPA, and instructor-recorded weekly attendance.

During the qualitative phase of the design (fall 2008), 10 students participated in individual interviews and another nine students participated in focus group interview sessions. Focus group sessions were held (separately) by group affiliation—treatment or control group membership. These interview and focus group conversations took place during students' first academic term (during the last four weeks of fall quarter) and were held on the campus of the study site. It was interesting to hear and intriguing to capture students' descriptions of their first term experiences during a historically volatile time during their academic pursuit with this college. Third-party facilitators (used to mitigate any perceived power—positional authority--issues involved with me conducting the interviews) followed the sequence of questions outlined within the interview protocol (see Appendixes E and F) while using probing questions to encourage deeper exploration with the subject. Taken together, the research design approaches complemented one another in response to the research questions guiding this study.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance to a broader community of researchers as well as having significance to various stakeholders of the institution serving as the setting for this study. In the broader community of higher education, policy makers, accrediting bodies, and

executive-level administrators stand to benefit from research targeted to improve retention within at-risk populations of students. With a growing emphasis on accountability practices as a means to demonstrate *institutional effectiveness* and *institutional performance*, this audience of readers stands to benefit from knowing how such an intrusive advising intervention could play out in a career college setting toward improving retention and persistence and, potentially, graduation rates as a measure of performance.

Extensive research has established the merit of greater degrees of educational attainment as a means of maximizing the chances of an adult earning higher wages over his or her lifetime. In the September 2007 journal, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities*, published by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the researchers cite educational attainment as one indicator of quality of life, future earnings, and employment opportunities among adults. Between 1990 and 2005, on a national level 81% of Caucasians completed a minimum of a high school education. By contrast, during this same period, 66% of African Americans earned a minimum of a high school diploma. Of the high school completers, 25% of the African Americans remained unemployed compared to 11% of Caucasians (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox & Provasnik, 2007). In terms of degree completion, between 2005 and 2006 just under 13% and 10% of Blacks earned associate and bachelor degrees in the United States (U.S.) (respectively) while Whites earned those same degrees at a rate of 68% and 72% (NCES Associates, 2007; NCES Bachelors, 2007). These trends among African Americans appear to be in conflict with the educational and employment objectives that comprise the mission and objectives of many higher education institutions, particularly those with a focus

on career-oriented education and promises of job placement following graduation—namely, career colleges.

Career colleges have increased in numbers and student enrollment in these schools has paralleled that trend (CCA, 2006; Imagine America Foundation, 2007). However, there is minimal published research available to provide administrators of this type of institution with practical retention recommendations based on empirical research methodologies. This is concerning on a number of levels, but particularly in light of research showing greater degrees of attrition among students attending open-enrollment (less selective) institutions— as is the case with the career college that served as the site for this study (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006; Tinto, 1993). This study contributes to the body of knowledge to fill such a void on behalf those interested in learning more about this type of college—a predominantly-White, private, not-for-profit career college.

The most obvious benefactors of this research are the African American students struggling to persist in this kind of higher education setting; and, in higher education, in general. The case study design adopted for this study provides a means to collect and report relevant findings that describes how these students describe their experiences while also providing the subjects with a mechanism (the results of this study) to communicate their experiences to an interested group of administrators employed throughout this study site. The potential that these administrators could extend or adopt such an advising practice beyond the scope of this pilot period is real and is expected to increase the retention possibilities for this kind of student enrolling with this type of institution.

As one can see, the potential benefit of this research is multifaceted and numerous stakeholders stand to benefit from a carefully constructed study design and comprehensive

analysis of the results. As with all research, there are known and unknown constraints that the researcher should disclose to the reader in order to provide a transparent means of interpreting the findings as an outcome of this study. The following section of this report offers such disclosure of what was known and unknown during the study.

<div align="center">Synopsis of the Limitations and Delimitations</div>

Researchers commonly bound studies within the context of certain limitations and delimitations (Creswell, 2003). Limitations are those adverse conditions that result from the study's design whereas delimitations are those conditions imposed by the researcher to frame the study within some predetermined context. This next set of paragraphs presents a brief overview of the limitations and delimitations of this study, with expanded details documented within Chapter Three.

Limitations

The results of this research will have limitations that naturally result from the research design. As one example, this study integrates the use of qualitative research methods in the form of interview and focus group conversations. Researchers have historically considered qualitative data collection as *non-generalizable* to the population at large because of the use of small sample sizes (Huberman & Miles, 2002). In other words, when data is collected and analyzed from the interview and focus groups, some would assert that the participants' responses apply only to themselves and that those reviewing the results of this study should not assume the students' descriptions are reflective of other African American students with similar characteristics. This may be true, but it does not negate the value of reporting subjects' descriptions of their academic experiences toward the study

site's regional accreditation goals to display the attributes of a *learning organization* (Senge, 2006).

This study also acknowledges the fact that any potential effect from the intrusive advising intervention could vary by individual participant—each participant experiences his or her first-year advising differently. This point is relevant in the context of responding to the second quantitative research question that seeks to explain how much of the variance between the two groups is explainable by this intervention.

The potential effects of other retention initiatives underway with the study site (implemented within the same timeframe as this treatment) were also targeted as having the potential to limit or interfere with interpretation of the results—that is, when trying to account for the effects of intrusive advising on students' retention trends. Beginning fall 2008, students living in residence halls were required to maintain a minimum grade point average (2.00) on a quarterly basis. The study site outlined a plan to remove students from the residence halls if a student's end-of-quarter grade point average fell below 2.00; the student could remain with the institution but would require alternate housing accommodations. In addition, the study site implemented a new attendance policy that administratively withdrew students who did not maintain regular attendance throughout the quarter. When interpreting the results, this study had to account for potential effects from these alternative interventions.

Delimitations

The scope of this study was delimited to a single institution (the case) and the following participant profile outlined in Table 1. The reader should note that students (in both groups) were required to match the criteria listed in the upper portion of the table (such

as being a first year African American student) and each qualifying subject had to match at least one lower-criteria (such as having a grade point average below 2.69 or having earned a general education diploma). The study used this set of criteria as a delimiter in order to account for the way this institution maintains secondary data while also taking into consideration what literature supports as common and significant at-risk predictors of retention among college freshmen (Horn & Berger, 2004; Levin & Levin, 1991).

Table 1

Participant Profile for Research Participation

Condition	Criteria
Must match all of these criteria	First-time, full-time, African American student,
	Pursuing an associate's degree with the study site (a predominantly-White, private, not-for-profit career college), and
	Testing into at least one developmental education course upon entrance to the college
Must also match at least *one* of these criteria	High school grade point average (GPA) is 2.69 or below, *or*
	Earned a General Education Degree (GED), *or*
	Tested into two or more developmental education courses upon entrance to the college

This study is also being delimited to the three primary academic terms for this site— fall, winter, and spring quarter enrollment. The literature clearly supports this decision based

on the observations of many researchers asserting that most students who fail to persist

through graduation drop out during their first year of enrollment (Earl, 1987; Tinto, 1993)

and many leave within the first six to eight weeks (Noel, Levitz & Saluri, 1985). Studies

published by the study site (with references omitted for the purpose of anonymity) also

substantiate my decision to delimit this research to fall-to-winter, winter-to-spring, and fall-

to-spring retention. The goal of this intrusive advising intervention is to increase the probably

that more students will persist beyond their first quarter and, ultimately, throughout their first

year of enrollment.

<div align="center">About the Researcher</div>

This section was added to provide a context within which the reader can further

examine this study. I am an academic administrator employed with the study site.

Throughout this study, I also served as the supervisor to the intrusive advisor who frequently

interacted with the treatment group participants. I recruited and contracted the facilitators for

the qualitative interviews, the video camera man, and the transcriptionist as an element of my

job duties during this study. Although I chose to limit my direct interaction with the students

throughout the course of this study, it seems relevant to disclose the relationship I would

have to others involved with this study as a transparent means to interpret the findings.

According to my job description, I have leadership responsibility with a number of

students enrolled throughout this institution—including some of those receiving the treatment

(intrusive advising). I was initially concerned with potential risk to subjects in the form of

any perception of coercion. For this reason, I considered excluding from the study any

student with whom I would have administrative authority. The institutional review boards

(IRB) of Western Michigan University and the study site did not deem added precaution as

necessary.

Professionally, I am a Black, middle-aged female who is one of two African American ("executive" level) administrators employed with the study site. Throughout my years of employment with the institution (10 years), I have been actively involved with a variety of retention efforts with all students enrolled in our institution (regardless of race or ethnicity) and I have championed (with the help of others) our diversity initiatives. As one of a few Blacks employed with the study site, I found myself, on numerous occasions, serving as a mentor to Black students and the scarce Black faculty employed with the site; both groups sought my guidance to help interpret situations and to navigate this predominantly-White environment that was *foreign* to them. I began to wonder what the effects of these unintentional conditions were for Blacks within this setting.

On a more personal level, I grew up in a predominantly-Black neighborhood and was educated in my primary years in a predominantly-Black public school system that had scarce resources compared to other traditional White school systems. While enrolled in these schools, I was an exceptional student—well liked and always at the top of my class. I even graduated salutatorian of my high school class. My parents are not only well-educated but they were actively involved in matters of education throughout most of my youth. My mother was employed by the public school system that I attended, and my father served on the school board of that school system before serving (at one point) in the office of president of the intermediate school system for the county wherein we lived. As the reader can see, I had positive influences that shaped my appreciation and passion for education. My story seems to be a stark contrast to the experiences of the majority of the students who

participated in this study. This contrasting perspective, also, helped to shape the lens I used to examine issues of retention described in this study.

Research guidelines, generally, suggests that researchers remove or "bracket" their preconceptions and personal experiences in order to remain objective when collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 1998, 2007). I attempted to adhere to these guidelines. After completing this study, however, I question whether this practice aided or interfered with the research design, the data collection, and the analysis and interpretation of the results. From the vantage point of a Black woman who has chosen to study retention issues among Black students, it seems obvious to me that such professional and personal experiences have a place in most stages of this study. My experiences (i.e. my story) is one that on some levels shares some experiences with the subjects, while on other levels offers a stark (yet meaningful) contrast to theirs. I believe both perspectives are pertinent in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of retention among this population.

For the sake of practice, however, I have chosen to trump my perspective with practice—at least for now. This study, therefore, explores student-related retention questions within some (but not all) elements of this brief biography about me--the researcher.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This chapter offered an introduction to the key concepts, problem, purpose, research questions, methodology, significance, limitations and delimitations of this study. The next chapter, Chapter Two, offers a richer discussion of the theoretical framework that provides a broader context for the reader to understand issues of student persistence in or departure from higher education. It also attempts to present adequate evidence justifying the relevance and

appropriateness of the advising approach proposed as an intervention within this study and in this kind of postsecondary setting.

CHAPTER TWO

In many ways, I view this research as pioneering in the arena of student retention with predominantly-White, private, not-for-profit career colleges enrolling at-risk African American students. The pages that follow provide a thorough examination of the literature anchoring the key concepts of this study. This chapter begins with an introduction to fundamental theories on the topic of student development and retention. Using these theories as a framework, this chapter provides an examination of trends pertaining to student persistence and retention in higher education and discusses what these trends reveal about minority and underprepared populations of students in higher education settings. Prior to its conclusion, the reader will gain a more thorough understanding of the various models of academic advising and why the intrusive model of advising has the ability to serve as an effective intervention strategy with career college students matching the at-risk profile outlined earlier in this study. As the reader progresses through the following pages, the voids in the literature become increasingly apparent as the literature fails to address persistence and retention research within career college settings using intrusive advisors to deliver an intervention with African American students.

Persistence and Retention: Theories and Trends

Much of the literature published on the topic of persistence and retention has evolved from the work of Astin (1975, 1985, 1999) and Tinto (1975, 1993). Some would say that these theorists have anchored years of research in the areas of student persistence and retention with their theories regarding college student development and departure. Their research has provided a framework by which academic practitioners, researchers, and stakeholders have made considerable progress toward identifying the "causes and cures" of

matters involving retention. In this context, their research has helped to guide future research, policy, and practice as a means for many to continue examining and responding to concerns regarding student departure in a variety of academic settings. It is, therefore, essential that I begin this section with an overview of the seminal work of Astin and Tinto.

Astin's Developmental Theory of Student Involvement

In 1975, Alexander Astin published the results of a longitudinal study of the factors contributing to college student dropout. The purpose of his research was to identify factors inherent within the college environment that significantly affected students' abilities to persist in college, and he endeavored to offer recommendations to academic decision makers seeking to increase student persistence. Among the results that contributed significantly to students remaining in college, Astin found that living on campus, being involved in extracurricular activities, holding a part-time job on campus, and attending a 4-year college increased persistence. Astin also proposed that student-to-college "fit" was of interest in explaining students' reasons for persistence or dropout. For example, students who attended religious colleges reflective of their own religious backgrounds, Blacks who attended predominantly-Black colleges and universities, and students from small towns attending small colleges all had greater degrees of persistence. Within his recommendations, Astin included academic advising as an effective means to reduce college dropout rates (1975). In 1999, Astin continued his research by examining how the lack of persistence, and in turn the act of dropping out, is reflective of a deficit in students' levels of student involvement. Kuh (2008) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) have affirmed the same.

Astin's theory of student involvement (1999) extended his earlier work by proposing that student involvement can predict persistence trends. He defines involvement as "the

amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). Unlike traditional pedagogical theories, Astin's involvement theory does not view students as "black boxes" (p. 519)--where institutional resources go in and outcomes (such as grade point averages and graduation rates) serve as outputs. On the contrary, his theory emphasizes active student participation in all aspects of the learning process, including students' involvement with counselors and student personnel workers (Astin, 1975, 1999). In its simplest form, Astin's theory is that, "students learn by becoming involved" (1985, p. 133).

Astin emphasizes what students do more than the institution in the retention equation. He, therefore, urges high-performing institutions to place greater emphasis on the passive, reticent, and underprepared students in order to help facilitate their involvement in all aspects of their academic experience, including facilitating their involvement in academic advising (Astin, 1985). Interestingly, and especially so in the context of this study, Astin recommends that future research examine issues of student involvement by looking at particular populations of students who possess a given set of characteristics (e.g. academic preparation, race) and report how a particular form of involvement might produce desirable outcomes in different academic settings (Astin, 1975, 1999). As the reader will examine in the next section, his work provides a common thread linking involvement theory with Vincent Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1975, 1993).

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1975, 1993) suggests that student departure has more to do with what takes place post-entry than what has taken place in their lives before arriving on campus. While Tinto acknowledges the relevance of students' academic,

economic, and social conditions upon entry, he suggests a kind of student-institution reciprocity that provides a means for schools to influence students' decisions to persist toward graduation with less regard for students' individual conditions at the time of entry. Some may consider this encouraging news for institutions of all types, but particularly encouraging for open-enrollment institutions (like some career colleges) that seek to provide quality higher education to a more diverse population of students.

While the phenomenon of student departure transcends all types of institutions, Tinto discovered greater degrees of premature departure among students enrolled in open-enrollment institutions compared to those enrolled in schools having more selective entrance criteria (Tinto, 1993). Similar to community colleges, some career colleges tout their open-enrollment philosophies as being responsive to the need for more inclusion of students with varying degrees of abilities and academic preparation (Imagine America Foundation, 2007; Roman, 2007; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006; Zafft, Kallenbach & Spohn, 2006). In their efforts to serve a broader population of students, they also attract students who fit an at-risk profile in terms of being a racial or ethnic minority, having graduated with a low high school grade point average, requiring remedial education, and being a first-generation college student (Horn & Berger, 2004; Imagine America Foundation, 2007; Warburton, Bugarin & Nunez, 2001; White, 2006). Tinto's findings by selectivity of institution are of particular importance to this study, and in light of the focused missions of these career colleges, include the one providing the setting for this study.

As another outcome of his study on departure theory, Tinto (1993) finds that most students depart during their first year of college and that their first-year experiences are so critical that they can predict student persistence in subsequent years. He categorizes

students' reasons for departure as being internally or externally motivated. Internal reasons for departure include student adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation. External reasons for departure are those such as obligations and financial conditions. He also reports that some students depart because they do not come to college with clear goals. He asserts that the stronger the link between students' goals and college completion (as a means to attain those goals), the more likely students will persist toward graduation. This is of particular interest in light of this study's first qualitative research question, which seeks to discuss students' descriptions of their goals in the context of their reasons for enrollment in the institution providing the setting for this study.

Tinto (1993) also links the quality of students' interactions with members (other students and employees) of the institution to their reasons for departure. His findings appear to overlap the work of Astin (1999) predicated on the belief that more involved and engaged students remain in college. In support of this opinion, he cites the work of Martin (1990), who argues that minority retention is a reflection of the academic climate in which minority students find themselves just as much as it is a reflection of minority students' academic abilities. Tinto (1993) supports her position by stating, "climates that discourage and discriminate, however subtly, are also climates that give rise to student failure and departure" (p. 74). Campus climates that discourage and discriminate foster incongruence.

A lack of congruence also emerges between the school and the student when the student does not take advantage of the array of academic resources provided by the institution. In this context, Tinto (1993) describes incongruence as a lack of commitment (not having a clear definition of and commitment to goals) on the part of the student that regrettably, and quite often, leads to their premature departure. He acknowledges that some

ambiguity is inevitable among first year students, but when this phenomenon persists and

goes unaddressed without effective guidance, it can be detrimental to students' persistence.

In response to such concerns, he affirms the relevance of *intrusive advising* as an effective

response to student retention during the first year. When comparing the "intrusive" model of

advising to the "developmental" model (Crookston, 1972; Gordon, Habley & Associates,

2000), Tinto links the effectiveness of the intrusive approach to advisors' required contact

with student advisees. He also attributes the relevance and effectiveness of intrusive advising

to its unique focus on the "*whole* student" (Tinto, 1993, p. 173).

From Tinto's perspective, when institutions view advising as an integral part of the

first year experience and systematically link advising services to other student services,

students gain the most benefit from these resources. When discussing his departure theory,

Tinto references a variety of institutions (none of which, however, is a career college) and he

discusses how and when these schools provide intrusive advising services to their students

(Tinto, 1993). He discovered that some institutions house the advising function in a central

location on campus while others disperse this function throughout the campus. Some

campuses (such as the University of Denver) approach advising as a comprehensive system

spanning students' entire stay, while others (such as the State University of New York)

established freshman-advising centers on campus. In the case of the University of Chicago,

students receive intrusive advising support during their entire stay (from admittance to

graduation) via the services of a centralized advising center. From his work, we learn that

most campuses provide a hybrid approach to advising—providing centralized freshman

advising during students' first year followed by departmental advising in subsequent years.

Tinto (1993) also reports an increasing reliance on the use of "professional advising staff" (p.

173)—trained advisors who (sometimes) work in cooperation with the faculty. He purports

that, "the single greatest hurdle to effective program advising...[is] the inability of advisers

to provide students with consistent and accurate information" (p. 174). He, therefore,

supports the relevance of a professional advisor, computer-assisted advising (and

registration), and online degree audits to reduce inaccuracies and inconsistencies during the

advising process.

From his research, we also learn that more schools are targeting *intrusive advising*

during students' first-year. Some have also found this advising model effective with targeted

populations of students. Schools such as George Mason University and Ohio State University

have adopted an intrusive approach to advise students who are undecided, transferring in,

nontraditional, and who are students of color (Tinto, 1993). More recent research provides

support for targeted outreach with minority students (Rendon, 1994; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen

& Person, 2006).

Other Theoretical Links between Persistence, Retention, and Advising

In 1994, Rendon presented her model of *validation* founded on the premise that

"validation" is more effective in transforming non-traditional students to become capable

learners. Her model suggests that students experience "incidents" that validate them. These

incidents can occur in or outside of the classroom and are initiated by individuals who take

an active interest to reach out to the student. These "validation agents" offer encouragement,

support, and affirmation that aide students' academic and social adjustment to college.

Rendon (1994) based this model on the premise that non-traditional (generally minority,

first-generation, working-class, and employed) students require outreach because they do not

perceive "involvement" as something they (the student) should initiate--"They perceive it

when someone takes an active role in assisting them" (p. 44). Rendon (1994) is joined by other researchers (Terenzini et al., 1994) who establish an argument that *involvement* is difficult for non-traditional students—it is a better fit for traditional students (generally middle- to upper-class, predominantly-White, with at least one college-educated parent, and taught that college attendance is a normal rite of passage). Non-traditional students require "active outreach" (Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2002).

Astin, Tinto and Rendon are among other scholars who have also linked student development theory to the purposefulness of academic advising when attempting to encourage increased persistence among college students. Theories developed by Chickering (1969), Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) also attest to the effectiveness of advising as a means of reducing student departure. Chickering (1969) organized a psychosocial theory around seven concepts, or *vectors*. Of the seven, three vectors—developing competence, developing autonomy, and developing purpose-- directly relate to developmental models of academic advising. Because developmental advising (to be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section of this paper) is described as an interactive "process"—rather than a "routine endorsement of course taking" (Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000, p. 13), it requires continual interaction between the student and the advisor to encourage persistence toward the student's goals.

Crookston (1972) coined the terms prescriptive and developmental advising after linking advising to the teaching and learning aspects of college student development. In this context, the prescriptive model of advising is reflective of the authoritative role of the advisor (as teacher) to whom the student brings his problem for resolution. The advisor addresses basic questions, but does not assist beyond a brief exchange of questions and answers.

Although convenient for and desirable to some who prefer not to become too involved with the student, this model places the burden of responsibility on the advisor (the authority)—not the student. Conversely, the developmental model of advising integrates a variety of strategies in order to build an advising *relationship* that has the potential to facilitate attainment of long-term and short-term goals. In this context, the advisor takes on the role of a mentor to help facilitate the student's development over time (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

Crookston based developmental advising on two fundamental assumptions (Crookston, 1972). The first assumption is that higher education provides an opportunity by which a person can pursue a satisfying lifestyle. Current research supports this assumption, as well (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox & Provasnik, 2007). This assumption centers on the notion that students benefit when they learn to view higher education as an opportunity to develop a plan to attain a self-fulfilling life--instead of preparing for a profession and building one's life around it. The second fundamental assumption of developmental advising is that *teaching* includes any experience between the "teacher" and a student in the learning community that contributes to individual, group, or community growth and development. Sometimes, the students and others in the community play the role of "teacher." From this perspective, "the student cannot be merely a passive receptacle for knowledge" (p. 12).

Working independently, Terry O'Banion (1972) also developed what some view as the origin of the developmental model of advising (Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000). O'Banion's five-step advising model suggests that students assume responsibility for decisions during each phase of the advising process. With the O'Banion model, the advising relationship involves exploration of life goals, vocational goals, program choice, course choice, and scheduling options. Within each of these dimensions, the advisor—the teacher--

encourages students' involvement in and responsibility for decision-making. Researchers, such as Astin (1999) and Tinto (1993), link increases in student involvement (including student involvement in the advising process) to a reduction in student departure rates.

Theoretical Factors Influencing Student Persistence

Research has identified several causes contributing to a lack of student persistence and retention (Astin, 1999; Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Among those cited are sociological, organizational, economic, psychological, and cultural issues (Kuh, Kenize, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2007). Sociological factors are those that either promote or complicate a student's social integration into the academic setting. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1993) postulates that students must separate from one group (e.g. family and peers) and integrate with the norms and patterns of a new group. This transition is simpler for students whose values, norms, and behaviors more closely align with that of the dominant pattern on campus, but creates additional barriers for those whose patterns are less congruent with the pre-established patterns on campus. When students must learn to navigate an unfamiliar environment (e.g. African American student enrolled in a predominantly-White college), persistence and retention challenges often emerge (Fleming, 1984). For racially and ethnically diverse students, social adjustment is primarily a function of family support networks, while college friendships serve as a greater influence on social adjustment among White students (Kuh, Kenize, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2007). This same line of research has established that social integration is a more robust predictor of persistence and retention than academic integration (satisfactory compliance with academic standards)—even though the two ideally complement one another. For students of color, family support serves as a strong predictor of minority student success (retention) in college (Guiffrida, 2006).

From an organizational perspective, institutional structures and processes also influence students' persistence. The size of the institution, admission selectivity criteria, resources available, and faculty-student ratios are among the most influential organizational factors affecting college student persistence and retention (Kuh, Kenize, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2007). Astin (1975, 1999) also addresses institutional "fit" within his theory of student involvement and he identifies low selectivity as a significant contributor to increases in students' premature departure. Some might view this finding as being in direct conflict with any efforts among open-enrollment institutions seeking to encourage greater degrees of persistence among their students. The fact is that research also provides support validating the merit of these schools' continued efforts to identify and implement effective retention intervention that respond to the needs of their students (Astin, 1975, 1999; Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Muraskin & Lee, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Economic factors have gained increasing attention as the cost of college continues to rise and students' reliance on financial aid increases (Horn & Berger, 2004; Muraskin & Lee, 2004; NCES NPSAS:04, 2004; NCES 030, 2006). The NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (2005) links increased earning potential, economic opportunity, and general health and wellness to minority college completion. In their report, the NAACP quotes the U.S. Secretary of Education who links 80% of the fastest growing jobs in the U.S. to post-secondary education or training, yet, "Many black students…have markedly diminished opportunities for educational, social, and economic advancement" (NAACP, 2005, p. 4). Among the reasons cited for this decreased opportunity among Blacks, is inadequate college preparation. Other students dropout of (or do not attend) college because they perceive that

the cost of attending college outweighs the benefits of degree completion (Muraskin & Lee, 2004). Additionally, students' ability to afford higher education influences college completion rates (Benton, 2001). Muraskin and Lee (2004) correlate increased persistence with higher amounts of financial aid awarded during students' first three years of college. Insufficient access to funding is, therefore, another contributor to low completion rates among non-traditional students. Garcia's (2000) study with students enrolled in developmental classes at an urban, open-admission, commuter-university finds that persistence is predictable by students' perceptions of difficulties financing their education. Tinto (2006) speaks of "economic stratification" (between high- and low-income families) as being relevant to the discussion of student departure because, "...where and how one goes to college influences the likelihood of college completion...56% of high-income students earn a Bachelor's degree within six years, only 25% of low-income students do...income matters" (p. 11). These scholars' findings are important to the significance of this study.

Psychological factors, such as students' attitudes and behaviors also affect their rates of persistence (Bean & Eaton, 2000). The more students present self-efficacy, the more likely they will persist in the face of academic and social challenges. The stronger their concept of self-confidence, the greater degrees of persistence they will experience. Expectancy, self-efficacy, and motivational theories suggest that students will seek out (or avoid) opportunities for greater levels of involvement based on their levels of self-concept (Kuh, Kenize, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2007). This study previously established the value of student involvement (engagement) toward increases in their completion rates. According to Rousseau (1995), students and organizations enter into a form of psychological contract when students attend a college. This contract presumes that students come to

campus with pre-established beliefs about the nature of their relationships with their peers and various employees of the college. When a discrepancy occurs between what students expect the "contract" to involve and what they actually experience, trust weakens and this can influence how they experience college thereafter. This theoretical perspective is of particular interest to this study that seeks to respond to research questions about students' reasons for attending the site for this study compared to what they actually experienced once enrolled.

Matters of culture also play a role in how students experience college. Historically, underrepresented populations of students experience challenges upon entry that complicate their abilities to take advantage of the resources provided by the institution (Kuh, Kenize, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2007; Kuh, Kenzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005). According to Kuh and Associates (2007), "Students perspectives of the institutional environment and dominant norms and values influence how students think and spend their time...these properties influence student satisfaction and the extent to which they engage in educationally purposeful activities" (p. 17). Underrepresented populations of students are often subject to *habitus*--enduring predispositions that impose unconscious limits on educational and career aspirations and perpetuate low self-concept (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). They must also learn to navigate dual environments—home and college—which may lack cultural similarities (Benton, 2001).

As a matter of culture, learning to navigate a new system can be particularly stressful for Blacks enrolled in a predominantly-White ("congruent") system unfamiliar to them (Thomas, 1999). Barker (2007) takes the definition of *congruence* from the work of Thomas (1999) to apply it to the higher education setting. Barker defines a *dominant congruent*

system as an organization that mimics the greater society (p. 95). He, therefore, categories PWIs as *congruent* systems "…because their senior leadership is dominated by Whites, and in most cases White males. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) serve as an example of *incongruent* systems. The HBCU places Blacks in power positions, which is not reflective of the greater society" (p. 95). In the context of my study, Barker (2007) develops a framework by which we can interpret how non-White members of a system can be disadvantaged in a setting unfamiliar to them. This is relevant to this study in the context of cross-cultural advising relationships, because "issues of power…may impact the students' perceptions of the mentoring relationship" (p. 95).

Researchers encourage institutions to implement solutions that help their non-White students navigate between worlds—their own and the predominantly-White setting--, especially when those students perceive the conventions and traditions of the college environment as alien to their own (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Jones, 2001; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). Black students enter college with preconceptions regarding their lack of similarity to the majority on campus, their own perceptions regarding the culture of others, and their individual "history of conflict" framing their perceptions of their own relevance within the broader campus culture (Barker, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). Institutional racism, "…the intended or unintended consequences that emerge from the operation procedures, rules, habits, culture, and symbols of a given organization or institution that negatively affect the marginalized…" (Davis, 2007, p. 219), has been cited by some as an impediment to our progress toward establishing confidence among Blacks that they will be treated equitably and enabled to succeed in higher education settings.

With these cultural challenges as a framework toward developing greater understandings of individual and organizational factors that impede Black student retention throughout higher education, mentors have the potential to play an important role toward helping Black students build trust and learn to navigate their new setting (Davis, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Mentors can also help these students establish a voice on campus. In related studies, Black students offer insight into the relevance of Black mentors as they describe the influence of these relationships on their ability to remain enrolled in college (Guiffrida, 2006; Ugbah & Williams, 1989). In those studies, Black students believed Black mentors shared similar experiences with them. In other studies, Black students also attributed *quality* cross-cultural relationships as influential to their success in college; although, these kinds of relationships were seen as difficult to establish (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Lee, 1999). The proactive mentoring aspect of the intrusive advising intervention outlined in this study has the potential to respond to these types of challenges among Black students.

Trends among Minority Students in Higher Education

Educational researchers throughout the United States are still trying to identify causes and trends associated with stagnant college completion rates (Wirt et al., 2004b). Such research responds to a growing need for a more diverse and educated workforce that has a greater potential for an improved quality of life and increased earnings (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox & Provasnik, 2007; White, 2006). This research also addresses a vital institutional interest among post-secondary schools since persistence and retention are linked directly to achieving and maintaining desired institutional enrollment and graduate completion goals (Alexander, 2000; Burke & Serban, 1998). Student retention has become a

growing topic of interest among educators as more institutions of higher education open their

doors to provide higher education to a more diverse population (Altbach, Berdahl &

Gumport, 2005). Researchers describe access to education as foundational to democracy and

equality of access to education attesting to a society's openness and perspective on power

relations (Allen & Jewell, 2002).

A shift occurred in U.S. higher education as it moved from elite to mass education

following WWII (Smith, Altbach & Lomotey, 2002). This transition is most evident when

examining trends in minority enrollment between World War I and the post-Civil Rights era.

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill), changes in the way higher education

was funded, Civil Rights legislation, and a series of affirmative action legal proceedings have

all been credited as levers during this shift. Yet, prior to the Civil Rights era (in the 1960's),

virtually every institution of higher education excluded African Americans. During these

earlier years in American higher education, when African Americans gained access to

education, it was provided by private Black colleges and universities. White missionaries

founded many of these colleges but African American religious mission societies such as the

African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church established a few (Smith, Altbach & Lomotey,

2002).

If a single phrase encompasses the African American pursuit of education in the U.S.,

that phrase would be "against the odds." Whether reflecting on the history of their education

in the U.S. prior to World War II or thereafter, African Americans have faced persistent

opposition in their effort to obtain equal access to higher education (Allen & Jewell, 2002;

Smith, Altbach & Lomotey, 2002; Trow, 2007). In the context of this quest, the Historically

Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have served as "gateways for social mobility,"

(Allen & Jewell, 2002, p. 246) with the very origin of their existence a direct result of the opposition African Americans faced following the Emancipation.

From the founding of the first missionary-sponsored schools, HBCUs have served as a catalyst for change in U.S. society. From their existence, HBCUs have faced opposition to their existence because some considered their educational missions--to educate Blacks and to facilitate Blacks' social mobility--as a threat to White supremacy (Allen, Epps & Haniff, 1991; Allen & Jewell, 2002). The existence of HBCUs helped to structure the social stratification systems within the Black community; open enrollment institutions play a similar role today. In the year 2004, HBCUs accounted for fewer than 2% of U.S. higher education enrollment yet they awarded nearly 22% of the bachelor degrees earned by African Americans (NCES, 2004). In the same year, African Americans throughout the United States earned less than 9% of the bachelor's degrees conferred. By one account, HBCUs have been credited for the education of 75% of all Blacks holding Ph.D. degrees, 75% of all Black army officers, 80% of all Black federal judges, and 85% of all Black doctors in the U.S. (Fleming, 1984; Hale, 2006).

By the 1960s, nearly every leading U.S. institution of higher education had initiated policies and programs more inclusive of students of color at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Hale, 2006; Smith, Altbach & Lomotey, 2002). The nation's once exclusive White predominance throughout higher education had given way to the recruitment and retention of increasing numbers of students of color. Since the Civil Rights Movement, the number of students of color enrolling in and completing higher education has increased steadily—but, not to a point of parity with Whites (Barker, 2007; Benton, 2001; Fleming, 1985; Hale, 2006; NAACP, 2005). In 1968, many of the nation's schools still had

no programs in place to address high-risk factors common among this population of students (or any population of students); and, such conditions still exists within some predominantly-White college settings to date (Benton, 2001; Fleming, 1985; Smith, Altbach & Lomotey, 2002). In current terms, the U.S. is projecting its non-Hispanic, single-race White population to decline from 66% in 2008 to 46% in 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). It expects Blacks to account for nearly 15% of the population in 2050. These trends justify new research questions and recommendations to address issues of retention among members of racial and ethnic "minority" groups.

Cook and Cordova (2007) reported a dramatic increase (49%) in the number of minority students participating in higher education between 1994 and 2004. Researchers anticipate these trends to continue (KewalRamini et al., 2007). Interestingly, career colleges and universities are gaining increasing proportions of these students--even though academic researchers have virtually ignored these schools in the literature (Jones, 2001; Kinser, 2006; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006). In terms of overall enrollment between 2005 and 2006, private *for-profit* career colleges served a larger proportion of minorities (37.1%) than public (24.6%) and private (19.8%) not-for-profit institutions—as a group. Equally notable, in 2004-05, as a group, career colleges graduated more minorities as a percentage (39%) of their total graduates compared to minorities as a percentage at public (19%) and private (16%) not-for-profit institutions; HBCUs are the only exception (Hale, 2006; Imagine America Foundation, 2007). Yet, despite gains in college entrance and graduation rates, nationwide this population of students continues to lag behind its Caucasian peers in the rate at which they complete a college education (American Council on Education, 2006). In 2003, less than 40% of minorities graduated from college (of any kind) compared to nearly

60% of Whites and the gap in enrollment and completion rates are even more disturbing among some categories of racial and ethnic minorities (White, 2006). When examining the rates of persistence among minority students, the premature exodus of African American students from higher education is severely disproportionate in comparison to that of Caucasian students (ACE, 2006; NAACP, 2005; Snyder, 1999; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

In 2006, 55.5% of African American high school completers (ages 16-24 years) were enrolled in college compared to nearly 69% of White high school completers in the same age group (American College Testing Program, 2007). In terms of associate- and bachelor-degree completion rates among African Americans enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States between 2005 and 2006, a mere 12.6% and 9.6% of degrees were conferred to African Americans, respectively, compared to 68.1% and 72.4% of degrees conferred to Whites (NCES-Associates, 2007; NCES-Bachelors, 2007). These dismal rates of degree attainment among African American college students have also remained discouragingly flat. According to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (2005) "nearly one-third of African American students (30.1%) dropped out [of college]…nationwide college graduation rates for Black students hover around 40% compared to 60% for White students, and 'that gap has not closed at all over the last fifty years'" (p. 5). Because minority students now account for a greater proportion of 18 to 24 year old students entering post-secondary education (NCES-Table 195, 2007), it becomes increasingly more troubling that they also represent a larger proportion of students failing to complete college (NCES-Associates, 2007; NCES-Bachelors, 2007).

The complexity surrounding issues of academic persistence is even more disturbing when reviewing the low rate of persistence among African American students enrolled in

predominantly-White institutions (PWIs) of higher education. Across the country, such institutions are endeavoring to increase their minority student enrollments, but they are showing few gains in retaining these students once enrolled (Field, 2007; Kezar & Eckel, 2007; Schmidt, 2006). Davis et al. (2004) refer to the dismal graduation rates of Black students at PWIs when they assert that,

> Predominantly-White institutions of higher education, in fact, often devote intensive efforts to minority student recruitment but find that subsequent retention is a significant problem. In predominantly-White institutions, 70% of Black students do not complete baccalaureate education compared to 20% of those from historically Black institutions. (p. 421)

Davis et al. cite the words of one student who described herself as ". . . the only fly in the buttermilk" (p. 420). Astin (1975) and Watson and Terrell (2002) document a similar expression of isolation among African American students who participated in their qualitative study that examined how multicultural students experienced college and what meaning they constructed from those experiences.

Research suggests that Black attendance at predominantly-White colleges and universities may present a handicap (Astin, 1975; Barker, 2007). Some view this finding as the result of factors within the locus of control of the institution—these factores tend to make Blacks more prone to dropping out. Rendon (1994) presents her theory of validation from the perspective that institutions should do more to reach out to minority (non-traditional) students who are not accustomed to advocating for themselves in predominantly-White settings. Her research finds that validating these students (through incidents that encourage, support and affirm their experience on campus) has a positive influence on retention. Astin

(1975) finds that Blacks are more likely to drop out of colleges with low selectivity criteria (e.g. open-enrollment institutions), yet this kind of institution appears to be among those most inclusive of and attractive to this population of students who are often less academically prepared for higher education.

Trends among Academically Underprepared Students in Higher Education

More students are enrolling in institutions of higher education but more often with less than adequate academic preparation to be successful in their higher education pursuit (Horn & Berger, 2004). Because of this reality, the need for developmental or remedial intervention has increased and become of primary interest to college and university presidents (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2006; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). One study, reported by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2004), identified 76% of postsecondary institutions offering first year remedial education in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics during fall 2000. Of those postsecondary institutions, findings suggest that a larger proportion (90%) of 2-year institutions offer remedial education (Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000). In some studies, the proportion of students requiring remedial education rises to 94% among institutions with large minority enrollment (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Researchers now assert that the need for postsecondary remediation is "the most serious barrier to degree completion" (Wirt, et al., 2004a, p. 63), but not all researchers agree with this statement (Guiffrida, 2006).

In general, African Americans graduate from high school with less than adequate academic preparation to successfully start and complete a postsecondary education. Findings from multiple sources provide evidence that suggest a significant percentage of African Americans enter higher education with low high school grade point averages (GPA), a need

for remedial education in one or more subject areas, and as first-generation college students

(Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Richardson & Skinner,

1992). In a 2005 study published by Bailey, Jenkins and Leinbach, using data from the

National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988, researchers found that 75% of

Black and Hispanic community college students required remediation compared to 60% of

all community college students enrolled in their first year. The study also revealed that the

same group of minority students was also those more likely classified as first-generation

students and to have occupational (rather than academic) goals as a reason for enrollment.

Furthermore, and as evidence of the impact of these at-risk factors, some researchers directly

attribute the lack of academic preparation as the primary reason some first-generation

students underachieve upon entering a higher education setting (Richardson & Skinner,

1992).

Payne (2007) describes first-generation students as being less academically prepared,

having elevated risk for academic failure, and often needing remedial assistance in math and

reading. In addition, they are often constrained by extensive financial obligations and by a

lack of family support. Several definitions of "first-generation" have been cited, but for the

purpose of this research a definition adopted from authors Brown and Burkhardt (1999) is

being used to describe a student for whom neither parent has attended a college or university

prior to the student's enrollment in higher education. To begin to understand how first-

generation status influences students, Richardson and Skinner (1992) capture minority

students' descriptions of their first-year experiences, "When I got there [the campus], the

things other kids knew already and you're expected to know, I didn't know…It just seemed

like we had gaps. It was like we were missing part of the picture..." (p. 32). Some attribute

their challenges to the evidence that shows "they don't know what they don't know" (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006, p. 125) and this often leads to simple mistakes (such as, not knowing which courses to enroll in toward their degree) and these mistakes can have a devastating impact on their ability to persist. Without effective intervention in an attempt to reverse the effects of these at-risk factors, the likelihood that these students will leave PWIs without a degree in hand (and the accompanying loss of economic benefits and diminished quality-of- life related to such) becomes more probable.

Adult learners in need of remedial courses are said to be among the highest at-risk of dropping out in their first year (Zafft et al., 2006). Non-traditional adult learners represent a greater proportion of enrollees with career colleges compared to other 2-year and 4-year institutions (Imagine America Foundation, 2007; CCA, 2006; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006). Adults with GEDs or other nontraditional diplomas are among those with the greatest potential to benefit from higher education, but are the least likely to enroll (Zafft et al., 2006). Among the reasons cited for their apprehension and lack of success are inadequate academic preparation, financial constraints, competing obligations, personal and psychological barriers, and the need to navigate a new and complex institutional environment. Despite these barriers, there is evidence to suggest that they can transition successfully into higher education and succeed in these settings with the right interventions available to them.

<div align="center">Advising Interventions Research</div>

Numerous publications point to the importance of effective advising models in terms of their positive impact on retention during students' first year of college (Brock et al., 2007; Earl, 1987; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Holmes, 2002; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Payne, 2007; Tinto, 1993). Research also reveals a range of organizational models adopted by various institutions offering student advising (Habley & Morales, 1998). These organization advising models range from advising provided solely by faculty ("faculty only") to advising provided solely by a centralized unit ("self-contained") (Habley & Morales, 1998, p.35). A common theme emerges from these publications in that they emphasize the importance of mentor relationships between college staff and enrolled students during their first year experiences.

First year students encounter many challenges when attempting to adjust to academic life. Their challenges are compounded if they are classified as *first-generation* college students (Kuh, et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and, as this literature review has demonstrated, African American students consequently turn to their academic advisors for guidance in order to "navigate day-to-day campus life" (Sickles, 2004, p. 1). According to Gordon, Habley and Associates (2000), helping students achieve academic success, while also addressing their personal and vocational needs, is one of the greatest challenges in higher education. For the academic advisor, there are just as many hurdles as there are opportunities to make a difference in a student's life; their students live complex and challenging lives that require the advisor's skillful direction. Because first-generation students experience an increased need for guidance, the literature clearly supports the importance of their advisor as a primary source of knowledge about campus and community resources. In a 2007 Noel-Levitz Research Report of student retention practices among 2-year institutions, academic support programs (including advising) were among the most successful interventions, lack of student preparedness was the top retention issue, and respondents acknowledged their need to improve the quality of their intervention strategies

with at-risk students. The advising and mentoring strategy proposed within this study responds to these findings.

Prescriptive Advising Model

There are three widely recognized models of academic advising. The oldest of the three—prescriptive advising—stems from the work of Burns Crookston (1972), which describes the process of advising as one based on the *authority* of the advisor to diagnose and prescribe solutions for the student. Under this model, the student assumes no responsibility for decision-making and the advising interactions are typically to address routine matters such as course selection, degree requirements, and registration (Crookston, 1972). The simplicity of this interaction is appealing to those who desire a "tidy relationship" with students that allow the advisor to remain uninvolved with him or her (p. 13).

A problem arises in this kind of relationship as the advisor views the student as being responsible for carrying out what he or she prescribed while the student views himself passive and void of responsibility for anything that goes awry in the process. From the student's perspective, the advisor is the authority, and if the student errs it is the advisor's fault and responsibility to fix the problem (Crookston, 1972). These differing perceptions of responsibility complicate the advising process and suggest the need for a more cooperative interaction between the two parties.

Developmental Advising Model

The developmental model of advising provides a means to establish a more cooperative advising relationship with students. In 1972, Burns Crookston organized a new theory of advising around two principles—higher education provides a means for developing persons to achieve self-fulfilling lives, and teaching is any experience that contributes to

individual growth and can be evaluated (Crookston, 1972; Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000). Using Chickering's (1969) vectors as a framework, academic advising was viewed from a new lens—the lens of teaching and learning.

In contrast to the prescriptive model, developmental advising is seen as being "concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavior awareness, and problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills" (Crookston, 1972, p. 12). Others have described developmental advising as "a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals" (Winston, Enders & Miller, 1982), "a process of teaching students how to become responsible consumers of their own educations" (Noel-Levitz, 1997, p. 1 & 3). Key differences between the prescriptive and developmental model are observable in Table 2 (Crookston, 1972, p. 14).

Table 2

Contrasting Dimensions of Prescriptive and Developmental Approaches to Advising

In terms of	Prescriptive	Developmental
Abilities	Focus on student's limitations	Focus on student's potential
Motivation	Students are lazy; advisor must urge student to act	Students are active and striving
Rewards	Students are motivated by grades, credit, income	Students are motivated by achievement, mastery, acceptance, status, recognition, fulfillment
Maturity	Students are immature, irresponsible, and in need of close supervision	Students are growing, maturing, responsible, and capable of self-direction
Initiative	Advisor is the initiator and then the rest is up to student	Student and the advisor are initiators
Control	Held by the advisor	Is negotiated
Responsibility	By advisor to advise By student to act	Is negotiated
Evaluation	By adviser to student	Collaborative between student and advisor
Relationship	Between advisor and student is based on status, strategies, games; low trust	Between advisor and student is based on nature of task, competencies, situation; high trust

* Recreated with modifications from Crookston, 1972, p. 14

In spite of the advances developmental advising present in comparison to its predecessor (prescriptive advising), there are weaknesses that have been noted. For example, Gordon (1994) cites (a) time, (b) large caseloads, (c) lack of advisor training, (d) lack of consistency in advisor contacts, (e) autonomous advising units, (f) poor integration between student and academic services, (g) lack of training in working with diverse student body, and (g) lack of effective evaluation strategies as limitations to the effectiveness of this model of

advising. Enders (1994) also cites increased out-of-class expectations for faculty advisors and increased numbers of part-time faculty advisors as shortcomings of this model. With the developmental model of advising, *relationship* is the most critical of all the dimensions. It is, therefore, worth recognizing the challenges of relationship building among faculty advisors (full- or part-time) and student advisees who are not *required* to interact on a regular basis (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Tinto, 1993). The intrusive model insists that such interactions take place routinely.

Intrusive Advising Model

The *intrusive* model of advising incorporates the components of prescriptive and developmental advising models (Earl, 1987). In a prescriptive advising setting, students bring specific issues (rather than comprehensive academic concerns) to advisors for resolution, whereas in a developmental setting of advising, the student and the advisor share responsibility for the nature and quality of the overall advising experience (Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000). Within the prescriptive and developmental framework of advising, advising is commonly optional—not required. Muraskin and Lee (2004) studied 10 "High Graduation Rate Institutions" and found that these institutions employed intrusive advising to personalize each student's academic experience, including *requiring* students to participate in multiple advising interactions each term. The intrusive approach to advising takes a holistic approach to address students' complex needs, proactively and intentionally.

Intrusive advising is, therefore, a proactive and deliberate approach to student retention (Earl, 1987; Heisserer & Parette, 2002). The underlying philosophy of this kind of intervention is that a proactive mentoring relationship with the student will provide the necessary role modeling and guided assistance that each first year student needs in order to

be successful. When used as an intervention with at-risk students, it can "(a) facilitate informed, responsible decision-making, (b) increase student motivation…, and (c) ensure the probability of students' academic success" (Heisserer & Parette, 2002, p. 4). The intrusive advisor customizes each advising relationship in order to understand as much as possible about each student's unique set of circumstances in order to facilitate a well-crafted first year experience that ultimately encourages the student to enroll and successfully complete subsequent terms. The idea is to serve as a role model and an all-encompassing human resource that is capable of providing the necessary support and assistance needed by a first-year student--especially those who are also first-generation college students.

One may describe intrusive advising as "action oriented [on the part of the advisor] by involving and motivating students to seek help when needed" (Earl, 1987, p. 24). It involves a range of intervention strategies that actively engages the advisor in the students' affairs. Rather than waiting for students to seek their help, intrusive advisors actively pursue students in order to increase the probability of their success. In this context, it is a "deliberate intervention…to enhance student motivation" (p. 24). Its advantages include increased rates of retention, increases in credit hours completed, increases in GPA, better use of study skills, time management strategies, and increases in classroom attendance (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

Researchers predicate the effectiveness of intrusive advising on the fact that the advisor will seek to learn about each student in order to predict his or her needs over time (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Holmes, 2002; Lopez, Yanez, Clayton & Thompson, 1988). The intrusive advisor strives to learn about the student and to learn how to respond to his or her comprehensive situation as a means of building a mentoring relationship with him or her.

Thomas and Minto (2004) recommends that intrusive advisors must (a) know the college or university, (b) know the college's resources and the staff of various programs, (c) be trained in all relevant academic and non-academic areas that have a direct impact on students' well-being and success, (d) be available when the student needs them, (e) monitor advisees progress, and (f) maintain clear boundaries with students. A review of intrusive advising models, implemented at various colleges and universities, points to the effectiveness of this advising approach and supports these recommendations.

In a study conducted by Thomas and Minton (2004), the researchers refer to the intrusive advising services provided by John A. Logan College's Student Success Center. These scholars tout the effectiveness of this advising approach with at-risk college students who require a college experience that "is a positive one from the beginning" (p. 10). Thomas and Minto (2004) studied John A. Logan's Student Success Center--a service center for at-risk students, including those who require disability support and those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. This center also houses the campus' tutoring program and federal TRIO™ program. Staff employed in the Student Success Center use an "intrusive advisement" (p. 10) approach with students. The study results provided evidence of statistically significant higher rates of fall-to-fall retention and completion (graduation) rates among students receiving services via the Student Success Center compared to John A. Logan College's overall retention and graduation rates (Thomas & Minton, 2004). These researchers believe students who receive intrusive advising, "…are able to gain knowledge about their institution and about the world of higher education…they [feel] more connected to their institution because of the relationship with their advisors" (Thomas & Minton, 2004, p. 11).

Kuh et al. (2005) pointed to the need for academic leaders to front-load resources with at-risk students and that leaders (of the institution) ensure these resources are integrated within or work in concert with students' academic curriculum. The University of Minnesota's General College (GC) Student Services has implemented several strategies that follow the intrusive model of advising (Albecker, 2005). The General College uses early-warning mechanisms, such as progress reports twice per semester with alerts sent to the student and the advisor. The University of Southern California (USC) also uses early alerts integrated within its student information database and advising system (USC, personal communication, March 18, 2009). University of Minnesota's GC implemented an intrusive approach to advising after examining the results of a one-year interview study involving 34 "GC" freshmen enrolled during the 1989-90 academic year. The study examined the freshmen experience and results are broken down into five evaluative criteria: "knowledge of advising, reported use of advisors, satisfaction with information gained during advising, general satisfaction with advisors, and skills and characteristics of a "good" advisor" (Albecker, 2005, p. 2). Positive feedback from participants reflected student satisfaction with advisors' knowledge about transfers, majors and careers. Dissatisfaction among participants focused on a lack of advisor availability, advisors' lack of immediate knowledge of policies, and students' feeling that they did not receive enough attention, follow-up, or monitoring of their progress based on their expectations (Albecker, 2005). In response to the findings regarding students' advising experiences, University of Minnesota committed more fully to an intrusive approach of advising than it had during the previous academic year. The University of Minnesota can trace the origins of its intrusive advising efforts back to 1988.

Other institutions join the University of Minnesota in celebrating their success with intrusive advising interventions.

Between 2003-2004, Smith (2007) studied intrusive faculty advising at a 2-year community college in the Northeast United States. His study describes an initiative to increase retention among students at-risk of attrition--due to academic failure or a difficult transition to college. Smith (2007) predicates his research on the belief that "nontraditional" students represent a much broader population of students than past research based primarily on student age at the time of college entry. He relies on an expanded definition of retention that includes rates of access, demographics (such as first-generation status), motivation, psychosocial characteristics, and metacognition. In this context, Smith (2007) studied the "high rates of attrition, primarily among [the school's] nontraditional student population" (p. 816) and the effects of an intrusive (faculty) advising intervention implemented by the school.

Smith's (2007) mixed-method study uses data from a variety of sources—a faculty survey, a student perception survey, attendance logs maintained by faculty, and student focus group results. Results from a faculty survey, administered spring 2003, suggest student involvement was a minor problem while student academic preparation was slightly more than a moderate problem. In addition to faculty input, during fall 2003 faculty administered a Student Expectations Survey in their selected courses. Half of the student participants were enrolled in their first year of study with the institution, and 16% of the all participants were African American. The survey contained 50 items with references to academic motivation, student receptivity to services, student engagement, and student perceptions of challenges to academic success. Results suggested that students expected to be highly engaged in their

college experience, that student responses reflected high levels of motivation in terms of

learning goal orientation and self-regulation, and average levels of external motivation.

Student survey results also indicated that students were not particularly receptive to services

offered to them—the item with the lowest average subscale score on the survey. Smith

(2007), also found that self-regulation of behavior was the strongest predictor of GPA and

that learning goal orientation--a student's desire to develop competence by expanding her

ability and mastering challenges in the face of difficulty (Hafsteinsson, Donovan & Breland,

2007)--was positively, but not significantly, related to GPA. He also found that a student's

level of receptivity to services was a negative predictor of GPA—students expecting to use

the college's services had lower GPAs that those less likely to utilize the same services.

Students' top two rankings of greatest concerns revealed concerns with meeting the academic

demands of college and balancing schoolwork with family life. Among other high-ranking

concerns, students expressed concern regarding their ability to pay for tuition and to balance

the demands of work with schoolwork. Smith (2007) used logistic regression analysis to

analyze data from the student survey. Results indicated that the survey was a viable predictor

of attrition.

Another source of data (attendance logs) was maintained by 14 faculty members on a

daily basis during fall 2003. These logs provided details regarding students who were absent,

late, or who disrupted class with behavior. Using a class attendance index, findings indicate

a 15% rate of absence during students' second month of enrollment and slightly better

attendance during their first month of enrollment in courses with these teachers; that is,

attendance was better during their first month of enrollment in the course. Smith (2007) did

not cite attendance rates for the remaining months. The focus groups, facilitated by trained

undergraduate students during spring 2004, sought to understand students' perceptions of their college experience. Similar to my study, Smith used open-ended questions to encourage participants to describe their reasons for enrollment, expectations of barriers to success, perceptions of faculty advisors, and resources provided by the institution. His focus group protocol was also designed to record perceptions of student behavior (e.g. conduct or attendance patterns) in class. Overwhelmingly, students cited the small-college environment as a primary reason for enrollment that allowed them to know their professor and maintain an identity (not just a student identification number). The greatest challenge described by focus group participants (non-traditional students) was balancing work and family with schoolwork, and being able to meet the demands of their coursework. These participants (who were receiving intrusive advising), expressed general satisfaction with their faculty advisor whom they found to be genuinely interested in their learning, available when needed, and responsive to inquiries.

Additional studies also provide support for the use of intrusive advising as an effective intervention with minority students (Lopez et al., 1988). In a 1988 study of intrusive advising interventions with special student populations enrolled with Central Washington University (CWU), Lopez et al. (1988) found a greater fall-to-fall mean cumulative GPA (2.47) and a higher fall-to-fall rate of retention (80%) among CWU minority freshmen who received intrusive advising, compared to CWUs general student population (2.45 and 62%, respectively). The need for an intrusive advising intervention developed out of Central Washington University's Office of Minority Affairs. The Office of Minority Affairs found the rate of attrition among CWUs minority students to be 50%--much lower than its rate of attrition for the general population--, even though admissions data

provided "no academic basis for expecting [the minority students] to have a higher attrition rate than the rest of the student body" (Lopez et al., 1988, p. 198). Informal contact with CWU minority students provided evidence that these students were generally dissatisfied with their advising experiences—the faculty advisors did not attempt to become familiar with their academic backgrounds and simply offered to sign their registration scheduled without any degree of inquiry. In response to these findings, CWU's Office of Minority Affairs collaborated with the institution's Educational Opportunities Program (EOP), a comprehensive admissions and academic support services program, to intervene with intrusive advising for the students.

During fall orientation, new and transfer students to CWU were told of the rationale behind assigning them to an intrusive advisor, and the students were given the option to opt out of this special advising; the majority accepted the offer. The only requirement of students was to meet with their intrusive advisor for registration authorization. The institution, in turn, expected a much greater commitment of the intrusive advisor who was required to initiate regular contact with his or her advisee throughout the quarter to inform the student of services such as tutoring, career exploration, summer employment opportunities, and to make referrals to other departments of the institution (Lopez et al., 1988, p. 198). The researcher found that 90% of the minority students came to talk with their advisor about other matters—not merely class scheduling. This finding is consistent with my study. CWU permitted its minority students to *seek* assistance from the advisor beyond their first year but, after the first year, CWU discontinued the outreach (intrusive) elements of the advising relationship.

Earl (2005) advocated for the workload of the intrusive advisor to focus on the holistic student life experience (not just the academic component) and that the advisor actively pursue students in order to encourage their persistence. This involves working cooperatively with not only the student but also with a variety of human resources forming a vital network with the student as a partner in order to maximize his or her potential for success (Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000; Lopez et al., 1988). The intrusive advisor can serve as the first year student's link to resources throughout the institution and (at times) within the community at large. A closer examination of intrusive models adopted by a variety of institutions, therefore, points to the increased workload assumed by the advisor in an effort to assist *intentionally* new students assigned to him or her (Albecker, 2005). From a review of the literature, there is considerable evidence supporting the merit of intrusive advising as an effective intervention with diverse first-year students enrolled in a variety of public institutions (Holmes, 2002; Sickles, 2004; Thomas & Minton, 2004; Upcraft & Kramer, 1995). Heisserer and Parette (2002) also summarizes the appropriateness of this intervention with at-risk students when she states, "The increasing number of students who are at-risk for academic failure, coupled with effective intervention approaches...suggest that academic advisors should strive to be more intrusive in their interactions with student advisees" (p. 5).

While some scholars may take advantage of the opportunity to extrapolate and apply the results of these intrusive interventions within and between public educational settings (including community, liberal arts, and four-year colleges and universities), there is something different about the profile of the student who attends a career college with an open-admissions philosophy, and there are differences among some types of institutions in

terms of assumptions they make about their students and how these assumptions play out in terms of degree completion (Cheng & Levin, 1995; Imagine America Foundation, 2007; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006).

When examining career college enrollment, research finds that 37% of career college students are minority--comprising a greater share of minority enrollment than private not-for-profit (19.8%) and public (24.6%) institutions (Imagine America Foundation, 2007). Researchers also find that career college students are disproportionately more likely to come from less educated families than those attending community colleges and, despite a mean age of more than 26 years (p. 52), many career college students still live with their parents (Cheng & Levin, 1995). Recent studies affirm much of the same (Goan, Cunningham & Carroll, 2007). Other research finds that career college students--compared to traditional postsecondary students--make up a larger proportion of independent students with incomes in the lowest quartile (in U.S. IRS income tax terms) and more are defined as "working class" (Clowes, 1995; Goan, Cunningham & Carroll, 2007; Imagine America Foundation, 2007). This finding is relevant to this study in review of research showing that colleges that serve low-income students generally report lower graduation rates than those that do not (Muraskin & Lee, 2004).

As a group, career college students also receive a larger proportion of federal financial aid when compared with students enrolled in other sectors of higher education (Clowes, 1995; Goan, Cunningham & Carroll, 2007). Other researchers assert that a two-year career college education provides substantially greater return on investment to taxpayers than a two-year community college education—based on net return for each public dollar spent (Imagine America Foundation, 2007). Research examining career colleges as a group

and comparing them to community colleges suggests career colleges graduate more of their students (Rosenbaum et al., 2006). Rosenbaum et al. (2006) also report that career ("occupational") colleges graduate far more "new disadvantaged and nontraditional students who have only recently gained access to postsecondary education" (p. 26). These researchers attribute these gains to findings (among others) that career colleges are (a) more likely to account for constraints on students' time, resources, and social support—all of which can interfere with degree completion—and, (b) are more likely to require structured advising that does not rely upon student initiated contact (Rosenbaum et al., 2006).

Similar to community colleges, research suggests that students attending career colleges enroll with employment goals as an outcome of their education (Clowes, 1995; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006). In contrast, community colleges generally focus on post-entry job skills (e.g. retraining or on-the-job training) with "little effort [devoted to] job placement" (Rosenbaum et al., 2006, p. 151) while career colleges place greater emphasis on "preparing students for entry-level occupational skills" (Clowes, 1995, p. 12) with concerted graduate job placement efforts (Rosenbaum et al., 2006) as an outcome of their students' educations.

Multiple authors reference the "sparse" research on career colleges as a deficit in the literature among a growing population of institutions enrolling disadvantaged and underrepresented populations of students (Clowes, 1995; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006). Yet, institutional differences and differences in students' profiles do not provide for me the luxury to extrapolate from prior research (conducted in other settings) regarding the effectiveness of intrusive advising to retaining more students. The literature demonstrates that my decision to broaden the scope of the literature to include intrusive advising results in

a career college setting is justified in order to learn whether this intervention could yield similar results, in the same way, as it has in other public and private settings of higher education.

An examination of the body of literature does not provide evidence that scholarly research on the subject of intrusive advising with a generally at-risk group of African American students enrolled in a career college existed prior to this study. Furthermore, the literature pertaining to career colleges discusses *private not-for-profit* career colleges as being synonymous with *for-profit* career colleges (e.g., DeVry™, ITT™, or University of Phoenix™) and *other* (non-career focused) *private* not-for-profit colleges (Clowes, 1995; Imagine America Foundation, 2007). The literature does not appear to acknowledge any distinguishable nuances particular to private, not-for-profit career colleges (e.g., who attends or why they attend, or unique traits within their students' financial or academic profile) compared to other kinds of private institutions. These gaps in the literature suggest that this study has the potential to reveal new findings about African American students and their lack of persistence and retention in this and similar settings. Future research may have the potential to extrapolate from these findings, as well.

Summary of the Literature Review

There is an abundance of literature published on the topic of student retention in higher education. Researchers generally agree that student pre-enrollment conditions (including, but not limited to, minority status and academic preparedness) and students' levels of involvement once enrolled contribute to and can predict their persistence patterns— with some variation in the degree to which researchers believe these factors contribute more or less to students' rates of departure. The literature also describes the effectiveness of the

intrusive model of advising as an intervention with first-year students. The primary issue of interest within this study is the observation that countless studies have been published about students' first and subsequent year experiences in higher education, but those studies have not focused on their experiences within career college settings such as this study site. This study seizes the opportunity to expand the body of scholarly knowledge regarding this increasing class of students enrolled in this growing class of institutions—career colleges—and how a generally at-risk group of African American students could be supported toward persistence in this kind of setting. Chapter Three describes the research methodology designed to address this research interest.

CHAPTER THREE

In this chapter, I describe the details of this case study that uses mixed methods to generate quantitative and qualitative sources of data. This chapter begins with a description of the overarching design for the study and additional details about the case study—setting, subject, and the treatment. Subsequently, two sections outline the details of the two phases of the design: a quantitative methodology section followed by a section outlining the qualitative methodology. Within these two sections, the reader will gain an understanding of the data collection methods and the data analysis procedures adopted for each phase. Before transitioning to the findings section of this study (Chapter Five), I describe the ethical considerations related to each design approach, and the limitations and delimitations of the design. The combination of quantitative and qualitative inquiry used in this case study work synergistically to inform the reader in the context of the research questions. I begin with an overview of the research design elements of this case study.

The Case Study

This was a case study designed to explore the potential effects of an intrusive advising intervention with a group of generally at-risk, first-year African American students enrolled in a career college. The sections that follow describe the participants, setting, intervention, and the overarching research design used to examine the effects of the intervention used in this case.

Subjects and Recruitment

Initially, I planned to draw a random sample by assigning a sequential record number to all incoming fall 2008 African American students who matched the at-risk criteria previously outlined in Table 1. The sample—treatment and control groups-- included

commuter and residential students who had full-time status--as defined by federal financial aid (Title IV) guidelines. The original goal was to invite up to 150 students out of the total number of participants qualifying for the study. As it turns out, just shy of 150 students ($n = 152$) met the criteria for participation, so all were invited to participate in the study.

I mailed consent documents (see Appendixes A and B) to all participants ($n = 152$) and utilized the Minority Student First-Year Advisor for administrative support to track all consenting volunteers ($n = 44$). The low response rate (28.9%) was a disappointment. Following this initial invitation, I used students' sequential record number as a reference. I maintained a master list of the names separate (and secure) from their encoded records to encourage anonymity. When I had a need to identify a student (e.g. to monitor his or her quantitative performance), I referred to a master list linking their personally identifiable data with their record identifier. I also used their record identifier as a selector variable within a random number generating program (a Microsoft Excel™ macro) to randomly assign an equal number of students ($n = 22$) to one of the two groups. Within the groups, there was a diverse distribution by age, housing status (residential or commuter), and program of study.

Setting

The setting chosen for this study is one campus of a predominantly-White, private, career college in the Midwest. It is one of a system of 12 colleges, many (including this one) with satellite campuses providing extension services. The site for this study is located in an urban area that is (primarily) surrounded by residential housing with some retail, food, and entertainment establishments within a two-mile radius of the campus. It is in very close proximity to a major highway and a community college--a neighbor with which it shares some students and faculty. Nearly 5,000 students attend this "right to try" (open admissions)

career college campus each fall. For several years, the average student age has hovered around 27 years. Of its total population of students, African Americans comprise 14% (approximately 700 students) and most of these students require remedial (developmental) education during their first term. For these reasons, the college offers an assortment of academic support programs (including tutoring) at no additional cost beyond tuition and housing. The majority of the students who attend this campus commute (i.e. they do not live on campus). Those living in one of several residence halls (within a one-mile radius) typically utilize the free shuttle service provided by the campus to facilitate travel to and from campus Monday through Friday—but not weekends.

In terms of day and evening enrollment, campus administrators classify a larger percentage of its students as *"day"* compared to *"evening"* or *"weekend"* students. Administrators schedule the majority of class sessions Monday through Thursday with a limited selection of classes offered Fridays and Saturdays, and none on Sundays. The college also has a significant base of its student population (but not those registering for their first term) that are permitted to enroll in some of their courses via an online (distance learning) delivery mode. The site has a satellite campus within approximately 40 minutes (driving distance). The satellite campus offers a limited selection of classes that are (more commonly) classified as general education.

The college expects all new students (freshmen and others) to schedule their first quarter courses with input from their "academic advisor" (a dean, department chair, or faculty member with advising responsibility). This happens during a pre-term orientation session for which incoming students are required to attend; there are exceptions to this requirement, however. In preparation for academic registration (for subsequent terms), all

students are *encouraged* (but none required) to consult with their academic advisor prior to enrollment. There is no mechanism in place today to prohibit a student in good standing with the college from registering for required courses independently—without any input from his or her academic advisor.

As an institutional standard, program (faculty) advisors handle most academic advising encounters with students. This is a common advising approach referenced in the literature (Habley & Morales, 1998). These researchers cite faculty-based advising as an effective means of increasing student engagement and, therefore, retention. It is for this reason that this study seeks to offer an explanation as to why this approach has not yielded significantly increasing gains in students' rates of retention within this career college setting. These faculty advisors (predominantly-White, as a group) are content-experts within their areas of teaching which span programs in the fields of architectural construction, aviation, business, culinary arts, corrections, education, health sciences, human services, and technology-related fields. This college views this approach to advising as essential to its career-focused mission, because is the best way to ensure students receive accurate information about their programs and remain in compliance with expectations prescribed by accrediting or authorizing (external) entities. One of the things this institution prides itself on is the reality that most of these programs (curriculum) are under redevelopment on an annual basis—to ensure content and objectives remain reflective of the work experience required by graduates in search of employment. Administrators also consider this reality as another reason "program advisors" (deans, department chairs, and faculty by discipline) are a student's best source of information for academic advising. The challenge this school has faced is that these advisors are not centrally located in a physical space, their teaching and

office schedules seldom coincide with that of their students, and advising is one of many responsibilities of the program advisor. To provide a more full-service advising service, this institution employs three "counselors" who provide not only counseling intervention by way of student referrals but who also provide supplemental academic advising and career guidance with students. It is, therefore, possible for a student to avoid all interaction with his or her assigned "academic advisor" during his enrollment.

As a standard advising practice (see Table 3), when a student needs academic advising, career-guidance, or counseling *he* must identify that need and *seek* the assistance they need. This institution recognizes that a smaller percentage of its students actually seek the help they need (and, an even smaller percentage seeks help when it can provide the greatest benefit). Students of the institution, conveying their dissatisfaction with academic advising via a Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey (Noel-Levitz, 2008), describe the standard advising approach as too ambiguous and cumbersome. When students were asked whether they felt they got "the run around" when seeking advising assistance, their collective responses indicated they considered it difficult to gain access to the people who could help them. Their responses also suggested that they also have trouble identifying *who* their advisor really is. At this institution, several departments have employees classified (by job title) as an "advisor" of some sort. As one example, admissions and counseling staff members are referred to as "advisors" by internal staff directing students to them for help. There is some reason to question exactly "who" students were referring to as their "advisor" even when completing the Noel-Levitz survey.

Table 3

Comparison of Intrusive versus Standard Advising at the Study Site

	Intrusive Advising	Standard Advising
Who advises	One first-year advisor; Black middle-aged, female with a counseling (therapy) background	Various administrators (deans, department chairs), faculty (full or part-time), and academic counselors—predominantly-White advisors
Frequency	Several (4+) times a quarter (term)	Once per quarter (during registration week) or not at all; some advisors provide additional assistance to advisees enrolled in their class
Location	In the academic hub of the campus (in a single-office)	Dispersed throughout the campus, in various office settings; collectively, one per quarter
Methodology	Using intrusive advising strategies to encourage frequent contact to serve students holistically; willing to escort student to another office as needed; willing to track down a student that is unresponsive	Using (most commonly) a combination of prescriptive and developmental advising strategies, with traces of intrusive advising in select cases; advising occurs infrequently and on an as-needed basis
Initiator	More often, the intrusive advisor until rapport develops resulting in more student-generated contact	More often, the student with the advisor responding to his or her request
Scope	Advising entails anything needed by the student (financial, emotional, academic, social, physical, etc.)	Generally academic; in cases where rapport exists, student may seek non-academic support
Tracking visits	Using an electronic student tracking database to log all contact (in any form) with students	Tracking software available but seldom utilized to track student visits which commonly occur unplanned (i.e. as a conversation in the hallway or before leaving class)

The Intervention

One may describe intrusive advising as "action oriented [on the part of the advisor] by involving and motivating students to seek help when needed" (Earl, 1987, p. 24). It involves a range of intervention strategies that actively engages the advisor in the students' affairs. Rather than waiting for students to seek their help, intrusive advisors actively pursue students in order to increase the probability of their success. The intrusive approach to advising examines a student's holistic needs in order to support them proactively and intentionally.

Comparing treatment to the standard advising practice. The differences between the two models of advising used at this site are depicted in Table 3. Intrusive advisor is *proactive*--reaching out to the student who may not even realize he or she needs the help. Conversely, the standard advising practice of the site is *reactive* and it has yielded minimal student contact on a regular basis. The standard practice aligns more closely (although, not fully) with what Habley and Morales (1998) call a "supplementary" organizational model of advising (p. 35). Advising--under the standard practice of this study site--is subject to chance and it is student initiated. The exception to this happenstance is "Week 7" advising and registration which provides centralized access to academic advisors, and representatives from the various functional (e.g. Business, Financial Aid office and Career Services) departments throughout the campus. During this week of advising (during fall, winter, and spring quarters), a representative from each academic department or discipline is available in a central location on campus. Ironically, the representative available may not be the advisor assigned to the student. The goal of this one-time, central advising experience is to provide assistance with the selection and registration of courses for an upcoming academic quarter—

rapport may or may not be a byproduct of this experience.

Another issue with the standard advising practice of this college has to do with commonalities of the job titles carried by various "advisors" employed with the institution. Language used throughout the organization further complicates this task as many are referred to as "advisors"—including admissions *advisors*, academic *advisors*, program *advisors*, and faculty *advisors* to student clubs and organizations. By mere interaction with a student, this confusion is evident—they do not know *who* their advisor is. The strategy employed in this study—to hire a single Minority Student First-Year Advisor to carry-out the treatment outlined in this study-- was intentional and in response to weaknesses evident within the standard advising practice of the study site.

Duties of the intrusive advisor. For an overview of job duties required of the intrusive advisor, please refer to Appendix G.

Recruitment of the advisor. Recruit of the intrusive first-year advisor began in May 2008 with the development a detailed job description that reflected what the literature emphasized as essential qualifications. This person was required to have earned a minimum of a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university, have the ability to demonstrate proficiency working with a computer to input, organize, compute, extract, and analyze data, and have the ability to demonstrate excellent written, oral and non-verbal communication skills. In addition to these qualifications, the person recruited for this position was required to demonstrate (a) a commitment to working with a generally at-risk group of first-year African American students, (b) a commitment to continuous personal and professional development in support of these students, and (c) the ability to empathize, motivate, and inspire the students to identify and pursue their academic and career goals.

These descriptors were outlined within the job description that was posted via internal, local and regional media sources.

The job was posted early the month of June and it yielded 76 applicants within less than a two-week timeframe. Some of the applicants were recent college graduates while others were re-entering the workforce following retirement. I maintained contact with all of the applicants (via mail, telephone, and in person) and served the project as the "ASPIRE Project™ Advisor." The Executive Committee of the study site, also, determined that I would serve as the direct supervisor to the individual who would be selected the Minority Student First-Year Advisor during this pilot—i.e. at least through summer of the current academic year (2008-09). The recruitment process involved three rounds of interviews, with the first interview initiated by me via telephone. The intent of the first interview was to assess basic information about the applicant, including his or her reason(s) for applying for the job and his or her expectations of the job duties. From this first round of interviews, 12 candidates emerged and they were interviewed in a face-to-face setting. This second round of interviews took place in July, followed by a third round of interviews later that month. One candidate was selected out of three finalists.

Selection of the advisor. I would describe the candidate that was selected as a self-starter with a charismatic personality, abundant energy, culturally competent, and well-informed of community services that would support generally at-risk first year African American students such as those targeted to participate in this study. She has a unique ability to identify an opportunity to make something (or someone) better off, acquire the physical, financial and human resources to respond to that deficit, and sell that solution in such a way that others buy into it and are ultimately better off. She is also a licensed counselor (a

therapist) who used to spend each day intervening with victims of substance abuse—users, sellers, and transporters—and, some were students enrolled in the study site. The combination of her professional training and her ability to relate (with ease) to people of all levels of abilities, ages, backgrounds, and experiences made her a natural fit for this job.

One of the things that initially concerned the campus' executive leadership team—as it related to my involvement with this project--was the reality of preexisting demands on my time. As an academic administrator, the core duties of my job are multifaceted and many (including me) believed that this would leave me with very little time to effectively carryout the additional responsibilities that would come with oversight for this project. Early in the process of developing this project and its associated proposal for adoption, I recognized the need to hire an "intrusive advisor" who would "own" this project passionately and who was willing to devote to it the human resources that would ensure its success. This was of particular interest to me to keep the project moving forward during times when my other duties would limit my direct interaction with her on a daily basis. Throughout the study, she has demonstrated a personal commitment to Project ASPIRE™.

Training the advisor. During the time within which this study was launched, the site for this study implemented a broader first-year advising initiative which was also based on intrusive advising. For its sample, it used a subset of students on each campus that were among those *most likely* to remain enrolled in the institution—a direct contrast to the subjects identified for this study. This broader study targeted students in their first year of college who did *not* require any remedial courses. This segment of the student population represented a fraction (roughly 20%) of the students enrolled in the study site. The advisors (those involved with the site's broader first-year advising initiative) were expected to use the

intrusive model of advising to increase rates of retention among their cohorts. Given a common intervention (the use of intrusive advising), the Minority Study First-Year Advisor for this study was invited by administrators to participate in all training elements, along with the other first-year advisors (called "FYAs"). Among the training elements was a required one-week orientation/training that took place several weeks prior to the start of fall quarter.

The Minority Student FYA for this study attended that one-week orientation that was held off-site. The training began on a Monday morning and concluded the following Friday afternoon. With the exception of the final day of training (concluding by 3:00 p.m.), each day required an eight-hour commitment—for a total of nearly 40 hours of training in support of those carrying out intrusive advising with first-year students. Appendix K provides a detailed overview of the comprehensive training that she received prior to interaction with the student subjects. The advisor described this orientation as "time well-spent" and felt that it strategically prepared her well for the start of the academic year. In addition to this formalized training, she continued to attend quarterly meetings with other FYAs, and she attended monthly academic staff meetings that involved participation from the site's registrars and members of its counseling staff.

Proposed strategies to engage students. I gave the intrusive advisor the latitude to develop a strategy to engage the students, as long as those strategies aligned with the foundational elements of the intrusive model of advising (see Chapter Two for details of these elements). She utilized the skills she brought to the position and coupled them with what she learned during the interview process and from her training/orientation, and she applied these skills in a customized way as she interacted with each students. Not surprising, we found that what worked for one student, did not necessarily work for another.

During the fall quarter, her first interactions with the students came via the consent process. This brought many to her office—most asking for someone to explain what the consent letter was telling them. Some said the consent letter was "too long" so they did not read it entirely. They preferred to have someone summarize what the study was about, answer their questions in person (face-to-face or via telephone), and allow them to determine their level of involvement in the project. In several cases, parents were involved in these first conversations with students. In some cases, she was still gathering consent forms during the first week of the academic quarter. I will discuss findings from the consent gathering process (in relation to other themes that emerge) in more detail within Chapter Four.

By the start of the fall quarter (late September), her primary goal was to have contact with each student in the original treatment group—and, attempt to avoid engagement with students in the original control group (those receiving standard advising). As I will discuss in detail within Chapter Four, this group delineation became impossible to maintain over time. Her involvement in the consent gathering process, her administrative role during the scheduling of the qualitative elements of this study, and just operating within the very culture of the site (one with an emphasis on *customer service* and helping anyone who needs you) contributed to her inability to *avoid* the original members of the control group. I recognized, after the fact, that this became a flaw in my research design.

Throughout the fall quarter, she proactively pursued the students. In any given week, she could be observed going from classroom to classroom delivering "come see me" notes to her students. She was careful to word her communications with them in a non-threatening, non-disciplinary way. Most responded promptly and willingly to these personal visits to their classroom. At midterm, she distributed and obtained progress notes from the teachers

regarding her advisees' progress. This is a strategy she refined and repeated quarterly. It was also during fall quarter that she accompanied one of her advisees in an ambulance due to a medical emergency. It was also during fall quarter, that the advisor played a crucial role to schedule students' participation in interview and focus group sessions, and to follow up with them to encourage their participation.

Between fall and winter, the advisor mailed postcards to her advisees to encourage them to remain connected with her and the study site. She also sent post cards to students who struggled; the cards included encouraging words to validate their decision to enroll and not to abandon pursuit of their higher education.

It was during the winter quarter that I made a decision to merge the two "original" groups into a single treatment group. In support of this decision, she mailed "Welcome" letters to her new advisees and personally delivered (to their classrooms) notes to those who did not follow instructions (stated in the letter) asking them to initiate contact with her so she could get to know them better and proactively assist them. It was during this quarter that she worked with some students who needed additional one-on-one tutoring. This was not a strategy that she used with all advisees; she only tutored those who communicated a need for additional tutoring. In hindsight, this was a missed opportunity to adopt this strategy on a broader scale. It was during winter quarter that she attempted to re-engage students who were not currently enrolled, but who were eligible to return the next (spring) quarter. The site refers to these students as "stop outs." She placed phone calls and mailed "Come back" letters to these stop outs--only one returned the next (spring) quarter, however.

Between winter and spring, she refined a previous strategy she used to encourage her advisees to remain engaged. She mailed letters of "praise" to those who improved

academically, and she sent "Don't give up" messages via postal mail and email to those who continued to struggle. The data collection phase of this project concluded two weeks into the spring quarter.

Throughout this project, the intrusive advisor spent time talking with and offering assistance to students in her office and in various settings around campus. She customized the intervention to their individual needs. The evidence suggests that she utilized every possible interaction to build rapport with them, and she never turned down an opportunity to offer a hug, share a smile, or share a word of encouragement to an advisee who needed it.

The next section provides an overview of the overarching design for this study. It also describes changes that were made to the makeup the two groups after the study was underway.

Overarching Research Design

The overarching design chosen for this case study integrates quasi-experimental research design with interpretative qualitative follow up. The case uses qualitative conversations with students--interviews and focus groups with them--to inform the quantitative findings pertaining to their first year experience. This mixed methods research design challenges researchers because the design methodology requires broad knowledge of qualitative and quantitative methods of research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Creswell (2003) advocates for the use of the mixed methods approach as a means to neutralize the inherent biases that naturally result as a limitation of the quantitative or qualitative research method in isolation. The author describes how the results of one method could help to inform those of the other.

I made the choice to use mixed methods for this case study as a means to respond to

the overarching question for this study, "How does intrusive advising influence the retention of African American students who are at risk of attrition?" With this overarching question in mind, I addressed the following quantitative research questions in this study:

1. To what extent is there a difference in retention (quarter-to-quarter enrollment, attendance, and GPA) between two groups of African American students – those who receive the institution's regular advising approach, and those who receive an intrusive advising approach?

2. How much (if any) of the variance between the two groups can be explained by intrusive advising?

In terms of a hypothesis, I believed that the results of an intrusive advising intervention would contribute positively (and, significantly) to the institution's efforts to increase rates of retention among generally at-risk, first-year African American students who are likely to experience disproportionate rates of attrition during their first year of college at the study site.

This design approach also responds to the following qualitative research questions:

1. Why did these students (in the intrusive advising and standard advising groups) enroll with this institution? How do they describe their goals as they relate to their reasons for enrolling?

2. How do at-risk, first-year African American students (in the intrusive advising and standard advising groups) describe their experiences since enrolling with this college?

   a. How do they describe their experiences with academic advisors, peers, instructors, and other employees and services of the college?

b. How do they describe any influence from external relationships (e.g. with family, friends, and community resources) in light of their goal(s) and other reasons for enrolling with this college? What level of importance do they attach to these influences in the context of their goals and reasons for enrollment?

In an effort to synthesize information from the various sources of case study data (and, to respond to the overarching research question for the case study), a final question was addressed by this study. That question is, "What does the combination of the quantitative and the qualitative findings suggest as recommended approaches to a career college seeking to increase academic persistence and retention among their generally at-risk, first-year African American students?"

By employing a mixed methods design approach within this case study, the two approaches (quantitative and qualitative research) worked cooperatively to describe who was retained (and, who was not retained) through the start of their third (spring) quarter of first-year enrollment (the outcome variable), and *how* or *why* they persisted (or did not persist). When I implemented the research approaches together, they offered increased potential to deepen our understanding of the research problem than either would have in isolation from the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

This was a quasi-experiment waiting to occur. I must admit, in hindsight, that this was a quasi-experimental design waiting to occur. The study began as an experimental design but evolved into a quasi-experimental design during the first of this two-phased *concurrent* design. Normally, in a two-phased design, "the researcher proceeds sequentially...a qualitative phase followed by a quantitative phase" (Tashakkori & Teddlie,

2002, p. 519). In this study, the phases occur *concurrently*; therefore, I refer to it as a two-phased concurrent design, or a "concurrent mixed methods design" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2002, p. 686).

Experimental and quasi-experimental designs differ. An experimental design is a research design that integrates the key element of an experiment—random assignment (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002; Trochim, 2006). In research, "random assignment is achieved by any procedure that assigns units to conditions based on chance...Random *assignment* is not random *sampling*" (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2002, p. 248). The quasi-experimental design that I ultimately adopted for this study, although similar to an experimental design, lacks random assignment (Trochim, 2006).

During the *quantitative* data collection phases (September – early April), I evaluated students' quarter-to-quarter retention, grade point averages, and attendance trends, and I analyzed the results using descriptive and inferential statistic techniques. The qualitative (concurrent) phase began during the latter weeks of the students' first term of enrollment—during the last three weeks of the fall quarter. During interview and focus group sessions, they offered oral descriptions of their experiences as a means of interpreting *how* or *why* they persisted (or, were not persisting) beyond the fall quarter.

Initially, I sought to select (randomly) up to 150 subjects from all first-year African American candidates who matched a set of at-risk criteria (see Table 1) and who were willing to participate voluntarily via written consent. In actuality, a total of 152 students from the fall 2008 freshmen cohort met the at-risk criteria. All ($n = 152$) were invited to participate, but only 44 (28.9%) consented to participation. The 44 consenting students were equally distributed via random assignment into one of two groups—one group receiving the

treatment (intrusive advising) and the other receiving the standard (non-intrusive or *control*)

advising practice of the study site. With students randomly assigned to one of the two

groups, the decision as to which group would receive the treatment or standard advising

practice was also randomly determined by the flipping of a coin. The application of these

randomization strategies supported the experimental design approach that I initially outlined

for the study, but I could not maintain this experimental approach for the duration of the

study. I will describe (within a subsequent section of this chapter) how I was compelled to

abandon this experimental approach and to adopt a quasi-experimental strategy for the

duration of the case study.

A key element of the study's design was the creation of two groups (treatment and

control) that were as similar as possible in order to minimize threats to internal validity and

to yield valid results for the purpose of causal inference (Trochim, 2006). Authors Shadish,

Cook, and Campbell (2002) purport, "The only internal validity threat that [random

assignment] prevents from occurring is selection bias, which it rules out by definition,

because selection bias implies that a systematically biased method was used for selecting

units into groups…" (p. 249). In this study, initially I assigned subjects randomly into two

groups from a criterion sample (the 44 consenting subjects matching the at-risk profile

outlined in Table 1). As the study progressed through the first phase—through students' first

academic term (fall)--, I was able to validate qualitatively and quantitatively the need to

combine subjects from the two *original* groups (original treatment and original control

group) to form a *new treatment group*.

I assigned the control group to the standard advising services at this site; all enrolled

students of this college have access to standard advising. I denied them access to intrusive

advising; at least, I initially thought I had. I gave academic staff members a list of advisees (members of the treatment group) and asked them to deny access to anyone not on that list. This was a fruitless effort as some students crossed over into the treatment by accompanying other students (i.e. by accompanying students in the treatment group), or by becoming seriously agitated with the academic staff who tried to act as gatekeepers. To maintain peace and order, the staff allowed these "cross over" students to see the intrusive advisor. They manipulated the physical barriers to access, and I discovered (during the qualitative elements of this study) that many established a bond with her via the consent gathering processes and via casual interaction with her around campus—passing in the hallways or in the campus dining facilities. As a result, I established a *new control group* using extracted data (archival records) to form a random sample of subjects ($n = 44$) who were enrolled during the fall 2007-08 academic year, and who also matched the selection criteria outlined in Table 1. I assigned a sequential number to all records ($n = 144$) and used a random number generator to extract the 44 records (subjects) to form this *new* control group. This change to the research design is worth noting in the context of findings presented in Chapter Four and implications outlined in Chapter Five.

I tried to remain realistic regarding the likelihood that some elements of inequality would exist between the groups--this seemed unavoidable within the scope of this study. I realized the need to acknowledge the fact that even subtle differences between the groups could have a negative impact on the internal (causal) validity of this study, unless I identified and reduced the possibilities of alternative causation and utilized other informative means of substantiating the findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003; Trochim, 2006). The reality of this design limitation provided a source (justification) for the use of mixed methods

research to carry out this case study.

Quantitative Elements of the Case Study

Several researchers have confirmed grade point average as a statistically strong predictor of rates of retention and persistence among college freshmen (Brown & Burkhardt, 1999; DeBerard, Julka, & Spielmans, 2004). Therefore, high school GPA and quarter-to-quarter (college) GPA will be of interest when reporting the quantitative results of this pilot project, particularly when measuring any causal effect of the intrusive advising intervention. At this institution, a GPA of 2.69 or below would constitute an academic grading classification of "average" or "below average" (i.e. having a grade of "C" or lower), respectively. I recorded quarterly retention, GPA, and attendance the second Wednesday of each quarter—the official point in time within which the study site determines the rate of retention of its full student body. In the context of this study, a retained student was any student enrolled with the "System" with which the study site is affiliated. This definition of retention aligns with the institution's description of "retained" in the context of its first-year advising efforts.

Quantitative data collection methods. For both groups, I monitored subjects' retention (enrollment) across three academic terms—fall (September – December), winter (January – March), and the start of spring quarter (early-April). During fall and winter quarters, I also monitored their attendance and GPA. In a research report produced internally by the study site, findings reveal that the majority of new students leave within their first two academic terms (fall and winter); with the majority (71%) departing prematurely *prior* to their second term of enrollment (prior to winter). This internal study (which I have not cited in order to protect the institution's anonymity) also reports that

longevity (i.e. with each additional term of enrollment), the likelihood of persistence and, hence, retention increases significantly—especially among those who are retained through their first two terms (through winter quarter) of their first year.

Institutions adopting an intrusive advising intervention sometimes survey incoming freshmen to gather data to supplement their retention efforts, as this study site did. Using the survey adopted by this site, students provided demographic data and additional details about their choice of program, expected GPA, plans to work while enrolled in school, anticipated obstacles, and the highest level of education completed by at least one parent. All students at this site, including those recruited for this project, participated in this survey. The information provided by the subjects participating in this study offered additional insight that allowed the intrusive advisor to customize the intervention in response to their unique needs. It is important that the reader understand clearly that this survey approach is inherent to this model of advising and that I did not design or administer it to the participants--as a separate quantitative data collection instrument for the purpose of this study. In this sense, the survey data became a product of the treatment (intrusive advising) of which I was also able to use as a means to determine how students' responses informed the questions that guided this study.

Quantitative data collection (for both groups) was produced from extracted (secondary) data routinely archived by the study site (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This data is stored (electronically) within the site's student records database. The information that I was interested in analyzing was not easily retrievable in its original format. As an example of the institutional commitment demonstrated by the study site, the institution assigned one of its computer programmers to this project to develop custom queries and reports. These reports simplified the data collection, and made it possible for me to extract (easily) the data

that I needed—each student's quarter-to-quarter retention, cumulative grade point average, and rate of attendance within and by quarter.

Quantitative data analysis and procedures. To examine the extent (if any) to which the intrusive advising intervention contributed to changes in subjects' quarter-to-quarter retention, cumulative grade point average and rate of attendance, I used a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics. To report any difference in their rate of attendance, grade point average, and term-to-term enrollment patterns as a group, I used simple descriptive statistics--counts and mean results by group. I also used results from a two-sample T-test of Proportions and Chi-square with odds ratio analyses to supplement my response to the first research question. This analysis allowed me to investigate the significance of any difference between the groups' results (Walonick, 2003).

In an effort to respond to the second quantitative research question—regarding how much of the variance (if any) between the groups could be attributed to the intrusive advising intervention—, I used inferential statistics (t-tests and logistic regression) to analyze the results. Logistic regression is an appropriate means of predicting the results of a dichotomous dependent variable, such as who will and who will not be retained (Glass & Hopkins, 1996). It is an analysis procedure that allows a researcher to "examine the relationship between a dichotomous variable (takes on only two values) and one or more explanatory variables (also called independent or predictor variables)…[it is] often used to answer yes/no type questions" (Walonick, 2003, p. 112). To measure the overall significance of the equation in explaining what is going on with the dependent variable, researchers often include the results of the Chi-Square statistic (Walonick, 2003); I did the same.

The quantitative procedures outlined in this section made it possible for me to

identify *what* was going on in terms of rates of retention between the two groups, but it will

not help me to describe *how* and *why* the groups yielded a particular retention outcome.

These quantitative procedures, however, were insufficient (in isolation) to adequately

respond to the full set of research questions, and the overarching question guiding the case

study. To answer the qualitative questions pertaining to the case, I used adaptations from the

case study tradition of qualitative research. I collected this during student interviews and

focus groups with participants from both groups.

Qualitative Elements of the Case Study

The qualitative approach to research design allows a researcher to capture the *how*

and *why* elements of one or more occurrences. According to Creswell (1998), "Qualitative

research is an inquiry process of understanding…The researcher builds a complex, holistic

picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a

natural setting" (p. 15). Whereas the quantitative elements of this study will help to describe

what happened in terms of the students' ability (or inability) to remain enrolled for their first

three academic terms, I needed a way to attach meaning to these numerical findings while

building "an in-depth picture of the case" (Creswell, 1998, p. 123). Case studies are

appropriate for studies like this that focus on society and culture within a group, a program,

or an organization rather than focusing on an individual's lived-experience (Marshall &

Rossman, 2006). For this reason, I collected qualitative data via interview and focus groups

within the framework of a case study research tradition (Yin, 2003).

In an effort to identify and test the full range of effects from the intrusive advising

intervention, I needed a way to relate students' quantitative outcomes with their qualitative

conversations. For this reason, I scheduled one-on-one interviews with students (from both

groups) who volunteered to engage in a conversation with a third-party facilitator contracted by me. Other students (from both groups) volunteered to participate in a focus group session that involved yet another third-party facilitator. Using a standardized, open-ended interviewing format, I invited participants to respond to a set of prefigured open-ended interview questions posed by the facilitator. My role with this institution carries positional authority. Therefore, I contracted with other trained facilitators to conduct the interviews and focus groups; I wanted to eliminate any potential concern that might have implied coercion from me. A standardized, open-ended approach to interviewing allows the facilitator to ask probing questions without varying the language or sequence of the questions listed within the interview protocol (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2003). To review a copy of the interview protocol, refer to Appendix E. A copy of the focus group interview protocol is located within Appendix F.

This college is aware of students' dissatisfaction with its standard academic advising practice. This awareness came from previously collected Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory™ survey data collected during the years 2005 and 2007 (Noel-Levitz, 2008). As a finding from these quantitative surveys, students expressed concerns regarding advising and difficulties accessing various services provided by the institution. In this study, I framed the qualitative research questions in such a way that they provided a response to these concerns—using a semi-structured, open-ended format. This protocol format invited free expression during in-depth discussions in response to the research questions (Creswell, 1998). In this kind of mixed methods design, the use of focus groups presents an opportunity to integrate "a priori" and "emergent/flowing" data collection strategies (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Facilitators. The facilitators were selected by me—the researcher. As part of my oversight for this study (including oversight of its budget and related contracts), I was held responsible for identifying all of the human and physical resources necessary to carry out the study. They signed contracts that included confidentiality agreements. Even the videographer (video recording the focus groups) was required to sign a contract and confidentiality agreement.

Using a network of colleagues, I found someone to facilitate the interviews. She is a youthful (20-30 year old), Black female who conducts substance abuse therapy as her primary employment. I interviewed her approximately one month prior to the facilitation of our first interview. What resonated with me (during my interview with her) was her genuine interest in this study, her attentive listening skills, skillful questioning technique, and the ease within which I felt a student could converse with her. Her attributes aligned with the desired outcome of the qualitative elements of this study.

The focus group facilitator is a friend and colleague who is a masterful facilitator on the subject of "tough topics" such as race-related matters. He has facilitated countless sessions for the Institute for Healing Racism™ and he continually expressed his intrigue for and commitment to this study from its inception. He is a 30-something year old, Black male who is a sales professional as his primary employment. These traits, and the ease with which he engages a conversation with people of varying backgrounds, made it easy for me to select him as the focus group facilitator. His alumni status with the study site gave him keen insight into the culture and operation of the organization from a student's perspective that also made him an ideal candidate for this task.

Coding subjects. For the student participants involved within an interview or focus

group session, I encoded their identities using a scheme that referenced them by group

affiliation, gender, and their unique record identifier. Table 4 outlines details of this

encoding scheme.

Table 4

Encoding Scheme for Qualitative Participants

Elements of the scheme	Treatment Group	Control Group
Session Type	I = Interview G = Focus Group	I = Interview G = Focus Group
Gender	F = Female M = Male	F = Female M = Male
Housing Status	C = commuter R = residential	C = commuter R = residential
Type of Advising	I = Intrusive Advising	S = Standard
Unique Record Identifier	Numbers 1 - 44	Numbers 1 – 44

I referenced this encoding scheme within all transcriptions and used each participant's unique

scheme during the analysis phase of this study. I did this to protect the students' anonymity

while providing me with a means to attach their qualitative conversations with their

quantitative outcomes—one for one. I chose a standard, open-ended interview approach

during this phase of the research design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This approach

allowed questions to be presented in a sequential manner (for all participants) while

providing the facilitator with the latitude to use probing questions to gain a deeper

understanding of the participants' experiences.

Student interviews. Interviewing is one of the most popular qualitative research

techniques (Ortiz, 2003). This study used a standardized, open-ended approach to interview the students. Although the questions listed in the protocol would be asked sequentially, the facilitator could ask probing questions as needed.

I originally planned to interview up to 16 students from the 150 voluntary participants. In actuality, there were 10 interview participants ($n = 4$ from the treatment group and $n = 6$ from the *original* control group). I was, overall, pleased with this participation rate given the significant ($n = 7$) no-show participants. As stated earlier, I did not want students to experience any form of coercion resulting from my positional authority, so I hired a third-party facilitator to carry out the interview protocol. For this reason, I removed myself from this data collection role. A female (Black) facilitator conducted all of the interviews with the exception of one.

As were the focus groups, the interviews took place on the campus of the study site. Students were scheduled based on their availability and at times when the facilitator could also be on campus—mostly afternoons and evenings. An interview protocol was constructed (see Appendix E) to allow the facilitator to ask a prescribed set of questions while retaining the option to use probing techniques to help the participant construct deeper meaning.

In line with research practices (and institutional review board requirements), I fully disclosed within a consent document (refer to Appendixes C and D) the purpose and procedures used for this form of data collection. Each participant was required to review and sign the consent document prior to the start of the session. As a token of appreciation, each participant was given a five-dollar coupon to use in one of the dining services on campus. The consent form, interview protocol, an ink pen, a notepad, the coupon, and a mini tape recorder were given to the facilitator at the time of the session. A separate envelope was

labeled for each participant using the encoding schemes described in Table 4. Most of the items listed—the exception was the recording device—were placed inside the envelope. After the session, the facilitator signed the protocol and sealed the envelope containing these items. All envelopes were returned to me—the researcher.

Since the overall study produced such a low response rate (28.9%), I decided to invite all participants ($n = 44$) and I allowed the students to choose whether they wanted to participate in a focus group or an interview. About half ($n = 10$) of those participating in one of these data collection options opted to participate in an interview.

Student focus groups. Focus groups are useful "in college settings where students naturally form in groups...Focus groups are distinguishable from a one-on-one individual interview in that participants...have the opportunity to clarify and modify their ideas through discussion and challenge with other participants" (Turner-Kelly, 2003, p. 50).

I am also reflecting the literature that suggests students could benefit from listening to one another's opinions--in a supportive environment with peers--as one way for them to construct or attach meaning to their own ideas and beliefs about their first year experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2003; Tinto, 1993). A focus group, in comparison to in-depth interviewing with individuals, would best facilitate that process within the context of this study. Focus group interviews acknowledge the fact that many ideas and opinions do not form in a vacuum (Turner-Kelly, 2003).

The original plan was to randomly select a maximum of 24 focus group participants—using a criterion sample. The sessions were to represent an equal number of members ($n = 12$) from the treatment (intrusive advising) and control (standard advising) groups (Creswell, 1998). Research confirms that this targeted participation rate would have

been within recommended guidelines (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

In line with research practices (and institutional review board requirements), I fully disclosed within a consent document (refer to Appendix C) the purpose and procedures used for data collection. Each participant was required to review, sign, and return the consent document before participating in a session. As a token of appreciation, subjects were treated to a buffet meal prior to the start of the session. The consent form, interview protocol, an ink pen, a notepad, and a mini tape recorder were given to the facilitator at the time of the session. The focus groups were also videotaped. A separate envelope was labeled for each session; all items were replaced inside the envelope. Participants' identities were encoded (see Table 4) as the transcripts were developed and reviewed. Most of the items listed—the exception being the recording device—were replaced inside the envelope. After the session, the facilitator signed the protocol and sealed the envelope containing these items. All envelopes were returned to me—the researcher.

A total of nine ($n = 9$) students participated during three focus group sessions ($n = 6$ participants from the treatment group and $n = 3$ participants from the standard advising group). It was very difficult to get students to attend the sessions—they would agree, but would not show up. Ten ($n = 10$) students were classified as "no-show." Even with the intrusive advisor calling and emailing reminders to the participants (not to mention the offer of *free* food), attendance was lower than projected.

It was also my intent to balance the number of commuter and residence hall participants so that I could gather information representative of both groups of students. This was of interest to me, particularly if the data revealed that their first year experiences differed

based on their housing classification. I was unable to control for this in actually, but I did find differences in their conversations and these differences are documented in Chapter Four—within the findings of this study.

Focus group with facilitators and the intrusive advisor. As I began to analyze the findings from the students conversations, I realized that I nearly missed an opportunity to incorporate another useful source of data—conversations with those carrying-out this research in the form of facilitation and intrusive advising. With IRB approval to modify my protocol, I invited the interview facilitator (Black female), the focus group facilitator (Black male), and the intrusive advisor (Black female) to join me in our very own focus group. I facilitated the conversation at an off-site location that offered privacy and freedom for the conversation to take place.

In keeping with research practices involving human subjects, they were required to sign a consent form prior to the start of the session (see Appendix I). I developed the interview protocol (see Appendix J) to guide the conversation and inform findings gathered from students. The reason I decided to engage them in this dialogue was two-fold. First, prior to their involvement as focus group participants, they were initiating conversations with me (one-on-one) regarding their experiences, and these conversations (another potential source of data) was not being documented in any structured way. Secondly, what they were sharing with me had the potential to inform findings from the students. I, therefore, decided to capture these conversations as a source of data and I received institutional review board approval to make this modification. It made sense to capture all related experiences in fulfillment of the study purpose—not only the students experiences, but the facilitators' and the intrusive advisor's experiences. Beside this, the facilitators communicated their desire to

have a formal means of closing out their involvement with the project. Secondly, it seemed like a perfect way to apply an adaptation of the *respondent validation* technique to data analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). I structured the interview protocol in such a way that it allowed their responses to assist me in clarifying student responses and identifying the major themes throughout the qualitative conversations held with students. I could not go back to the students for validation (it was tough enough to access them the first time), but I could use these supplemental conversations to clarify and inform what I read within the transcriptions. This proved useful, on many levels that were revealed throughout the remaining chapters of this study.

They all ($n = 3$) agreed to participate and we met off campus in a mutually agreeable location for this element of the data collection methodology. After obtaining their consent to participate, I began with the first question in the interview protocol and we proceeded sequentially through the list of questions, using probing questions where applicable. I recorded the conversation using a digital mini tape recorder. I, also, took hand written notes, but sparingly—I wanted to listen intently and writing became a distraction. In response to the last research question, offering them the opportunity to share any other thoughts, the conversation ended with expressions of gratitude for being allowed to participate in the study and praises in support of the merits of this research study.

Qualitative data collection and instruments. This is a two-phased concurrent research design that used qualitative data to help explain or build upon the quantitative results collected during the first (quantitative) phase of research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). During this second phase of the research design, I invited students to participate in interview or focus group interview sessions—but not to both. A third-party facilitator (a Black female)

presented the sequence of questions outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix E) while using probing questions to encourage deeper exploration with each subject. A Black male facilitated the focus group sessions using the focus group protocol (see Appendix F).

Interview conversations were audio taped and I encoded participant's identities to promote confidentiality. On the audio tape, their identities were introduced by the facilitator using their encoded name; for example, "IMCI-44" would refer to a male commuter student in the treatment group who was participating in an interview session (see Table 4 for more details regarding the encoding scheme).

The focus groups were audio and video recorded. During the focus group session, I placed table tents at each seat. Each tent displayed the participant's encoded name on the side facing group members and the video camera (operated by a videographer contracted to do the recording). The other side of the tent (facing the subject while seated) displayed their first name followed by the first initial of their last name. Within the recording, the facilitator simply references the session type (a focus group with the treatment or control group), the date of the session, and the start and end time. I was able to link subjects' voices (the statements during the conversation) with their encoded names (on the table tent) via the use of the video tape and the transcription that documented the conversation.

In terms of a primary data collection instrument, I audio taped each interview sessions (using a mini-digital recorder), and I audio- and videotaped each focus group session. The use of videotaping has strengths and weaknesses (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). As a positive effect, videotaping allows researchers to capture the non-verbal elements of the interview experience. I worked with the videographer to position the videorecording device strategically for maximum visibility while also counteracting the

potentially negative side effect of students perceiving it as distraction or an intrusion of their privacy; the latter is considered a source of error called "reactive effects" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 302) that pose a threat to validity.

This pilot of intrusive advising included detailed tracking of each (student) advising encounter with his or her intrusive advisor. As an element of a broader first-year initiative, the institution developed (in-house) an advising software system that the intrusive advisor used throughout this study. The advisor and other departmental employees of the college used the software to record, track, and respond to issues and opportunities pertaining to a student's advising interaction. Although each interaction most commonly originated with the intrusive advisor to this study, an entry in the advising software system could originate from any individual with access pertaining to the student involved. The software has the ability to maintain summative details of phone discussions, formal and informal conversations with the student or other employees on behalf of the student, listings of outstanding action items involving the student, and the software can generate historical reports of each encounter with a student. It also has the ability to alert employees in another department that a student requires a response from him or her regarding an issue brought to the advisor's attention. I did not utilize access to this software for data collection purposes during this study, but I feel that it is noteworthy to mention that the intrusive advisor had this level of access to record and track his or her interactions with each student as an element of the intrusive advising intervention.

Qualitative data analysis and procedures. During transcription, I took great caution to protect students' anonymity. I asked the intrusive advisor to encode the participants' identifications using the encoding scheme outlined in Table 3—it merely identifies pertinent

information about each person (e.g. group affiliation, gender, housing status, and unique record identifier). I also contracted with a transcriptionist (not an employee of the site) to transcribe all audio recordings into text (Microsoft Word 2003 format). I purchased a USB flash drive that was used to transport audio recordings and transcriptions—I would not allow her to transmit them via the Internet (e.g. by email). During the qualitative analysis phase, I relied on subjects' encoded names when picking out salient points and themes. I, also, encoded their names within the quantitative data set. This made it possible to link subjects' qualitative responses with their quantitative results. My interest was in the meaning they attached to their experiences and how those descriptions helped to inform the quantitative results; I was not concerned with *who* (by personal identity) contributed a statement.

With all of the qualitative data encoded and transcribed into text, I began searching for salient points (attention-grabbing comments). I developed the cross-walk (cross-analysis) table (a matrix) that outlined each source of data by salient theme; that is, which group of participants made reference to a point. Along the columns (vertically), I listed each source of data collection. Along the rows (horizontally), I listed each salient point that came up within the transcriptions. I reference and outline the results of this table (and its content) in more details within Chapter Four. With salient points identified, I grouped overlapping comments into clusters while also making note of any outliers that might have been relevant to the findings. I revised my cross-walk table to reflect these groupings (clusters) of common threads. The use of this cross-walk table also helped to inform the quantitative findings--by revealing (visually) if any particular group of subjects were more likely to reference an experience related to a particular topic that could help explain their retention (quantitative) results. Finally, the clusters and outliers gave way to major themes that assisted me in

responding to the research questions. Some might refer to this process of moving from the specific to the general details as "inductive analysis" (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). Inductive analysis involves discovery of patterns, themes, and categories whereas deductive analysis works within the boundaries of predetermined categories (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This study involved minimal prefiguring—allowing data to materialize with subtle guidance (probing) from the facilitator in an effort to identify whether the combination of the qualitative and quantitative results could produce results that explained what transpired in subjects' experiences and why.

In a 2007 field test that I designed and administered with employees of this same study site--those who provided academic and career guidance to students--, that study revealed findings of interest to this research project. Three major themes emerged during the data analysis process of that 2007 field test. Those themes (*connections*, *preparation*, and *institutional characteristics*) described the essence of a phenomenological experience among predominantly-White advisors as they interacted with African American students enrolled in the study site.

The *connections* theme (sometimes referred to by the subjects as "networks") encompassed multiple sub-themes. Those sub-themes described whether students had access to support systems (internal and external), whether they were able to make connections with non-faculty employees of the college (like advisors and counselors), and whether students were able to establish mental links between the need to perform well academically in order to attain their career objectives.

The second theme from that 2007 field test, *preparation*, was another strong thread that emerged from subjects' responses. In terms of the findings, preparation encompassed

the complexities and obstacles with which African American students had to overcome. It also involved students' academic preparedness for the rigor of higher education, student's ability to set and stick to their goals, and their ability to establish realistic expectations of themselves and others. Elements regarding students' mental and physical preparation for the higher education experience, their participation in pre-start initiatives developed by the College, and whether they were the first (first-generation) in their families to attend college also impacted their preparedness for college.

The final theme from that field test, *institutional characteristics*, encompassed sub-themes related to this institutions' open-enrollment (open admissions) philosophy, a perceived lack of racial and ethnic diversity among members of the college's workforce, a significant proportion of commuter students enrolled there, and the school's policies, procedures and practices, in general. In the opinions of these advisors, many of these institutional characteristics seemed to help in most cases, but in the case of some, they wondered whether they contended with the students' ability to persist toward graduation. I reflected on the emergence and meaning associated with these three themes when I designed this study.

About the Researcher

The reader may find it meaningful to learn pertinent details about me--as a researcher—within the context of this study. I am not only the researcher, but I am an academic administrator employed with the study site. My employment relationship with the study site provided both opportunity and challenge, in the context of this study (see Appendix L) for additional insight regarding this).

During this research project, I also served as the supervisor to the intrusive advisor

who interacted with the participants on a regular basis. I also employed the facilitators, videographer, and transcriptionist as an element of my job duties during this study. Although I chose to limit my direct interaction with the students throughout the course of this study, it seems relevant to disclose my relationship to the advisor and the subjects to offer others a transparent means to interpret the findings.

By nature of my job description, I have leadership responsibility with a number of students enrolled in this institution—some receiving the treatment (intrusive advising). I was initially concerned with risk associated with any perception of coercion, so I thought I would need to exclude from the study students with whom I have administrative authority. The IRB did not deem this necessary.

I am a Black, middle-aged female who is one of two African American (executive-level) administrators employed with the study site. Throughout my years of employment with the institution (10 years), I have been actively involved with a variety of retention efforts with all students enrolled in our institution (regardless of race or ethnicity). As one of a few Blacks employed with the study site, I found myself on numerous occasions serving as a mentor to Black students and the limited number of Black faculty employed with the site; both groups sought my guidance to help interpret situations and to navigate this predominantly-White environment that was caring, accessible and friendly yet *foreign* to them. I began to wonder what the effects of these unintentional conditions were for Blacks within this setting.

I grew up in a predominantly-Black inner-city community, completed secondary education with a predominantly-Black public school district, and later completed undergraduate and graduate education with a predominantly-White institution of higher

education. My personal experiences--as a Black female (having to navigate a variety of predominantly-White settings and conditions) shaped my interest in this research topic. Equally important, I am committed to the promotion of greater degrees of access to higher education and retention of students (regardless of race or ethnicity) enrolled in higher education. These traits compelled me to identify and implement a proven intervention called *intrusive advising* with a generally at-risk group of African American students enrolled in the study site. I anticipated that the findings from this project would have significance for *all* students enrolled in the study site—in that the site could improve upon the services it extends to all students. This turned out to be true, as can be seen in the findings reported in Chapter Four and the implications outlined in Chapter Five.

Summary of the Case Study Design

After reading the details of this case study that uses a mixed methods design, the reader will hopefully begin to develop an appreciation for the need to integrate the two-- quantitative (phase one) and qualitative (phase two)--research methods concurrently. I expected the quantitative data to explain *what* resulted in terms of the participants' rates of retention, grade point averages, and attendance during this study. I also anticipated that the qualitative findings would provide an opportunity to attach deeper meaning to the quantitative results by describing *how* and *why* students succeeded or struggled during this portion of their first year with study site. I was correct. Taken together, this approach to research remained in alignment with the *fundamental principle of mixed methods research.* In principle, "[the] *methods should be mixed in a way that has complementary strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses*" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 299).

Ethical Considerations

This study was carried out in adherence with ethical guidelines and practices instituted for the protection of human subjects. Such guidelines and practices describe how researchers should behave and what kind of research should be conducted (Cohen, Bankert & Cooper, 2007). With these guidelines in mind, I made sure that each subject was informed of his or her rights, I openly disclosed any potential risk to the subject, and I maintained their privacy to the best of my ability. In an effort to educate them about their rights, I strived to develop understandable documents that allowed the participant to voluntarily consent or deny his or her participation without negative repercussion. Although I found that some needed additional clarification, all consented based on a clear understanding of their role and rights as participants in this study. Furthermore, I did not coerce students. Even when I realized response rates would be low, I remained within the guidelines set by the institutional review board and I limited my contact with students; my conversations with them encouraged their freedom to choose or deny participant in any element (or all elements) of the project. To protect the rights of these human subjects, I minimized the element of risk in every aspect of their participation while seeking to maximize their potential benefit from the research. This research adhered to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (The National Commission, 2006). These principles also applied equally to my desire to behave ethically in order to protect the well-being of the institution that so graciously provided the setting for this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations commonly influence the results of any study. Limitations surface as potential weaknesses during the course of the study while researchers

intentionally impose *delimitations* in order to narrow the scope of their studies (Creswell, 2003). In line with common research practices, I am disclosing the following limitations and delimitations in the context of this study.

Limitations

  The results of my research reflect limitations naturally resulting from the research design. As one example, each student experienced advising in his or her unique way—including those in the intrusively advised group. I raise this inherent fact in reference to my use of students' conversations about their first year experience to help explain variations that may appear within the two groups' quantitative outcomes. Another example of research design limitations relates to sample size. This is difficult to control, and it had negative implications in the context of this study in that it produced limitations related to statistical power.

  As another example, this study integrates the use of qualitative research methods in the form of focus groups interviews. Researchers have historically considered qualitative data collection as *non-generalizable* to the population at large because of the use of small sample sizes (Huberman & Miles, 2002). In other words, when I collected and analyzed the data from the study's participants, some would assert that the their responses apply only to themselves and that we should not assume their descriptions are reflective of other African American students with similar characteristics. While this may be true, it did not negate the value of capturing their descriptions of their academic experiences in the spirit of scholarly inquiry and in the context of the organization's interest in establishing itself as a *learning organization* (Senge, 2006). The participants' "voices" are indeed their own, but they shed light on important questions regarding their observations and descriptions of the services

provided by the institution in the context of the purpose for this study. In this regard, their voices supplement the quantitative data collection methodology and their voices assist academic leaders and policy makers in their efforts to make continuous improvement to student service, access and retention.

Quantitatively, the use of oversampling when selecting participants for the treatment and control groups did not play out as I expected. This had more to do with low participation rates than any deviation from historical trends at the study site.

I anticipated that this study might benefit from statistical analysis in order to identify the minimum number of participants needed in both groups to increase statistical power. I conducted a power analysis, however, post hoc—after data was collected. This limited the potential for statistical significance in that the size of the sample was too small to account for variability in the data set and the effect size was not large enough to overcome this limitation.

While designing this study, I discovered plans to launch another initiative that also sought to increase students' persistence--including some of the students in my sample. For those to whom this applied--those living in the residence halls beginning fall 2008--, they were required to maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.00 in order to continue living in the residence halls beyond their first academic term. In terms of this research project, the effects of this second initiative may have presented other causal effects within the quantitative results. Given a lack of statistical significance (even with this second initiative), the impact of this limitation is less of a concern in terms of a need to parse out this potential partial effect.

Delimitations

I have delimited the scope of this study to the following participant profile outlined in Table 1 within Chapter One. I selected these criteria in response to the study's problem, purpose, and research questions but also delimited certain criteria within the constraints of the site's methods for data collection and recording of new student information. For example, the institution may choose to admit an incoming student without evidence of his or her high school transcript explicitly stating his or her incoming GPA. Therefore, other at-risk criteria (GED or placement into multiple developmental education courses) must be taken into account when recruiting and selecting participants (Horn & Berger, 2004).

This study is also being delimited to three academic terms—fall through the start of spring quarters. The literature clearly supports this decision based on observations of researchers who found that most students who do not persist through graduation drop out during their first year of enrollment (Tinto, 1993). Researchers employed with this career college, also, found that the majority of their students (71%) depart prior to the second academic term (I have omitted a citation to this document to encourage institutional anonymity). Researchers at this site found a statistically significant trend showing that those who persist and enroll for a second term (winter quarter) are much more likely to return during their third and subsequent terms. Upon careful evaluation of such a trend (in the context of this study), I found this pattern to be consistent (although, not statistically significant). This finding, however, provides evidence to support my decision to delimit (bound) this case study within this timeframe. A goal of this intrusive advising intervention was to increase the probability that more students will persist beyond their first quarter in this setting. The descriptive statistics and qualitative findings suggest, this was accomplished to

some degree.

Summary

The case study design outlined in Chapter Three sought to maximize my potential to explore and describe these first-year African American students' struggles and accomplishments. The case study tradition of qualitative research (using mixed methods for data collection) allowed the combined methods of one research approach to inform the other while increasing the validity and reliability of the results. The setting, subjects, and methods that have been described in this section give way to new understandings about students' persistence and retention in a new and growing class of institutions—the *career college*. In the next chapter, Chapter Four, the reader can examine the results of this study in detail.

CHAPTER FOUR

This portion of the study describes the findings—what emerged quantitatively and

qualitatively during the study. Morgan, Reichert and Harrison (2002) states the results

section, "contains a description of the results of statistical analyses as they relate to the

hypotheses and research questions in the study. A primary goal of this section...is the

summarization of data collected and the statistical treatment of that data" (p. 7). In the case

of qualitative research, this section produces, "large quantities of data that represent words

and ideas rather than numbers and statistics" (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p. 156). In the

case study tradition of qualitative research, this section presents the key issues that surfaced

in the study, introducing the reader to confirming and disconfirming evidence revealed

through the findings (Creswell, 2007).

The pages that follow offer a detailed description of the results and their connection

to the research questions. Before describing those results, I want to remind the reader of the

overarching research question providing a scope for this case study, "How does intrusive

advising influence the retention of African American students who are at risk of attrition?"

The sections that follow provide insight regarding the quantitative and qualitative findings

resulting from this study.

Quantitative Findings

In response to this overarching question, the following research questions guided the

quantitative elements of this case study:

1. To what extent is there a difference in retention (quarter-to-quarter enrollment,

   attendance, and GPA) between two groups of African American students – those

who receive the institution's standard advising approach, and those who receive an intrusive advising approach?

2. How much (if any) of the variance between the two groups can be explained by intrusive advising?

My hypothesis was that there would be a statistically significant difference between the groups based on one or more independent or predictor variables in relation to group retention.

The quantitative elements of this case study reflect a quasi-experimental design that involved 84 ($N = 84$) subjects—an equal number of subjects ($n = 42$) in each (treatment and control) groups. Although the full data set included 88 records ($n = 44$ in each group), two records ($n = 2$) were removed from each group during the analysis phase. These omitted records represented students who disengaged from the institution within their first few weeks of enrollment. The subjects earned no credits, had no reported GPA and their attendance reflected their extremely premature departure. Various factors--outside the control of the researcher--would have made it impossible to study these subjects or apply a treatment to the two who were members of the treatment group. Their results created outliers in the data set. The results that follow, therefore, represent the data set excluding these four outliers.

Table 5 provides an overview of the fields that made up the data set. It also denotes whether a field served as a dependent variable (DV) or independent variable (IV) to produce the test results.

Table 5

Data Set Fields and Descriptors with Variable Designations by Test

Field Name	Description	T-test / Wilcoxon		Logistic Regression	
		DV	IV	DV	IV
ID	Sequential Record Identifier				
GRP	Group (Treatment=1, Control=0)		X		X
GENDER	Female=1, Male=0				
AGE	Age (at Fall start)				
Q1_REG	Fall (Quarter 1) Registration (1=Yes, 0=No)				
Q1_GPA	Fall (Quarter 1) Grade Point Average	X			X
Q1_ATTND	Fall (Quarter1) % of Attendance	X			X
Q1_SCR	Fall (Quarter 1) Starting Credit Hours				
Q1_ECR	Fall (Quarter 1) Ending Credit Hours				
Q1_RESH	Fall (Quarter 1) Living On (1) or Off (0) Campus				
Q2_REG	Winter (Quarter 2) Registration (1=Yes, 0=No)			X	
Q2_GPA	Winter (Quarter 2) Grade Point Average	X			X
Q2_ATTND	Winter (Quarter 2) % of Attendance	X			X
Q2_SCR	Winter (Quarter 2) Starting Credit Hours				
Q2_ECR	Winter (Quarter 2) Ending Credit Hours				
Q2_RESH	Winter (Quarter 2) Living On (1) or Off (0) Campus				
Q3_REG	Spring (Quarter 3) Registration (1=Yes, 0=No)			X	
Q3_SCR	Spring (Quarter 3) Starting Credit Hours				
Q3_RESH	Spring (Quarter 3) Living On (1) or Off (0) Campus				

I studied the subjects' retention (enrollment, GPA, and attendance) from the time of their fall enrollment (September 2008) through the start of their third (spring) quarter (April 2009). I worked with computer programmers employed by the study site to extract subjects' data (by group) from an academic records database maintained by the study site. This was the case for subjects in both (treatment and control) groups. Tables 6 through 10 provide descriptive statistics describing quarterly results by group. The reader is encouraged to take note of the large degree of variability (standard deviations) depicted in several of the tables.

Table 6

Fall (Q1) to Winter (Q2) Retention – Descriptive Statistics

Group	N	*M* Age (Q1)	% Retained Q1 to Q2	SD Retained Q1 to Q2	*M* Q1_ GPA	SD Q1_GPA	*M* Q1_ ATTND	SD Q1_ ATTND
Treatment	42	23.05	71.4%*	0.46	1.51	1.25	82.9%	10.71
Control	42	22.81	54.8%	0.50	1.27	1.32	74.8%	23.77
Summary/ Difference	84	0.24	16.6%*	0.04	0.24	0.07	8.1%	13.06%

* This is a "System" retention rate. The treatment group's rate of retention in the study site, excluding subjects who transferred to other campuses of the "System," was 66.7% from fall to winter quarter, reflecting an 11.9% difference in favor of the treatment group.

Table 7

Fall (Q1) to Spring (Q3) Retention Including Q2 "Stop Outs" – Descriptive Statistics

Group	N	% Retained Q1 to Q3	SD Retained Q1 to Q3	M Q2_ GPA	SD Q2_GPA	M % Q2_ATTND	SD Q2_ ATTND
Treatment	42	45.2%*	0.50	1.53	1.27	58.95%	39.60
Control	42	45.2%	0.50	1.24	1.30	46.38%	43.64
Summary/ Difference	84	0.0%*	0.00	0.29	0.03	12.57%	4.04

* This is a "System" retention rate. The treatment group's rate of retention in the study site, excluding subjects who transferred to other campuses of the "System," was 38.1% from fall to spring quarter, reflecting a 4.8% difference in favor of the control group.

Table 8

Winter (Q2) to Spring (Q3) Retention Excluding Q2 "Stop Outs"- Descriptive Statistics

Group	N	% Retained 3-Qtrs	SD Retained 3-Qtrs	M Q2_ GPA	SD Q2_GPA	M % Q2_ATTND	SD Q2_ ATTND
Treatment	30	60.0%*	0.50	2.06	1.08	82.53%	14.28
Control	23	65.2%	0.49	2.26	0.85	84.70%	12.48
Summary/ Difference	53	5.2%*	0.01	0.20	0.23	2.17%	1.80

* This is a "System" retention rate. The treatment group's rate of retention in the study site, excluding stop outs and subjects who transferred to another System campus or another college, was 35.7% from fall to spring quarter, reflecting a 2.4% difference in favor of the treatment group.

Table 9

Fall (Q1) to Winter (Q2) Credit Hours and Residential Status

Group	N	Total Q1_SCR	Total Q1_ECR	Total Q2_SCR	% Q1_RESH
Treatment	42	516	448	358	59.5%
Control	42	513	455	294	31.0%
Summary/ Difference	84	3	7	64	28.5%

Table 10

Winter (Q2) to Spring (Q3) Credit Hours and Residential Status

Group	N	Total Q2_SCR	Total Q2_ECR	Total Q3_SCR	% Q2_RESH	% Q3_RESH
Treatment	30	358	264	225	50.0%	47.4%
Control	23	294	253	224	47.8%	47.4%
Summary/ Difference	53	64	11	1	2.2%	0.0%

Findings from the Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics suggest there are group differences—most in the favor of the treatment group. Table 6, "Fall (Q1) to Winter (Q2) Retention," shows a much greater proportion of retention (71.4%) among members of the treatment group compared to that of the control group (54.8%). This is noteworthy in light of 2007 results (reported internally by the "System" which the study site is affiliated) showing that 71% of its new students depart sometime between the first (Q1) and second (Q2) quarter of enrollment (the citation to which has been omitted to encourage anonymity). Equally noteworthy, the treatment group's mean

GPA ($M = 1.51$) and average attendance (82.9%) was higher than that of the control group--($M = 1.27$) and 74.8%, respectively (see Table 6). Over time, however, the margin of difference observed between groups begins to dissipate.

Table 7 summarizes retention results from fall (Q1) to spring (Q3) for all members ($n = 42$) members of each group, including students who stopped attending during the winter quarter but returned during the third (spring) quarter. The study site refers to these students as "stop outs." The treatment group had one ($n = 1$) stop out, and the control group had four ($n = 4$) stop outs. Factoring in these stop outs, there is no retention difference detected by the start of the third (spring) quarter (45.2% for each group); Figure 2 depicts this, also. By the start of the third quarter, however, the treatment group's mean Q2_GPA was higher ($M = 1.53$ compared to $M = 1.24$), and the treatment group's mean Q2_ATTND was also higher (59% compared to 46.4%). Both of these findings suggest those remaining exposed to the treatment by the start of the third (Q3) quarter improved academically.

Table 8 depicts retention results for students who persisted winter (Q2) to spring (Q3) (excluding "stop outs"). This variation of the descriptive analyses favors the control group on all measures--Q3_REG (65.2% compared to 60.0%), Q2_GPA ($M = 2.26$ compared to $M = 2.06$), and Q2_ATTND (84.7% compared to 82.5%). Figures 1 through 3 provide visual representation of this finding. An exception to this finding is noted in the commentary beneath Table 8 showing a 2.4% retention difference in favor of the treatment group when factoring for students remaining enrolled at the study site—compared to a system rate of retention which has been reported thus far.

When analyzing the results across three quarters, using records from all subjects ($n = 84$), retention results favor the treatment group which accounts for a higher proportion of

students ($n = 18$) remaining enrolled for three consecutive quarters ($M = 42.9\%$ compared to $M = 35.7\%$). Simply stated, students in the treatment group were less likely to "stop out."

Overall, the treatment group demonstrated considerable retention gains from the first to the second quarter and other academic gains (e.g. in GPA and attendance) throughout the duration of the study. In that same 2007 internal study conducted by the system affiliated with this site, the researcher discovered a strong relationship between "academic performance" (GPA) and retention. The importance of this finding is further supported with evidence based on an examination of each subject's performance in this study. In some cases, students' GPAs rose by more than two points (i.e. gains in excess of 2.00) from fall (Q1) to winter (Q2) quarter. This finding seems particularly mentionable when triangulating subjects' quantitative results with their qualitative transcriptions; several demonstrated an ability to persist academically despite considerable hardship (e.g. evictions, health crises, and family turmoil). From their interviews, it is known that they attributed their persistence to having the intervention—intrusive advising. Although a review of each group's results for the full duration of this study (from fall to the start of spring quarter) reveals, in some cases, subtle differences between the groups over time, these discoveries are still of interest and relevant within the broader context of this case study.
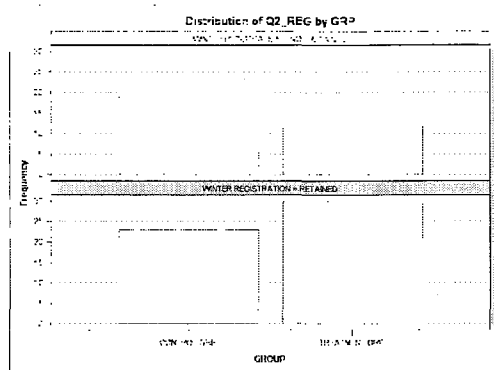
Figure 1. Distribution of winter (Q2) retention by group.
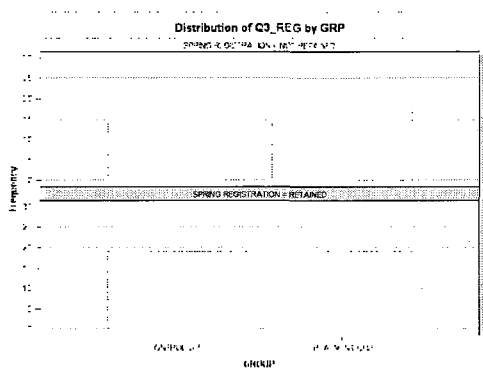
Figure 2. Distribution of Spring (Q3) retention by group.
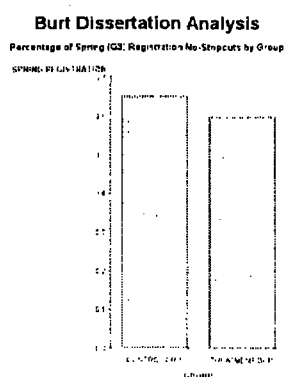
Figure 3. Histogram of spring (Q3) group retention (excluding stop outs).

Reasons for students' departure varied. Data for those in the treatment group was available for analysis but not for those enrolled the year preceding this study (i.e. those in the control group). By Q3, most ($n = 15$ or 35.7%) left involuntarily--because of academic

dismissal. Another five students (11.9%) transferred to another college or university. Two more students (4.8%) departed for reasons related to financial aid and another one (2.4%) left without any explanation. This summary of reasons for students' departure seems relevant to data resulting for a logistic regression model used in this study; those results are discussed in an upcoming section of this study.

Tables 9 and 10 provide additional details regarding subjects' credit hour load and housing status. These tables have been included as supplements in terms of other financial and social implications pertaining to their retention. Within these two tables, the treatment group accounted for a greater quantity of starting credits over the three quarters, although minimally at times. This finding is noteworthy when examined along with observed gains in the treatment group's mean GPA by quarter. In other words, in some quarters, they not only maintained a larger credit load but they did so while also performing better as a group. In addition to carrying a greater proportion of credit hours quarterly, the treatment group also accounted for more students living on campus during the fall and winter quarters. By the end of the data collection period (by the start of spring quarter), group differences in terms of housing status were nearly undetectable, however.

Response to Research Question One

The first research question seeks to determine the extent to which the two groups differed in terms of their quarterly retention, GPA, and attendance. In addition to the descriptive statistics above, I used a combination of Chi-square and Odds-Ratio non-parametric tests to answer the categorical data elements of this research question--whether the groups differed statistically based on quarter-to-quarter retention).

Chi-square results. I setup a 2 x 2 frequency analysis using the Chi-square statistic to

test the probability of a retention difference between the groups (based on a Chi-square value) by chance alone. Table 11 represents the findings. The results of the Chi-square test of equal proportions suggest no statistical difference between the groups in terms of winter (Q2) quarter retention, $\chi^2(1, N = 84) = 2.5052$, $p = 0.1135 > \alpha = 0.05$.

Table 11

Chi-Square Results for Winter (Q2) Retention by Group

Group	Retained	Not Retained
Treatment	71.43%	28.57%
Control (Standard Advising) Group	54.76%	45.24%

A similar finding holds true regarding subjects' spring (Q3) retention where, again, there was no statistically significant difference between the groups—both groups had an equal number of subjects ($n = 19$) retained at the start of the third quarter,

$\chi^2(1, N = 84) = 0.0000$, $p = 1.0000 > \alpha = 0.05$.

Odds ratio results. I conducted an odds ratio analysis to determine the odds of a group difference. The results indicate that students in the treatment group (those receiving intrusive advising) are slightly over two times more likely to be retained in the winter (Q2) quarter compared to students in the control (receiving the standard advising) condition. This difference in retention odds, however, is *not* statistically significant in that the 95% confidence interval (CI) included 1.00, $OR = 2.07$, 95% CI = (LB = .8362, UB = 5.1004). A lack of statistical retention difference continued to be observed at the start of the spring (Q3) quarter, $OR = 1.00$, 95% CI = (LB = .4235, UB = 2.3615). The null hypothesis, "There is no statistically significant difference between the groups in terms of their quarter-to-quarter retention," is, therefore, accepted.

T-test results. I used a combination of dependent t-tests (parametric statistics) to generate a response to the non-categorical elements of the first research question (detecting any group differences based on GPA and attendance). T-tests are useful in experimental research to determine "the probability that the difference in the means that is observed is due to chance" (Cody & Smith, 2006, p. 184). I wanted to know if group membership influenced subjects' GPA or attendance.

T-test results for GPA. With regard to group influences on quarterly GPA, the Folded-F method provided no evidence to reject the assumption of equal variances regarding any potential influence of fall (Q1) quarter GPA, $F(41,41) = 1.11, p = 0.7315, (\alpha = 0.05)$ or winter (Q2) quarter GPA, $F(41,41) = 1.04, p = 0.9053, (\alpha = 0.05)$. Pooled t-test results for fall, $t(82) = -0.86, p = 0.3946, (\alpha = 0.05)$ and winter $t(82) = -1.05, p = 0.2969, (\alpha = 0.05)$ confirm no statistically significant difference between the groups based on GPA. The null hypothesis, "There is no statistically significant difference between the groups in terms of their quarterly GPA," is, therefore, reported as tenable. A review of distribution curves and scatter plots by group and GPA (see Tables 5 and 5), however, provide evidence suggesting the study could have benefited from a larger sample size to account for considerable variability in the data set. Although these figures suggest more students in the treatment group earned GPAs above 0.00, the visual story depicted by these figures provide compelling evidence to confirm the distributions violated the assumptions of normality and equal variances.
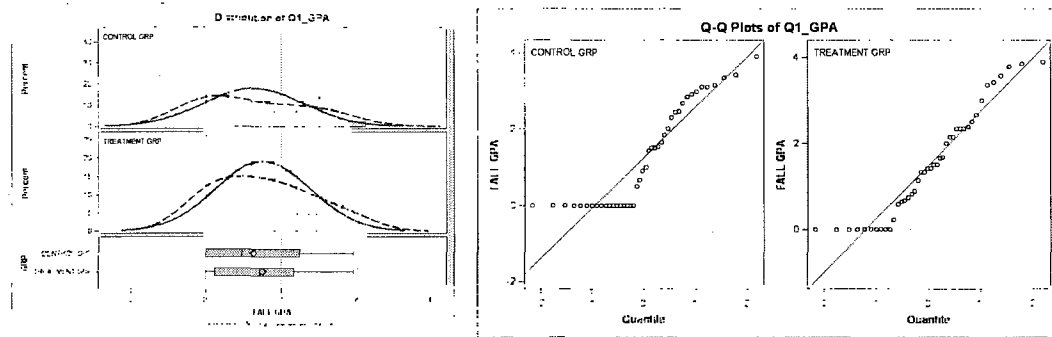
Figure 4. Distribution curves and scatter plots reflecting group influence on fall (Q1) GPA.
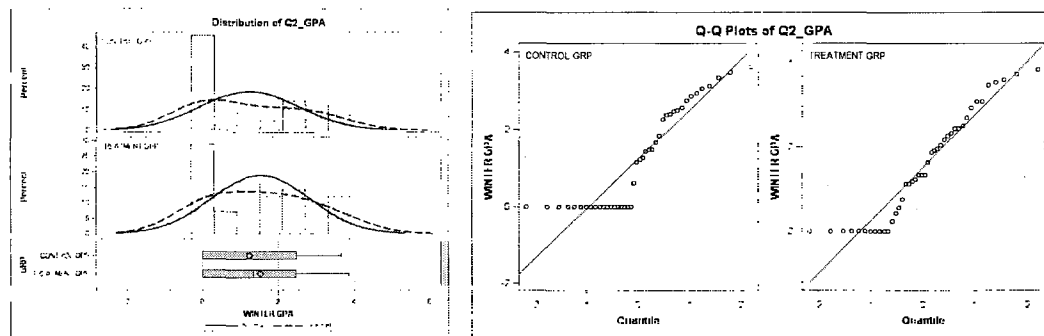
Figure 5. Distribution curves and scatter plots reflecting group influence on winter (Q2) GPA.

T-test results by attendance. The analysis shifts to examine the influence of group

membership on quarterly attendance. T-tests detected strong statistical evidence to reject the

assumption of equal variances based on the pooled t-test statistic for fall (Q1) quarter

attendance, $F(41,41) = 4.92$, $p < .0001$, ($\alpha = 0.05$), but a review of Satterthwaite results

(since the variances were unequal) provided evidence (although weak evidence) of a lack of

statistical difference between the groups based on their fall (Q1) quarter attendance, t (57) = -

2.00, $p = 0.0503$, ($\alpha = 0.05$). I, therefore, accept the null hypothesis, "There is no

statistically significant difference between the groups in terms of their first quarter attendance

patterns." Descriptive statistics (summarized in Table 6 and Figure 6) provide additional

evidence of this finding.
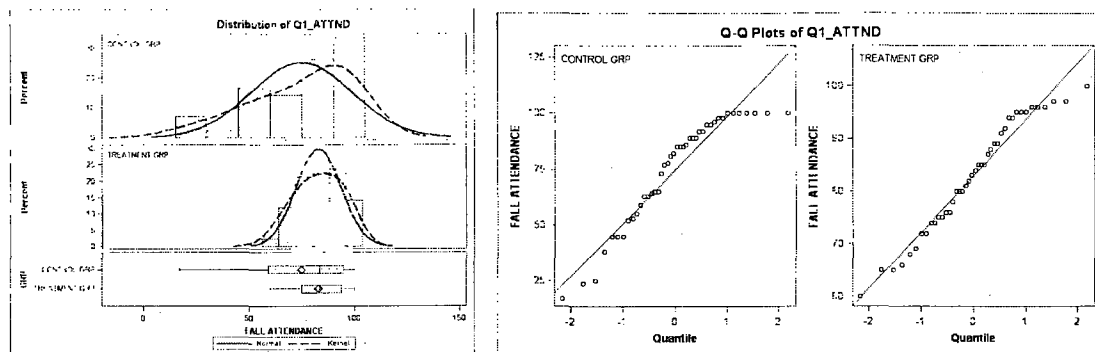
Figure 6. Distribution curves and scatter plots reflecting group influence on fall (Q1) attendance.

As I reviewed winter (Q2) quarter attendance by group, the findings hold true--

variances between the groups reflect equality, $F(41,41) = 1.21, p = 0.5373,$ ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Pooled results for winter (Q2) quarter attendance confirmed no statistically significant

difference between the groups, t (82) = -1.38, $p = 0.1705,$ ($\alpha = 0.05$). The null hypothesis,

"There is no statistically significant difference between the groups in terms of their second

(winter) quarter attendance," is accepted. Figure 7 provides evidence to suggest, however,

that members of the treatment group were more likely to attend class (i.e. fewer fell into a

no-attendance status) and, they generally maintained higher rates of attendance throughout

the second (Q2) quarter.
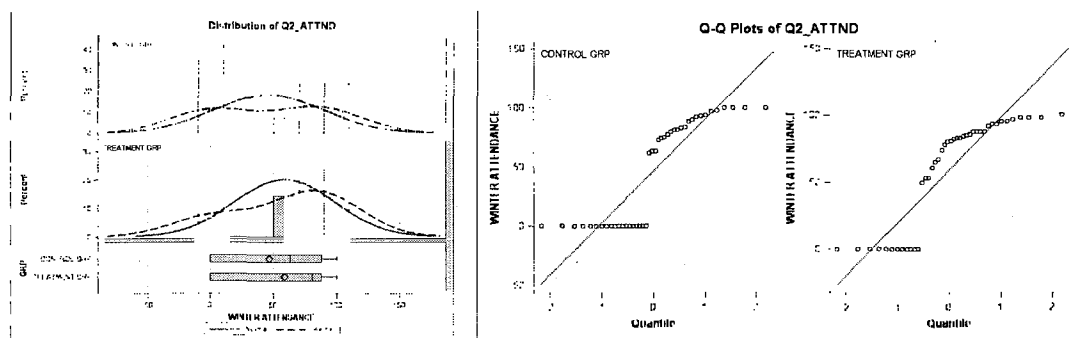
Figure 7. Distribution curves and scatter plots reflecting group influence on winter (Q2) attendance.

Wilcoxon results. Previous findings from the t-tests confirm violations of the

assumptions of normality and equal variances. The sample size used in this study turned out to be much smaller than I anticipated. When sample sizes are small, researchers recommend the use of the Wilcoxon non-parametric test (Cody & Smith, 2006). Results of the Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test by group ($n = 42$) suggest a lack of statistical difference based on attendance--Q1_ATTND ($z = 0.7209$, $p = 0.4710$) and Q2_ATTND ($z = 1.1525$, $p = 0.2491$), and a lack of statistical significance based on grade point average--Q1_GPA ($z = 0.9756$, $p = 0.3293$) and Q2_GPA ($z = 1.1080$, $p = 0.2679$).

To summarize a response to the first research question exploring any group differences by GPA and attendance, the results of Chi-square, t-test and Wilcoxon (non-parametric) analyses converged. Beyond basic differences in descriptive statistics, there is no statistically significance evidence to support a conclusion that one group did any better than the other.

Response to Research Question Two

The second quantitative research question seeks to determine how much of the variance between the two groups could be attributed to the treatment condition—intrusive advising. In addition to the results of the T-test and Wilcoxon tests, I applied logistic regression to begin analyzing which variables could predict winter (Q2) and spring (Q3) retention. Cody & Smith (2006) define logistic regression as an, "equation [that] predicts the natural log of the odds for a subject being in one category or another...[and] the regression coefficients...can be used to estimate odds ratios for each of the independent variables" (p. 301). Within the context of this study, logistic regression was used to predict the probability of a subject being retained to the second (Q2) and third (Q3) quarters based on group membership—i.e. whether or not they were in the group receiving intrusive advising—,

quarterly grade point average (Q1_GPA and Q2_GPA), and quarterly attendance (Q1_ATTND and Q2_ATTND). Tables 12 through 14 offer a summary of the regression coefficient, 95% Wald test, p-value, and odds ratios by retention period.

Table 12

Logistic Regression Predicting Q2 Retention from Group, Q1 GPA, and Q1 Attendance

Predictor	β	Wald χ^2	p	Odds Ratio	LB	UB
GRP	0.5980	0.6165	0.4324	1.818	0.409	8.091
Q1_GPA	2.0448	14.6169	0.0001	7.728	2.709	22.045
Q1_ATTND	0.0657	4.3604	0.0368	1.068	1.004	1.136

Table 13

Logistic Regression Predicting Q3 Retention from Group, Q1 GPA, and Q1 Attendance (Including Stop Outs)

Predictor	β	Wald χ^2	p	Odds Ratio	LB	UB
GRP	-0.2714	0.2772	0.5985	0.762	0.278	2.093
Q1_GPA	0.8184	9.5749	0.0020	2.267	1.350	3.807
Q1_ATTND	0.0090	0.2441	0.6212	1.009	0.974	1.046

Table 14

Logistic Regression Predicting Q3 Retention from Group, Q2 GPA, and Q2 Attendance (Excluding Stop Outs)

Predictor	β	Wald χ^2	p	Odds Ratio	LB	UB
GRP	0.0024	3.5371	0.9971	1.002	0.268	3.754
Q2_GPA	1.1262	6.5837	0.0103	3.084	1.305	7.290
Q2_ATTND	0.0295	1.0545	0.3045	1.030	0.974	1.089

Predicting fall (Q1) to winter (Q2) retention. From the first (fall) to the second

(winter) quarter, results from the regression model indicate that 54.2% of the variance

between the groups can be explained by the predictor variables—GRP, Q1_GPA, and

Q1_ATTND--,

(Psuedo R^2 = 0.5360, Wald X^2 (3,N = 84) = 20.0040, p = 0.0002). As can be seen from Table

12, fall (Q1) GPA, ($p < 0.0001$), and fall (Q1) attendance, ($p = 0.0368$), have significant and

strong partial effects in predicting winter (Q2) retention, but group membership does not, (p

= 0.4324). A more in depth analysis of the Wald Confidence Interval for Adjusted Odds

Ratios suggests that for every 0.10 unit of increase in first quarter GPA, the likelihood of

retention increases by more than 22%, *OR* = 1.227, 95% CI = (LB = 1.105, UB = 1.362).

The odds of a student retained in the winter (Q2) quarter would also increase by nearly two

times for each 10% increase in first quarter attendance, *OR* = 1.929, 95% CI = (LB = 1.041,

UB = 3.574). These are points of interest that I will explore in the context of opportunities to

refine the advising intervention over time.

Predicting fall (Q1) to spring (Q3) retention. Slightly different results emerges when

examining retention from fall (Q1) to the spring (Q3) quarter, using the same predictor

variables--GRP, Q1_GPA, and Q1_ATTND. Approximately 23% of the variance between those retained or not retained can be explained by the predictor variables, (*Psuedo R^2 = 0.2274, Wald X^2 (3,N = 84) = 16.9212, p = .0007*). A review of Table 13, however, shows that only Q1_GPA has a significant partial effect on spring (Q3) retention, ($p = 0.0020$), with an odds ratio revealing more than two times the likelihood of spring (Q3) retention based on Q1_GPA, *OR* = 2.267, 95% CI = (LB = 1.350, UB = 3.807). Group membership, (p = 0.5985), and Q1_ATTND, ($p = 0.6212$), are however weak predictors of spring (Q3) retention. In addition to these results, I tested for how much (if any) effect a 0.10 unit increase in first quarter GPA would have on third quarter retention. Results suggest a subtle increase would be observed in Q3 retention, *OR* = 1.09, 95% CI = (LB = 1.030, UB = 1.143) based on a Wald Confidence Interval for Odds Ratio test.

Predicting winter (Q2) to spring (Q3) retention. When predicting spring (third quarter) retention from the winter quarter, I setup the model to use GRP, Q2_GPA and Q2_ATTND as predictor variables. I excluded stop outs--those not in attendance during the winter (Q2) quarter-- within this model; in other words, those that were retained for three quarters. Findings suggest 26% of the variance can be explained by the combination of the three predictor variables, (*Psuedo R^2 = 0.2582, Wald X^2 (3,N = 84) = 11.1624, p = 0.0109*). Table 14 also depicts that Q2_GPA accounted for a significant partial effect on retention from winter (Q2) to spring (Q3), ($p = 0.0103$), but group membership, ($p = 0.9971$), and winter (Q2) attendance, ($p = 0.3045$), had little ability to predict whether students would be retained in the third quarter. Using students' winter (Q2) GPA, the odds of third quarter retention increases more than three times, *OR* = 3.084, 95% CI = (LB = 1.305, UB = 7.290). This is a finding worth noting as a means to adjust the focus of the intrusive advising

intervention over time to increase the effect size.

Examining the effects based on "crossed over" subjects. I mentioned in Chapter Three that this study originally involved two smaller groups ($n = 22$), but these groups were merged as a result of control subjects' voluntary decision (and disclosure) to "crossover" into the treatment condition. In the spirit of inquiry, I took advantage of the opportunity to examine the results within the context of yet another scenario—the formation of another type of treatment and control group configuration. To construct a newly arranged data set, I developed another treatment group using the "original" 22 treatment group members and the additional control group subjects who disclosed an intentional decision to cross over into the treatment condition ($n = 7$). One record from the original treatment group ($n = 1$) was, however, omitted from the analysis due to a very premature departure from the institution; those fitting this extremely premature departure were mentioned earlier in this chapter. Under this new scenario, I ran the same parametric and non-parametric tests based on this additional treatment group ($n = 28$) and an additional control group made up of the 44 archival records from the 2007-08 cohort plus the remaining members of the "original" control group ($n = 56$). The results, using the same instruments, yielded identical results in terms of a lack of statistical significance and which variables predicted retention. This analysis provides justification for my decision to combine the groups at the start of the winter (Q2) quarter.

Several factors can negatively affect statistical significance, including a lack of statistical power (small sample sizes) and variability within the samples (Glass & Hopkins, 1996). Both appear to be at work in this study, judging from the figures (throughout this chapter) depicting parametric and non-parametric results. I cannot confirm to what degree

these two factors lead to a general lack of statistical significance, but the results of a power analysis that I conducted confirmed that the sample size was too small to account for variability within the data set. Any possible group difference remained generally undetectable for their pooled or partial effects. This confounding discovery speaks to the strength of this mixed-methods case study that allowed me to use qualitative data (interviews and focus groups) to fill in some of the gaps that were unexplainable by the quantitative results, in isolation. This next section of the case study--the qualitative findings--captures subjects' experiences during early portions of their first year experience. It is within this next section that we have the potential to explore some of the gaps undetected by this quantitative analysis.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative research is designed to capture the "how" and "why" elements of subjects' experiences. It is an "inquiry process of understanding...The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants..." (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). The qualitative findings from this study evolved from face-to-face, one-one-one interviews with students ($n = 10$), focus group sessions with students from the two groups ($n = 9$), a focus group session with the intrusive advisor and the two facilitators ($n = 3$), and field notes maintained by the researcher. Table 15 provides a breakdown by data collection method.

Table 15

Qualitative Participation by Data Collection Method

Data Collection Method	N	Intrusive Advising Participants	"Original" Control Participants
Student Interview	10	5	5
Student Focus Groups	9	6	3
Facilitator & Advisor Focus Group	3	N/A	N/A
Summary	22	11	8

Researchers suggest that sample size, as it relates to qualitative research compared to its quantitative counterpart, has more to do with "saturation"—that point at which the same information is heard repeatedly—rather than number of subjects, and that saturation typically occurs with 15 or more subjects (Ortiz, 2003). My sample included 19 subjects ($n = 19$).

I designed the following qualitative questions to guide this study:

1. Why did these students (in the intrusive advising and standard advising groups) enroll with this institution? How do they describe their goals as they relate to their reasons for enrolling?

2. How do at-risk, first-year African American students (in the intrusive advising and standard advising groups) describe their experiences since enrolling with this college?

   a. How do they describe their experiences with academic advisors, peers, instructors, and other employees and services of the college?

b. How do they describe any influence from external relationships (e.g. with family, friends, and community resources) in light of their goal(s) and other reasons for enrolling with this college? What level of importance do they attach to these influences in the context of their goals and reasons for enrollment?

3. What does the combination of the quantitative and the qualitative findings suggest as recommended approaches to a career college seeking to increase academic persistence and retention among their first-year, at-risk African American students?

This section of the study begins with a response to the first qualitative research question which sought to identify students' reasons for enrolling with the study site. Following a description of their responses regarding their reasons for enrollment and criteria by which they said they would evaluate that decision, I list and describe the major themes that emerged from the findings. Four themes provide a response to the second research question that sought to explore subjects' descriptions of their first year experience with an emphasis on reporting their description of interactions with their academic advisor in the context of their holistic experience with the study site. I provide a response to the third qualitative question, synthesizing the qualitative and quantitative elements, within Chapter 5. Before concluding this section, I also include a section that reflects excerpts from the focus group involving the intrusive advisor and the facilitators—their perspective on the relevance and effectiveness of the intrusive advising intervention. This first subsection begins with a description of subjects' reasons for enrollment.

Enrollment Objectives and Goals

There is general agreement among researchers that an overarching objective of academic advising is to assist students toward the completion of their degree--in line with their short- and long-term goals (Earl, 1987; Gordon, Habley & Associates, 2000; Heisserer & Parette, 2002). To this aim, the first research question, "Why did these students (in the intrusive advising and standard advising groups) enroll with this institution? How do they describe their goals as they relate to their reasons for enrolling?" establishes a foundation to interpret students' goals and subsequent experiences. A conversation with students followed the interview protocols in Appendixes E and F. The first protocol question was, "Why did you decide to enroll with this college this fall? What goal(s) did you have in mind when you decided to come here?" Table 16 provides an overview of subjects' clustered responses to this question.

Table 16

Top 10 Reasons Students Enrolled with the Study Site

Reason #	Enrollment Reason (1 = most commonly cited reason)
1	Career / Job focused institution
2	Institution's close proximity to "home" or family
3	Institution's reputation
4	Acquainted with someone who attends (or has attended) the institution
5	Fulfillment of a personal goal
6	On-campus (residence) housing available
7	Economical / Affordable
8	Size "not too big like a university"
9	Open Admissions philosophy
10	Easy to enroll

The 10 most common reasons are based on the frequency with which each reason was cited—with the first (reason number one) being the most frequently cited reason for enrollment and the last (reason number 10) being less frequently cited as a reason but with enough frequency that it is noteworthy.

Career / Job Focused Institution

The most common reason for enrollment among subjects was the college's focus on careers and jobs as a trajectory to what they envisioned as a better lifestyle. All subjects cited this reason for enrollment. Students talked about their goals to work in the field in line with the focus of their program of study. Programs of study were diverse among them, including disciplines related to business, corrections, culinary arts, education, health science, human service, and technology. As a "career college," the study site does not provide a

trajectory for a liberal arts degree, although all students are required to complete general

education in accordance with regional accreditation standards. Some of the subjects

discussed plans to own their own business or team up with a family member to support an

existing business owned by that family member. A few in health-related programs described

this goal as a means to assist an ailing family member or to memorialize the loss of a family

member from a health-related illness. Several disclosed plans to move to another state in

search of more plentiful job opportunities and greater chances of economic stability. The

study site is located in a state that, currently, is ranked as having one of the nation's highest

unemployment rates. From a broad overview of responses related to a career or job, subjects

seem hopeful that these goals would be attainable even though they described the pursuit as

"hard." In the focus group conversation with the intrusive advisor and the two facilitators,

they affirmed that careers and job placement were the most commonly cited reasons for

students' enrollment in this college.

Institution's Close Proximity to "Home" or Family

The second most common reason for their enrollment was the site's proximity to their

homes or family members. Nearly every subject referenced this as being an important

determinant when choosing to attend this school. The majority of those interviewed lived

within two hours of the campus—with several living one hour or less from this location. The

greatest distance was approximately 250 miles or 3 ½ hours from the study site. Subjects

placed a lot of emphasis on this factor and their conversations seemed to suggest this was

even more important for those leaving home for the first time. Older students (coming to

college following several years since high school graduation) spoke of the importance of

proximity from the perspective of the site being within a reasonable commuting distance--

allowing them to reach the campus by bike, foot, or via public transit systems as a backup.

Institution's Reputation

The third most frequently cited reason for enrollment was a positive impression of the site's reputation prior to enrollment. Subjects mention having learned about the institution from admissions recruiters, other students, friends or family. None of the subjects (regardless of age, or city or state of origin) mentioned learning about the site via mailings, brochures, billboards, or television ads. Knowing who (among this population of students) responds to varying forms of advertising (including word of mouth) may be of interest for further exploration in future research. The majority mention someone (from the site's admissions department) coming to their school to talk with junior- and senior-status students about the benefits of attending this college. Others' decisions were influenced by the positive experiences others had during their enrollment with the site. Several subjects were able to recite (verbatim) topics that admissions personnel emphasized as differentiating characteristics that sets this school apart from other institutions. These topics included descriptions of the site as a career-focused college with job placement for life, no requirement to enroll in "unnecessary classes" beyond the core courses, an emphasis on "hands-on" learning versus a lecture-based curriculum delivery modality, friendly people ready to assist in any way, free tutoring and learning support, and access to on-campus housing.

Access to "free" help surfaced as a strong thread within the context of the site's reputation and the influence that available help had on subjects' choice of college. All subjects discussed access to free support services as fundamentally important when making a choice to attend this school. Support (from the students' perspective) resonated initially in

the context of their academic experience but as time lapsed with the facilitator, it became

obvious that their definition of "help" related to every (holistic) aspect of their first year

experience with this site. This finding may not surprise readers given the at-risk

characteristics of the population of subjects involved in this study—to be successful they

would need a lot of support.

Equally related to the importance of the college's reputation, subjects discussed their

perceptions of the caliber and variety of programs offered by the study site. The participants

in these qualitative conversations represented a variety of programs—business, culinary arts,

corrections, education, health science, human service, and technology. A few mention this

college as being their first or only choice because of the types of program available in line

with their post-graduate goals; in other words, this was the only place where they could

enroll and complete a program toward their desired career goal. In light of other findings, it

seems pertinent to note that they discussed proximity to home more frequently than program

offering when choosing a college.

Acquainted with Someone Who Attends (or Has Attended) the Institution

The fourth most common reason for participants' enrollment with this school was

preexisting connections with people who had attended this school or acquaintances that were

currently enrolled. When talking about their reasons for enrolling, they overwhelmingly

mentioned a friend or family member having a connection to the school. Their conversations

seem to suggest that this provided a connection to the institution on some level, or that it

made the site more appealing or accessible to them. A few talked about these individuals'

successful completion of a degree with the site, but most simply talked about these

individuals as having "attended here"—without any reference to degree completion. In other

words, regardless of the person's degree completion status, the fact that someone they knew

attended school at the site provided a connection in some meaningful way. A number of the

traditional college-aged participants were recruited from a technical center approximately 40

miles to the east of the study site. These participants also spoke of having classmates who

had attended (or who were in attendance) at the site.

Interestingly, a few older students (ages 44 and older) referenced their perception of

this site as having a history of being a school only for "White people" (in reference to

students and employees). These participants, having maintained residence in the surrounding

community where the campus is located, talked about how they would not have considered

attending this school in the past because the minority-community viewed the study site as

exclusively for Whites. In their opinion, the school has made noteworthy gains in its effort to

reinvent its community image and this change contributed favorably to these participants'

decisions to enroll in this site.

Fulfillment of a Personal Goal

The fifth most frequently cited reason for enrollment among subjects was a desire to

fulfill a personal goal on some level. For a handful of subjects, the goal was to transfer to

another college after earning their degree with this site. For others, the goal was to finish

their academic program and to graduate in roughly two years with employment as a product

of their graduation. For most, their personal goals were comprehensive—encompassing

benefit for them and for others.

Several described a sense of obligation to their families, and this obligation motivated

them to make college more accessible to others in their lives. They talked about this

obligation as a duty on some level—to assist, serve as a role model, or gain a skill that might

aide the family in some way (e.g. earn a nursing degree to care for a sick loved-one). Several subjects conveyed feeling torn between a desire to better themselves and the guilt associated with leaving their siblings in the care of their single parent.

In many cases, students were older siblings with younger brothers and sisters living at home while they were away in college. Some were parents, themselves. These students spoke of carrying the family's financial burden on their shoulders. Prior to coming to college, they worked part-time jobs to provide financial assistance to their family. Some also disclosed an expectation that they maintain enrollment in college as a means of providing financial assistance to the family. For some, this would mean maintaining eligibility for the family to continue to qualify for government assistance (e.g. social or welfare benefits), or so they could receive direct benefits as a foster child enrolled in college. For others, it meant having money from financial aid refunds that would provide a source of cash to immediate (and, in some cases extended) family members.

With few exceptions, all of the subjects were first generation college-goers. They described their enrollment in college as a means of social mobility so they could create new possibilities for their siblings or their children. One male interviewee's response portrays this perspective when he said, "I just want to be better, that's all...I got...little brothers and a little sister, and one of us had to do it...they my motivation!" In a few cases, students also talked about how their enrollment decision is having a positive influence on their parents (often their mothers) and some extended members of their family. One female participant depicts her excitement about being the first in her family to go to school by saying,

> I was amazed...things at home with my family [made me think] I'm not going to get
>
> an education...My family is amazed. They're like we're proud of you...half my

family didn't go to college...my mom, she didn't go to college but she got her GED...Out of her kids, I'm the only one... it made it positive for my mom. She's like, 'I been thinking...I'm going to go to college so I can get a degree'...and my aunt is thinking about going back to school; going to college now.

A few of the student participants were trying to escape tarnished pasts that included encounters with law enforcement, frequent discipline issues in school, or just hanging around people who influenced them negatively. In this context, attending this school fulfilled a personal goal to start "fresh"—to make a clean break from a troubled past. An interviewee talks about her decision to enroll with the study site because, "I didn't want to be [at other schools] with all my friends... they would have dragged me along..., then I probably would have got kicked out....I'm starting fresh." Their personal goals for attendance often included such a chance for a fresh start (or restart) on life.

On-campus (Residence) Housing Available

Access to residence halls (campus housing) was the sixth most common reason subjects chose to enroll in this site. In some cases, access to residence halls was a deciding factor to select this site even when another campus (affiliated with this college system) was much closer to home. One subject's hometown includes a campus affiliated with this site, but she stated, "I like it that [this site] have dorms. That's the most important because you can be...away from home and be able to...live in a dorm...The [campus], where [I'm from], they don't have dorms....you still be living with your parents..."

Conversations about the benefits of housing were also integrated with discussions regarding the "small" size of the campus. They spoke of how they could have access to residence housing without going to a "big college like a University" and they enrolled with

the perception that living on campus would help them to stay out of trouble. In a subsequent section, I will focus on the topic of the campus' size and its influence on their college choice, but for now, I want to examine the seventh most common reason why they enrolled—affordability.

Economical / Affordable

Students enrolled believing they could afford to attend this college. It was important to them that this was a reality. More often, the economic value they associated with the cost of attending this college was framed within the context of access to financial aid. For some, college was not an expense at all. This was true for one subject who was eligible for "free college in Michigan" because of her status as a foster child. Other students qualified for college via a variety of state government sponsored incentives such as Michigan Tuition Incentive Program (TIP) (Michigan Department of Treasury, 2009) for qualifying Medicaid recipients. Ninety-three percent of the students in the treatment group relied on access to Title IV financial aid funds via the federal government; 74% of them required student loans. Students describe their initial impressions that this site would be able to provide them with attractive financial aid packages that would allow college to remain affordable. During their interviews, however, most portrayed their actual financial experience in a less-than-positive light.

Size "not too big like a university"

Earlier, I mentioned that the size of the institution was a determining factor in students' decisions to enroll in the study site. It is the eighth most common reason for their enrollment. Subjects often portrayed the importance of this by comparing the site to a "big university"--which was less desirable to them. Some tied these feelings to a keen awareness

that they would need additional support (a lot of help) and they believed a larger institution would not provide adequate levels of support to help them sustain enrollment. They believed the small size of the site, as one interviewee explained, "[would help] me a lot more than [a large university]. I really wanted help, you know, because I don't catch on to things really fast...That's what I felt like I needed." Interestingly, they also contrasted their perceptions of the difference between this career college and a local community college—both "small" sized schools with open admissions philosophies. One subject differentiated the two types of institutions by comparing the institutions' focus on hands-on training and differences in their academic calendars. She favored the hands-on experiences and the quarter (versus semester) system adopted by this career college site. Another subject depicted this institutional difference by referring to the study site's commitment to (and high rate of) job-placement of its graduates. He stated, "I'd rather go to [this site] than [the community college] cause it seems like...a good percentage of their graduates...[are in] good jobs and they seem to follow up more so than any other college..."

Open Admissions Philosophy

The site's "open admissions" philosophy was the next (ninth) most commonly cited reason subjects decided to enroll with this site. None of the subjects referred to the terms "open admissions" or "open enrollment" during their conversations. In fact, some asked the interviewer or facilitator to explain what he or she meant when asking if the site's "open admissions" approach to enrollment was a determinant for enrollment. Instead, most students voluntarily described their low high school achievement as having a bearing on college choice—they understood their enrollment options were limited because of low standardized test scores and low high school GPAs (e.g. "I didn't do so well on my SATs"

and "...this college doesn't require [a SAT score], cause I had a low one"). Most understood and expressed appreciation for access to college via this type of admissions approach (e.g. "you can still come here, regardless"). On the other hand, a few subjects seemed oblivious to any limitations on college choice based on their low high school achievement ("my [high school grades] are fine"). The criteria I used to identify the sample for this study targeted students with low high school achievement (a lack of post-secondary academic preparation for college).

Easy to Enroll

Finally, the tenth most common reason for enrollment was subjects' perception that it was very easy to enroll with this site. One male subject describes the ease of enrollment when he said, "They sent everyone an application to they [sic] house...I filled it out...I sent it back...probably a week later, they told me I was eligible to come to this college." Another subject also described this ease of enrollment coupled with what seemed to be a post-enrollment expectations gap. She says, "Everything seems pretty easy here--getting in. But, just getting the answers is kind of hard." I'll revisit this point in a subsequent section of this study.

Beyond subjects "Top 10" enrollment objectives and goals, they described additional reasons for their enrollment decisions and goals. Among these other reasons, students mentioned the effectiveness of the admissions recruiters, inadequate time remaining to apply to another school, access to Black employees of the study site for support and as role models (including the intrusive advisor and me, respectively), and feeling like they should start school because they were "not getting any younger" in terms of age. Their collective reasons for enrollment were also analyzed in terms of the criteria they said they would use to evaluate

the merits of their decision.

Evaluation Criteria Regarding Their Enrollment Decision

After subjects described their reasons for enrollment, the facilitators asked them to describe the criteria by which they would evaluate their enrollment decision. The protocol question, "How will you know that your decision to enroll here was a good decision?" sought to establish baseline (first term) expectations regarding how they would evaluate their enrollment decision with this site. Table 17 provides an overview of the nine most commonly cited criteria by which they would determine whether they made a good decision.

Table 17

Nine Most Common Criteria Subjects Would Use to Evaluate Their Enrollment Decision

Reason #	Evaluation Criteria (1 = most commonly cited reason)
1	Overall experience generally positive
2	Job / career results from enrollment
3*	Socially engaging experience
4*	College-provided support available and accessible
5	Rewarding academic experience
6	Treated fairly
7	Personally satisfied
8	Able to afford it
9	Interaction with African American role models

* An equal number of subjects cited this as a means to evaluate their decision

The first criterion (reason number one) was the most frequently cited criteria they said they would use to evaluate their enrollment decision. Two criterions—a socially engaging experience and access to college-provided support--were tied at third place in terms of how

frequently subjects cited these as a way to evaluate their decision. The last (reason number 9) was less frequently cited as a reason but with enough frequency that it was more noteworthy compared to additional responses they offered.

Overall Experience Generally Positive

Most of the subjects framed their conversations in the present when describing how they would evaluate their experience. Rather than speaking of their experience using a future point in time (e.g. as they approached the time of graduation), they instead used their current levels of satisfaction as an assessment—that is, how they perceived things were going at the time of their interview or focus group session. With few exceptions, students were generally satisfied with their experience and discussed plans to return to the institution the following quarter (winter) and remain enrolled until their degree was completed. They generally said things were, "alright" and "good." Overwhelmingly, students who interacted with the intrusive advisor (by assignment or by an act of will) described the support they received from her as essential to their holistic experience and they described how that support was influencing their experiences in a positive way.

There were other reasons students felt their experience was generally good. Among other factors contributing to a positive experience, they described the value they placed on things like supportive admissions advisors, helpful tutors, faculty who affirmed and validated their enrollment decision, peer relationships (e.g. experiences with roommates), study groups available for some limited-enrollment programs in the field of health sciences, and their perception of safety on the campus. On some level, they all described exceptions within this positive experience; I will elaborate of these exceptions in the context of a major theme related to an "expectations gap," in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Job / Career Results from Enrollment

Given the job (employment) focused mission of a career college, it should not surprise the reader that subjects would use job or career placement as an assessment of their enrollment decision. One male interviewee described the essence of his enrollment decision succinctly, "I think it's finding the right job." Multiple students were even able to quote statistics regarding this institutions' (near) 100% historic rate of post-graduate employment. This finding connects directly with students' number one reason for enrollment—the site is a career / job focused institution.

Socially Engaging Experience

Subjects frequently talked about evaluating their experiences with this site as conditional on whether their experience was socially engaging; for most, this was not the case. While they did not use the word "engaging" to describe their experiences, they frequently emphasized the importance of having a "social life" that involved interacting with others—on and off campus. They placed a lot of emphasis on gatherings that would place them in contact with others in socially fulfilling ways. This also included a desire to interact with Black employees of the institution.

College-provided Support Available and Accessible

This site has a reputation of providing a lot of academic support to underprepared students. Subjects cited the availability, accessibility, and quality of that support as criteria by which they would evaluate their enrollment decision. The vast majority of those interviewed described their academic success (maintaining grades that would lead to degree completion) as being contingent on access to adequate levels of academic support. The students frequently referred to their perception of the value of "the best librarian assistants"

and "free tutoring." There were, however, barriers they described to gaining access to enough and targeted tutoring support; I describe those barriers in detail within the major qualitative themes that follow this section of the chapter.

Academic support was not the only kind of "support" criteria subjects would use to evaluate their enrollment decision. Their expectations for support were comprehensive—including supportive interactions with various employees of the study site--from the point of recruitment to post-graduation (e.g. lifetime career guidance and job placement). From the point of recruitment, students expected assistance with financial aid matters (including the application process), with access to grants and other sources of funds to reduce loan debt, and they expected support with the interpretation of financial jargon that was foreign to them. They also expected support with the interpretation of academic policies and the impact of such on their continued enrollment. In addition, they wanted support that would familiarize them with the surrounding community--including how to access public transportation. Their support needs did not stop there. They also expected support in order to learn how to communicate a concern appropriately, to share an idea, and to learn from whom they should direct an inquiry. The reader should recall the student who said she found it difficult to get answers to questions at this site. They also expected academic advising support, even when they were oblivious to the benefits of it or from whom they should obtain it. Their locus of control appeared to be external, in many cases. They expected someone to make sure they received what they needed. This, unfortunately, was not what some students experienced, as the reader will discover within the themes that follow.

Rewarding Academic Experience

The students said they would know if they made a good decision to enroll at the site if

their overall academic experience turned out to be positive. In this context, they mentioned things such as earning good grades that would help them earn credits toward graduation. I scheduled these interview and focus group sessions near the end of their first academic quarter. With few exceptions, most students believed their grades would not be a barrier to returning the next quarter. A review of the quantitative findings by subject suggested their perceptions were generally accurate. Although a considerable proportion of the students (in both groups) were academically dismissed or placed on academic probation by the site, most of those who interviewed were *not* among those at risk of dismissal. This offers an interesting link to the quantitative findings in this study, which revealed a large proportion of control group subjects dismissed academically following their first quarter (fall). In a few cases, students were keenly aware of their struggle in certain courses (most commonly, their developmental math course); they described this situation as "stressful."

They also described a desire to have good "relationships" with their teachers. There were select faculty who they commonly described as strong supporters of their learning experience. Some went as far as to say, "I love her" or "He wants us to succeed." These teachers (predominantly-White) helped to validate their enrollment decision by creating a sense of "community" in the classroom setting and by caring for them as individuals. On the other hand, students believed some faculty questioned their motives for enrollment and neglected to build a "relationship" with them because of their skepticism. In a subsequent section of this chapter, I will describe this point in detail as an element of one of the major qualitative themes—a desire to maintain supportive relationships with staff and faculty.

The subjects also acknowledged the importance of good attendance as fundamental to a good academic experience. Many were proud of their attendance records; as a group, the

quantitative findings suggest they should have been. Some were even critical of their peers who neglected to maintain good attendance; they could not understand why they would choose to be absent in classes—especially, absences in classes for which those peers were struggling. This site has taken a proactive approach to encourage students to maintain good attendance patterns in order to avoid the negative implications of excessive absenteeism on students' academic standing with the institution. In addition to quarterly email reminders to students, each faculty member is also required to outline the site's standardized attendance policy within the syllabus for each course taught. At this site, consistent attendance is also a condition by which the institution determines students' eligibility to live on campus, and attendance patterns have implications on students' financial aid eligibility and other sources of funding.

Treated Fairly

When students discussed fair treatment as an evaluation of their enrollment decision, they framed this conversation within the context of parity—whether they felt they were being treated as well as another student in a similar situation. Most of their conversations about fair treatment related to their classroom experiences. They wanted their teachers to equally value their contributions, engage them in the learning experience, and to care about their overall (not just academic) well-being. In the majority of cases, subjects believed their teachers treated them equitably—they were "wonderful," "caring," and "sincere." In a few cases, however, students described a handful of teachers as treating them unfairly based on those teachers' perceptions of ulterior motives among Black students enrolled with this site. I will elaborate on this finding within the context of the major qualitative theme regarding support relationships with staff and faculty.

Personally Satisfied

Overwhelmingly, students described some kind of personal goal which they would use to evaluate their enrollment decision. Most wanted to earn a degree for personal satisfaction and for the anticipated improvements to their quality of life ("I just want to prove to myself that I can do it"), and many described attending college for the positive influence it would have on the lives of other people for whom they cared.

For some, they wanted to earn a degree as a means of motivating friends and family. Many wanted better lives not only for themselves but they wanted to reshape the landscape of possibilities for younger siblings or improve the lives of other relatives. In at least one case, the student's motivation was to earn placement in a highly competitive nursing program was to care for her uncle who had recently become paralyzed and would require long-term care. Another student helps us to understand how personally responsible some felt toward their families when he says, "[Making it in college is] very important...if I fail, it's like I let [my siblings] down...When things get rough or things not going so good, they my motivation."

Some students' determination to remain enrolled stemmed from an opportunity to prove someone wrong--someone who doubted their decision to attend or ability to succeed in college. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1993) speaks to this challenge as some students try to separate from one group (e.g. family and peers) and integrate with the norms and patterns of a new group. The transition is simpler for students whose values, norms and behaviors align closely with that of the dominant pattern on campus, but it creates barriers for those whose patterns are less congruent with the pre-established patterns on campus. The words of one subject describes the skepticism she experienced from some family members, "...I did so

badly in high school; they were shocked. But, I decided to go to college...[I'm] trying to prove them wrong--that I can actually get somewhere." Their personal reasons for attending college were many.

Able to Afford It

The majority (93.2%) of the students in the treatment group were dependent on financial aid to remain enrolled. Seventy-four percent of the sample was also dependent on student loans. A few subjects explained that they had no financial concerns because their educational expenses were completely funded by grants. Most were dependent on a combination of grants and loans, and they described themselves as economically challenged. They were concerned about the accrual of debt incurred from loans; this was prevalent in most of their conversations. They wanted access to higher education, but it was important to them that their education remained affordable. Subjects made enrollment decisions, therefore, based on a belief that their education would remain affordable, but their descriptions of their actual experiences suggest affordability was not always sustainable for some.

Employment was also a topic they related to discussions regarding affordability. Students expected to judge their enrollment decision on whether or not they had access to part-time employment. They expected (and stated a need) to have access to part-time employment while enrolled so that their educational experience remained affordable—not a burden on them or their families. For many, this was an unmet expectation that interfered with their ability to remain enrolled.

Interaction with African American Role Models

The racial demographics of the site's employee base was relevant to every subject

interviewed. Prior to enrolling, their conversations suggest an awareness that this site would be predominantly-White but, after arriving on campus they seemed surprised by what they described as a noticeable lack of Black faculty and staff. Although their conversations suggested a willingness to build supportive relationships with White employees of the site, there was something different about the interactions they desired with Black staff and faculty. To most of them, having access to Black staff and faculty "makes its more easy" because they believed Black staff members would have "your best interest [in mind]." Some believed that a more racially diverse makeup among staff and faculty at this site would also attract more students of color; "...they [would] definitely want to come here because they have Black staff."

Some subjects approached conversations about race cautiously--conditioning their discussions regarding the racial demographics of the site's staff with statements like, "I'm not trying to be racist, but..." Their comments suggest the racial demographics of the site mattered to them. As evidence of this, comments from all subjects ($n = 22$), including the facilitators and the intrusive advisor, confirmed agreement with the student who said, "I believe [the racial makeup of employees of the site] do make a difference." Their statements also reflect agreement with another student who said, "I won't say it's a racist thing, but it is a race thing; like to identify with a person more." Subjects' conversations suggest this perceived "difference" mattered in terms of having access to someone who could "relate to" or "understand" them; they used these words repeatedly. When choosing to enroll with this site, subjects expected to have access to Black employees whom they would look to as role models.

Summary of Evaluative Criteria

The criteria by which they would evaluate their enrollment decision are reflective of their reasons for enrollment, and each criterion emerges within one or more major themes of this qualitative inquiry. This next section of Chapter 4 provides an overview of the major themes that describe students' first quarter experiences.

Major Themes Regarding Students Experiences

In the case study tradition of qualitative research, we analyze themes, "not for generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case" (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). When the researcher analyzes the case in search of themes, she aggregates information into large clusters of ideas that describe issues that transcend any isolated instance within the case study. In this case study, students' combined descriptions give way to a comprehensive discussion that encompasses the essence of four qualitative themes: (a) students experienced an expectations-gap post-enrollment, (b) students desired supportive relationships with staff and faculty, (c) students desired a connection to the institution that included social engagement and a connection to the community, and (d) students' external support networks were insufficient and interfering with their persistence. In the pages that follow, I examine details of each theme using their descriptions.

As described earlier, these students enrolled with this institution for a variety of reasons. Their reasons for enrollment included (among others things previously cited) the site's focus on career and job placement, on-campus housing, affordability, and extensive support infrastructure. In analyzing their experiences, most students ($n = 17$) were generally satisfied with their overall enrollment decision and said they would recommend other students to enroll with the institution; two subjects ($n = 2$) said they were generally

dissatisfied. Comments from the majority suggest agreement with statements such as, "I like it here," "It's a professional environment," "It's a good school," and "[This school] has been nothing but nice to me."

Yet, in spite of general satisfaction with the site, all subjects were experiencing some kind of challenge that was interfering with their level of satisfaction with their enrollment decision and their ability to persist. Some of those challenges appear to be beyond the scope of what the site may be able to directly influence (e.g. a troubled family life back home), yet several barriers articulated by the subjects may rest within the scope of the institution's ability to influence in an effort to remove barriers they describe as interfering with their retention. Each theme explores both kinds of barriers (those within and beyond the scope of the institution) beginning with the first theme--students experienced an expectations-gap post-enrollment.

Theme 1: Students Experienced an Expectations-Gap Post-Enrollment

Despite general satisfaction with their overall experience, subjects articulated concerns that their expectations were unmet in terms of some criteria by which they made their enrollment decision and by which they said they would evaluate that decision. According to Rousseau (1995), students and organizations enter into a form of psychological contract when students attend a college. This contract presumes that students come to campus with pre-established beliefs about the nature of their relationships with their peers and various employees of the college. When a discrepancy occurs between what students expect the "contract" to involve and what they actually experience, trust weakens and this can influence how they experience college thereafter. Such was the case in this study.

As a group, the students described a disconnection (on some level) between what they

expected to experience and their interpretation of their actual experience. Using the words of one discontented subject, "I thought it was a really good college. I THOUGHT! But, you know that might have changed--that's questionable," her candid response to the question that asked how things were going is representative of a more pervasive gap between subjects' expectations and actual experiences. This subject was not alone in feeling that something did not align with their expectations. Table 18 offers a visual representation of sub-themes that surfaced as they attempted to describe this disconnection between what they initially said were their reasons for enrollment and how they were evaluating that enrollment decision.

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Table 18

Sub-themes Related to an Expectations Gap (Theme 1) by Data Source

Sub-theme	Sample Statement(s)	Student Interview	Student Focus Group	Facilitator & Advisor Focus Group	Field Notes
Affordability: Financial aid process foreign to them	"confusing...stressful" "They're not organized"	X	X	X	X
Affordability: Part-time employment / work study inaccessible	"It's been terrible...you run around"	X	X	X	X
Social engagement lacking	"There's nothing going on here," "trapped," "closed in"	X	X	X	X
Interaction with African American role models limited	"They should have more Black teachers"	X	X	X	X
College-provided support not always available or accessible	"Getting answers is kind of hard here"	X	X	X	X
Residence halls rules and procedures too restrictive	"strict rules and regulations"	X	X	X	X

Affordability: Financial aid process foreign to them. Most describe their financial aid experiences as "confusing" and "stressful." A few were able to tap into the resources of a financial aid officer employed with the site who helped them interpret the process. Most, however, held the site responsible for their financial aid frustrations and referred to the site as "unorganized." They described experiences of being assigned to a different financial aid

officer with each visit; none of which seemed to give them the same answer twice. During each visit, they explained how they were required to provide information for which they had already presented during a previous visit. They also described a communication barrier in terms of understanding financial jargon for which they were unfamiliar, "I can't understand like some of the words…like, what does this mean?"

Some were also surprised to learn (after committing to enrollment) that they could not secure enough money through financial aid grant awards to cover the full cost of their education; they would need supplemental funding through student loans or scholarships. They talked about how the financial aid department instructed them to secure this additional funding on their own; in some cases, a financial aid officer gave them a student loan brochure to get started. The words of one student characterized her general surprise, "I didn't expect to be looking for my own grants…they made it seem like they're going to help me [but]…it's just been like, 'you do the first few steps and we'll just finish it all for you." A first-generation student expressed feeling left alone to identify and gain access to grant monies to offset loan debt,

> I did the math by myself and saw that I would owe money by next quarter…I would end up taking out a loan…I asked the financial officer about helping me look for grants and stuff, and then she said 'we really don't do that. Normally, that's what you're supposed to do…propose the grant to us and we'll go through with it for you.' So, I'm really struggling to get money without getting a loan

Their conversations, in general, suggest a deficit in their pre-enrollment understanding of the financial requirements associated with college attendance, and they appeared to lack basic budgeting skills ("They should teach you life skills…like how to

budget when you're off for college"). Most were first generation students who had no one in their family to turn to for assistance to navigate the financial procedures they found so confusing. Some referred to themselves (and their families) as "poor." To these students, being able to afford college meant being able to establish financial and medical wellness that would make it possible for them to remain enrolled. The gap between their financial aid expectations and their actual experiences suggests a potential barrier to retention that may rest (at least in part) with the institution. One student (with a variety of medical conditions) exhibits the complexity associated with their academic experience hinged to their financial aid difficulties, "I don't have money for medicine...my Medicaid expired." This student earned a 0.90 GPA during the first (fall) quarter and dropped out (due to medically related challenges) in the middle of her second (winter) quarter. She did not return for her third (spring) quarter. During her interview, she stated that her experience was, "not what I expected."

Their conversations depict fear, anxiety and general confusion related to an unfamiliar process (funding their higher education) that they were responsible for initiating without personal guidance. Comments from several students suggest many could relate to the student who said, "Getting the answers is kind of hard here [at this site]." Conversations among those assigned to the intrusive advisor were more positive, though. One participant describes the resourcefulness of the intrusive advisor in terms of helping her navigate this unfamiliar process. She stated, "I just feel like they're not organized, they're not really helping us out. It took me to go to [my intrusive advisor] to figure out everything about my Financial Aid and she got everything situated. She got it broken down to me."

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application process and its

use of financial jargon (often equated with the filing of taxes) was confusing to them and they had no one at in their homes to help them complete the application (U.S. Department of Education: FAFSA, 2009). Many of them did not have the basic documentation to apply for financial aid (e.g. social security number, driver's license, income tax returns, bank statements). Furthermore, their comments suggested they also needed assistance to learn where to go (e.g. to which governmental agency) to attain the documents they needed. The intrusive advisor helped many locate resources in the community to obtain these documents (e.g. "She told me the place to go get a social security card"). A female student attempts to convey her general frustration to apply for financial aid in these words,

> ...now that part was confusing, cause I didn't get it at all, like my adoptive mom had
>
> to...do some stuff...I'm going through some financial stuff right now...That part was
>
> hard. I still don't get it now. I had to go online and request a loan, it was just
>
> confusing...It's like if you take out a loan, you have to owe them back...it was like
>
> confusing...

An older male subject, who had been incarcerated the majority of his high school years, had not met the government filing requirements for Selective Services prior to enrollment with the study site (U.S. Department of Education: FAFSA, 2009). This caused him to experience a delay in the receipt of his financial aid loan refund. He provides a different perspective on the frustration experienced by older students attempting to use the online financial aid process, "...by me being older, I couldn't go online...if you like 25 years old you can go online and do it electronically, make'n it easier. But, with me being older, I just basically had to wait it out...I'm still waitin'." This subject goes on to describe how this frustration would have caused him to leave the study site (drop out) without the intervention of his

intrusive advisor, "Without her, I don't think I would have stuck it out and that's the honest to God's truth."

Affordability: Part-time employment / work study inaccessible. The issue of affordability also encompassed discussions regarding access to part-time employment. Students were particularly disappointed with the lack of jobs available on-campus. Their comments suggested an expectation that plenty of work-study (financial aid) opportunities would be available; this was not their experience, however. Access to part-time employment was a criterion by which they said they would evaluate their enrollment decision. They described a need for on-campus employment because most had inadequate (or no) transportation to obtain or sustain employment off-campus. What they described as their actual experience was a frustrating and cumbersome work-study process that left them feeling as if they received a fruitless "run around" from department to department in search of work-study opportunities.

Social engagement lacking. The students expressed general discontent with the lack of social opportunities on campus and within the surrounding community. This finding was prevalent among those living on- and off-campus with students living in the residence halls describing a near-total disconnection from the community at large. A statement offered by one subject is reflective of this finding, "I don't know nothing! All I know is how to get to the grocery store and back." Some students spoke of their isolation from the surrounding community as being the result of not knowing how to use public transportation in this community (compared to the ease of accessing public transportation in their home towns where they said,"you just stand on any corner and the bus comes by"). Many blamed the institution (the study site) for failing to acquaint them with the surrounding community. I

will elaborate on this topic within the sub-theme related to their desire for a social connection to the institution.

Interaction with African American role models limited. The subjects expected more opportunities to interact with Black members of the site's faculty, "They should have more Black teachers." One or two had Black teachers, but most did not and they were not visible around campus. Most praised their White teachers when describing how much they cared about them and motivated them to learn, but they still wanted to be in the classroom with Black faculty, "I haven't had an African American teacher yet." They also desired interaction with other Blacks as staff members. One subject described her surprise that no one who looked like her was involved in her first tour on campus, "They should at least have somebody Black show you around." Another describes how surprised she was to find out her intrusive advisor was a Black female, "It's a huge difference...I was shocked to see that she was Black. It is very rare to see somebody Black in that position." When the facilitator asked this student why that was important she explained, "you feel like you can identify with them more." Other students' comments affirm this student's response.

Many prefaced their discussions about the racial demographics of the site's staff with statements like, "I'm not trying to be racist, but..." Comments from all subjects ($n = 19$), confirm agreement with the student who said, "I believe [the racial demographics among the employees of the site] do make a difference," and their descriptions suggest agreement with another subject who said, "I won't say it's a racist thing, but it is a race thing, like to identify with a person more." Most were adamant that they would rather withhold important details regarding their struggles than to disclose them to White employees with whom they "wouldn't have been comfortable talking with." They believed the consequences of their

reluctance to talk with a White member of the staff would mean, "You have to walk around like everything is okay when it's really not okay."

College-provided support not always available or accessible. As a sample (regardless of group affiliation), they clearly described an expectation that support would be plentiful, readily available (convenient to access), and a positive experience. They expected "someone" (admissions personnel, financial aid officers, teacher, advisor, counselor, residence life staff, and others) to recognize when they had a need for assistance. They also expected these individuals to *reach out* to provide them with assistance, even if the student did not know he or she needed the help, how to request it, or whom should ask. In other words, they *expected* all personnel employed with the study site to behave proactively to assist them with all their needs—and beyond their academic experience. This was their experience in some (but not all) cases.

In terms of their tutoring experiences, subjects seemed generally satisfied with the quality of the tutoring support they received. With few exceptions, they referred to their tutoring experiences in a positive light. None of the subjects described a reluctance to utilize this free service, but some described barriers when attempting to access the free tutoring support. Those barriers included a maximum number of tutoring hours per course (two hours per week, per course), tutors with varying degrees of ability (knowledge and time) to assist with course or program specific questions, and a lack of course or program-directed tutoring (e.g. tutoring in study groups by course or program).

Most of their frustration regarding a perceived gap in terms of college-provided support had to do with experiences related to finances, the classroom, and advising. I discussed in detail, within a sub-theme preceding this section, students' concerns with their

financial aid experiences. In terms of any gap in their support expectations, as it related to their classroom experiences, their experiences varied. Most had teachers who proactively assisted them (e.g. calling them, making sure they received lecture notes following an absence, and taking time to talk with them outside of class), but some had teachers for whom they depict as ignoring them (e.g. not returning their calls) and making them feel "stupid" in class. Their conversations regarding college-provided support via the academic advising process are of particular interest to this study. I will introduce this topic next, but I will defer some details of this conversation so that I can elaborate on them within the next major theme regarding their desire for supportive relationships with staff and faculty.

Their conversations regarding the support of advisors affirmed previously captured quantitative student satisfaction data (via a Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey) where a broader population of students enrolled in this site described their advising experience unfavorably. Overwhelmingly, in this case study, control group subjects' offer considerable evidence that clearly indicates they do not know who their academic advisor is. The exception to this lack of clarity is among those subjects who were assigned to the intrusive advisor; they knew her well. Subjects in the control group (receiving the standard advising practice of the college) referred to a broad range of employees as their advisor--including financial aid officers with whom they interacted, their admissions "advisor," and counseling "advisors" (who are not assigned to any particular student). A few even referred to their admissions advisors as their *"financial* advisors." One student finally asked the interview facilitator, "Who's my advisor?" I will elaborate on this point of confusion as an element within the next major theme—they desired supportive relationships with faculty and staff.

Residence hall rules and procedures too restrictive. One of the "Top 10" reasons

students said they chose to enroll in this site was the availability of on-campus housing. Some even chose to enroll with this site (rather than a campus closer to their home which is affiliated with this site) because of the importance they placed on access to on-campus housing. Their actual housing experiences, however, commonly refer to dissatisfaction with the "strict" rules of the residence halls. In one focus group session, participants candidly described their experience with discontent. They characterize the housing "rules and regulations" as including invasive security procedures which they perceived to be excessively restrictive and creating a hurdle for them and others. The majority of the subjects (those living in the residence halls) echoed this concern—they felt the policies and procedures in the residence halls (including campus security procedures) were "overkill."

One male focus group participant metaphorically described residence hall security as the "LAPD." He said, "…the experience [is like being] watched over every second…like LAPD…They be trippin' over everything…They question you if you just walkin' down the street, trying to ask you 20 questions." Several students refer to the residence hall rules as working in conflict with their desire to use college as a rite of passage from "home" to independent living and to allow others (e.g. family members) to remain engaged with them (e.g. by coming for a visit). Some equated their residence hall experience to "being in jail," and feeling "closed in" or "trapped."

A few students were of the opinion that living assignments to certain residence halls units reflected segregation by and within a living unit. They felt Black students were being assigned to living units in close proximity to each other—"It's like they separated all the African American people and put them in one house, and they put all the White people in another house…All the White people live on [street name]." Subjects also perceived their

housing assignments falsely assumed Black students preferred living with other Blacks. In other words, within a living unit racial demographics among roommates reflected a lack of diversity. One subject candidly describes this, "I feel like they could have put us with some White people...let us experience something...I didn't want to live with six all Black girls, that's hell if you ask me!" Other subjects expressed agreement with this statement, but not all perceived a lack of racial harmony in the residence halls. Some even mention roommate assignments with students of other ethnic backgrounds (e.g. those living with a White roommate) as harmonious, supportive, and generally positive. The scope of this case study is to report how students described their first year experience, not to investigate the details of subjects' living situations in order to substantiate or deny any claims they made; these are their descriptions.

Commuter students also complained of the strict rules that excluded them from resources targeted at on-campus students. Some of these resources seemed inaccessible to them because of the procedures that limited commuter students' access. One resource is a recreational center within one of the residence hall facilities. The Center provides a variety of services including entertainment activities (e.g. games), an exercise facility, a laundry room, a computer lab, a convenience "store," and a place to meet or just hang out with friends. Commuter students felt they should have full access to this facility, "whenever they want," but the barriers to access made it less appealing so they avoided using the resource all together. These students talk about restricted hours of access for those living off campus and annoying check-in procedures. To them, "It ain't worth it to do all that."

Theme 2: Students Desired Supportive Relationships with Staff and Faculty of the Institution

The students' conversations made it clear that they desired to establish and maintain

supportive relationships with staff and faculty. Tinto (1993) also links the quality of students' interactions with members (other students and employees) of the institution to their reasons for departure. The students in this study describe these relationships as having an influence on their ability to persist toward degree completion. Among the types of relations that they described as having an influence on their first-year experience, they discussed relationships with their academic advisors (standard and intrusive), teachers, other Black employees of the site, Residence Life staff, and the facilitators of the qualitative interview and focus groups sessions for this study. Table 19 outlines these relationships by data source.

Table 19

Sub-themes Related to Relationships (Theme 2) by Data Source

Sub-theme	Sample Statement(s)	Student Interview	Student Focus Group	Facilitator & Advisor Focus Group	Field Notes
Standard advising process vague	"Who's my advisors?"	X	X	X	X
Intrusive advising holistically fulfilling	"I can talk to her about anything"	X	X	X	X
Relationships with teachers valuable	"Like, you want to have a relationship with the faculty"	X	X	X	X
Interactions with Black employees motivating	"I spoke to the dean...she was very encouraging to me...by her being African American"	X	X	X	X
Residence Life staff supportive	"He's always there to help us with everything	X	X		
Relationships formed with interview and focus group facilitators established relationships	"Will you be here, if I need to talk to you again?"	X	X	X	X

Standard advising process vague. Student descriptions of the standard advising

process suggested widespread confusion. With few exceptions, they did not know who their

standard advisor was or if they had one to begin with. One subject's comments represent

general confusion among subjects assigned to a standard advisor, "Who's that anyway? Is

that a person I'm suppose to come talk to or something?" Most recalled a brief connection

with their (actual) academic advisor during the orientation or winter (second) quarter

registration process, but beyond these brief (and hurried) encounters, these subjects'

interactions with their academic advisors were non-existent or too infrequent for them to

describe as an advising relationship.

When the facilitators asked the students who their academic advisor was, those

assigned to the standard advising practice commonly referred to their "admissions advisor."

Some even referred to their admissions advisor as their "financial advisor." When their

admissions advisor did not offer to assist them with post-enrollment matters (things outside

of the scope of recruitment, such as ongoing assistance with financial aid questions or

resolution of a conflict with a teacher), the subjects expressed frustration and confusion.

They described a kind of abandonment that left them feeling these employees (who recruited

them) had left them to navigate these unfamiliar situations without adequate support. They

also felt like their standard advisors were not reaching out to them and because of this they

felt, "people don't finish because they feel like there's nobody there when they have hard

times, and nobody there to talk to." They felt maintaining a connection with a

knowledgeable internal resource a necessary condition for them to persist.

In a few cases, students described their standard advisors as unapproachable and

unhelpful. For example, one subject stated, "My other roommate, she got a mean

advisor...she don't be helping her out but she'll sit there and talk to the White kids for like a

long time." During the quarterly registration process, all advisors of this site gather in a

common place on campus to assist students with the selection of courses for the next quarter.

In multiple cases, students described this setting as "too loud"—creating a distraction--, and

they described their standard advisors as "too busy" to address their questions in that setting.

In other words, they felt rushed and their conversations reduced to the exchange of basic scheduling information.

   Intrusive advising holistically fulfilling. Students accessing advising through the intrusive advisor (by group assignment or an act of will) describe a much different experience compared to those assigned to a standard advisor. These subjects explained that they could "talk to [the intrusive advisor] about anything." They believe "she understands" them and she did not make them "feel dumb." They describe her approach as involving active and intentional outreach. They even go as far as to say, "She'll come find you" because she wanted to "reach out to [them]."

   They appear to have established a relationship with this intrusive advisor formally and informally. Their interactions with her included scheduled and walk-in appointments ("she's never too busy"), "hugs," friendly greetings (calling them by name) in the hallways, and plenty of motivation and kindness. Some said they would have given up (during their first quarter) without access to her, "Without her, I don't think I would have stuck it out." In terms of how they were evaluating their enrollment decision, one student's words seem to represent the opinion of most, "If I didn't have her, probably, I would have wished I'd gone somewhere else."

   Their needs were comprehensive and the intrusive advisor's knowledge of campus, as well as the surrounding community and its resources, met a need for each in a personalized way. One student, who was unfamiliar with the community, did not have a social security card (a FAFSA requirement) and she needed to see a physician. She said, "[the intrusive advisor] told me the place to go, and...where all the doctors are around here...cause, I'm not from here." It was evident among students' descriptions that this was a person for whom

they could "go to her for stuff outside of the school, too." For many, aside from a single

parent back home (typically, their mother), the intrusive advisor was "basically the only

support [they had]—mentally, emotionally, and everything." The statement, made by the

male student who had not filed with Selective Services prior to submitting this FAFSA, is

worth repeating in this context, "Without her, I don't think I would have stuck it out and

that's the honest to God's truth."

Relationships with teachers valuable. Subjects also valued the faculty-student

relationship. They talked about key instructors (calling those teachers by names of those

who routinely instruct in first year courses) who made a positive impression and who helped

them establish a connection with someone early in their academic pursuit. They described

these teachers as affirming their enrollment decision by validating their value to class and by

providing them with support that exceeded their expectations. Students repeatedly

mentioned a certain developmental education English teacher who positively influenced their

persistence. In one student's words, "I love her." The majority of their teachers motivated

them on some level, including one math instructor who told them, "Keep trying...not

everybody catches on as quick." Comments from everyone who described a teacher who

motivated them suggest agreement with one student who said her teacher "doesn't want to

see us fail."

These teachers built a "personal relationship" with each student that let them know

they cared about them, "I know I got people who care about me up here. I can call my

teachers or email them to ask for help on a problem...they give you that attention you

need...take time to stop the class to help a student with a specific question" It seems

noteworthy to mention, these teachers (with whom they developed a relationship) were

predominantly-White, as a group.

Not all of their relationships with faculty were positive. Compared to the teachers whom they described as supporting them, subjects talk about unsupportive teachers as "not caring" about them and how they "blow you off." They felt these teachers "should listen to students more...some people just don't get things [easily]." Their descriptions of these teachers suggest the teachers felt little sense of obligation to student learning, "They got they diploma and they already doing what they want to do, so they're really not going to push you along."

Some also were of the opinion that a few White instructors questioned their motives for enrollment and neglected to build a "relationship" with them based on preconceived notions of them as a group. Consequently, multiple students expressed skepticism of the levels of support they received (compared to White students in the same classes). I reviewed the quantitative findings (by subject) and the students who made these statements did not persist beyond their first quarter (fall). Even though most subjects describe opinions of fair and equitable treatment by their teachers, there were a few cases where students described their teachers as treating them differently from the White students in the class. These subjects described these teachers' perceptions that Black students (enrolled with this site) only attend class sessions until they receive their loan refunds. Federal loan eligibility is conditional on satisfactory academic progress that often factors in student attendance (U.S. Department of Education: Financial Aid, 2009). According to the subjects in this study, these teachers verbally disclosed their perceptions as generally reflective of Black students and this left these subjects (with a desire to persist) feeling like they were not given adequate levels of support to encourage their persistence in those courses. One student describes this

phenomenon,

> That's what one of my teachers was talking about. How it's the 8th week and students
> will start leaving cause their [loan refund] check came. So, I feel like, at first they
> didn't want to talk to me. They're like you don't want to learn…but, I really did…I
> guess they're starting to see it now because they are starting to help me a little bit
> more when I ask questions.

This student participated in her interview approximately two weeks before the end of the fall quarter—during the eighth week of a ten-week quarter. Her GPA at the end of the fall quarter was 0.90 and she did not complete a second term of enrollment. Research has demonstrated that teacher expectations have been found to be influenced by cultural mismatch (whether based on race, socioeconomic status or ethnicity) and this can lead to lowered expectations for disadvantaged students or students from minority racial and ethnic groups (Rogers-Sirin & Sirin, 2009).

In a few cases, their perception of fair treatment transcended the classroom experience to include other employees of the college—including expectations of the academic advising relationship. Regardless of who the advisor was, subjects expected to base (and were basing) their enrollment decision (in part) on the outcome of that advising relationship. In a few cases, students described their standard academic advisors and a handful of employees in some departments as unapproachable and unhelpful. One subject offers insight into this when she states, "My other roommate, she got a mean advisor…she don't be helping her out but she'll sit there and talk to the White kids for like a long time".

Interactions with Black employees motivating. Students' conversations suggested a willingness to build supportive relationships with their teachers and advisor--regardless of

any racial difference between them. They describe, however, something different about their interactions with Black staff and faculty. One very frustrated student talked about how her standard advisor sincerely tried to relate to and support her, but could not. The student was struggling in an entry-level course in the health sciences field and her advisor (who was White) suggested that she "get an apartment" if she lost academic eligibility to remain in the residence halls due to a low GPA. The student tried to explain to the advisor that she had no income to afford an apartment off campus. The (standard) advisor's response to the student was to "go back home" if she could not find a job to pay for the apartment. The student recounts the experience in these words, "Like my regular advisor...I don't feel like she really understands me... we from two different backgrounds...I come from an urban area...gangs and all that stuff...I'm trying to get out of that, not put myself back in that." This student (who was not assigned to the intrusive advisor) openly disclosed her conscious decision to avoid future contact with her standard advisor. Instead, she identified ways to gain access to the intrusive advisor for assistance ("somebody who can relate to me and know my background"). Her attempts were successful and contributed to the crossover condition in this study that ultimately resulted in the merging of the original groups into a new treatment group.

To most of them, having access to Black staff and faculty made their experience feel less threatening. Their perception (as they stated it) was that Black staff members had their best interests in mind. Participants overwhelmingly, and candidly, commented on this shared perspective. Some said they "wouldn't have been comfortable talking with anyone else...you have to walk around like everything is okay when it's really not okay." Others believed that a more racially diverse population of staff and faculty at this site would attract

more students of color, "…they [would] definitely want to come here because they have Black staff."

I was rather surprised that some students described a connection with me (the researcher, a Black woman) as shaping their experience in some positive way. Throughout this process, I attempted to maintain as-needed interaction with subjects; for some, I am their dean and I could not avoid interacting with them, at least periodically. While some do not know me on a personal level (only referring to me as "the other Black lady"), they were able to decipher that I am a Black woman who they also perceive as having their best interest in mind. As additional evidence of this indirect relationship they formed with me by race, one subject said, "When I first signed the consent form, I saw it was a sister trying to get her dissertation, so whatever I got out of it, I was going to go into it." My positional authority in the organization also served as a motivation to some subjects,

I spoke to the dean…she was very encouraging to me, you know, by her being African American…a dean, you know, and an African American..It allows the rest of us to sense that we can do it too…[Blacks in positions of authority] inspires us so that we can become great leaders as well…not only presidents but a dean of a department of a college!

Residence Life staff supportive. Despite widespread discontent with the housing "rules and regulations," many students praised their residence hall assistants (RAs) and residence hall coordinators (RHCs) for their genuine interest in their well-being. They were able to establish healthy and ongoing relationships with their RAs and RHCs who (generally, White) reached out to them in various ways. Subjects talked about how their RAs and RHCs routinely visited them to "check on [them]" and to "see if [they] needed anything." Some

even took time to play board games with them while visiting their housing units. Most RAs, also, made routine visits to invite these students to the various events they organized for (and mostly catered to) the residence halls students. Students' comments suggested these individuals helped them establish essential relationships that connected them with the institution. Their outreach appeared to promote a sense of belonging that contributed positively to their experiences.

Relationships formed through interview and focus group sessions. For several, being able to participate in the focus group and interview sessions filled a social void and helped them establish relationships with the facilitators and each other. In some ways, this was a treatment condition in addition to the intrusive advising. Focus group and interview participants wanted their sessions to continue, "Whatever you guys do, don't stop this [ASPIRE] group," and many participants asked the facilitators, "Are you coming back?" and "Will you be here so I can talk to you again if I need to?" or, they stated, "We gonna' do this again?" Subjects frequently referred to the need to talk to somebody, particularly those with whom they shared a common experience. They wanted the site to organize events like these to bring them together in a formal way; they did not want these gatherings left to chance.

Theme 3: Students Desired a Connection to the Institution That Included Social Engagement and a Connection to the Community

The reader may recall that among the most commonly cited reasons for enrollment, students mentioned an acquaintance with someone else attending (or having attended) the site. This connection (in isolation), however, was not enough. Regardless of housing status (living on campus or commuting), students talked about the lack of social functions that would help them establish a connection to the institution. Within this context, they also described isolation from the local community. Their combined descriptions of these two

sub-themes formed the basis for this theme reflecting their desire to establish a connection with the institution in some meaningful way. Table 20 provides a summary of each sub-theme in relation to the data source.

Table 20

Sub-themes Related to Institutional Connections (Theme 3) by Data Source

Sub-theme	Sample Statement(s)	Student Interview	Student Focus Group	Facilitator & Advisor Focus Group	Field Notes
Lack of student activities, clubs, organizations, and organized sports	"…provide more opportunities for kids to do something— organizations and groups and stuff like that"	X	X	X	X
No ties to surrounding community	"All I know is how to get to the grocery store and back"	X	X	X	X

Lack of student activities, clubs, organizations, and organized sports. Several students discussed the absence of clubs and organizations that would typically bring people of like-interest together on a college campus. Suggestions for activities, clubs and organizations ranged from those with an academic orientation (by program) to those that would bring together participants of the same racial and ethnic background. Among those who lived in the residence halls, they commended the staff's efforts to organized activities that would bring residence hall students together, in a common place. In the opinion of some, however, those activities were not culturally reflective of the things that would appeal to Black students. These Black students suggested activities such as pool or ping-pong

tournaments, plays, talent shows, dance teams, "step," and "active stuff like sports teams." Some also mentioned wanting fraternities and sororities formed on campus. Whether they lived on- or off-campus, students describe the need for "more things where we can all get together...enjoy ourselves," and "things to bring the students together...school functions that everybody can come attend...get to know each other...to socialize...There's nothing going on here. It's just here." You may recall that they said they would evaluate their enrollment decision (in part) on the basis of their social experiences while enrolled at this site.

No ties to surrounding community. Not only were they generally discontent with the lack of social opportunities on campus, they were equally unhappy with their lack of connection with the surrounding (local) community. Students living in the residence halls felt isolated from the community at large. This statement, offered by one subject, is reflective of their general feeling, "I don't know nothing! All I know is how to get to the grocery store and back."

Some students spoke of their isolation from the surrounding community as being the result of not knowing how to use public transportation in this community (compared to the ease of accessing public transportation in their home town where, "You just stand on any corner and the bus comes by." Although the campus is in close proximity to some (but limited) recreation, (e.g. a bowling alley and skating rink), subjects were surprised to learn from one of the facilitators that these opportunities were within two or three miles from the campus; the students were clueless about these venues. The responses suggest that they wanted the site to provide incoming students with a "big ole map" of the city. They also requested that someone familiarize them with the bus routes around town. Most blamed the institution (the study site) for failing to acquaint them with the local resources. In their

opinion, the site (the institution) is responsible for acquainting its students with the resources available within the surrounding community. Their conversations regarding this disconnection with the community suggest that they wanted someone to act on their behalf to anticipate their needs; to remove the barrier proactively.

Theme 4: Students' External Support Networks were Insufficient and Interfering with Their Persistence

Overwhelmingly, the subjects who participated in these qualitative elements of the case study came from single-parent households. When they discussed who made up members of their support network, their "mom" was most often stated. In the majority of cases, the father was not in the home; if he was, he was not an active participant in terms of supporting their academic pursuit. For a few, their fathers were in jail or prison. Most of the subjects talked about relationships (although not always positive ones) with extended family members. When discussing their experiences and available support to encourage their persistence, the following sub-themes (depicted in Table 21) emerged.

Table 21

Sub-themes Related to Insufficient Support Networks (Theme 4) by Data Source

Sub-theme	Sample Statement(s)	Student Interview	Student Focus Group	Facilitator & Advisor Focus Group	Field Notes
Students acting as primary caregiver to younger siblings	"I'm the oldest…hard for me to leave knowing that, to me, my mom is a single parent"	X	X	X	X
Students with little or no external support to validate the academic benefits of their enrollment decision	"I got my [financial aid] reimbursement…my granny thought I was going to pay her car bill so after that she wasn't even going to [bring] me back [to school]"	X	X	X	X

Students acting as primary caregiver to younger siblings. Several subjects cited

personal goals when they described what influenced them to enroll with this site. Sometimes

that motivation included others—siblings—for whom they described themselves as a primary

caretaker along with their mothers. For most, their siblings were living in risky situations—

"in trouble" academically or with the law. Those interviewed were often the older sibling

who helped their single parent (in most cases, their mother) care for the other children in the

home. When they left home to come to school, these subjects experienced the tug of

competing interests—the well-being of those back home and a desire to improve their lives

and extend their possibilities. One subject provides a detailed description of this dilemma,

It was kind of hard for me to leave knowing my mom is a single parent…I was

working with my mom and like whenever [my brothers and sisters] didn't have anything, I was there to give it to them (*subject becomes very tearful*). I think about my brothers and sisters. I think about going back home, but on the other hand, I think 'How you going to live your life...you can't put your future on hold.' Like, my mom calls me with her problems...It's like, 'Mom, I'm sorry but I can't leave school' and she's like, 'Trust me I don't want you to leave school, I just don't have nobody to talk to about my problems, so I call you.

One subject referred to her father as "a ghost"—living in the home but leaving the caretaking to her mother. She explains, "My daddy is not there. Like he stays with us but it's like he's a ghost...I barely see him... my baby brother is doing bad in school cause [my mom] works and my daddy's suppose to be there...he's not even making sure my baby brother's doing his homework." Other subjects echo similar concerns for their siblings' well-being (staying out of trouble, completing their homework, and having their basic needs met). One male subject adds to these findings when he says, "My other brother, he back and forth with Juvenile right now...I'm the oldest." I mentioned that the majority of the subjects interviewed (in interviews and focus groups) lived in a single-parent household with mother as the primary care-taker, and that some of their fathers were incarcerated, and some subjects had been incarcerated also just prior to enrollment. One male participant described how the absence of his father contributed to his dependency on the support of his mother and grandmother, "My dad, he's in jail right now. I rely on them two because basically they support everything I do. So, that's who I always run to--my mom and my grandma when times get rough."

Students with little or no external support to validate the academic benefits of their enrollment decision. For some subjects, members of their families and some of their peers

failed to acknowledge the academic benefits they would gain from college enrollment. For some, they painfully describe how they have become outcasts in their families. For example, this subject states, "My grand daddy told me he was going to be there. He don't want nothing to do with me." Furthermore, some of their family members (and friends) articulated skepticism whether they belonged in college. Most, however, used this doubt as motivation-- to disprove the naysayers, "[I'm] trying to prove them wrong; that I can actually get somewhere."

One male subject experienced a change in his life circumstances when, as a high school athlete, he suffered an injury to his leg and he fathered a child during his senior year of high school. Although he had to place his plans to attend a southern university on hold, he said he was determined not to settle for what others expected of him—to settle into work within a factory setting and never go to college. After working in a factory for one summer, he said, "It just wasn't what I wanted." He spoke of the motivation he gained from this opportunity to prove "people" wrong who doubted whether he could give up the money to further his education, particularly in light of the changes in his situation.

Some family members placed considerable financial pressure on students to use their financial aid loan refunds for the benefit of the family—not for their educational expenses. The words of one subject provides a startling context regarding this kind of dilemma, "I got my reimbursement but I paid for my classes with it. [My grandmother] came to pick me up and thought I was going to pay her car bill...She wasn't going to take me back [to school]." This lack of support provides insight into the benefits that could be gained from strategically placed liaisons throughout the institution to counteract potential negative effects some individuals could have on these first year students.

This concludes findings from conversations with the students. In this next section of the qualitative findings, I share insight gleaned from discussions with the facilitators and the intrusive advisor who also served as participants in this study.

Reflections from the Focus Group with the Facilitators and the Intrusive Advisor

I mentioned in Chapter Three that I modified the research protocol so that I could include a focus group conversation using the intrusive advisor and the facilitator as participants. As they engaged with the students, they were eager to spend time with me processing their experience. I, therefore, decided to capture these conversations as another source of data to inform the findings of this case study. Using an interview protocol specifically designed for the purpose of this additional session (see Appendix J), the facilitators and the advisor offered responses that helped to inform data collected from the students and this conversation revealed deeper meanings beyond what the students could describe.

This case study had an influence on the students, but the study also had an impact on the facilitators and the intrusive advisor. By protocol design, many of the responses they offered reflected the four major themes that emerged from the students' conversations; in other words, I was able to use this conversation with the facilitators and the intrusive advisor along with those of the students to identify the major themes outlined previously in the qualitative section of this chapter. Beyond the major themes, however, a deeper revelation of the experience emerged during this additional focus group session.

When I asked the three to describe what was contributing to the students' persistence (or the lack, therefore), they helped make deeper meaning of the students' attempts to describe the influence of a lack of cultural competence in this predominantly-White setting,

and how vitally important the role of the intrusive advisor was in increasing the students' chances of survival in this setting that was foreign to them. I, therefore, use this section of the qualitative findings to reflect on these distinct elements from that conversation to recount their perceptions of the role of intrusive advising as an effective intervention with these students. I begin by reflecting on their conversation regarding issues of "cultural competence" (Bensimon & Soto, 1997) in predominantly-White settings and how this influences dropout rates.

Issues Involving Cultural Competence in Predominantly-White "Systems"

One of the things that surprised me, when I reviewed the students' transcriptions, and that captured the interest of the facilitators and the intrusive advisor is how often the students projected an external locus of control. In other words, they did not seem to know how to access the help they needed or they seemed reluctant to do so. There were cases were students in the control group clearly had no idea who to turn to with a question or to offer a suggestion, and there were cases where they knew where to go but they did not believe their opinions would matter or make any difference toward a desired outcome. This topic framed a passionate discussion among these three participants regarding the students' lack of "cultural competence" and how this lack was playing out to their disadvantage.

In Chapter Two, the literature describes Black students' feelings of alienation in predominantly-White settings (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Jones, 2001). The literature goes on to describe how Black students enter college with preconceptions regarding their lack of similarity to the majority on campus and their individual "history of conflict" that has framed perceptions of their relevance in predominantly-White settings (Barker, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). Some researchers suggest the responsibility rests on the institution to

reach-out to their minority (non-traditional) students who are not accustomed to advocating for themselves in these predominantly-White settings (Rendon, 1994). Since institutions with low-selectivity (e.g. open enrollment institutions) are among those more likely to attract minority students, they may have more reaching out to do with these students upon enrollment (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1993). This session with the facilitators and the advisor emphasizes the relevance of this literature in the context of this case study.

In this focus group session, they talked extensively about the students' lack of familiarity with this predominantly-White setting. In the opinions of these three participants, without the intrusive advisor (without an advocate) they would be more likely to drop out. They attributed this likelihood of dropping out to the students past experiences working within White "systems" where they have learned not to trust—i.e. experiences in systems that typically deny them access to resources needed for their survival. As one example of this, one participant described the students' reliance on social security and welfare benefits. As students grow up dependent on these systems (some enrolling in college so their families can remain dependent on these systems), they are accustomed to hearing "no" as a response to a request for help and they learn to withhold information because of a fear that someone will use the information they provide to further disadvantage them. Rather than asking for help from these systems, they would rather do without because there is too much at stake when being required to reveal details to evaluate their needs; in other words, they learn not to trust "the system." Furthermore, "the system" is generally a "dominant congruent system" (Barker, 2007, p. 95) where Whites are in charge and have the power to grant or deny access to those resources. These participants perceived that the students in this case study transferred those experiences into this predominantly-White higher education setting and this

resulted in unmet expectations at the study site. The reader should recall from literature discussions in Chapter Two that describe how students come to campus with pre-established beliefs about the nature of the relationship they will have with the institution—a "contract," of sorts—and when a discrepancy is detected in their experiences, trust weakens and this can influence how they experience college thereafter (Rousseau, 1995). The exceptions in this case study were the students who developed a relationship with the intrusive advisor—with a Black female who they could "relate to," who they believed "understood" them, and in whom they could "trust" or "go to for anything." They found an advocate who reached-out to them in this alien setting, and the findings suggest this relationship was vitally important in the institutions efforts to retain them. She taught them "cultural competence" (Bensimon & Soto, 1997)—how to navigate this new setting while drawing on their experiences.

An interesting debate resulted during this conversation about cultural competence. The three debated the idea of under-preparedness for college. For some, the notion of referring to these students as "underprepared" was offensive and shortsighted. While all participants understood these students were selected based on low academic achievement (see Table 1), they debated whether the students were prepared for higher education. In the words of one participant, "there is a difference between being 'ready' and being 'prepared' for college." This participant believed the students were "ready" for college. Being "ready," in this context, meant "ready to learn how to be in college" where they could be taught how to be successful college students. This, again, lead into a recursive discussion of how institutions with open-admissions policies must be willing to teach nontraditional students how to be college students and extend to them the support they need to be successful. There was consensus among them that the institution should not expect the students to do all of the

adjusting in order to adapt to a new setting—the responsibility is a shared one between the

student and the institution. They believed this study (the ASPIRE Project™) was a positive

reflection on the institution's willingness to adapt to its students' needs.

Perceptions Regarding the Role of the Intrusive Advising Intervention

This conversation left no room to question how vitally important (and effective) they

believed the intrusive advising intervention had been with the students in this case study.

Not only had the study demonstrated a willingness, on the part of the institution, to adapt to

its students' needs but it also met a real need among its participants. The students had gained

access to someone (the intrusive advisor) who knew how to navigate the environment, and

she was some with whom they felt a natural connection. She filled a void that would have

otherwise made it easy for them to disengage from the institution. These three were, for this

reason, very concerned by their conversations with members of the control group who were

obviously confused about who their standard advisor was and, in the few cases were they

knew the identity of the standard advisor, some had disappointing interactions with that

advisor. They elaborated on findings from the students' conversations that students where

intentionally avoiding contact with their standard advisor and opting to seek the help of the

intrusive advisor.

An interesting twist to this conversation presented itself when the conversation lead

into a dialogue about knowing how to ask questions and, furthermore, asking the right

questions to produce a desired outcome. They believed the students were so

disadvantaged—because of their past experiences with predominantly-White "systems" and

inadequate family support—that they did not even know what they did not know to ask

(taken from the words of one of these participants, "they don't know what they don't know,"

so how can they ask). These three participants believed the reality of this finding further complicated the standard advising relationship because although the students did not know what questions to ask of their standard advisor (or chose to avoid him or her altogether), they still held that advisor accountable for their needs being met. This finding goes back to earlier discussions about minority students' external locus of control and how it commonly leaves them at a disadvantage in predominantly-White settings (Rendon, 1994; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006).

The intrusive advising intervention gave the students access to someone who did not make any assumptions about their prior knowledge and she proactively responded to their holistic needs. She remained approachable and non-judgmental with them; this helped to solidify rapport between them. Advising these students were her primary responsibility and this was evident from the students' conversations. They did not feel like they were "bothering her" and she was "never too busy" to talk to them about any topic. To some she was "like a mother" while to others she was a "good friend," but to all she was necessary to their overall well-being. The students articulated this and this focus group confirmed the same.

Reflecting on the "Journey"

As the researcher, I never expected this study to captivate the minds and emotions of the intrusive advisor and the facilitators in the way in which they articulated this journey. This was not been a mere project that would start and conclude. To the contrary, this study had shaped them personally and professionally in a profound and everlasting way. In this section, I recount their descriptions of this phenomenon.

From the words of the intrusive advisor. For the intrusive advisor, she described the

experience as "painfully wonderful, horrible, great, awful... all in the same day." Early on in the study, some of the elements left her with a sense of betrayal to those who were randomly placed in the control group after forming an initial connection to her—e.g. those she briefly interacted with during the consent gather stages but who were randomly assigned to the "original" control group. She talked about how, when hired for the job, she did not expect to rely so heavily on her training as a psychology therapist; she said this thinking was flawed and "wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong." To the contrary, she routinely utilized most of those helping skills as their intrusive advisor. These students needed a confidant, a cheerleader, a mentor, an advocate, a gentle disciplinarian, a listening ear, and (some days) just someone to point them in the right direction to obtain the help they needed. She also felt that she spent a lot of time "re-parenting" the students who lacked parental support and positive (and stable) role models.

From the start, she felt drawn to this project like a divine calling on some level. When she left her former employer, she said those who knew her professionally kept asking her about her decision to leave. Her response to this was,

> I wasn't running from, I was running to and that is a very different feeling... It just spoke to my heart and it lined up with my values...I'm thankful for this opportunity...I've seen some stuff happen in my office that has just blown me away and the impact that we are making, 'we' being all of us, are making because of [this study].

From the words of the facilitators. The facilitators describe a similar "calling" and personal connection to this study that was less about them and more about the students in line with the study purpose. Yet, on some level, what they experienced surprised them. From the

words of one,

> You know initially when I was asked...I was so excited...[about] what would be
> happening. [I thought] how hard could it be to sit down with students, you know, for
> a little bit of time... I got to my first interview and I think we went almost the whole
> time...everything just started coming out and it was so much, and you know, I just
> stepped back....Then the next [interview],...I'm thinking to myself, how much you
> can impact a person and not even say anything!...[It has been] very rewarding. It has
> been truly an amazing experience and, for that, I am grateful for the opportunity just
> to be a part of it.

This facilitator also shared the difficulty she experienced trying to bring closure to some of the sessions. The students became so easily attached to them, some with very emotional outpourings during their interview or focus group session. She recalls, "That was tough a couple of times. It was like, oh boy, you just cry with me for an hour...and, this is it!" As a reflection of this challenge on the part of the facilitators and the students, these sessions often ended with requests from the students to have the facilitator return so they could have someone to talk to again. According to the facilitators, the students also felt part of something important, something that could make a difference at the site. One facilitator recalls the words of a student who said, "Wow, I'm a part of something really big...something that's going to impact."

On some level, interacting with the students caused these three participants to reflect on their own lives and, where applicable, the lives of their children. Interacting with the students in this study left them feeling connected to a broader purpose in life. One facilitators' words sums up general feelings among the three,

When you start to deal with some of these people, you realize how fortunate you've

been to have had some of the people in your life to kind of navigate you through this

process... I feel a sense of relief that somebody is acknowledging [the students'

needs] and, you know, that somebody is {site name intentionally omitted}. I want to

say that they're paying attention and that these students know that they're paying

attention; that's a sense of empowerment in itself. I know this is not an easy task for

any one [sic] involved. It, also, reminds me of when I was a student and how I got

through some of this... I was like some of these students in that I didn't know...God

must have had somebody around me all the time, walking me through the process...

You can't go through this and not feel any emotion... If you care, you're going to feel

something, and I feel a lot of love for those people that I've met... I feel a

connection...some similarities...being people of color in this society, experiencing

some of the same challenges--no matter what our academic level is...that we are all

somehow connected; that's what it's saying to me. So, we can't downplay that

through a simple process of which people go and get a piece of paper we call a

degree. You can't downplay the cultural aspect that's involved in this--entangled in

learning... I feel privileged to have participated in this process and I don't want to

call it 'a project', I want to say it's 'a process' because I don't think this is the end of

what were dealing with here.

As I bring closure to this portion of the study, it is evident from the combined sources

of qualitative data that this study was impactful on a number of levels. It was a study of the

effects of an intrusive advising intervention, but what it yielded speaks to the complexity of

students' holistic needs in higher education settings—in the case of this study, at-risk African

American students in a predominantly-White career college setting. This study also demonstrates that higher education practitioners have an equal opportunity to learn from their interactions with these students.

<div align="center">Summary of the Findings</div>

On the surface, this case study produced mixed results. The quantitative data suggest there were retention differences between the groups but a lack of statistical significance (at least on some level) as a product of inadequate sample sizes. The qualitative findings, however, speak with clarity to the importance all participant sources attached to the merits of the intrusive intervention. I propose that the complexity of these combined findings speak to the difficulty of designing, implementing, and assessing the benefits of interventions designed in response to attrition among at-risk populations of students. Taken together, these findings offer deeper understandings than either research approach could have produced in isolation for the other. In this next chapter, I attempt to unravel this combination of findings to present my observations and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

The purpose of this study was to examine the retention effects of an intrusive advising intervention with a group of at-risk, first time, first-year, African American students enrolled in a predominantly-White, career ("proprietary") college in the Midwest. The findings of this mixed methods study affirm its significance in the context of higher education policy related to institutional effectiveness and accountability (Alexander, 2000), documented benefits attached to degree attainment (NCES, 2007), and a response to greater degrees of attrition among less-selective institutions such as career colleges and other non-HBCU minority-serving institutions such as community colleges (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Although retention and advising research pertaining to at-risk (and, in particular minority) students is plentiful, I wanted to study this issue in a new context—the career college setting. This study was successful in that it fulfilled its purpose and it does so by contributing significantly to the body of scholarly knowledge.

The merits of this case study have not been difficult to justify. It uses current research predicting career colleges to be among some of the fastest growing minority-serving institutions in terms of student enrollment (Imagine America Foundation, 2007; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006) and couples those findings with years of retention research revealing considerable achievement gaps among minorities enrolled in predominantly-White higher education settings (Gilliam & Kritsonis, 2006; Lee, 1999). The evidence presented as an outcome of this study is compelling and suggests that higher education researchers and practitioners must continue to identify effective strategies to encourage greater degrees of persistence among at-risk populations (in the context of this case, African American students) enrolling in this growing class of higher education institutions. To this end, I

targeted intrusive advising as an intervention within a case study framework and I used mixed method approaches to collect data in response to the research questions.

The scholarly contribution of this study does not rest on a deficit model—one that projects minorities as the "underdog." To the contrary, what this study reflects is a population of potential achievers capable of thriving in a predominantly-White higher education setting because of the help of adequate support systems—specifically, in the context of this case study, the support of intrusive advising. The relevance of this research suggests transference of the findings to a much broader audience of at-risk students—e.g. rural-Whites and Hispanics—who are often first-generation and low-income students. The potential to extrapolate these findings to other populations in similar academic settings may be of interest in future research.

From this study, I have learned that it is difficult to encourage retention among this population of students; their circumstances are complex and when invited to participate in studies like this, they are reluctant to consent. The latter was a surprising finding that I did not anticipate to the degree with which they abstained from participation (28.9% response rate) and this complicated the quantitative elements of this study. Their reluctance to consent seems, however, worthy of future investigation. As a result of this low response rate, the reader will observe limited quantitative evidence that the intrusive advising intervention contributed to any significant retention gains compared to those who did not receive the treatment. The students' voices—by way of their oral descriptions of their experience—however, tell a much different and convincing story; having access to the intrusive intervention was the only reason (in some cases) that they were able to persist through and beyond the first quarter.

The sections that follow provide a synopsis of my observations from the findings in the context of the research questions and the literature. Before concluding this section, I also offer recommendations in the context of higher education policy and practice, and I present suggestions for future research as an extension of this scholarly contribution to the literature.

Relationship of Findings to the Research Questions and the Literature

A single overarching question guided this case study, "How does intrusive advising influence the retention of African American students who are at risk of attrition?" Within this case, I investigated a response to a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions using mixed methodologies. In the following subsections, I synthesize the findings to the research questions and to the existing body of scholarly work presented in Chapter Two. This next section presents a summation of my observations from the quantitative findings.

Response to the Quantitative Research Questions

The following research questions guided the quantitative elements of this case study:

1. To what extent is there a difference in retention (quarter-to-quarter enrollment, attendance, and GPA) between two groups of African American students – those who receive the institution's standard advising approach, and those who receive an intrusive advising approach?

2. How much (if any) of the variance between the two groups can be explained by intrusive advising?

My hypothesis was that there would be a statistically significant difference between the groups based on one or more independent or predictor variables in relation to group retention. The results of this study disprove my theory--there was no statistically significant

difference between the groups. In the subsections that follow, I share my observations pertaining to each research question.

Observations in response to the first quantitative research question. The first quantitative question seeks a response regarding any statistical retention differences between the treatment (intrusive advising) and control (standard advising) groups. On several measures, I discovered a lack of statistical significance that appears to be (at least in some part) the result of an insufficient sample size; the groups did not have enough subjects to address statistical power.

At the start of the winter (Q2) quarter, when I analyzed preliminary findings using descriptive statistics, my observations suggested that there was something obviously different about the two groups. The descriptive statistics indicated that the treatment group's retention--on all measures (quarter-to-quarter enrollment, attendance, and GPA)--was much better than that of the control group. This was a noteworthy discovery as I reflected on internal research (conducted in 2007 by the site) that found 71% of its students (system-wide) departing after the first quarter (fall) enrollment; I cannot include a citation to this study without compromising the institution's anonymity. In the context of this study, the site retained 71.4% of those in the treatment group at the start of winter (Q2); revealing an inverse relationship to prior findings reported by the study site. In line with intrusive advising effects reported by Heisserer & Parette (2002), descriptive results from this study also reflect treatment group gains in GPA, attendance, and credit hours completed compared to the control group. Looking at fall (Q1) and winter (Q2) descriptive statistics, it seems that more students in the treatment group stayed and that they were doing somewhat better academically than the control group on a number of measures. By the start of the spring (Q3)

quarter, group retention differences became less obvious with subtle retention gains observable only when analyzing those retained at the study site. Beyond an analysis of the descriptive statistics, the statistical significance of any group differences was difficult to detect. I know, however, that most (35.7%) of those in the treatment group left involuntarily; they left due to compulsory academic dismissal.

When I analyzed the results using additional non-parametric and parametric analyses, there was a lack of statistical significance. In the spirit of inquiry, I used different combinations of the data set to analyze the results for any statistically significant group difference; there were none discovered. The results of all analyses converged to suggest a lack of statistical significance, in some part resulting from a lack of statistical power (very small sample sizes) to detect a group influence on quarter-to-quarter retention, GPA, and attendance. Beyond basic evidence in the descriptive statistics (see tables and figures throughout Chapter Four), there were no obvious quantitative differences between those receiving intrusive advising compared to those who received standard advising. This finding conflicts with years of retention research showing significant group differences resulting from intrusive advising interventions in other kinds of higher education settings (Earl, 1987; Heisserer & Parette, 2002). These results, however, may hint to the unique characteristics of this kind of institution that do not allow researchers to merely extrapolate findings from other predominantly-White settings to a this career college setting.

Observations in response to the second quantitative research question. The second quantitative research question investigates how much (if any) group variance could be attributed to intrusive advising. What I discovered was that group differences were statistically undetectable. As I reviewed distribution charts and scatter plot diagrams, the

variability in the data set was undeniable. These visual findings hint to some sort of group difference (e.g. a higher mean GPA and higher mean attendance among those receiving intrusive advising), but (again) the sample sizes were insufficient to quiet the "noise" resulting from variability in the data set. Minimally, I needed more participants.

I used logistic regression to determine how well the variables (group membership, GPA, and attendance) predicted retention to the winter (Q2) and spring (Q3) quarters. I did not find group membership to be a predictor of retention in this study. GPA and attendance, however, were very strong predictors of who returned in winter (Q2) quarter, but only GPA could predict who would continue on to the spring (Q3) quarter. Furthermore, each 10% increase in GPA at the start of winter (Q2) increased spring (Q3) retention odds by more than three times. While some researchers have confirmed GPA as a statistically strong predictor of retention and persistence among college freshmen (Brown & Burkhardt, 1999; DeBerard, Julka, & Spielmans, 2004), others have found that GPA has little to do with Black student retention and more to do with non-cognitive variables (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1982, 1987). These contrasting perspectives, within the context of findings in this study, present an opportunity for future research.

Summary of responses to the quantitative questions. Three observations resonate from the combination of these quantitative findings. First, adequate participation rates were essential in research; in this case, quantitative research. The rate of participation in the quantitative elements of this study was inadequate to handle the variability in the data set (i.e. students' varying degrees of retention, GPA, and attendance). Recruitment efforts were constrained by time (a narrow recruitment timeframe), skepticism among the participants (and some of their guardians) who thought "White people" were trying to invade their

privacy or "label" them negatively, and comprehension challenges—several said they did not read (i.e. disposed of) or could not understand the consent form. Ironically, many who initially declined participation have since requested to participate; but it was too late for them to be included in this study. The field notes I maintained as source of data, reflecting multiple conversations with the intrusive advisor, confirm that these late inquiries occurred several times throughout the duration of this study as students began to appreciate perceived benefit from the intervention.

The second observation is that the intrusive advising intervention, if it is to produce a significant effect size, must shift in focus beyond the first quarter. As the reader witnessed from a review of the qualitative details (reported in Chapter Four), the intrusive advisor's focus on building relationships, support systems, and connections (within and outside of the institution) contributed to a positive effect on persistence during fall (Q1) quarter, and this encouraged many (71.4%) to return the next (Q2) quarter. In other words, there is qualitative evidence to support my belief that the interventions contributed positively to the holistic (which includes the academic) experience among members of the treatment group, even though there is a lack of quantitative evidence to confirm this. It does not appear, however, that the focus of the intervention was adjusted adequately to the students' changing needs over time—their support needs became fundamentally more academic over time as can be seen by the large proportion (35.7%) of those in the treatment group who were academically dismissed from the institution by the third quarter. As I reflect on the results of the logistic regression, providing evidence that GPA and attendance are strong predictors of their retention, I believe the focus of the intrusive intervention must become increasingly focused on students' academic support needs during the second (Q2) and third (Q3) quarters. The

data suggest, however, that the focus of the advising intervention helped during the fall (Q1) quarter to assist the students in adapting to this predominantly-White setting that initially felt alien to them (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Jones, 2001; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). The quantitative results (I do not have qualitative data beyond the first quarter), however, suggest that the focus of the intervention beyond the fall quarter may have been inadequate to help raise their GPAs and rates of attendance (i.e. to create a large enough effect size beyond fall quarter). Combining prior research (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1982, 1987) with the results of this study, researchers may find that some combination of non-cognitive variables (i.e. having a person available to support Black students) is crucial when combined with cognitive initiatives directly targeting increases in academic achievement (i.e. higher GPAs). This study did not include a quantitative analysis of such non-cognitive variables, but the qualitative results of this study offer evidence to suggest that one or more non-cognitive variables were at work and created a positive retention effect. This finding, also, offers a response to the third research question, which combines the two research methods (quantitative and qualitative) to offer recommendations to career colleges interested in increasing retention among students like those identified for this study. I will elaborate on this within a subsequent section of this chapter.

The final observation in response to the quantitative questions is that the descriptive data suggest more (although, not statistically more) in the treatment group were retained to the winter (Q2) quarter, but by the start of the spring (Q3) an equal number of students remained in both groups ($n = 19$). The descriptive data show a greater proportion of the treatment group left after the second (Q2) quarter, whereas the magnitude of the control group's departure occurred *prior* to the start of the second (Q2) quarter. In other words, and

in the scope of previous research conducted by this site, a larger proportion of the control group departed by the end of the first (Q1) quarter. When I observed this, my initial thought was that the intervention may have lead to the retention of more of the site's lowest-performing students (all subjects were academically underprepared students on some level). Eventually, by spring (Q3) quarter, the same number of students departed, but group departure just happened at different points in time. This discovery is fundamental to a complex argument reflected in the literature regarding who should have access to higher education—some have asked the question whether higher education should be for everyone (Altbach, Berdahl & Gumport, 2005).

I argue in favor of "access for all" those who have a desire to benefit from higher education, but I petition open admissions institutions of higher education to accompany such access with adequate support in order to generate real opportunity among them (Tinto, 2008). For a tuition driven institution such as a career college, retaining students longer offers an opportunity to generate additional revenue and it reduces time to recoup return on the investment (investments in recruitment and academic support). Increased retention for any kind of institution of higher education also provides some degree of evidence of institutional accountability (and ability) to increase rates of retention among those at-risk of attrition. On the opposite side of this argument, some might question whether those that departed were destined for departure and whether the intervention only delayed the inevitable—an inability to retain them. In the context of who should have access to higher education, this raises an ethnical argument among scholars (Altbach, Berdahl & Gumport, 2005; Cheng & Levin, 1995; Kinser, 2006; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006).

Response to the Qualitative Research Questions

Watson and Terrell (2002) tell researchers that the emphasis of qualitative research should be on "processes and meaning" and, that it does not "examine, or measure, in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency" (p. 26). Additionally, the authors describe the focus of qualitative research on the participant's view of reality, constructed socially in the context of various situational constraints that shape the inquiry process. To this end, the following set of questions guided the qualitative elements of this study:

1. Why did these students (in the intrusive advising and standard advising groups) enroll with this institution? How do they describe their goals as they relate to their reasons for enrolling?

2. How do at-risk, first-year African American students (in the intrusive advising and standard advising groups) describe their experiences since enrolling with this college?

    a. How do they describe their experiences with academic advisors, peers, instructors, and other employees and services of the college?

    b. How do they describe any influence from external relationships (e.g. with family, friends, and community resources) in light of their goal(s) and other reasons for enrolling with this college? What level of importance do they attach to these influences in the context of their goals and reasons for enrollment?

3. What does the combination of the quantitative and the qualitative findings suggest as recommended approaches to a career college seeking to increase academic persistence and retention among their first-year, at-risk African American students?

The subsections that follow provide an overview of my observations in response to each research question. I discuss, however, my response to the last (the third) qualitative research question within the policy recommendations of this chapter.

Observations in response to the first qualitative research question. The first qualitative question asks why the students enrolled in the study site, in the context of their enrollment goals. I found that they enrolled for several reasons (see Table 16). In this section, however, I present my observations regarding the three most common enrollment reasons—a career/job focused institution, close proximity to home, and the institutions reputation for providing a lot of free support.

The most common reason for their enrollment pertained to the site's focus on careers and jobs as an outcome of enrollment. The site has a long history of post-graduate job placement that hovers around 98% on an annual basis, and programs offered by the site reduce general education requirements to the basics required to comply with program and institutional accreditation standards. There are no liberal arts degrees offered by this career college; all programs focus on job placement and hands-on skills attained in a concise format. The irony of this enrollment objective is represented by both groups' dismal rate of retention by spring (Q3)—45.2%. Over half of them did not make it to the third quarter--regardless of group affiliation—and this interferes with goal attainment among those who failed to persist.

The site's "close" proximity to home was also important to them. The furthest distance required a 3 ½-hour drive. Being close to home was critical for different reasons, but commonly it allowed students to fulfill a sense of obligation to help their single parents—mainly, their mothers—raise their siblings. In addition to helping their families, the close

proximity also seemed to fulfill an important need for family support. Kuh et al. (2007) found social adjustment to college to be primarily a function of family support for racially and ethnically diverse students, whereas peer support (e.g. college friendships) had a greater influence among White students. The commuter nature of this college site is conducive to the kind of student who prefers to remain transient—between school and home throughout the quarter. Most living in the residence halls return home by Thursday each week. This reality does appear to compete with qualitative suggestions from the students who asked for more activities on campus that would help them establish a connection to the site.

The students also based their enrollment decision on the site's reputation of providing a lot of free support. This was the third most common reason for their enrollment and this study extended that available support by providing one group with access to an intrusive advisor. They seem keenly aware that they would need a lot of academic help in order to persist toward graduation, but it was obvious that they did not always know how to tap the resources that would facilitate this; at least, this was the case among those in the control group receiving the standard advising services of the site.

Academic advising is a free support service provided by the site, yet most members of the control group could not identify their academic advisor and those that could, generally, did not speak well of their encounters with their advisors. If they knew who their standard advisor was, their interactions with this individual were often limited to a brief encounter in a mass setting to register for the next quarter. The experiences of the student who openly shared how her advisor could not understand her (because of their cultural differences) provide evidence for the merits of strengthening cross-cultural mentoring relationships in higher education settings (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). I suspected the race of the advisor

(compared to that of the advisee) would be a factor on some level, but the students' voices suggest it was more of an issue than I anticipated. Having a Black advisor (the intrusive advisor) made them feel like they had a relationship with someone who could understand them, relate to their challenges, and who had their best interest in mind. The reality of their experiences speak to an ongoing opportunity to invest in cultural diversity initiatives to reduce (ideally, to eliminate) barriers interfering with cross-cultural communications in the context of advising relationships, and it provides evidence of the merits of a culturally diverse workforce.

What does all of this mean in terms of their enrollment goals? Their goals (referenced in Table 17) included topics that align with their reasons for enrollment, but ones that did not always play out in their favor in terms of their actual experience. Whereas many sought a job or a career as an outcome of their enrollment, more than half of them did not continue to the spring (Q3) quarter. Departure among the majority who did not persist was related to academic challenges; a few transferred to another college, or did not return because of financial aid violations or health-related challenges. For the majority, they abandoned their enrollment goals in the context of this career college experience, at least, for now.

Observations in response to the second qualitative question. The next question sought to describe how things were going for the students in the context of relationships with peers and employees of the site, and in the context of their external relationships. They experienced barriers in both settings. When Zafft et al. (2006) described reasons why most adults did not enroll in higher education, the researchers cited inadequate academic preparation, financial constraints, competing obligations, personal and psychological barriers,

and fear of navigating a new and complex institutional environment. This study confirms the same were ongoing barriers to subjects' enrollment and retention throughout this study.

On campus, the students describe their experiences as generally good, but they encountered barriers when they tried to access answers to their questions. When I designed this study, one of the things I wanted to know was why some students (participating in a Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey™ prior to the time of this study) felt they got the "run around" when trying to access resources at this site, and I wanted to know why they expressed general dissatisfaction within the academic advising relationship. Interestingly, a few students in this study used those same words ("run around") to describe their experiences related to financial aid procedures, accessing part-time employment, knowing where to go for help, sharing an idea or suggestion, and other related experiences. When students, "don't know what they don't know" (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006, p. 125), it becomes even more important for institutions to proactively anticipate and support them to encourage their persistence.

The qualitative findings in this study provide overwhelming evidence to suggest that those receiving intrusive advising found solace in the advising relationship and this contributed positively to their retention as a group. Several perceived her support to be so vital to their first year experience that they intentionally crossed over from the control group to receive this intervention. They perceived the intrusive advisor to be someone equipped, available, and willing to respond to their holistic experiences. With each interaction, they increasingly tapped into the resources she could provide in response to their varying (and complex) needs.

From a focus group interview with the facilitators and the intrusive advisor, as well as a review of the field notes I maintained during the study, it is obvious that their interactions with the intrusive advisor more commonly centered around personal (non-academic) issues— family, health, community resources, male-female relationships, and other personal matters. According to the intrusive advisor, 80% of more of the advising relationship had nothing to do with their academic experience during fall quarter—they needed someone to talk to or to point them in the right direction. This suggests that the magnitude of any negative effect resulting from such non-academic issues, and competing with their persistence, were minimized as a result of the quality, cohesiveness, and stability of the intrusive advising relationship. Their descriptions of this proactive and holistic relationship reveal a heightened sense of hopefulness that everything would work out favorably because they had her (the intrusive advisor) there to provide direction and support whenever they needed her; this discovery aligns with the recommendations of Thomas and Minto (2004).

Having an adequate level of support from the advisor was important, because for most of them life off-campus was less than ideal. They lacked basic resources (e.g. transportation and housing during academic breaks), and there was dysfunction within their families (immediate and extended families). Their mothers were their primary caretakers, and many of their fathers were incarcerated; some of the students had been incarcerated, also. They were very concerned about leaving home for fear that things would turn for the worse with their siblings, for whom they provided supplemental care before leaving for college.

The student who metaphorically described her father as "ghost"— present in the home but detached from his children's lives—offers compelling evidence about their complex lives. During her interview, overtaken by grief, she described what it was like to

learn about her younger brother's academic and social struggles because of her father's

passive role in the family. Her words may cause researchers to wonder just how pervasive

this kind of dysfunction is among this population of students. Although no other student

referred to his or her father as a "ghost," most of their fathers had "ghost-like" traits--absent

from the home and absent from their lives. Some had extended family--a grandparent, aunt

or an uncle--who attempted to provide additional support, but even in those relationships

produced more stress than support at times. The challenge of focusing on one's academic

performance with so many other competing events in one's life is conceivable, but this

challenge speaks to the need for institutions of higher education to increase the level of

proactive support available to non-traditional students who need to be validated in these

predominantly-White settings (Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2002; Rendon, 1994).

In summary, the quantitative and qualitative findings respond adequately to the

study's purpose, the significance of the study, and to the research questions. In this next

section, I offer policy recommendations to the site and in the broader context of higher

education policy.

<center>Recommendations for Policy</center>

The findings that emerged from this study attest to my agreement with Vincent Tinto

(2008) who purports, "Access without support is not opportunity" (p. 10). Tinto (2008)

frames the context of this statement by also stating,

> Again, some students are able to locate that knowledge, often through informal
>
> networks of peers, while others, in particular low-income, first generation college
>
> students, are not. It is for this reason that student support services and other programs
>
> targeted at at-risk students, such as mentoring, are particularly important to the

success of low-income and first-generation college students for whom knowledge of the ins and outs of college is not a given. It is through the affiliations that are formed in those places of support that important knowledge is gained about the ways to navigate the often-foreign landscape of university life. (pp. 3-4)

It is within this context that I present the following policy recommendations as an outcome of this case study, and in response to the final research question, "What does the combination of the quantitative and the qualitative findings suggest as recommended approaches to a career college seeking to increase academic persistence and retention among their first-year, at-risk African American students?"

Policy Recommendations for the Study Site

The targeted audience delineates my recommendations in this section. That audience is the study site that so graciously allowed me to carry out this study in this setting. It, however, is conceivable that many of these site-based recommendations could be transferable to a broader audience with an interest in expanding access to and increase retention among at-risk populations. With this as a context, I present the following recommendations: (a) continue to provide intrusive advising to at-risk populations of students, (b) continue collecting data using student academic advising questionnaires, (c) clarify "advisor" job titles and job descriptions, (d) simplify financial aid processes, (e) continue to invest in student affairs initiatives that are seamlessly integrated within the students' overall academic experience, (f) solicit student feedback regarding residence life experiences, (g) connect students with the community, and (h) invest in cross-cultural mentor training and a diverse workforce.

Continue to provide intrusive advising to at-risk populations of students. Even

though the sample size was too small to detect a statistical significance as an outcome of the quantitative elements of this study, the percentage of those retained (a) from fall (Q1) to winter (Q2) and (b) the percentage of those retained for three consecutive quarters was higher. In addition, the students' voices describing the merit of the intrusive advising intervention leave no room to doubt the design of the intervention facilitated retention beyond their first (fall) quarter. By committing to this study, this site demonstrated a commitment to continue helping at-risk students persist toward graduation. This proactive and intentional intervention was vitally important to students, so much so that those who were initially denied the intervention found a way to access it. Drawing from the words of one student with access to intrusive advising, most believed the intervention was "very inspiring." I encourage this career college, however, to customize the focus of the intervention from one quarter to the next based on each students' needs. While the intrusive advisor initially focused the intervention toward helping students adapt to their new setting, results from the logistic regression suggest the focus of the intrusive advising intervention should become more academically oriented over time. Researchers recommend peer study groups to encourage retention (Tinto, 1993) and this would not be difficult to integrate within this setting. These study groups could be coordinated with the support of the intrusive advisor and other members of the site's learning support team. As the students become more proficient in their understanding of the ins and outs of college life, they can assist in supporting their peers. Since we know from the selection criteria used for this study that they have severe academic deficits, the site should charge the intrusive advisor (with the support of tutors) to develop an extensive and intentional academic support regimen as an extension of the classroom setting, and these students should be required to participate in this

intervention.

Continue collecting data using student academic advising questionnaires. When it launched the intrusive advising initiative during fall 2008, the study site made a decision to collect survey data from all students (those new and returning for enrollment). That dataset contains demographic data and other valuable information about students' support network, and this information has the potential to assist with intrusive advising. It is my recommendation that this site continue to collect such data (survey new and re-entry students) and make this information accessible to the intrusive advisor. This source of information gives the advisor formative information about her advisees that she can use to customize the intrusive advising intervention from the first point of contact with the student. If analyzed for patterns, it could also be used to design or expand group support opportunities such as a support group for students with a parent who is or has been incarcerated, a workshop designed to teach basic budgeting skills to low-income, first-generation college students, or a health information session for students with medical challenges. The questionnaire also asks students about their employment plans while enrolled. The site could also use this source of data internally to project and allocate work-study dollars, and to collaborate with community employers who may be looking for full- or part-time help. The possibilities are endless and this speaks to the merit of this recommendation.

Clarify "advisor" job titles and job descriptions. This site offers a variety of free support services to its students. As a matter of practice, however, the study site is encouraged to evaluate and make changes to the job titles and descriptions of those carrying the title of "advisor." With so many different roles referred to as "advisor" (academic, admissions, counseling, financial aid, and student club "advisors"), this is confusing and

contributing to expectations gaps among students. This, also, appears to contribute to feelings of receiving a "run around" as they seek to identify who can assist them. In addition to clarifying advisor job titles, the site should also examine their job descriptions to account for adequate degrees of support for these students and to delineate advisors by job function. During this job description analysis, I also propose to the site that it re-evaluate the "referral only" nature of its counseling services to assess whether this level of service provides adequate support to increase students' retention opportunities. Once the site is prepared to implement these changes, it should utilize effective communication channels to relay these changes to its student body—prospective, incoming, and currently enrolled students.

Simplify financial aid processes. The students' voices make it obvious that issues related to financial aid are presenting a serious barrier to their retention. As first-generation college-goers, they had to navigate the FAFSA process without adequate support. Not only is this condition likely to contribute to simple mistakes and unnecessary delays, but it also leads to frustrations and feeling of receiving a "run around" in order to resolve financial aid issues. As an extension of the site's financial aid services, it is encouraged to provide budgeting and financial management workshops to incoming students. These workshops could be integrated within the orientation sessions and replicated in an online format—e.g. as in a webcast via links from the study site's website.

It seems that the students could also benefit from consistent access to information essential to their financial well-being. The students also felt like they got a "run around" on occasions when they had to consult with different financial aid staff over a series of visits to that department. According to them, the information they received was not always consistent, accurate, timely, or presented in a way that allowed them to adequately respond to

their financial situations. I, therefore, recommend that the site explore expanded use of its student tracking (records) database to record data pertaining to each student visit. It may also help if the site continues its professional development efforts to increase the likelihood that students will receive consistent information from each visit to the department—regardless of who provides the assistance. Furthermore, information about students' financial situation should be readily available to anyone with an ability to respond to their financial inquiry— this includes an appropriate level of access granted to the intrusive advisor to answer basic questions like, "What is the status of my loan application?" or "Has the department received the forms mailed?"

This recommendation also includes granting students access to readily available information pertaining to work-study job opportunities on campus. I would encourage the site to invest in a work-study database that is a link available from the financial aid and job opportunity pages of its website; this aligns with its career-oriented mission. A designated person from each department of this college should be responsible for providing the financial aid department with work-study job posting information, and this website link should include searchable criteria and features that allow students (and employees) to identify easily information regarding work-study opportunities on campus; intrusive advisors could use this information in support of their students. The site should also automate the work-study application process via its website. The combination of these financially related recommendations may help to reduce the "run around" feeling students experience when searching for help.

Continue to invest in student affairs initiatives that are seamlessly integrated within the students' overall academic experience. The students in this study spoke highly of the

efforts of the residence life staff employed by the study site. At this institution, the Department of Residence Life carries a considerable burden of the student affairs efforts in support of its mission to "support the students' academic efforts through the creation of an atmosphere conducive to the balanced growth of their emotional and social well-being" (I intentionally omitted the citation to encourage anonymity). Given the holistic nature of intrusive advising, this department's mission aligns with the fundamental philosophy of the intervention. An opportunity, therefore, exists, to increase the integration of these Residence Life efforts within the students' broader academic experience. When carrying out this study, data from my field notes reveal communication gaps between the Residence Life and Academic departments that, if closed, could provide more seamless support and opportunities for students and a more efficient use of resources. One example of this, but one that showed improvement as the study progressed, was the lack of access to timely information reflecting Residence Life's proactive efforts to intervene with students at-risk of attrition; information was not being shared with the intrusive advisor earlier in the project. There also appears to be a number of opportunities where, if given ample time for planning, a Residence Life event could be integrated as a classroom learning experience that would be inclusive if commuter students (e.g. diversity initiatives in response to poverty or hate crimes that have direct application of Human Service majors). With more seamless integration of efforts that span these departments, the site moves closer to a model that not only provides access but opportunities for student success.

Solicit student feedback regarding residence life experiences. Although students praised members of the residence life staff, they were generally surprised by the "strict" rules of the residence halls. While some communicated their understanding of the *intended*

purpose for the rules, most believed the rules went overboard and created barriers that

created dissatisfaction among them; this may be a universal complaint shared with other

institutions providing residence housing. Nevertheless, my recommendation is to survey first

year students regarding the expectation gaps related to their housing expectations, and use

this data to (a) modify the rules (where appropriate) or (b) communicate the importance and

impact of the rules sooner. With on-campus housing such an important element in their

college selection decision, this recommendation should be given due consideration by the

site.

Connect students with the community. The students in this study communicated a

serious deficit in terms of knowledge of the surrounding community—where the resources

are, how to get to them, and who to know in the community. With such limited resources

(money, medical insurance coverage and transportation, to name a few), they found it

difficult to obtain off-campus services. I cannot confirm (with any accuracy) to what degree

the site has pre-established partnerships with service providers throughout the community but

I can confirm that it has a relationship via its local Chamber of Commerce. This relationship

offers the site centralized access to a host of resources that can influence its students in a

positive way. Among the possibilities, the site is encouraged to work with its local Chamber

to put together an "About our Community" care package containing information that could

be given to new students at orientation or as they check into the residence halls. I will

elaborate on additional details regarding this recommendation (and related one) in the context

of a broader policy recommendation that I will discuss below.

Invest in cross-cultural mentor training and a diverse workforce. It is obvious from

the findings that these Black students experienced expectations gaps in their attempts to build

relationships with some White faculty and staff employed at this site. I offer two recommendations in response to this discovery—invest in cross-cultural mentoring initiatives and take the necessary steps to recruit, hire and retain a diverse workforce employed by the site. This site could offer cross-cultural mentoring opportunities in a professional development format. It has a formal faculty development program that could be easily adapted to include topics focused on cross-cultural mentoring in the context of the student-teacher relationship. Beyond this readily available format, staff in most departments have regular meetings (weekly, monthly, and quarterly). These formats may be conducive to training segments that increase the cultural competence among the site's staff. Where internal expertise is lacking, the site is encouraged to invite professional trainers with expertise in cross-cultural mentoring relationships.

As it pertains to diversifying its workforce, I acknowledge any organization's challenge to recruit, hire, and retain a diverse workforce; this task has been difficult for me, at times. Despite these challenges, this is not an impossible task but one that is critical to pursue strategically. The site is encouraged to explore this recommendation with its leadership team. This last recommendation concludes my list of recommendations specific to the study site. Next, I present a broader impact recommendation to higher education policy makers interested in increasing retention possibilities among at-risk students.

Policy Recommendation for Higher Education Policy Makers

Researchers acknowledge the merits of intrusive interventions *within* higher education settings, but have we considered the potential benefits that could accompany transference of this strategy beyond this setting to include partnerships between institutions of higher education and local, state, and federal government in support of at-risk students? If

the objective of the intrusive intervention is to respond to students' holistic needs, would we not expand the context of this strategy beyond the college and university walls? The students' conversations caused me to ponder these questions and search for ways in which institutions of higher education could align strategically with local, state, and federal agencies using innovative and proactive methods to tightly integrate and deliver services via intrusive support (if you will) to at-risk students. What I propose is a low-cost, high impact solution that could pioneer intrusive interventions within a broader context related to first year experiences among at-risk students.

I presented one example of this earlier when I recommended that this site explore ways to use its partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce to provide resources to its incoming students. Access to such integrated services (those that transcend the boundaries of education and service sectors in isolation), appears to be an untapped opportunity to help equalize the first year experience among at-risk students in comparison to their traditional White counterparts. The students in this study were, may I say candidly, "clueless" to the level of importance attached to essential services that would grant them access to birth records, medical assistance, social security, mental and human services, and transportation resources to name a few. From their conversations, it is recognizable that they had no one in their families to whom they could go to facilitate this acquisition of knowledge. Furthermore, this lack of access to these resources was creating retention barriers; e.g. to attain financial aid without the proper documentation or medical attention to address a mental health condition. The harsh reality of this matter is that these were resources should have been within their reach, but they were not; they either lacked understanding of their importance or had no idea how to acquire these resources. My recommendation is that

institutions of higher education establish ongoing relationships with key contacts throughout government and service sectors in order to build collaborative partnerships that encourage persistence among at-risk first year students.

One way to accomplish this is by pooling community resources in the form of "care packages" upon arrival (as I mentioned earlier). Institutions could also connect their students with these services in a "community fair" forum, via community resource pages integrated within the institution's website, and via a centralized information resource function within the college or university—filling a role similar to that of a "concierge" in a hotel. On a routine basis, contacts from local, state, and federal agencies would make themselves available to students on campus. On the campus (not in their decentralized locations), they would extend their services to the students in a distributed (and "intrusive") format that does not wait for students to find them off campus.

The vitality and sustainability of such a collaborative partnership will be contingent on the level of institutional and agency commitment. The fate of such a collaborative and "intrusive" partnership should not be left to chance alone, on the contrary, it should become an essential extension of the institution's support services and assigned to someone who will accept responsibility for its success.

Even though some institutions of higher education have bought into an "access for all" (open admissions) philosophy, if they do not intentionally and strategically establish these partnerships beyond the campus walls they may only facilitate the perpetuation of the Black-student versus White-student achievement gaps researchers have witnesses for more than 50 years (NAACP, 2005). President Barack Obama has communicated his commitment to expanded access to higher education (Dervarics, 2009; Organizing for America, 2009). It

is, however, my belief that if we do not accompany access with integrated, intentional, and collaborative support across the various sectors of our economy, that access will not produce sustainable "opportunity" gains among at-risk students and this phenomenon will impede our progress as a nation.

This single policy recommendation is comprehensive. For this reason, an institution of higher education may need to use a phased approach toward its full adoption. When considering such an approach toward the full adoption of this recommendation, the most important element is to establish (or expand) access to local, state, and federal support agencies in a way that brings services to students. Each institution will need to evaluate the needs of its students and assist them proactively by placing those resources within their reach; this could be as simple as having representatives on campus during new student and parent orientation sessions, or during the first weeks of students' first quarter.

This single policy recommendation concludes this section of the chapter. In the next section, I suggest recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this section, I offer several recommendations to expand the body of knowledge beyond the scope of this study. While some of these recommendations apply specifically to the study site (as a continuation of this study), most can be translated beyond the scope of this site to an audience interested in expanding access to and improving retention of at-risk populations. If given the opportunity to conduct additional research on this topic, there seems to be several topics worthy of inquiry.

If there is one "big question" that seems of interest it is a question that appears to contrast results from years of retention research involving Black students. The logistic

regression results in this study suggest that a tremendous opportunity exists to increase student retention by raising Black student GPAs and improving their rates of attendance. This finding contradicts prior research by Tracey and Sedlacek (1982, 1987) which found non-cognitive variables to the only strong predictors of Black student retention. In their study involving 208 Black and 1,475 White entering freshmen at a predominantly-White eastern state university, the researchers examined the relationship between seven non-cognitive variables and more traditional definitions of academic ability, including Statistical Aptitude (SAT) test scores, first semester GPA, and persistence up to five semesters post-enrollment in higher education. They found that academic ability was related to first semester GPA but first semester GPA did not predict persistence among Black students. The only thing that could predict their persistence were the non-cognitive variables which included having the support of others. While this particular non-cognitive variable is supported by the qualitative results of this study, this study suggests GPA acts as a strong predictor of retention among the subjects in my study.

The primary research question of interest as an outcome of this study is, therefore, "What accounts for the variance observed between this study and the results described by Tracey and Sedlacek (1982, 1987)?" Independent variables of interest could include (among others) the type of institution (i.e. a predominantly-White career college compared to a predominantly-White public institution), the type of academic term (semesters or quarters), and the point at which the Non-cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) is administered—pre-term versus in-term. Given the expectations gap described by the students participating in my study, there is convincing evidence that suggests what they expected to experience differed from what they actually experienced post-enrollment. Tracey and Sedlacek (1982, 1987)

administered the NCQ prior to the start of the participants' first semester. In their study, the researchers compared Black with White students; I compared two groups of Black students. The criterion sample used in my study also focused on students requiring developmental (remedial) courses. The effects of these kinds of group differences on the results could also be examined when trying to answer this new research question. I also acknowledge the significantly smaller sample size involved in my study compared to that of Tracey and Sedlacek. Nevertheless, I found the results of the logistic regression to be statistically significant and GPA to be a strong predictor of quarter-to-quarter retention among the Black students who participated in this study. What accounts for such a difference between the two studies seems worthy of inquiry.

In addition to this broader question, the following are also topics worthy of exploration:

1. As an extension of the broader question described earlier, I recommend that future research focus on the effects of an adaptive intrusive advising intervention—one that increases the academic focus of the intervention over time to determine how much of an effect can be realized by doing so. An analysis of this adaptive approach could also be studied using the Noncognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) developed by Sedlacek & Brooks (1976).

2. Repeat this study (in this kind of setting) using an adequate sample size to address concerns with statistical power. The quantitative elements of this study could also be accomplished as a secondary data analysis of student records matching the selection criteria outlined in Table 1. This modification could be accomplished as a post hoc analysis of three quarters' retention results (quarter-to-quarter

enrollment, GPA, and attendance) between two groups (one receiving intrusive advising and the other receiving the standard advising approach).

3. Along the same lines, I struggled to find literature that offered a response to reasons why the students were initially apprehensive to consent to participation in this study; they were skeptical. Yet, when I consulted with other researchers who studied similar student populations, they could relate to this observation of apprehension. What was different, in the context of this study, was the question of whether the term "intrusive advising" created a deterrent, feeding their suspicions by using a term many find "offensive." When presenting this work to a group of distinguished scholars, I was encouraged to develop a new model of advising—one I propose referring to as "adaptive" or "additive" advising--which is more reflective of the intervention designed for the purpose of this study and reflected in my list of recommendations. This topic of skepticism in the context of advising terminology and other factors (psychological, social, or cultural), therefore, seems worthy of additional inquiry to learn why students who are among those most in need of help may be among those least likely to accept the help when it is offered to them.

4. Analyze those retained (in both groups) in spring (Q3) to potentially identify unique traits that may account for why they stayed while others departed without a degree in hand. In other words, analyze reasons for their retention. Of particular interest, examine retention within groups—e.g. looking at those in the treatment group to understand why some stayed while others left.

5. A researcher could also replicate this study using a different population of at-risk

students—such as low-income Whites—enrolled at career colleges. The results of such a new study could be compared to the results presented within the findings of this one.

6. The qualitative findings provide compelling evidence of students' positive perceptions of the intrusive advising intervention. Although they talk, to some degree, about the ways they used this kind of advising relationship, this additional level of detail was not tracked within the scope of this study. It, therefore, would be interesting to design a study that tracks the kinds of interactions they have with the intrusive advisor as a means of refining the intervention. Such a study might reveal patterns in terms of students' needs and (possibly) provide insight into the times throughout their first year in which certain kinds of needs are more prevalent.

7. Several students spoke highly of their instructors' ability to validate their enrollment decision. These instructors seemed to make learning fun and non-threatening, and they used techniques that engaged these students on a personal level. This is a point of interest and a recommendation for a future study—to learn how teachers serve as "validation agents" with at-risk students and what influence this has on student persistence separate from an intrusive advising intervention. This topic may seems particularly intriguing given the dominant adjunct-faculty model adopted by most career colleges and controversial discussions in the literature regarding the quality of student learning at institutions committed to this kind of faculty model.

8. Analyze the data for any influence from the site's residence hall initiative that

evicts students maintaining low GPAs. Within the timeframe of this study, the results of that initiative were not available to me and, therefore, I could not factor for this potentially confounding condition within the analysis of these findings.

9. Redesign the study to include follow-up interviews or focus groups beyond the first quarter. While it was invaluable to document their descriptions of their first year experience early in their academic pursuit (in the fall), in order to effectively customize the intrusive intervention over time it would have been helpful to discover how their experiences evolved (from one quarter to the next) in the context of their reasons for enrollment and their goals.

10. Conduct additional research using career colleges as a study site. With the expected increase of minority students choosing to attend this type of institution of higher learning, and given over 50 years of research demonstrating an ongoing retention gap when comparing White and Black student completion rates, new research questions related to minority student retention at these schools seems worthy of exploration.

11. Conduct research in a setting other than the researcher's place of employment. It is complicated to carryout research studies in "your own backyard" (Creswell, 1998, p. 114). I attest to this conclusion, and speak of the challenges I faced in Appendix L. Although ideal in terms of access and cost reduction, the "negatives outweigh the positives" (p. 114).

Conclusions

One thing seems obvious from this study--it is difficult to increase retention among at-risk populations of students enrolled in this kind of higher education setting, but this is not an impossible task. Given a student population like the one identified for this study that has chosen to enroll in a college like this one that has an intrusive advising intervention, the reader can expect to receive similar results to those presented in this study in the absence of adaptations presented as recommendations in this chapter.

The overarching question for this case study was, "How does intrusive advising influence the retention of African American students who are at risk of attrition?" The intricacies of my response to this question can be found with the details of this study but, in summary, such an intrusive advising can increase retention among this population of students but the statistical significance of such an increase cannot be confirmed without an adequate sample size.

This study is important not only to the site providing the setting for this study, but the findings and recommendations seem to have relevance to other institutions of higher education attempting to serve a similar student population. The study also is relevant in the context of higher education policy. In summary, if we are to carry out our institutional missions, demonstrate institutional effectiveness, and facilitate gains in training a globally competitive workforce, we cannot become "weary in well doing" (Biblegateway.com, 2009) regardless of the complexity of the task.

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APPENDIX A

Study Invitation Letter

[Insert date]

[Insert subject's address]

Dear [insert subject's first name]:

My name is DeAnna Burt and I am writing to invite you to participate in a pilot project that has been designed to study the first year experience among a group of African American students enrolling with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} this fall. I am a graduate student with Western Michigan University, but I am also an administrator employed with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. Rest assured that {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} is aware that I have made contact with you and the College has given me permission to invite you to participate in this project, called *"Project ASPIRE."*

Please take a moment to review the enclosed consent form that tells you more about this project and why you have been selected to participate in this project. ***If you agree to participate in the project, I ask that you*** <u>***sign and return the consent form by [insert deadline to receive mailed response from participant]***</u>. For your convenience, I have enclosed an envelope with prepaid postage that has been self-addressed to me. Just place the form inside of this envelope and drop it in a mailbox. You may also bring it to {name of site omitted} if you choose to do so. Please allow enough time (4-5 business days) for me to receive your response by [*insert deadline date*].

If you have questions about any aspects of this project or my reasons for communicating with you, you may contact me or persons listed within the enclosed consent form. The phone number that I have listed within the consent form is my phone number at {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} and I invite you to contact me with any questions that you may have. I hope that you will consider participating in this important campus initiative this fall.

Sincerely,

[insert signature]

DeAnna R. Burt
{job title omitted}, {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}
Doctoral Candidate, Western Michigan University

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Project Title: <u>African American Student Persistence: A Study of the Effects of an Intrusive Advising</u>
<u>Intervention at a Career College</u>

Principal (WMU Student) Investigator: <u>DeAnna Burt, Academics, {phone number omitted} or</u>
<u>{phone number omitted}</u>
Co-Investigator: <u>Dr. Andrea Beach, Western Michigan University, {phone number omitted}</u>

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted through {name of site omitted} (and, if applicable—any other cooperating institution). The College requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, the expected duration or frequency of your participation, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form. You are being sent an extra copy of this form to keep. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the College. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

This is an invitation to participate in DeAnna Burt's dissertation project which has been designed to study the first year experience among African American associate-degree-seeking students enrolled with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. More specifically, this project (called *Project ASPIRE*) seeks to study and understand what influences students' persistence (degree completion) during their first two academic terms of enrollment with this college and what role does academic advising play in terms of encouraging students to remain in college until their degree is completed.

This study will involve approximately 150 first-year, first time, African American students who are pursuing associate degrees with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. Based on your demographic profile and academic history, you are being invited to serve as one of the participants in Project ASPIRE. Your name was selected from a list of all incoming students to {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} this fall. I am an employee of {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} and have the College's permission to invite you to participate in this study. As a participant in Project ASPIRE, you will continue to have access to the standard advising services provided to all registered students of {name of site omitted} and you might also be assigned to a first-year academic advisor who will remain in contact with you throughout your first year. The decision to assign a student to a first year advisor will be determined randomly for the purpose of this project. By agreeing to participate in this study, you will be giving me permission to monitor your academic progress throughout your first two academic terms of enrollment with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. In other words, you will be allowing me to review your attendance, grade point average, and quarter-to-quarter enrollment patterns for two academic terms—fall and winter quarters—and to compare your academic progress to other students who are also participating in this project.

In addition, you could also be invited to participate in a one-on-one interview or a small focus group session with other students who have also agreed to participate in this project. Interview or focus group participants will also be determined randomly from all of the students who volunteer to participate in one or more aspects of this project. Approximately 16 students will be invited to a casual (informal) one-on-one interview conversation about what it's like to be a first-year, first time student with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} and another 24 students will be invited to participate in one of two focus group sessions. The interview conversations and the focus group sessions will be scheduled on the campus of {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} and will take place during your first quarter of enrollment—during the fall. The focus group sessions have been designed to give you the opportunity to talk with other African American students about what it's like to be a first-year, first time student with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. Information gathered during the interview and the focus group sessions will remain confidential and used by me—the researcher—to help {name of site omitted} and other schools like it to better understand the experiences of first year African American students.

As in all research, there may be some unforeseen risk to the participants. As the researcher, I assure you that I will do my best to minimize any risk associated with your participation. Although you will not receive compensation for your involvement in this study, the project seeks to enhance first-year students' overall academic experience over time. Your unpaid participation is purely voluntary and you can choose to stop participating in any aspect of this project at any time, without prejudice or penalty. Furthermore, during the interview or focus group sessions, you can refuse to answer any question or to participate, and you have the right to leave the session if you do not want to continue participating. *Please realize that you can allow me to monitor your academic progress as part of Project ASPIRE without agreeing to participate in the interview or focus group session, but you cannot participate in the interview or focus group if you do not consent to participating in Project ASPIRE.*

All the information collected for the purpose of this study will remain confidential. Your personal information (e.g. your name, contact information, social security number, grade point average) will not appear within any published documents. The interview will be audio typed and the focus group sessions will be video and audio taped to make sure student comments are documented accurately. To protect you and the other focus group participants, everyone participating in the focus groups will be required to sign a separate consent form that describes what their participation will involve. That consent form will also include an agreement not to repeat things stated during the focus group with persons who were not in attendance. Once the data has been collected and transcribed accurately, I will destroy all video and audio tapes. They belong to me and are *not* the property of {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. I will maintain copies of the transcribed documents for three years in a secure location and will destroy them thereafter.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me, DeAnna Burt, {phone number omitted} or {phone number omitted}, {email address omitted} or Dr. Andrea Beach at Western Michigan University, {email address omitted}, ({phone number omitted}). You may also contact the Chair of the {name of site omitted} Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through {site IRB contact information omitted} if questions or problems arise during the course of the study. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board {phone number omitted} or the Vice President for Research ({phone number omitted}) of Western Michigan University if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

My signature below indicates that I have read and/or have had explained to me the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate in the following elements of this project:

Mark the box next to each component of this study for which you agree to participate:

☐ I am giving the researcher permission to monitor my first-year academic progress as a participant in *Project ASPIRE*

☐ I am giving the researcher permission to have someone contact me so that I can participate in a one-on-one interview conversation this fall as part of *Project ASPIRE*

☐ I am giving the researcher permission to have someone contact me so that I can participate in a focus group session with other first-year students this fall as part of *Project ASPIRE*

_____   _____
Participant's Name (*please print your name clearly*)   Date

_____
Participant's Signature

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Consent Form

Project Title: African American Student Persistence: A Study of the Effects of an Intrusive Advising
                 Intervention at a Career College

Principal (WMU Student) Investigator: DeAnna Burt, Academics, {phone number omitted} or
{phone number omitted}
Co-Investigator: Dr. Andrea Beach, Western Michigan University, {phone number omitted}

You are being invited to participate in DeAnna Burt's dissertation research study designed to
examine the first year experience among African American associate-degree-seeking students
enrolled with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. More specifically, this project
(called Project ASPIRE) seeks to study and understand what influences students' persistence
(degree completion) during their first two academic terms of enrollment with this college and
what role does academic advising play in terms of encouraging students to remain in college until
their degree is completed. {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} has authorized me to
conduct this study and the College fully supports all aspects of this project. It will take
approximately 90 minutes to participate in a focus group session with other first year students.
This session will be held on the campus of {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}.

The focus group sessions will be video and audio taped to make sure student comments are
documented accurately. To protect you and the other focus group participants, everyone
participating in the focus group session will be required to sign this consent form that
describes what their participation entails, and to state their agreement not to repeat things
stated during the focus group with persons who were not in attendance.

During the session, you will also be asked to wear an encoded name tag during the focus
group session and you will be referred to by that code (not your name) when the group's
responses are typed (transcribed from the tapes into text).   I am interested in what the group
has to say about its first-year experiences and this will not require me to identify you
personally. The data will be encoded and rearranged into categories of information that are
similar (or different) from what other interviewees have said. The written results of the research
may include some direct quotations from things that you say, but your identity will remain
confidential and not tied to any statements that you share during the session.

All the information collected from you will remain confidential. That means your name or other
identifying features will not be used in any analysis or in any reporting of the research. Data will
be reported as a group of responses—meaning, it will be reported along with what other
participants said in response to the same questions. All transcripts of this interview will be
retained for at least three years in a locked file, with only encoded identifying marks, in the
principal investigator's office. Only the co-principal investigator (i.e., I) will have access to the
file. After three years the transcripts will be destroyed.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may elect not to participate at any time, to
not answer certain questions, or to request your data not be included in the analysis, without

prejudice or penalty. During the focus group session, you can also choose to discontinue participating at any point.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me, DeAnna Burt, {phone number omitted} or {phone number omitted}, {email address omitted} or Dr. Andrea Beach at Western Michigan University, {email address omitted}, ({phone number omitted}). You may also contact the Chair of the {name of site omitted} Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through {site IRB contact information omitted} if questions or problems arise during the course of the study. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board {phone number omitted} or the Vice President for Research ({phone number omitted}) of Western Michigan University if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read or had explained to you, or both, the purpose and requirements of the study, and that you agree to participate.

_____   _____

Participant's Name (*please print your name clearly*)   Date

_____

Participant's Signature

APPENDIX D

Personal Interview Consent Form

Project Title: African American Student Persistence: A Study of the Effects of an Intrusive Advising
Intervention at a Career College

Principal (WMU Student) Investigator: DeAnna Burt, Academics, {phone number omitted} or
{phone number omitted}
Co-Investigator: Dr. Andrea Beach, Western Michigan University, {phone number omitted}

You are being invited to participate in DeAnna Burt's dissertation research study designed to
examine the first year experience among African American associate-degree-seeking students
enrolled with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. More specifically, this project
(called Project ASPIRE) seeks to study and understand what influences students' persistence
(degree completion) during their first two academic terms of enrollment with this college, and
what role does academic advising play in terms of encouraging students to remain in college until
their degree is completed. {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} has authorized me to
conduct this study and the College fully supports all aspects of this project. It will take
approximately 90 minutes to complete the interview and you will be able to complete it in a
single day.

This interview will be audio taped and the script will be transcribed from tape into text. The data
will be encoded and rearranged into categories of information that are similar (or different) from
what other interviewees have said. The written results of the research may include some direct
quotations from things that you say, but your identity will remain confidential and not tied to any
statements that you share during the interview.

All the information collected from you will remain confidential. That means your name or other
identifying features will not be used in any analysis or in any reporting of the research. Data will
be reported as a group of responses—meaning, it will be reported along with what other
interviewees said in response to the same questions. All transcripts of this interview will be
retained for at least three years in a locked file, with only encoded identifying marks, in the
principal investigator's care. Only the principal investigator will have access to the file. After
three years the transcripts will be destroyed.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may elect not to participate at any time, to
not answer certain questions, or to request your data not be included in the analysis, without
prejudice or penalty.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me, DeAnna Burt,
{phone number omitted} or {phone number omitted}, {email address omitted} or Dr. Andrea
Beach at Western Michigan University, {email address omitted}, ({phone number omitted}).
You may also contact the Chair of the {name of site omitted} Human Subjects Institutional
Review Board through {site IRB contact information omitted} if questions or problems arise
during the course of the study. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional
Review Board {phone number omitted} or the Vice President for Research ({phone number
omitted}) of Western Michigan University if questions or problems arise during the course of

the study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read or had explained to you, or both, the purpose and requirements of the study, and that you agree to participate.

_____   _____

Participant's Name (*please print your name clearly*)   Date

_____

Participant's Signature

APPENDIX E

Personal Interview Protocol

Principal Investigator: DeAnna Burt

Session (*Check one*):	**Date of the interview:** _____
☐ Intrusively Advised	**Start time of the session:** _____
☐ Non-intrusively Advised	**End time of the session:** _____
	Participant Identifier (Code): _____

OPENING STATEMENT

On behalf of DeAnna Burt, the researcher for this project, I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview conversation. My name is [*state your name*] and I will serve as the facilitator of our session today. During the next 90 minutes, I will invite you to respond to a set of questions that have been developed by Ms. Burt to guide our discussion. She is hoping to learn more about the first-year academic experiences among African American students and how colleges like this one can learn from your conversation as they try to help you persist toward the completion of your degree program. There are no *wrong* answers so please feel free to respond to each question based on your own experiences. Your voice counts.

As the facilitator and timekeeper, I will present the questions one by one and I will give you adequate time to offer a response to each question. If there is something that I do not understand from your response, I may ask additional questions to make sure that Ms. Burt and I understand what you have shared with me today. I will try to balance the amount of time that we have together in a way that gives you enough time to answer all of the questions. Please keep these aspects of my role in mind so that I do not leave you feeling "cut short" should I request that we move on to the next question.

As a reminder (from the consent form that you have signed), today's session will be audio recorded. This is being done so that your response can be reviewed and documented accurately. Everything you share during our conversation will be treated confidentially. Your identity will not be revealed to anyone outside of this session nor documented within any written documents shared with the College. You are being assigned a unique code that will conceal your personal identity from anyone other than me. Nothing that you say today will be used to intentionally place you at risk. As with any research, there is always some element of risk but rest assured that Ms. Burt is ethically bound to protect your overall best interest to the best of her ability. She anticipates that what you share with me today will be used to help this College and others like it to better serve students like you, so please feel free to express your opinions in your own way. As a reminder, you will not be forced to respond to a question and you have the right to leave this session if you prefer not to continue on with the interview.

Do you have any questions that I can answer before we begin with our first question?
[*Take questions and respond within your ability and make notes of anything the researcher should follow up on.*]

QUESTIONS

Note to Facilitator: Use space provided below each question to document anything that requires additional clarification that would not be detectable by the audio recording (e.g. non-verbal expressions, body language, temperature in the room, or external distractions) or to make your own notes (e.g. a reminder to ask a participant for clarification).

1. Why did you decide to enroll with this college this fall? What goal(s) did you have in mind when you decided to come here?

2. How will you know that your decision to enroll here was a good decision?

3. What has your experience been like so far? (Use probes where needed to encourage student to describe experiences with his or her advisor—who is the student's advisor?--, other employees or departments of the college, peers, faculty, and others, as well as to describe ease/difficulty of access to college's resources)

4. What is life like outside of the college? What kind of support is there for you to rely on? (Use probes to encourage student to converse about support networks or hindrances to goal attainment)

5. Is there anything else you would like to share that is related to your first-year experience with this college that might be beneficial to this study?

(Reassure the participant of confidentiality and "thank" them for participating)

Facilitated by: _____   Signature: _____
                 Print Name
Date: _____

APPENDIX F

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Principal Investigator: DeAnna Burt

Session (*Check one*):   **Date of the interview:** _____
☐ Intrusively Advised Group   **Start time of the session:** _____
☐ Non-intrusively Advised Group   **End time of the session:** _____
                                          Participant Identifier (Code): _____

OPENING STATEMENT

On behalf of DeAnna Burt, the researcher for this project, I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group session. My name is [*state your name*] and I will serve as the facilitator of our session today. During the next 90 minutes, I will invite you to respond to a set of questions that have been developed by Ms. Burt to guide our discussion. She is hoping to learn more about the first-year academic experiences among African American students and how colleges like this one can learn from your conversations as they try to help you persist toward the completion of your degree program. There are no *wrong* answers so please feel free to respond to each question based on your own experiences—even if your views are different from those expressed by other participants in the room today; it' okay to respectfully disagree. Your voice counts and your responses will be taken as seriously as anyone else's.

As the facilitator and timekeeper, I will present the questions one by one and I will allow adequate time for the group to offer a response to each question. It is very important that the views of all participants are expressed during our session. For this reason, I will try to balance the amount of feedback that each participant shares and I will attempt to invite each person into our group's conversation about each topic-- including participants who seem reluctant to share their thoughts. Please keep these aspects of my role in mind so that I do not leave anyone feeling "cut short" or "left out" of our dialogue.

As a reminder (from the consent form that you have signed), today's session will be video and audio taped. This is being done so that each person's responses can be documented accurately. Everything you share in this focus group session will be treated confidentially and we ask that you treat one another's responses confidentially, as well. Your identities will not be revealed to anyone outside of this session nor documented within any written documents shared with the College. This is why we have asked you to wear encoded identification badges during this session. Nothing that you say today will be used by the researcher to intentionally place you at risk. As with any research, there is always some element of risk but rest assured that the researcher is ethically bound to protect your overall best interest to the best of her ability. She anticipates that what you share with us today will be used to help this College and others like it to better serve students like you, so please feel free to express your

opinions in your own way. As a reminder, you will not be forced to respond to a question and you have the right to leave the session if you prefer not to continue on with us.

Do you have any questions that I can answer before we begin with our first question? [*Take questions and respond within your ability and make notes of anything the researcher should follow up on.*]

QUESTIONS

Note to Facilitator: Use space provided below each question to document anything that requires additional clarification that would not be detectable by the video or audio recordings (e.g. non-verbal expressions, temperature in the room, or external distractions) or to make your own notes (e.g. a reminder to ask a participant for clarification).

1. Why did you decide to enroll with this college this fall? What goal(s) did you have in mind when you decided to come here?

2. How will you know that your decision to enroll here was a good decision?

3. What has your experience been like so far? (Use probes where needed to encourage students to describe experiences with their advisor—who are their advisors?--, other employees or departments of the college, peers, faculty, and others, as well as to describe ease/difficulty of access to college's resources)

4. What is life like outside of the college? What kind of support is there for you to rely on? (Use probes to encourage students to converse about support networks or hindrances to goal attainment)

5. Is there anything else you would like to share that is related to your first-year experience with this college that might be beneficial to this study?

(Reassure the participant of confidentiality and "thank" them for participating)

Facilitated by: _____   Signature: _____
                  Print Name⸱
Date: _____

APPENDIX G

Intrusive Advisor Job Posting (with modifications)

POSITION: Minority Student First Year Advisor

MINIMUM EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS:

- Bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university in business, counseling, education, human service or related field required
- Commitment to work in support of a generally at-risk population of African American students, including a commitment to personal and professional development in support of the students' success required
- Proficient computer, computational and analytical skills required
- Familiarity with community agencies preferred
- Excellent written, oral and non-verbal communication skills required
- Ability to accurately document and collect data, and to follow all tasks through to completion required
- Ability to empathize, motivate and inspire students to create and pursue their goals required
- Willingness to travel required

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- First-year advisor to a group of generally at-risk African American students who have volunteered to participate in a pilot research project called "ASPIRE"
- Accountable for the evidence of increased persistence and academic success among cohort students by using the "intrusive" model of advising to proactively assist the students toward degree completion
- Serve as the liaison between pre-assigned first year students and the various departments of the College
- Work independently to initiate, investigate, and complete all assigned tasks that promote students' success and persistence
- Attend various campus and System-level meetings
- Other duties as assigned

WORK SCHEDULE: 40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year; some evening and weekend hours will be required

APPENDIX H

Phone Invitation Script

Principal Investigator: DeAnna Burt, [department], {phone number omitted} or {phone number omitted}

Hello, [*participant's name*],

My name is [*state your name*] and I am contacting you on behalf of DeAnna Burt who contacted you by mail just before you started your first term with {name of site omitted} this fall. She invited you to participate in Project ASPIRE—a research study designed to examine the first year experience among African American associate-degree-seeking students enrolled with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. This project has been authorized and is fully supported by {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. As a current participant in Project ASPIRE, you, also, have the option to volunteer your participation in the interview and focus group aspects of the project.

In the consent form that you signed to participate in *Project ASPIRE*, you mentioned that you were interested in having someone contact you regarding participation in an interview or a focus group session. That is the purpose of my call today. Both of these sessions will take about 90 minutes of your time and will be held on the campus of {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. Your participation in the interview or focus group is voluntary and you will still be allowed to participate in Project ASPIRE even if you decide not to participate in an interview or a focus group. These interviews and focus groups sessions will be scheduled during the next 4-6 weeks. If you volunteer to participate in an interview, the person facilitating the interview will contact you by phone to arrange an appointment that fits within your schedule. If you decide to participate in a focus group, you will receive a follow up call or letter from me to confirm the date, time, and location of the focus group session. You can volunteer

to participate in both—the interview and the focus group—but you will be randomly selected to participate in only one of these sessions from a list of all volunteers. Can you tell me whether you are willing to participate in an interview or focus group as part of this project?

[*If response is "No," –student is no longer interested--state the following:*] I understand, [*student's name*]. You are no longer interested in participating in this aspect of the project. Please be aware that you are still considered an important part of Project ASPIRE, even though you would rather not participate in an interview or a focus group. I want to thank you for your time and consideration, [*student's name*]. If you have questions regarding my call or you would like more information about the interview or focus group sessions before making a final decision, you can reach DeAnna Burt at ({phone number omitted}) or by emailing her at {email address omitted}.

[*If response is "Yes,"—interested in participating in an interview or focus group-- state the following:*] Okay, [*student's name*], I want to thank you for your willingness to participate in these other aspects of Project ASPIRE. Please tell me whether you are willing to participate in a <u>one-on-one</u> **interview** with a facilitator that will ask you a series of questions that DeAnna Burt has developed regarding your experiences during your first term with {name of site omitted}?

[*If response is "No," state the following:*] Okay, I will make a note that you do not want to participate in an interview. [Skip "*Yes*" response script and move on to next paragraph]

[*If response is "Yes," state the following:*] Okay, I will make a note that you are willing to participate in an interview sometime during the next 4-6 weeks. As I mentioned earlier, someone will be contacting you by phone to schedule a time for that interview.

Please tell me whether you are willing to participate in a **focus group session** with other students participating in Project ASPIRE?

[*If response is "No," state the following:*] Okay, I will make a note that you do not want to participate in a focus group session. [Skip "*Yes*" response script and move on to next paragraph]

[*If response is "Yes," state the following:*] Okay, I will make a note that you are willing to participate in a focus group session sometime during the next 4-6 weeks.

Before I conclude our call, I want to thank you for your time and for being a part of Project ASPIRE this fall. If you have any questions regarding my call today or would like more information about the interview or focus group sessions, please contact DeAnna Burt by phone at {phone number omitted} or {phone number omitted}, or by email to {email address omitted}. Have a nice [*day, afternoon, or evening, as appropriate*].

APPENDIX I

Advisor and Facilitator Focus Group Consent Form

Project Title: <u>African American Student Retention: A Study of the Effects of an Intrusive Advising</u>
<u>Intervention at a Career College</u>

Principal (WMU Student) Investigator: <u>DeAnna Burt, Academics, {phone number omitted} or</u>
<u>{phone number omitted}</u>
Co-Investigator: <u>Dr. Andrea Beach, Western Michigan University, {phone number omitted}</u>

You are being invited to participate in DeAnna Burt's dissertation research study designed to examine the first year experience among African American associate-degree-seeking students enrolled with {name of site omitted} of {location omitted}. More specifically, this project (called Project ASPIRE) seeks to study and understand what influences students' retention during their first two academic terms of enrollment with this college and what role does academic advising play in terms of encouraging students to remain in college until their degrees are completed. {name of site omitted} of {location omitted} has authorized me to conduct this study and the College fully supports all aspects of this project. It will take approximately 90 minutes to participate in a focus group session. You are being invited because of your role as an advisor, interviewer, or focus group facilitator for this project. This focus group session will be held off campus (i.e. not on the campus of {name of site omitted}) in a public location that is agreeable to all participants.

The focus group sessions will be audio taped to make sure your comments are documented accurately. To protect you and the other participants, everyone participating in the focus group session will be required to sign this consent form describing what their participation entails, and stating their agreement not to repeat things stated during the focus group with persons who were not in attendance.

Your identity will not be concealed from other participants during the session. I will, however, use an encoded name (e.g. not your given name) for the purpose of documenting findings from this conversation. Once transcribed from audio to text, the data will be rearranged into categories of information that are similar (or different) from what other participants have stated. The written results of the research may include some direct quotations from things that you say, but your identity will remain confidential and not tied to any statements that you share during the session.

All the information collected from you will remain confidential. That means your name or other identifying features will not be used in any analysis or in any reporting of the research. Data will be reported as a group response to the questions—meaning, it will be reported along with what other participants said in response to the same questions. All transcripts from this interview will be retained for at least three years in a secure location in the possession of the co-principal investigator. These transcripts will utilize encoded references to your identify and only the co-principal investigator will have access to the file. After three years the transcripts will be destroyed.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may elect not to participate at any time, to not answer certain questions, or to request your data not be included in the analysis, without

prejudice or penalty. During the focus group session, you can also choose to discontinue participating at any point.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me, DeAnna Burt, {phone number omitted} or {phone number omitted}, {email address omitted} or Dr. Andrea Beach at Western Michigan University, {email address omitted}, ({phone number omitted}). You may also contact the Chair of the {name of site omitted} Human Subjects Institutional Review Board through {site IRB contact information omitted} if questions or problems arise during the course of the study. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board {phone number omitted} or the Vice President for Research ({phone number omitted}) of Western Michigan University if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read or had explained to you, or both, the purpose and requirements of the study, and that you agree to participate.

_____   _____
Participant's Name (*please _print_ your name clearly*)   Date

_____
Participant's Signature

APPENDIX J

Advisor and Facilitator Focus Group Interview Protocol

African American student retention: A study of the effects of an intrusive advising intervention at a career college
Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Principal Investigator: DeAnna R. Burt (Student)
Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrea Beach
Date of the interview: _____
Start time of the session: _____
End time of the session: _____

QUESTIONS

1. In general, how would you describe students' reasons for enrolling with {name of site omitted}? What goals do they have in mind in relation to their reasons for enrollment with {site name omitted} this fall?

2. As you reflect on your interactions with students, how would you describe their experience thus far? What's getting in the way? What's helping them persist?

3. In general, how did students describe what life is like for them on campus? Off campus? What kind of support is there for them in each setting?

4. What role could {name of site omitted} play toward strengthening its support network for students such as these?

5. In terms of advising services, how did students describe their interactions with their advisors? Did you notice any differences between the experiences of students who had access to intrusive advising compared to those who accessed advising through the standard services of the college? If so, what seemed different? If not, what seemed to make their experiences so similar?

6. From your respective roles with this project, how would you describe what this experience has been like for you?

7. Is there anything else that you'd like to share with me, as it relates to this project?

(Reassure the participant of confidentiality and "thank" them for participating)

Facilitated by: _____   _____
                    Printed Name   Signature

APPENDIX K

First-Year Advisor Training

The first day (Day One) of training included an overview of the research describing the intrusive model of advising and why it intrusive advising had been chosen as the intervention. In addition to this overview, representatives from each academic division (compare a "division" to "The College of..." or the "Department of...") offered a 20 to 30 minute overview of the programs associated with their division. The first day of training, also, included a demonstration of the student tracking system that would be used to track advising interactions with students; some elements of the software (developed in-house) were still under development. The day concluded with the first part (of a two part) overview of the Admissions Department and the institutions marketing strategies.

Day Two of the training started with the completion of a presentation made by a top-level administrator within the Admissions Department. The admissions and marketing elements for the training comprised a total of eight hours of the one-week training plan. Day two also explored topics related to the classification of students, learning support services, career exploration resources, and other electronic resources (e.g. various databases and information sources via the site's website) that would be useful to a FYA.

The third day of training, focused primarily on procedures and forms that the advisors would need to become familiar with; such as those for dropping or adding a class, or changing a major. Day Three also provided the FYA with an overview of the role of general education and a pre-start seminar required of all incoming (non-transfer) students. This seminar concentrates on study skills, time management, and other essential skills to transition successfully into the college environment. Sometime during Day Three, the FYA

participated in a presentation from the Office of the Registrar who (among other things) talked about the handling of non-traditional transfer credit.

Day Four of this five-day training was devoted to the Financial Aid department. Among other topics discussed, the FYA learned about various financial aid requirements and the application process, and work-study eligibility. Within the context of financial aid requirements, the FYA learned about the kinds of situation that would result in a student's loss of financial aid eligibility—which include failure to maintain a certain percentage of attendance within the first weeks of the academic term or failure to complete successfully courses he or she is registered for. They also learned about the use of a form of "debit card" that is used to distribute student financial aid loan refunds and the steps students must take (within a certain timeframe) to activate the card.

The final day of training (Day Five), was devoted to representatives from the Bookstore, Business Office, and Career Services. Of the six hours of training that day, the FYA spent three hours with representatives from career (employment) services.

APPENDIX L

My Story: Reflections Regarding Dual-role Research in One's Own Backyard

I am writing this appendix with multiple purposes in mind. First, my dissertation chair (who is also my doctoral program advisor) required this of me; she called it, "a required assignment." Some part of me wonders whether she required the inclusion of this appendix to avoid hearing me repeatedly say, "I need to find a way to get my personal experiences in writing." Regardless of her reason, for me, this very small portion of this study facilitates "closure" through the practice of *bracketing* (Creswell, 1998) my personal experiences prior to an interpretation of the qualitative findings. I believe my dissertation chair--a White, middle-aged female who has become my mentor, my friend and now my colleague--would agree that this is a story worth sharing with other researchers who (like me) may shoulder the benefits and challenges of what I refer to as, "dual-role research in one's own backyard."

This term encapsulates the second purpose for including this special appendix—to describe the "balancing act" that is required of a researcher who must concurrently wear her "administrative hat" throughout all phases of a research study while allowing the natural "ebbs and flows" of the research process to arise. This is no easy task to balance.

Throughout this process, I carried a profound sense of responsibility for the outcome of this study. On one hand, I felt a personal sense of responsibility to these Black participants. As a Black woman who has enjoyed many successes early in my life, including multiple academic achievements throughout, I cannot forget "from whence I came." I grew up in a predominantly-Black, low-to-middle-income neighborhood, and I completed my K-12 education in a predominantly-Black, public, urban school district. As many school districts that fit a similar profile across the United States, this district struggled (and

continues to struggle) to raise graduation completion rates and standardized test scores among its predominantly-Black student body. I was an anomaly. I sustained an impressive GPA that attracted some of the best schools to recruit me out of high school even though I had (at best) average standardized test scores to accompany that GPA. I chose to attend Western Michigan University for my undergraduate education and I completed my undergraduate education free of charge as a recipient of various academically-focused scholarships. So, what does this have to do with dual-role research?

Through the duration of this study, I have felt academically, professionally and spiritually obligated to respond to a startling discovery regarding severely low rates of persistence among African American students enrolled in the institution that employs me. With such a successful academic and professional life, how could I sit idly by and do nothing when I have been so fortunately to have the expertise, resources, and influence to champion a positive impact on this at-risk group of students. From the literature, I knew that research in one's own backyard would be risky (Creswell, 1998), and in my heart, I knew what I was taking on would overextend me for nearly a year. I likened these complex emotions to the Biblical story of Queen Esther who championed a high-risk opportunity for the sake of a broader commission--to facilitate the preservation of a nation of people less fortunate that she (Biblegateway.com, 2009). Like Esther, I chose to attempt to "save" others, while caring less for myself even if it was to my demise.

This study has been supported by the study site with a generous investment of capital, expense, time, and the talents of many associated with the study site. Although committed to the purpose and significance of this study, at times it became difficult for administrators and some of my peers to comprehend my passion and commitment to this study that I accepted as

an additional (yet temporary) job function without any relief from my other duties. I knew carrying out this study in "my backyard" would require a tremendous sacrifice of time and energy, but what I was not prepared for were the times when I would have to negotiate with myself in order to balance a commitment to the institution without compromising the study. Let me offer the reader an example of this.

I was extremely disappointed by the low participation rate (28.9%) this project experienced. One administrator affiliated with this site even referred to this rate as "pathetic." As an administrator myself, this low rate had financial implications that could have negatively affected return on investment (ROI). If a researcher knows that she is working with a group extremely prone to dropping out, she should seek ways to work with an adequate sample size that would still have the potential to generate an adequate revenue stream among those remaining; in a tuition-driven institution, this point seems to have even greater significance.

As the researcher, I knew that I had to adhere to the protocol agreement approved by the institutional review boards. That protocol prohibited my interference with the natural occurrence that would surface in this research study—in the context of this discussion, low participation rates. I had to balance my fiscal duty to the institution with my willingness to allow this study to take whatever direction it ultimately would; I would have to report the results regardless of the outcome. I started searching for common ground, where I contribute favorably to ROI without jeopardizing the study and my ethical obligations to it. So, what did I do? I authorized the intrusive advisor to provide "standard advising" support to students unassociated with this study; e.g. a student returning to enroll after being out of school for awhile, or a current student not in his or her first year. I was reluctant to do this

because it would have the *potential* to interfere with the amount of time she could devote to her advisees (those in the treatment group), but it became the "right" thing to do to safely navigate this dual-role that I had taken on. My concern was not that she would struggle to navigate her (now) dual-role, but others might make her feel obligated to do so.

Despite such challenges, dual-role research has its benefits. In the context of this study, I acquired a tremendous amount of knowledge regarding the various departments of our college and the policies that guide our practices. In my own backyard, I also built new relationships with individuals throughout this college system that I may have never had an opportunity to work with directly—e.g. members of its system leadership team and information systems department who supported the programming requirements of this project. In my backyard, I also had the pleasure of supervising one of the world's finest and most talented intrusive advisors who will soon be writing her own dissertation. Most importantly, in my backyard, I was able to make a positive impact on a few Black students. I can only hope that the few that remained in this study will someday be able to help others.

In summary, there are benefits and challenges that accompany dual-role research in one's own backyard, but the completion of this study attests to the reality that it can be done. It is not only possible to navigate this dual-role, but it can be done well and it can make a world of difference in the lives of even a few.

APPENDIX M

Approval of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: May 12, 2008

To: Andrea Beach, Principal Investigator
         Deanna Burt, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 08-05-05

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "African
American Student Persistence toward the Completion of Higher Education at a
Predominantly White, Private, Career College" has been **approved** under the **expedited**
category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions
and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan
University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved.
You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also
seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In
addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events
associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project
and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: May 12, 2009