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The Work Life of the Professional Academic Advisor: A Qualitative Study.

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The Work Life of the Professional Academic Advisor:

A Qualitative Study

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctorate in Education

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by

Susan Bramlett Epps

May 2002

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Keywords: Academic Advising, Professional Advisor, Work Life

ABSTRACT

The Work Life of the Professional Academic Advisor: A Qualitative Study

by

Susan Bramlett Epps

Professional advisors are bearing the burdens of a) helping students make a connection to their institution; b) being largely responsible for the efforts to retain these students; and c) providing a multitude of services to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body. While a great deal of information is available about students, retention, and services, the literature is void of detailed information on the professional advisor and the advisor's work life. The purpose of this study was to learn more about how advisors experience the elements of work life (job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, commitment to the organization, performance, variety, and autonomy) and, in doing so, illuminate ways in which institutions can create environments in which advisors are encouraged to maximize their potential.

Advisors' perceptions and the way they experience their work lives were collected through eighteen one-on-one personal interviews. The interviews were audio-taped and then professionally transcribed for a verbatim transcript. The transcripts were coded into the categories of work life and then sub-coded by emergent themes.

In general, the professional advisors interviewed reported they were satisfied with their jobs as advisors and, most particularly, with the support and guidance they receive from their colleagues and supervisors, the amount and level of variety in their work responsibilities, and their level of autonomy. These advisors described a strong degree of commitment to quality advising and notably to their students. Most of the frustrations they reported were related to concerns of 'letting the students down.'

As a result of this study, recommendations for further research in the area of academic advising include 1) examining the roles, attitudes, and responsibilities of professional versus faculty advisors, 2) investigating the reasons institutions do or do not employ professional advisors, 3) collecting more detailed, preferably qualitative, information on the advisor/student relationship from the student perspective, and 4) addressing the issue of whether advisors would advocate for academic advising to become a profession.

DEDICATION

"Inside my empty bottle I was constructing a lighthouse while all the others were making ships."
- Charles Simic

To professional advisors everywhere and especially those eighteen who gave me their time and their stories...

May your light guide the way for all the ships you see.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I certainly would not have completed this endeavor without the following people:

Tracey Fields of Ablescribe in Elizabethton, TN, who is a transcription goddess. She should charge more.

Dr. Ramona Milhorn-Williams, my debriefer, she is a true advocate for academic advisors.

Dr. Sally Lee, my auditor, but more importantly, my friend and the woman who showed me women can be good supervisors and good leaders.

Brenda, Rana, Mary Jo, Michael, Ute, Bob, and Peter, my colleagues in the physical therapy department who encouraged me, and particularly Duane Williams, boss extraordinaire, who has led by example.

Jane Jones, whose presence warms my heart and brightens my days, for her inspiration and friendship.

Tim Dills, who was the initial inspiration for this study.

My family: those who came before me who knew the importance of an education; and those here now, all of them, who have never let me forget that I can do this thing.

John Bramlett, computer god, who saved this darn thing when the file got corrupted.

My husband, Jimbo, my anchor, who cannot wait to tell people he is married to a doctor.

My angel boys, John Parker and Christopher, who remind me every day to be amazed by little things.

My committee members, Dr. Nancy Dishner, Dr. Terrence Tollefson, and Dr. Norman MacRae who were there for me with their guidance and support.

And finally, my committee chair and 'the boss of me' for the last four and a half years, Dr. Hal Knight, whose patience rivals that of Job; who has challenged me, encouraged me, and unceasingly supported me; and who has made me ever so glad that someone is "teaching me something I didn't already know."

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On most college campuses professional academic advisors, those people who are full-time, non-faculty personnel, are responsible for more than just helping students with their schedules each semester. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Journal cumulative index to volumes 1-15 (1995) provides a daunting list of job tasks facing academic advisors, including: working with academically under-prepared students; handling college adjustment issues; setting up advising centers; training peer advisors; meeting the needs of adult students, athletes, minorities, and gay/lesbian/bisexual/trans-gendered students; dealing with alcohol and drug problems; assisting students with career advising and decision making; and performing evaluation and assessment of services.

Meskill and Sheffield recognized academic counseling as a new specialty in 1970, indicating a role that was no longer the sole responsibility of the faculty. Historically, academic advising, with its wide range of job tasks, has not been viewed as a desirable responsibility (Walsh, 1979). However, as institutions placed greater emphasis on advising (Mash, 1978; Trombley & Holmes, 1980) the literature did begin addressing the roles and skills of the advisor.

In addition to the job tasks, advisors must function in various roles necessitating the development of a number of skills. Walsh (1979) outlined the roles of "counselor", "advocate", and "guardian" as they pertained to the advisor's relationship with both the institution and the student. The advisor's role is to help the institution meet its goals for recruitment and retention and to assist students in meeting their goals of academic success and in selecting a good major/career (Baer & Carr, 1985). Gordon (1992) suggested that advisors needed skills in teaching, counseling, mentoring, referring, monitoring, decision-making, and information disseminating, as well as the ability to work with a diverse population of students. The advisor is more than an information provider and the need for the previously mentioned roles and skills is evidenced in Crockett's (1985) definition of academic advising:

a developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of these goals. It is a decision-making process by which students realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchanges with an advisor; it is ongoing, multifaceted, and the responsibility of both student and advisor. The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary. (pp. 248-249)

In addition to the responsibilities inherent in developmental advising, NACADA's Statement of Core Values adds the following:

1. Advisors are responsible to the students and individuals they serve.

2. Advisors are responsible for involving others, when appropriate, in the advising process.

3. Advisors are responsible to the college or university in which they work. Advisors are responsible to higher education generally.

4. Advisors are responsible to the community (including the local community, state, and region in which the institution is located).

5. Advisors are responsible to their professional role as advisors and themselves personally. (NACADA, 1994).

Obviously, advisors bear a significant amount of responsibility for the students of their respective institutions and, as Goetz and White (1986) argued,"[d]espite the current flurry of interest there still remains much that is not known about academic advising" (p. 43). More recently, Tuttle (2000) argued that academic advising is one of the most "technically challenging positions in the area of academic or student services" (p.19) and suggested that these overwhelming responsibilities are one reason for the dearth of advising research.

Another reason for the lack of information on advisors is that there is no "average advisor" in terms of a typical context within which an advisor works (Severy, Lee, & Polson, 1996). Fox (1994), speaking of work in general, stated that "We workers are being called to reexamine our work: how we do it, whom it is helping or hurting: what it is we do" (p.103). While there is seeming clarity in what an advisor is supposed to do, little if anything is known about how advisors experience their work. Understanding the advisor's "work life," defined for

the purposes of this study as a complex interaction of factors such as job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, organizational commitment, performance, autonomy, and variety (Igbaria, Parasuraman, & Badawy, 1994; Lau & May, 1998), may shed some light on these jacks-of-all-trades and to begin to answer the question asked for over 40 years (Robertson, 1958; Stodt, 1987), who are these people?

Statement of the Problem

Professional advisors are bearing the burdens of a) helping students make a connection to their institution; b) being largely responsible for the efforts to retain these students; and c) providing a multitude of services to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body. While a great deal of information is available about students, retention, and services, the literature is void of detailed information on the professional advisor and the advisor's work life.

Purpose of the Study

Herzberg (1966) argued that we have a "...compelling urge to realize our own potentiality" (p. 56). A look at the elements of work life - job satisfaction, collegial relationships, organizational commitment, job performance, variety, and autonomy - might suggest that how one experiences these elements could very well affect how one reaches his or her "potentiality." The purpose of this study was to learn more about how advisors experience their work life and in doing so, illuminate ways in which institutions can create environments in which advisors are encouraged to maximize their potential.

Research Questions

To begin charting the unknown territory of the advisor and the advisor's work life, the following questions will be addressed:

1. How does the professional advisor experience or perceive each element of work life - job satisfaction, relationships, organizational commitment, performance, variety, and autonomy - in his/her role as an academic advisor?

2. How does the way the advisor experiences his/her work life relate to his/her decision to remain in or leave the field of academic advising?

Significance of the Study

College student demographics have changed over the years and institutions have made changes to keep pace with the "new" student body. One could assume that the advisors' demographics might have changed as well. The retention literature discussed briefly in Chapter 2 addresses the importance of the role the academic advisor plays in the institution's retention strategy. In addition, most institutions administer surveys of their current and graduated students that include questions designed to ascertain the students' perception of the institution, including academics, student services, and academic advising. However, the literature is void of information on how to retain advisors and on what measures institutions take to collect information on advisors' perceptions of their work situations, or work life. Institutions continue to place increasing emphasis on the role of the professional advisor in meeting the connection, retention, academic, and emotional needs of the institution and its student population and yet, so little is known about the same needs of the very people in whom they have such great expectations.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, these terms are defined as follows:

1. Professional Advisor: full-time, non-faculty academic advisors whose primary responsibilities are advising-related and require direct student contact

2. Work life: interaction of the factors of job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, organizational commitment, performance, autonomy, and variety as they are experienced by the individual in his/her work setting or environment. (This definition is a combination of the definitions of work life from Igbaria, Parasuraman, and Badawy, 1994 and Lau and May, 1998.)

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study include:

1. As a professional advisor, my own experiences and biases could affect both the collection and analysis of data in this study. I recognized this potential problem and made every

effort to maintain objectivity. As I discuss further in Chapter 3, I used both an auditor and peer debriefer in the course of this study who helped in detecting any possible personal bias in analyzing and reporting the results.

2. The participants in the study were professional advisors at four-year institutions of higher education in a limited geographic area in the southeast. A further limitation was the difficulty in locating institutions that employ professional advisors.

3. The potential participants had to be willing to donate at least an hour to an hour and a half of their time to be interviewed for this study.

4. The results of this study are not generalizable to the professional academic advisor population.

Assumptions

In conducting this study, I made the following assumptions:

1. Conducting individual interviews was the most appropriate method of data collection for this study because of the lack of qualitative, descriptive information on the work life of the professional advisor.

2. Participants were truthful in their responses to the interview questions.

3. I had the didactic and professional knowledge and experience to conduct this study.

Organization of the Study

This chapter outlined a concern germane to academic advising in higher education settings; that is, the lack of qualitative, descriptive information on professional academic advisors. The next chapter presents literature as it applies to advisors' concerns about work and the elements of work life in general.

Chapter 3 describes the qualitative methodology by which this investigation was conducted. The results of interviews with professional advisors are reported in Chapter 4. The final chapter includes conclusions, recommendations for institutions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As stated in Chapter 1, the literature base is lacking a qualitative, descriptive picture of the professional academic advisor. In an effort to set the stage for the elements of work life as defined in Chapter 1, this chapter begins with some background on advisors' concerns and issues that may affect one or more areas of the advisor's work life.

Lack of Research

Kramer and Spencer (1987) and Midgen (1989) suggested that the best way to meet the many developmental needs of students was by employing professional (non-faculty) advisors. However, the lack of information about these advisors, the people expected to function in such varied roles and to possess such a multitude of skills, is disturbing, especially in light of Kuh's (1997) NACADA annual conference keynote address statement that "It is hard to imagine any academic support function that is more important to student success and institutional productivity than advising" (p.11). McGillin (2000) noted a lack of research on advising despite the willingness of academic advising research to borrow from a wide range of social science theories. She also pointed out that the research being done is primarily institution-specific on advising processes and outcomes; she makes no mention of research on academic advisors.

Advisors and Student Retention

One reason the lack of information on the professional advisor is disturbing is because of the increased focus on the connection between quality effective advising and student retention (Bedker & Young, 1994; Crockett, 1985; Forest, 1985; Habley, 1981; Metzner, 1989; Trombley & Holmes, 1980; Tuttle, 2000). Levitz and Noel (1989) viewed advising as such a strong priority that they promoted the idea of front-loading or putting "the strongest, most student-centered people...in the freshman year" (p.79). King (1993) later suggested that

> academic advising is the only structured service on college campuses that guarantees students interaction with concerned representatives of the institutions. Consequently it can be viewed as the hub of the wheel, with connections to all of the other support services on campus...effective advising can be a key factor in helping students make the

necessary adjustments to college life and become integrated into the academic and social systems of our institutions. Such integration is directly linked to student success, satisfaction, and persistence (p.1).

Tinto (1999) found that "…students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide clear and consistent information" (p.5) and that "…institutions that provide academic, social, and personal support encourage persistence" (p.5) supporting earlier predictions that higher education's responsibility to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body will fall in large part on the shoulders of the academic advisor (Byrd, 1995; Kramer & Spencer, 1987; Migden, 1989). Advisors are not only expected to provide accurate information on academic matters (Woodbury, 1999) but also to "attempt to raise their students' aspirations" (Kuh, 1997, p.10).

<div align="center">Advisor Concerns</div>

With all the hats the advisor is expected to wear, there is no wonder that an advisor recently lamented, "I don't want to be an advisor for the rest of my life, but I could see myself ending up being an advisor for the rest of my life." A roundtable discussion at the 1999 NACADA National Conference (Steele and Gardner, "Advisor Retention" presentation, October, 1999) was the setting for a dialogue among advisors about the issues on the top of their concerns list.

<div align="center">*Advisor Retention and Career Mobility*</div>

The presenters of the roundtable noted that their institution had just lost five good advisors, all within a month, to jobs outside of academe. The participants then compiled a short list of reasons why losing advisors was detrimental to the institution, including: loss of continuity for the student and department, college, or division; potential lack of consistent information provided to the student; the need to train someone new; potential reduction in quality of advising when a seasoned advisor is replaced by a newcomer; loss of department, college, or division liaison to other campus offices and services; low morale among remaining staff who may be required to take on the departing advisor's responsibilities during the search and training period

<div align="center">14</div>

for a replacement; and the monetary, time, and effort costs involved to conduct the search and training for a new advisor.

Advisors participating in the roundtable were clear about the issues of attrition, both of colleagues and themselves. Several advisors voiced concerns about their jobs and about how long they would stay in advising before moving on to another job or even another career. One advisor commented that the lack of any type of career ladder in the field might promote job dissatisfaction in the long run. She asked what happens to the currently satisfied advisor who, in a few years, has not received a promotion or a pay raise. How long will that advisor be willing to stay without the possibility of advancement? Could it be that higher education administrators are expecting people who have little long-term loyalty to the institution to assist in encouraging institutional loyalty and connection in their students?

Faculty in higher education settings have a clearly defined ladder for advancement from instructor, to assistant professor, to associate professor, to full professor, with tenure along the way (Holmes, 1982). Although career patterns in non-faculty positions in higher education are usually shorter and less clear than those in the business sector (Evans, 1988), in either arena the perception is that promotion equals success (Leibowitz, Kaye, & Farren, 1990) and employees will place advancement opportunities high on the list of importance where their jobs are concerned (Moore, 1998).

Habley stated in his keynote address to the NACADA Region 3 conference in 1986 that three quarters of the original members of NACADA were no longer members and that two thirds of all lapsed memberships were the result of advisors leaving the field of advising. A NACADA study released the following year reported that two thirds of the survey respondents indicated a career ladder and opportunity for advancement was important to them (National Academic Advising Association Task Force, 1987). Unfortunately, two thirds of the respondents also noted that the future of academic advising at their institutions was either uncertain or that there was no future at all. Those advisors could very well have seen themselves in dead-end jobs, in an occupation with "little or no advancement potential" (Rosenthal, 1989, p. 3).

Sandroff (1990) noted that while people starting out change jobs with some degree of frequency, a settling-down phase should eventually begin. However, settling down should not be used interchangeably with the concept of plateauing. Career-related literature describes content plateauing, as a "decreasing rate of promotions which forces talented employees to remain in the same positions for a considerable number of years without a significant change in job responsibilities" (Weiner, Remer, & Remer, 1992, p. 40). This state of plateauing may be a source of stress, frustration, and dissatisfaction for advisors and is likely to be the type that causes academic advisors who find themselves in a "no-man's land" with limited opportunities for advancement (Bender, 1980, Habley, 1986; Murray, 1987) to look for employment in areas outside the academy.

Plateauing should not be viewed only as a negative. The task force study also found that over 80% of the respondents, all members of NACADA, indicated a plan to stay in advising for a variety of reasons. Unlike content plateaus, structural plateaus occur when an organization cuts off or does not offer mobility to higher levels within the organization (Dawson, 1983). Advisors, able to spot a potential structural plateau from an institution's organizational chart, may be able to accept the situation as productively, partially, or pleasantly plateaued (Leibowitz et al., 1990).

Productively plateaued employees may not even classify themselves as being plateaued because they have achieved their aspirations, they are known as "do-ers", and their contributions are recognized and appreciated. Employees who are partially plateaued find themselves in situations where personal projects, rather than their organization, keep them going, and where they enjoy their reputation as having expertise in their field. These employees may also routinely present presentations at conferences or consult, making them feel less plateaued. The third type, pleasantly plateaued, have a sense of belonging, have "made it" (at least in their own eyes), do not want to change the nature of their job, and desire a minimum of stress (Leibowitz et al., 1990).

This idea is similar to Hitchin and Hitchin's (1999) description of a 'midlaner', "someone who is deliberately living a reasonable and appropriately integrated work life" (p.1). "The

midlaner's success paradigm includes 1) personal growth and spiritual development; 2) family and other interpersonal relationships; and 3) productive work and the need to achieve" (Hitchin & Hitchin, p.1) The 'midlaner' is unlikely to leave his/her position as long he/she is engaged in productive work and has an opportunity to achieve, however, the midlaner is likely to look for other employment options if he or she cannot answer positively to the question 'is my heart in my work? (Hitchin & Hitchin).

Compensation

Along with career mobility comes the issue of appropriate compensation. Advisors want to be viewed and treated as professionals and receive appropriate compensation (Bee, Beronja, & Mann, 1990) and yet many advisors are advising students who will earn more upon graduation from baccalaureate degree programs than the advisor makes after years of work (Murray, 1987). Advisors' titles, levels of preparation, and salaries are inconsistent within and between institutions (Gordon, 1992), making a job change to another institution or even to another area within the same institution a potential source of frustration. According to the NACADA roundtable presenters mentioned previously in this chapter, advisors at their institution were leaving to higher paying fields, a trend noted earlier in the literature (Bee et al.; Habley, 1986). Abraham (1999b) even suggested that these perceived and actual discrepancies in pay might result in low self-esteem on the part of the advisor.

On the other hand, it should be noted that pay itself might not be as much an issue as the discrepancies in pay are. Vinokur-Kaplan, Jayaratne, and Chess (1994), in a study of social workers (whose job elements are similar to that of advisors: large 'caseload', varied educational backgrounds, less respected, etc.), found that pay was not significantly related to the worker's intention to leave the job.

Recognition and Involvement

The elements of low status and little, if any, recognition also head a list of advisor concerns (Stodt, 1987; Wade & Yoder, 1995). Several authors argue that advisors should be recognized for the work they do and for the contributions they make to the institution (Biggs,

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Brodie, & Barnhart, 1975; Gordon, 1992; Stamatakos, 1981). Habley (1986) noted that, unfortunately, there is a common misperception that advising is merely a set of information skills that are institution-specific and that there is "little recognition [within the academy] of the transferability of [these] skills" (p.10) to other positions within the institution or to other fields. McGillin (2000) confirmed that institutions generally do not support academic advising "unless they have seen it as a high-status role for faculty or professionals" (p.372). Rosenthal (1989) suggested that employees frequently consider a position's status within an organization in evaluating job desirability; having respect and responsibility within the organization is part of what makes one's work meaningful (Bellinger, 1999; Burns, 1982; Caudron, 1997). Although this latter information is from the business literature, the same could apply to the professional academic advisor.

Burnout and Disillusionment

Edelwich (1980) suggested that

vocations in the human services are characterized by several built-in sources of frustration that eventually lead many dedicated workers to become ineffective and apathetic: noble aspirations and high initial enthusiasm; lack of criteria for measuring accomplishments; low pay at all levels of education, skill and responsibility; inadequate funding and institutional support (p. 15).

The advisor's multitude of job tasks, as described in Chapter 1, are a potential source of burn-out, according to Laabs (1999) and Marton (1999), who argued that in business, job overload, what usually begins as a temporary situation or crisis management but turns into status quo, is becoming a major cause of burn-out.

Biggs et al. (1975) and Moser and Chong (1995), although writing 20 years apart, pointed to the large number of advisees assigned to most advisors and the diversity and severity of student problems as other reasons advisors look for positions elsewhere. The frustrations of dealing with so many problems may cause advisors to "wonder what the job means anymore and what [one has] accomplished" (Marton, 1999, p. 60).

Disillusionment is another mitigating factor in the advisor's work experience. As was evident in the NACADA roundtable discussion, therefore anecdotally, the advisor is not immune to the stages of disillusionment. The advisor who starts a job with high hopes and energy (enthusiasm stage) may, over time, find the job is no longer so thrilling (stagnation stage). At this point, the advisor may begin to question his or her effectiveness and even the value of the job (frustration stage). From this stage, the advisor may fall prey to the "it's just a job" attitude, putting in the minimum time required to keep from endangering his or her position (apathy stage). During this stage, the individual trades job satisfaction for the security of the position (Edelwich, 1980). As an advisor experiences various stages of disillusionment, one could assume there would be a corresponding effect on the advisor's perceptions of the elements of his or her work life.

Elements of Work Life

With American workers spending more time at work than workers in any other country in the industrial world (Zuckerman, 2000), there should be no surprise that non-wage attributes of a job are important to the employee (Rosenthal, 1989) and to the employee's quality of work life. As defined in Chapter 1, work life is the interaction of factors such as job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, organizational commitment, performance, autonomy, and variety (Igbaria, Parauranman, & Badawy, 1994, Lau & May, 1998). In order to address these issues, a look at the literature in related areas was necessary due to the absence of literature in these areas on the professional academic advisor. While most of the references are from the social work literature base, a look into other helping professions and even the manufacturing area yielded confirmation that the elements of work life are not occupation specific.

Job Satisfaction

The quality of one's work life, "the degree to which members of a work organization are able to satisfy their most important needs through their experiences in the organization" (Mandell, 1989, p. 49) is obviously connected to one's job satisfaction, the "pleasurable

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emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values" (Locke, 1969, p. 316).

Zuckerman (2000) reported that 80% of workers are satisfied with their jobs. Studies of social workers in various work settings (public, private, psychiatric) (Marriott, Sexton, & Staley, 1994; McLean & Andrew, 2000) also suggested that, in general, workers are satisfied with their jobs overall. What employees reported as the least satisfying aspects were the very things over which they had little control, such as lack of recognition, feedback, and gratitude from users; amount of change and volume of paperwork (McLean & Andrew); promotional opportunities and financial rewards (Jayaratne & Chess, 1986; McLean & Andrew); and financial support for continuing education (Marriott, Sexton, & Staley).

Job satisfaction is found to be associated with intrinsic factors such as a sense of challenge (McLean & Andrew, 2000; Vinokur-Kaplan et al., 1994), sense of personal growth and self-actualization (Herzberg et al., 1959), and individual effort, achievement, helping people, and the quality of service personally provided (McLean & Andrew).

However, Poulin's (1994) ideas put an interesting twist on the aforementioned section on job satisfaction. He suggested that in looking at social workers' job satisfaction, there is a "blame-the-victim" approach because the focus is on the workers' characteristics and not the organization's. Poulin proposed that it would be easier to change job tasks and organizational characteristics than to change those of the worker, therefore, putting the burden of job satisfaction back on the organization.

Relationships with Colleagues

Business arena recruiters are reporting that recruits want to know about work environments and how people work together (Shellenbarger, 1999). Just as telling are the results of a 1996 study of nurses (Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman), in which interviewees gave supervision, rather than pay, as a reason for leaving their jobs. Pettit, Goris, and Vaught (1997) stated "Communication plays a major role in one's job satisfaction. How an employee perceives a supervisor's communication style, credibility, and content...will to some extent influence the

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amount of satisfaction he or she receives from the job" (p.81). Although this study was conducted with employees in manufacturing rather than in a helping profession, the findings are in agreement with Turnipseed's (1994) work with nurses that suggested, "employees may view any negative supervisory behavior (or lack of positive behavior) as a detriment to the work process" (p.793).

The importance of creating supportive work environments (Abraham, 1999a; Poulin, 1994; Schor, 1997; Turnipseed, 1994), particularly in the helping professions and service industry, is certainly not a novel concept. Turnipseed even suggested that a "lack of peer cohesion may alter the individual's susceptibility to other negative stimuli in the work place" (p.792). While upper management employees are not the focus of the present study, Schor's study on networking as it relates to career enhancement for persons in upper management positions is included here to demonstrate the importance of this concept at even higher levels of employment than those in which advisors are usually found. The female respondents of this study (and academic advisors, like many of the employees in helping professions, are predominantly female) reported they received not only advice, support, and encouragement from those in their relationship network, but valuable information as well.

Commitment to the Organization

As mentioned in Chapter 1, academic advisors are bearing a great deal of the load for helping students connect, or make a commitment to, their institution, possibly without having that same level of connectivity themselves. McLean and Andrew (2000) suggested that

> a high level of personal commitment is required of human service personnel, often in return for lower pay than might be earned in other occupations. Other rewards may compensate, such as satisfaction from helping people and involvement with others in a purposeful activity, but insufficient satisfaction or high demands may adversely affect the level of involvement and commitment on which the work depends (pp.93-94).

The days of long-term relationships between employers and employees have been replaced over the years by "expectations of shorter relationships and more frequent departures" (LaFarge, 1994, p. 175). Harkins (1998) found employees leave their jobs for five reasons: 1)

lack of confidence in the organization, 2) lack of recognition/inadequate rewards, 3) trust factor (broken promises), 4) the fit factor, and 5) the listening factor (employees believe they are not being heard). Now, employees, and advisors, if the NACADA roundtable discussion is evidence, "are asking whether it's worth it to spend time at companies where they feel no passion or commitment" (Caudron, 1997, p.1).

An individual's commitment to an organization or institution may fall into three categories - affective, continuance, or normative. "Affective commitment is independent of inducements or reciprocity and implies that the employee wants to stay" (McLean & Andrews, 2000). Continuance commitment, implying the employee needs to stay, is an exchange of involvement for economic or intrinsic rewards, a lack of alternatives, or the prohibitive cost associated with leaving. Normative commitment suggests the employee has a "sense of obligation, duty, or personal or societal expectations about work" (p.95) through which the employee ought to stay.

Performance, Variety, and Autonomy

While employees may like some aspects of their jobs enormously, most find themselves in a situation where the job itself is a frustration that does not allow the employee to use the full spectrum of his or her skills and talents to keep him or her interested and energized over time (Koonce, 1997). Schwalbe (1985) compared this to self-esteem and suggested "We learn about ourselves by observing what we make happen in the world and on this basis make inferences about our characteristics as persons" (p.520).

In addition to desiring an interesting and enjoyable job ("Job variety", 1990), studies of teachers and social workers and even homemakers found that employees also desire variety (Marriott, Sexton, & Staley, 1994; Raelin, 1985) and autonomy (Dodd & Ganster, 1996; Evans & Fischer, 1992; "Job variety"; Marriott et al.; Turnipseed, 1994). Teachers and social workers, like professional advisors, are members of a helping profession; however, unlike advisors, teachers and social workers may not have the wide variety of roles made a necessity by the demands of the increasingly diverse college student population. Therefore, advisors may have

little reason to complain about a lack of variety in their work if the list of job tasks presented in Chapter 1 (from the NACADA Journal 1995 cumulative index to volumes 1-15) is any indication of what advisors do on a routine basis.

Autonomy, the degree to which an individual has control (Evans & Fischer, 1992) or the discretion to determine how a job is to be performed (Dodd & Ganster, 1996; "Job variety", 1990; Lennon, 1994) is "an indicator of an employee's status, trust, reliability, and competence" (Schwalbe, 1985, p.525) that is also linked with accomplishment in which at least "part of any success experienced is due to the personal abilities and efforts of the employee" (Turnipseed, 1994, p. 794). Conversely, a "lack of autonomy may be perceived as a lack of support, a lack of confidence, or a reluctance by the supervisor to relinquish any control" (Turnipseed, p.793). Advisors who view themselves as professionals, and especially those with advanced degrees and more years of experience, may even have a need, not just a desire, for autonomy as suggested by Brady, Judd, and Javian's (1990) study of dental hygienists. Not surprisingly, autonomy has been linked to both job satisfaction and performance (Dodd & Ganster).

As the saying goes, "Nothing happens in a vacuum". Student demographics change. Student needs and expectations change. Institutions address the 'new' student body's changing needs and expectations. Should the same not be true for the employees of these same institutions? The lack of literature on how advisors experience the various elements of their work lives may be indicative of a lack of concern for their needs and expectations. A single institution can collect and provide a seemingly inexhaustible supply of data on its student body for student recruitment and retention efforts. Yet the same institution may have little or no information with which to do the same for professional advisors - the very individuals who are, in large part, charged with incorporating those efforts into their work every day. The next chapter will describe the process through which the beginnings of descriptive data were collected in order to learn more about the advisor and his/her work life.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

The need for descriptive information on the work life and experience of the professional academic advisor supports the use of qualitative methodology and, in particular, the use of individual interviews to gather this information. As Seidman (1991) suggested, the purpose of interviewing is to understand the experiences of others and to make meaning of them. By interviewing academic advisors, I expected the advisors to report on and about themselves and clarify their responses in their own words (Lederman, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), and as a result, "take us into [their] lifeworld to see the content and pattern of [their] daily experience" (McCracken, 1988, p.9).

I began by conducting a pilot interview following the process described in a subsequent paragraph. After this pilot interview, I re-evaluated the process and questions. On the suggestion of the individual I interviewed for the pilot, I made changes to the wording of some of the questions. I then conducted 18 in-person individual interviews. I interviewed advisors until I detected a repetition of ideas or themes and was hearing much of the same thing from the interviewees (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seidman, 1991); in fact, I conducted interviews past the point of redundancy. The professional academic advisors were employed at four public four-year institutions of higher education in the southeast. Three institutions classified as Master's I institutions and one was a Doctoral/Research-Intensive institution (Carnegie Foundation, 2000). Total student enrollment at these institutions ranged from 6,800 to over 18,000. Four participants were male, the rest female. The participants' experience as academic advisors ranged from approximately six months to over 10 years. They ranged in age from mid-20s to over 60. The participants worked in a variety of settings, including departments, divisions, central advising or special populations centers, colleges, and off-campus centers.

Interview Format

Using the basics of Rubin and Rubin's (1995) outline and suggestions for interviewing, I conducted the interviews in a semi-structured format, introducing the topic and then guiding the subsequent discussion with specific questions. I used the following questions for each interview:

1. How did you become an advisor (or how did you get into academic advising?)

2. What, if any, specific training did you have for your job?

3. What do you like about your job?

4. What do you dislike about your job?

5. What guidance and support do you receive from your unit/division/university administration?

6. What financial support do you receive for professional development and from where?

7. Are you included in the decision-making process for advising-related issues at your institution? If so, describe your level of involvement.

8. What kind of interactions do you have with your colleagues?

9. How have you developed working relationships with others in your unit/division/university?

10. What concerns do you have about working with students? Staff? Faculty?

11. What skills and talents do you bring to your job?

12. Do you believe you are using your full spectrum of skills and talents in your job? Why or why not?

13. Describe the level of variety in your job. Are you satisfied with this level? Why or why not?

14. Describe the level of autonomy you have in your position. Are you satisfied with this level? What would you change?

15. Do you think you are appropriately compensated for the work you do as an advisor? Why or why not?

16. Do you plan to remain an advisor? If you plan to remain an advisor, what about the position or job makes you want to stay in the field?

17. If advising is not in your long-term career plan, why are you planning to leave the field and what do you want to do?

I took general notes during the interviews to serve as memory aides and audio-taped each interview with the permission of the interviewee to provide a verbatim transcript for analysis. The general structure for the interviews included asking main questions to begin and guide the conversation, probing questions for obtaining more in-depth or elaborate responses, and follow-up questions for clarification.

During the course of the interviews, I adapted to the direction of the interview and was prepared to change directions if the interviewee brought up issues or trains of thought that led away from the original question (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). At the end of each interview, I reviewed my notes with the interviewee or asked for clarification of responses to ensure I correctly understood the interviewee's ideas and thoughts.

Data Analysis

I had a transcriptionist prepare a verbatim transcript of each interview. Using the verbatim transcript, I began processing the data by inductively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) using content analysis, the "process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data" (Patton, p.381). By analyzing the transcripts I began to see patterns emerge. In addition to analyzing the transcripts for common themes I also looked for what Patton called "negative cases," those that do not fit the established pattern. I was also able to establish the point at which the interviews become redundant.

Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

Qualitative methodology does require that I address certain issues regarding the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility involves the truth, value or believability of the findings (Leininger, 1994) or what Rubin and Rubin (1995) call the transparency of the study. By keeping careful records,

including the original notes, audiocassettes, and verbatim transcripts of the interview, as well as a log of the procedures I followed during each interview, I contributed to the credibility of the study. I conducted member-checking (Lincoln & Guba; Maxwell, 1996) through a debriefing at the end of the interview. At that time I reviewed my notes and verified my understanding of the interviewee's comments with the interviewee. In addition, I noted contradictions that emerged in the interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Rubin & Rubin). I also addressed my credibility as the researcher by noting any personal or professional information that could bias my understanding of the interviewees' words (Glesne & Peshkin; Leininger, 1994; Patton, 1990).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested conducting an inquiry audit in which an individual other than the researcher examines the process to determine if the process itself is acceptable. Because of my own role as an academic advisor, and the potential for bias, I asked Dr. Sally Lee, Associate Vice-President of Student Affairs at East Tennessee State University, to serve as my auditor. Dr. Lee is knowledgeable of the role of the academic advisor through her work with the institution's advisors as the Student Affairs liaison to the campus Advisement Resources and Career (ARC) Center, and as coordinator of many of the campus's recruitment and retention efforts, including New Student Orientation, the Retention Management System (RMS), the Early Semester Progress Reports (ESPR), and Freshman Success Program (FSP). She reviewed the transcripts of the interviews and my analysis of the interviews and determined the emergent themes as I have noted them are evident in the words of the interviewees.

In addition to the auditor, I also used a peer debriefer, Dr. Ramona Milhorn-Williams. As Director of Undergraduate Student Advisement at East Tennessee State University, Dr. Williams is familiar with the role of the professional academic advisor. She agreed to meet with me as necessary to discuss my impressions, questions, concerns, and thoughts as I progressed through the interviews.

Although themes emerged from the interviews, the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize to a wider population than those actually interviewed (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Leininger, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995); therefore the burden of determining transferability

is on the person who wants to apply the findings (Leininger; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I kept a notebook in which I maintained a log of the interviewing process. I also included sections in the notebook for my notes of each interview, my thoughts on the process, and any of my own biases that emerged in the process of interviewing.

The final issue, confirmability, actually ties the previous three together by examining the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations to determine if they are coherent as a package (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Leininger (1994) suggested that confirmability takes place in two ways, by observing repeated themes over the course of the interviews and by restating ideas to the interviewees at the end of the interviews to ensure I understand their ideas as they have discussed them with me. As I have already discussed, I conducted a debriefing at the end of the interview in which I will reviewed my notes with the interviewee or asked for clarification to confirm that I have understood their comments and ideas.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Data Collection

I collected information for this study through one-on-one individual interviews with 18 professional academic advisors from four public four-year institutions of higher education. Three institutions were Carnegie classified as Master's I institutions and one as a Doctoral/Research-Intensive institution (Carnegie Foundation, 2000). The student enrollment at the four institutions ranged from 6,800 to over 18,000. Four participants were male, the rest female. The participants' experience as academic advisors ranged from approximately six months to over 10 years. They ranged in age from mid-20s to over 60. The participants worked in a variety of settings including departments, divisions, central advising centers, colleges, and special population or off-campus centers.

I recruited participants for the study through direct contact and e-mail, having asked for assistance from contacts at each institution or because of my own acquaintance with the professional advisor. I explained the nature of my study and the time commitment involved and answered any questions the potential participants had about confidentiality and/or anonymity. I also explained that the interviews would be tape recorded but that any specific reference to a person, unit, or university that could identify that person as the speaker would not be used in the dissertation. The names used for the advisors in this study are pseudonyms.

Upon receiving confirmation that an individual was willing to participate, I scheduled an appointment with that individual. I conducted the interviews in either the participant's office or in another location that afforded privacy if the interviewee's office space was not conducive to conducting an interview. Before the interview began, I provided the participant the informed consent form and answered any questions about the form prior to obtaining the participant's signature. I then reviewed the procedure for the interview, including a reminder that I would be audio-recording the interview and that I would also take notes from which I would review the

interview at the end. Once that was completed, I turned on the tape recorders and began the interview.

Following each interview, I provided the set of tapes to a professional transcriptionist who prepared a verbatim transcript of the interview. I then made a copy of the transcript for the notebook mentioned in Chapter 3 and saved a copy of the interview in text only with line breaks format to be used in the QSR-NUD.IST data analysis program. I coded each interview using the elements of work life (job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, organizational commitment, performance, autonomy, and variety) as the primary nodes. After printing a report of each node, I made notes of sub-codes within each primary node and highlighted appropriate passages to use as examples.

I met with my debriefer, Dr. Ramona Williams, near the end of the interview process to discuss what I had heard during the interviews. I also discussed with her themes that had emerged as I progressed through the interviews. The debriefer certification is Appendix A. I also provided my auditor, Dr. Sally Lee, a copy of each transcript, the coding reports, and my notes, as well as a copy of this chapter, for her review and confirmation that what I reported in this chapter was evidenced in the interviews. The auditor certification is Appendix B.

The research questions for this study were 1) How does the professional advisor experience or perceive each element of work life - job satisfaction, relationships, organizational commitment, performance, variety, and autonomy - in his/her role as an academic advisor? and 2) How does the way the advisor experiences his/her work life relate to his/her decision to remain in or leave the field of academic advising? The Findings section of this chapter begins with how these eighteen people became advisors. The remainder of the chapter includes, in the advisors' words, how they experience or perceive the different areas of work life and their feelings or decisions about remaining advisors.

Findings

Although the primary focus of this study was the work life of the professional academic advisor, I believed it was important to include additional information about the advisor.

Therefore, in addition to the questions related to work life, I asked each participant how he or she became an advisor, what training he or she had to be an advisor, and whether or not he or she planned to remain an advisor.

Becoming an Advisor

The advisors interviewed for this study did not have a consistent pattern for entering the role of professional academic advisor; however, three themes emerged from the interviews as to how these people became advisors. The first was what I call "serendipity" or "fell into it." John said he became an advisor because of the "availability of the job."

> I had to stay here in the area knowing that [this institution] would be a very stable environment in which to work. I'm not a big risk taker and this is a job that as long as we're going to have college students we'll need an advising system.

Beth described her becoming an advisor as "an evolution." "I was a program director of a community college for [an academic program] and was an advisor there. Then I finished my master's degree here...and was teaching part-time and had the opportunity to work some with advising here." She went on to explain that after a major life event occurred she "needed a job that I didn't have to concentrate on when I went home in the evenings so that I could have time with my children...It's [advising] not anything I ever set out to do." Maggie also talked about her evolution into advising.

> I think the way that I became an advisor was actually working at [another institution] and I got a position in [a particular program center]. At that time the position was like an...office supervisor. It was like an assistant director kind of position in that center, and I did a lot of referrals for services, assisted or oversaw orientation for [our students] and started advising students there actually when I was working under the direction of [the director] and started out very slowly and learned firsthand on the job from her. I was, I guess, at the time probably working on my master's degree in counseling, so I really didn't have formal training at that point in advisement...As I continued to train with her and progressed and was advising a lot of adult students and reentry students, because that's really what the job became, was advising them, it was just restructured and re-titled.

Carla said it was a way to get her foot in the door to the area in which she wanted to advance. "The appeal [of the advising job] was to get in on the ground floor and to build the program into what I knew it could be and what I'd seen at other universities."

Lewis stated that he was looking at ads in his local paper and saw one for an advisor at his alma mater. "I was looking through all of the educational ads in the [hometown] paper and I had attended [this institution] as an undergrad so that attracted me to it. I guess familiarity with the institution." He also said that the only thing that appealed to him about the position and the reason he took it was "because it was a pay increase from the community college position that I had and it was closer to home. I live on the outskirts of [town] and the community college I was working at was about forty miles away. So, it was much closer."

Ruth explained that she assumed one must have a doctorate to be an advisor until

> my mother actually handed me an advertisement for a job for an academic advisor at another school that had...a master's as a requirement. I looked at that ad, and [my mother] said, 'I thought this was for you' so I looked at that and looked at what they were looking for. Then I sought a degree, master's degree toward that. I started [advising] while I was still working on the master's degree. I was working at a community college as an academic advisor...someone from my program knew that that was something I was looking at, and at his school...there was an opening, so I applied for it and took that position.

Frank reported that "it wasn't my goal in life to be an advisor...it kind of fell into my lap almost." He explained:

> I used to teach...and because I don't have my doctorate I wasn't full-time. So, this job came open and I applied for it and just happened to get it kind of by luck. I enjoy working with students and wanted to still work here but I also wanted a full-time job, so this kind of enabled me to stay on to work with students.

The second theme was a desire to work in a college environment or with college age students. Brenda gave a lengthy explanation,

> Well, to make a long story short, I always knew that I wanted to do something with college students from a fairly early age when I was in college. I thought that seems like a really neat thing to do, and I actually was working in student programs as an undergraduate student just answering the phone and things like that...and didn't know that there was a field of student development, had no idea, and met a colleague that actually works here now, too...and I was like what kind of degree do you have and what did you do in order to become assistant director of student programs...she started talking to me about the field of student development and what all it encompasses, and so I started looking into that and thought I would do student programming at that point. And actually found out that that was late hours, weekend work...so I started working in the learning assistance program with an internship, an assistantship actually, first, in graduate school

when I started doing student development. I started finding out about the more academic side of student development where I was looking at admissions and financial aid and residence life and that kind of thing and just found, hey, there's a whole other side of this. I had a lot of friends that were advisors here in [this office]. I stayed in the learning assistance program for a while and then took different paths, went to a few different colleges. I went to [another college] and started a learning center there...then I went [another institution] and worked with, for the federal program for a while that did outreach to public schools helping students get prepared for coming to college, still doing the advising kind of role there. And then went back to get licensed in school counseling just cause I had been in the public schools with that job and thought, oh, that would be nice. So, I did that and went out to a public school in [the] county and worked there for a while, and that really wasn't what I wanted to do. I still wanted to be with college students and that was the underlying theme through the whole time that I was searching for what I wanted to do.

Sally began working in higher education when she graduated from her undergraduate program.

When I graduated from college, I worked in college admissions. And from there, several years later I worked as an advisor in a student support services program...and that is basically how I became an advisor...I've been in higher education for about a total of eleven years...I really liked admissions and I liked going out and meeting with prospective students and doing all of that and college fairs...then when I had the opportunity to become an advisor it was just...a natural fit.

Robert said he just really wanted to be a in college environment.

Because of things I was going through with my previous job, burnout, etc., I needed to find something that was related yet kind of separated from that field...The job that I had prior to coming here...I did for ten years, essentially had the same clients with very little movement as far as improvement with clientele. That tends to wear on you after a while, seeing the same people and not seeing a lot of improvement in their conditions. In addition to the problems that you have with the administration and the responsibilities...I really needed a break from that type of intensity. I really want to be in this environment with students. I feel like I relate pretty well with those types of individuals [students]. I enjoy this setting and it would seem to be a pretty good fit making that transition from one to the other.

Related work experience was the third theme that emerged. Patricia, who has a master's

in counseling, described the similarities.

I basically had decided to go...through the counseling master's program. Now, at the time that I did that, I did not have advising in mind. I had more personal counseling, in a community agency [in mind]. After I finished the program, at that point I had worked [at this institution] for fifteen, sixteen years, so I felt like I was not at a point where I could leave the university...so at that point it was a matter of the positions that were available that I would qualify for, and on our campus, as far as personal counseling, the majority of

those positions are Ph.D. filled. And then one position was advertised that really I think just piqued my interest because...that particular program was geared to adults who had been in the workplace maybe for ten to twenty years and were coming back to get a degree...As it turns out, I did get an interview for that position but did not get the position. And so then at that point I guess that I realized well, this is something that counseling also is required through the advising. I guess prior to that, although I had done a lot of informal advising in my [previous] role, it was only informal advising and just had never thought about it in a way that you were looking at the whole, I guess the holistic lifestyle of the student. But when I stopped and thought about it, I really was doing as much listening and personal type informal counseling as well as academic. So then I thought, well, this is something that would be of interest because I had been doing it all along...

Leigh explained how her work experiences related directly to advising.

I think a major portion of my being hired in this position had to do with my previous work experience. I coordinated a TRIO program, educational talent search, for eleven years and did a lot of work with students who were interested in pursuing a post secondary education, which could have been technical school, community college, four year institution and had to learn a lot of information about admissions procedures, financial aide, programs offered. That information really prepared me well to go into this job and I really firmly believe that that was the deciding factor in my being hired....I had applied for lots of jobs related to what I'd been doing but the advising positions intrigued me. When I saw the ad in the paper for this position I knew I was a pretty good fit...I had a lot of the experience that was being asked for so it just looked like a good opportunity.

Cynthia stated that the way the job was advertised was what attracted her.

It was advertised in such a way that it indicated that I would be connected with students, working with students. The teaching element was the thing for me because my background is education and teaching and that's what I like to do. So, that was the ultimate drawing factor, but the idea that I would still be in contact with students within an educational environment...and so I was looking for a full-time position in education...actually anywhere in the teaching element...it was more of the teaching [that appealed to me] not necessarily the advising-my experience in the advising was slightly different from what I'm doing now.

Karen talked about her related admissions office work.

I started out in the undergraduate admissions office as a transfer credit evaluator, so I worked a lot with courses and students who were transferring in helping them to determine how whatever they had taken and they were bringing in would translate into credits here. And in that capacity, I started working with the two, I guess they were sort of the pioneers in advising here on campus, two advisors in...the very first college that established their independent advising center. I started working with those two persons and when one of them decided to move on - as the academic advising component because more something that was standard in a lot of areas around campus as far as the colleges,

one of those advisor moved to another position and when [her old position] became available, they...encouraged me to apply...That's...how I got here, just kind of came, still from the university, just from one area to the next area and it seemed to be a good transition.

Sandy described her student development training.

I came through student development training and then worked in student affairs for a number of years and saw one of my colleagues move into the advising role in the academic advising office and really liked what I saw about what she did. My concentration in grad school was counseling, and I never felt like I had an administrative position in student development where I got to do enough of that [counseling] for my own tastes, so this was sort of a way to incorporate more of that love into my work.

Counseling or student personnel work was an obvious entrée for Trish as well.

I got my degree in guidance and personnel services with a concentration in student personnel services in higher ed, and by the time I'd graduated I had some good experiences in terms of practice and internships and counseling and testing and did career counseling at a small private school, was my first job. I liked that okay, but just always liked the idea of advising and that counseling was pretty draining and demanding for me. I mean, I liked it and liked helping people, but advising---so I got my first job in advising...and loved it and have loved it ever since...I've done different kinds of jobs. In higher ed I've done career counseling, the career center director, assistant director and counseling. I've worked for a state Merit system and different agencies in state government, but had done advising [for over 10 years],part-time, full-time, different configurations of it, but just really like that aspect of working with college students.

Hillary described her experience as a graduate assistant in an advising office.

I was a graduate assistant to the...advisor at that time in the [college] and that person was leaving to pursue his doctorate, and I had worked with him closely. He had trained me well and they liked my work, so they encouraged me to apply. I was interested. I was working on my master's in that area.

Only Judy said that becoming an advisor had been her goal.

I started actually in April here...this is my first advising job. I did some when I was in graduate school and also in undergrad school as a peer... We did peer advising, so I think it was my junior and senior year there I did some of that. But...basically when I graduated, I knew that was what I wanted to do...I came here and got my [master's] degree in counseling with the intention of working in higher ed...

In answer to my question about any training they had received or coursework they had taken in preparation of being an advisor, 17 of the 18 advisors said any advising specific training they had received was on the job. John recalled his first day on the job.

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The first day on the job my supervisor was late, and it was right before the beginning of spring semester, and the department secretary brought me in and said here's the computer and I can log you in and can you advise someone? Fortunately I had been given the catalog and the department's handbook and such as this to review, but...other than that not a lot of training was given. The graduate assistant who'd been working here in the office showed me the ropes, taught me a lot about the paperwork involved.

Carla described a similar first day on the job.

I walked in, they gave me a stack of files...I had no clue what was going on...I was very lucky in ...that I had done my undergraduate experience here and knew a lot of people, and that was the only thing that helped me...No training, underline that!

Lewis commented that his training was limited as well.

Just getting a bachelor's degree here...I did get to work with the previous advisor who held this position for two or three days and she gave me the basic ropes as it were, but my training was literally under the barrel as it were. And most of my training was via telephone just calling the various advising centers.

Beth said, "Just on the job training. I have a master's in education...and it's in two-year college teaching, but there wasn't anything taught about advising." Patricia said, "I felt like that even though I did not have experience as far as formally advising, I had the informal experience that really someone coming in off the street doesn't have." Trish reported her training was "just kind of my education in personnel work in higher ed just provided some context for it, but on the job training is where I got it." Sandy described her previous work experience as training.

I think the variety of experiences I had in student development were all transferable, but I really didn't have, no I really didn't have any specific training before I got in the position. And they have an extensive training model, once you get hired here that's very thorough and I feel very well trained now but not really before. But, I consider all that I did working with students in different capacities before this as training cause I've used it all since I've been here.

Sally said her experience in higher education settings was her training. "I guess just my years in higher education provided me with the experience that I needed to know."

Karen said her training was primarily through observation and reading informational materials.

When I first came, it wasn't really specific training, it was more just listening in on interviews with or on advising sessions with the other advisors. They had compiled

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information for me sort of just to read through and know policies and the little intricate things about the policies that weren't stated anywhere else but, you know, you just kind of had to know them.

Judy described pursuing experience since she did not have experience in advising.

I didn't have anything in higher education, but that's why I tried to get my assistantships and my practicums for counseling...in student, well higher education settings so that I would have the experience. But I haven't had any, I guess, formal training or classes in advising in particular.

In this interview situation, apparently even those advisors with backgrounds in counseling, education, or student development interpreted this question narrowly to mean coursework or training specifically in academic advising, as some of the responses suggested. Cynthia was the only advisor who reported any academic preparation to be an advisor, having taken a course in academic advising in graduate school.

Elements of Work Life

What follows are the findings of how these advisors experience the six elements of work life: job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, commitment to the organization, performance, variety, and autonomy.

Job Satisfaction

The questions I asked the advisors to gather information about their level of job satisfaction were related to what they liked and disliked about their jobs, the appropriateness of the compensation they received, and the degree of financial support they had for professional development.

Likes. The reasons advisors liked being advisors were varied, although nearly all of them immediately mentioned they liked some aspect of working with students as John did.

The majority of them are at a point in their life where they're seeking some guidance, seeking a little bit of affirmation. They see this job as kind of a safety catch to make sure that they are on the right track to graduate, that they've chosen wisely, and the majority of them can handle college work fairly successfully.

Patricia reported liking the interactions she had with students.

> I like the interaction with the students and being able to actually help them...through the process...And I guess it's the satisfaction knowing that you are helping the students. Very few come in with self-confidence and self-esteem and the reassurance that they need. Most come in and they have no idea what they need to do. They're very timid, actually a little scared. And to me that's just really rewarding that to say, 'It's okay, this is how you can do it, and this is how we can help you do it.'

Karen and Ruth also mentioned interaction. Karen explained her reason for becoming an advisor:

> The reason I got into [advising] is when I was in admissions I was dealing with paperwork. I knew the student by the transcript, and this way you get to actually talk one on one with the students. And that's what I like. That's the main thing that really attracted me to the position...the interaction...with students on a more personal level than I was before.

Ruth liked having assigned advisees. "I enjoy having individual students that are my advisees that I can go ahead and keep check into, make sure they're doing okay, keep checking up on."

"I like being able to connect with the students and feel like I can help them with their academic plans. And, I feel like I can hopefully make a difference in their lives, you know?" said Beth. Being able to help students appears to be a primary motivator as Judy indicated,

> The thing I like best is just feeling like I'm helpful to the students and hoping that I'm making a difference in some way in their success, hopefully a positive difference and not a negative difference! But...hopefully being helpful to them and that's the reason that I wanted to get into this work is because of my experiences I had as a student in school and knowing that those people that really had an influence on me and you know, I still keep in touch with them, I wanted to be like that for somebody else, and so that was kind of my reasoning for getting into advising, and so I hope I'm doing that.

Trish said she liked helping solve problems and watching the students grow.

> I just love this, working with college students. The role of advisor is real interesting because you get into all kinds of things going on with each individual student...I like that aspect of it. I love helping them solve problems. I love helping them articulate their goals if they're not clear on what those are and help them reach those by being sure that they understand the requirements and timing of things...The change that you see in traditional age college students from freshman to sophomore to junior year is pretty phenomenal and great fun to watch.

Hillary, who currently works with adults, said she liked talking to and helping her students who

bring their life experiences with them.

> It's such a high level of student contact, I think that's the biggest draw in the beginning. Now what I like a lot is I'm dealing with adults primarily that are over the traditional age. It's fun to talk to them. They have such a variety of experiences to bring and to share their life experiences and to help them. They are so motivated to be here and to get that degree finally for a variety of reasons, and it's so fun to help them find that path and a way to do it.

Robert has student athletes in his caseload and reported being able to relate to them.

> Probably the most rewarding part about being an advisor is the contact with the students, particularly student athletes because that's something that I relate to because I myself was a student athlete. I enjoy that contact with students. I enjoy being able to offer them something and be able to leave the office with something, not necessarily tangible in a physical way but they have information that they didn't have when they came in so that they're more enriched when they leave in some respect.

Carla, who also advises athletes, said she liked "having the opportunity to be an advocate for

students because I feel like students on a lot of campuses don't have the voice that they need."

> Frank, who had come from a teaching background, compared advising to his previous

teaching experience.

> I like [advising] better than I thought. I guess it's the idea of being able to solve certain problems. So, I feel like I'm getting something done and I can sense the gratitude that the students have unlike with teaching where you can't ever tell if you're getting through or making an impression...[y]ou get to know them, see another side of them that they wouldn't reveal if you were their teacher, you know, they're much more guarded. [H]ere...they're friends almost.

Maggie summed it up when she said,

> I like just the one-on-one interaction with students, helping them, not just with course scheduling but the developmental aspects of advisement, clarifying their career goals, if they're really on track with what they want to be doing, kind of the holistic approach, seeing what other factors they have occurring in their life, personal, work factors, and how that all figures into what they can do while they're here in college.

The other reasons advisors liked their jobs seemed to fall into three basic categories. The first category is contact with others. Leigh described how advising was different from her previous work experience.

> I like having contact with a lot of different kinds of people. I knew that that was something that was missing in my life. I was seeing the same people day in and day out on my previous job and in this position I get to work with students, I get to work with faculty, I get to work with staff. I'm encouraged to be involved with faculty and staff from other post-secondary institutions, so I've had a lot of exposure...to different situations that I would not have had otherwise and that's very stimulating to me.

Sandy said, "I love the colleagues that I have here and the team work atmosphere that we have, our approach to academic advising. That may not be the same everywhere but that's true here." Robert also liked working with his colleagues. "I like working with the staff. I think we have an excellent staff here. We have a diverse group of individuals and education levels, backgrounds, and it makes for very interesting and pleasant interacting for the most part." Ruth said, "I enjoy working with the other people that I work with, too. The people here, mostly is what I'm referring to, the other advisors, but also other people on campus."

The second category included situational elements such as scheduling, position level, and setting. John talked about his schedule.

> I like the idea of having fairly set schedules as far as work situations. There are some evening and weekend type assignments, special campus programs, orientation sessions, things of that nature, which are all right as long as they're spaced apart.

Patricia explained, "I like being administrative [staff]...being clerical [staff]...I considered always to be a very honorable position, but it's far more rewarding for me...to be able to say I'm an advisor in a center as opposed to [clerical staff]." Leigh also liked the administrative side of the job.

> I've also been asked to assist with administrative responsibilities by the dean and associate dean and that is very stimulating...It's personally rewarding because I feel like I've earned their trust and confidence and then also I'm just learning, I learn a lot of new information when I'm given different kinds of tasks. So, to me that's a really important part of this position. I honestly don't think that I could advise students day in and day out and not have any other responsibilities and stay in the position very long.

Other advisors, including Hillary and Trish, referred to the environment. Hillary explained that "It was a fun atmosphere. It was an enjoyable atmosphere to be at, so that also makes a big difference." Trish said, "I like working on the college campus, just like that general environment a whole lot."

The third category was task variety. Leigh commented, "In my job, I get to do a variety of tasks, and that's also very stimulating. Not only do I advise students, but I also teach...a class...." Brenda also reported enjoying the variety in her job.

> I've always enjoyed classroom experience...You know, we have this crazy advising time for a few weeks each semester, and it's pretty hectic, but it does not stay that way constantly. As a school counselor, I found that my days were pretty much like that every day for the whole year. So it's a variety, but we do have down time where we can get paperwork done, we can update manuals that we need to update, and things like [that] so we're not just running hither tither all the time meeting with students and not being able to organize our thoughts and our resource materials and things like that. That's really important to our particular situation that we stay up on policies and that we have it in writing for new advisors coming in...So I like the variety a lot, too, that this job offers.

> Lewis had a different perspective on what he liked about advising.

> Okay, now that's a toughie. Overall, I sort of like the university environment somewhat. Some of the people that I meet are interesting, some of the students are. Sometimes it's interesting to see the university grow...Oh, what do I like about being an advisor? Let's skip that one and go on to the next one.

When I asked the question again later he responded, "I think I pretty well covered it. I mean, it's not bad. I mean, it's a state position. I'm not jumping up and down with glowing reviews for it, but...it pays the bills." I asked again what he liked about advising and this time he said, "I like the environment. We have a pretty good office environment. We have a pretty good university to work on, work at. Overall, it's much less pressure than working in a bank or whatever..." Ruth also had a slightly different perspective and said that she just enjoyed education.

> I've always enjoyed taking classes, so I still take them for fun. People think I'm insane. And, so I just enjoy being around the whole experience...advising, education...I was the geek that read the catalog when I first got it, before I started college, from cover to cover!

Dislikes. Advising is not without its downside and six themes emerged related to what the advisors disliked about advising. One theme was paperwork. Advisors mentioned they disliked

paperwork in the form of reports, documentation, and check sheets or other forms. John explained, "I'm not wild about paperwork, but there's an element of that. When I was hired, I was told by my boss, 'Half of your job is dealing with people and half of it is paperwork' and I much prefer the people part." Beth disliked paper work because "I'm not detail oriented so I don't like the documentation." Other advisors had similar comments. Sandy said, "There's more paperwork involved, kind of like tallying and record keeping and that sort of thing, and that's not my favorite part of the job but it's a necessary evil." Hillary expressed that "In the advising, because I've done it so long...I get tired of filling out the check sheet, some of the routine administrative tasks or bureaucracy forms." Maggie described how paperwork created conflicting demands on her time.

> There are so many reports to different professional organizations. It seems like there is one every other week practically and there are just, we are pulled in a lot of different directions, both administratively and student service wise. We have always students coming through the office for different reasons, and of course, they are our primary reason for being here, but then at the same time we have these other competing demands that just make you have to be really good at time management...able to juggle things.

> Another theme was scheduling issues as John reported.

> There are evening and weekend type assignments, special campus programs, orientation sessions, things of that nature which are all right as long as they're spaced apart. Occasionally they will come right in a row, and that gets a little bit aggravating.

Lewis reported that "after working in the evenings for two years straight, it's getting kind of old." Brenda said she disliked summer work but offered a potential solution to that.

> Probably summers, having to work all summer because it was kind of nice in [my previous job] to have the summer off...but in the summer we do summer orientation, which is very intense for...a couple weeks in June to get prepared for it, then all of July is taken up with student orientation, and then kind of debriefing in August, the first part of August. So we don't have that much down time in the summer except May and a little bit in June where we can take vacation or we can be here, finishing up some things, paperwork and stuff like that. But, probably I really miss having the summer off. But, and when I say that, then I say, but you really like orientation, and I do, I really like new students orientation. I enjoy it. ..it's very rewarding to meet with new students and parents and things like that in the summer, so I don't begrudge it near as much as I would if I didn't enjoy that part of the job. But I wish that we could find a way to maybe have a little bit of May off and a little bit of June for maybe just a month where we don't have to be around for that, and we certainly can with vacation time. But, it would be kind of nice if

we were on an eleven-month kind of situation or something like that, an eleven-month contract instead of twelve.

Trish disliked the schedule for another reason; she disliked "the eight to five aspect of the job and having to account for all of my time and what kind of time." Carla reported that

The hours are terrible. In my position, it's a seven day a week job, and it has to be in our department because our kids go seven days a week...they're here all the time and they need to know that I'm there for them...I'm the go-to person for personal emergencies and things like that. And, so even though I like being able to help, it's pretty bad when you just want to get away, sometimes it's hard. Every weekend there's something to do.

She also admitted that this responsibility is not required in the job description but

It's a responsibility I've taken on because I've made a commitment to this program, and I think in order for me to be effective in my job, the kids need to see me, the students need to see me outside my office...I go to lunch in the cafeteria. I go to the ball games. We're creating a culture in our department where academics is on the same playing field as their athletic competition, and I think it's because I'm always there and they know they can talk to me if I'm there. If I'm sitting at a basketball game, they'll come up and sit down and talk to me and we'll talk about tutoring or whatever they need or if they're frustrated with a class or whatever. I have beyond an open door policy and I think it's really, really important for us. If we want to retain students and help students be successful, I think it's important for me to be there. It is not an 8:00 to 4:30 job by any means, and it can't be if we want to be successful and help our students graduate...I like it, but it's frustrating because I don't feel like I have the liberty to get away a lot of times. If we've got a home game, it's hard for me to say to myself, well, I should just skip this and go do my own stuff. It's hard for me to do that because I'm so invested in what's going on. So, I like it, but it is frustrating at the same time that I have added this to myself.

The third theme was related to the organization or its structure or nature of the position.

Trish said that she disliked all the committee work.

We are an organization that's grown a lot, so there's been a lot of committee work and kind of organizational tasks that we've been very involved, and it's been good and been interesting and productive, but it's also just not as, that kind of work is not as fulfilling, not as interesting to me as working with students.

Sally explained that her position in an off-campus site meant she had to be a little bit of everything to the students and reported that having to deal with financial aid issues was the only thing she disliked about her job because, "Students tend to blame me for financial aid related issues even though technically financial aid is really not part of my job responsibilities."

Patricia commented on the organizational structure of her unit and said that although she liked being under academic affairs

we don't have the equipment and the supplies that we need and we can't get them. We can't travel. We have hardly any travel budget, and there're conferences and workshops that we really need to go to...where you can get...a wealth of information...whether it's retention, recruitment.

She went on to explain the difficulty of working "…with what you know that somebody next door has, and they have maybe an eighth of the students. And so you're trying to do a lot with a little...I guess it's a little discouraging." Ruth commented about the inconsistency she experienced on campus.

I don't like...some of the things on campus that are inconsistent. It may be written one way one place and written another way another place but yet done a completely different way. That drives me absolutely, that's maddening. That's probably the biggest thing that I don't like about [advising].

The high volume work times or the high volume caseload was a fourth theme to emerge. Cynthia reported that she could not say she disliked anything in particular about advising itself, but that she was unable to give her students as much time as she would like.

I don't know that I can say that there is a particular thing that I don't like about the advising element itself. I think it's mainly just the structure here...because we advise so many students. Each of us have such a large number of advisees, it doesn't enable me to spend as much time as I'd like to working with individuals for one on one through the semester.

The volume of students was a problem for Sandy as well. "I miss the depth of relationships that I had with students before. So it's not really dislike about the job, but it's a part that I'm missing. I have much more lightweight relationships with students."

Robert disliked the extremely busy times but also admitted that he disliked the non-busy times as well.

I think that the nature of the job is that there are ebbs and flows of busyness and non-busyness. I really enjoy the times when there's a lot of activity going on, maybe perhaps not to the point where you're so full and you don't have time to take breaks or don't have time to eat lunch or go to the bathroom or whatever. That might be excessive, but I like the busyness. I like being able to do that sort of thing, and the part that I really don't like is when there isn't any. ..This time of year when students are in their exams and your

advising is pretty much done, we scarcely see a student in days. And since I kind of enjoy the contact with the student, when I don't get that, that's the down part for me.

Karen described her dislike of the high volume times.

I don't like the high volume times that we have here because some things, when we're in pr-registration advising and everybody's trying to get their schedules together, they cram in here. I mean, it's just one after the other all day. You can hardly take a bathroom break. It gets to be to that point. And we do everything that we can to try to prevent that from happening cause we'll...send out letters very early in the process telling them that it's time to come in for your advising appointment, come on by, let's talk about it, but they invariably wait until the very last possible moment and then they get upset when you can't see them when they want to be seen and you have to make an appointment for two weeks down the road. 'But oh, my...registration appointment's tomorrow.' It's like, well, you know, I can't help that and your procrastination is not my emergency.

Along this same line, Lewis expressed his dislike for what he saw as the repetition inherent in advising.

It's very repetitive. There's not a lot - once you've learned it, that's about it. There's no real deviation. I mean, for instance, in general education advising we've got a very convoluted system in gen ed here. But, once you've got it down, there's not a lot of deviation and the student needs to fulfill their goals in certain ways. There's not a lot of creativity in how you can do that. So, there's not a lot of room for self-expression. There's not, from one day to the next, from one month to the next, you know exactly how the cycles are going to go, you know at such and such date, we need to begin doing this, at such and such date we begin calling our students, you know, we begin advising, this is going to bet the rush period, and this is going to be the slow period and so forth. So, it's rather rote. Once you get it, get into it it's rather boring actually. The only creative part is to try to straighten out little snafus for students if they find themselves in a situation like, you know some kind of messed up situation or a student has run into a lot of problems, maybe personal problems, and this has effected their GPA or whatever, when the advising gets into a situation where perhaps the student is better advised to drop-out for a couple of years, go to a community college, and then think about coming back. But on a day-to-day basis, it's pretty rote.

The fifth theme was student responsibility, or lack of it. Judy was frustrated by some of her students. "[I]f you could change students to be responsible adults, that'd be nice, but some things just get frustrating...when you're trying to help a student...and they seem not to care or they don't want to put forth any effort." Ruth had similar thoughts about lack of responsibility on the part of her students.

When the students don't take responsibility to do what they need to do and...especially when they try to blame it on someone else when it's really something of theirs, they don't take ownership for their failing classes or things like that.

Karen spoke of a different frustration with students

I don't like...when you have students and there's just absolutely nothing you can do to help them...and you know that they need to be somewhere else but it's hard for you to...convince them of this because they...have been told by mom and dad and everybody that they have to do this thing and you're thinking, well, community college is just so much better for you. But you can't really say that because...you don't want to compromise what they've been told all their lives.

The final theme was a lack of dislike for the job. Although Leigh, who said, "I may sound pie in the sky," was the only advisor who claimed not to have any dislikes, Patricia and Robert did express similar sentiments about their job satisfaction. Patricia said, "I'm very happy with this position...this doesn't get boring" and Robert expressed that, "I think the things that are important to me in a job are satisfaction, enjoying what you're doing, which I really do."

Compensation. Because employees reported that promotional opportunities and financial rewards are two of the least satisfying aspects of their jobs (Jayaratne & Chess, 1986; McLean & Andrew, 2000), I asked the advisors if they believed they were being appropriately compensated for the work they do. Three of the advisors, Judy, Ruth, and Sally, reported being satisfied with their level of compensation. Judy compared her advising pay to what she had earned in her previous position,

I'm fine with it...I worked for a nonprofit organization for three years and I was happy to have a state job. I mean, I got a raise when I came here and health insurance. Even though it might not be the greatest plan...I'm just glad to have it...retirement...I didn't have any of this stuff where I worked before and...I'm just thankful to have a job right now because...the way the economy's going it could be worse.

Ruth expressed similar feelings. "I'm not doing any hard labor... I don't feel like I have...a huge level of responsibility in the university. Maybe I feel like I do though for the students, but so, like I said, it's okay." Sally spoke only positively about her level of pay.

I guess I'm really, really fortunate based on my level of degree, having a bachelor's degree, to be in [the] position I'm in. I feel very fortunate, very lucky, very blessed. I feel as though certainly based on that, I can't have a lot of demands, but yes, I feel as though

based on my level of degree that I am very well compensated...I think even based...on my experience...I feel as though...I'm probably one of very few people who would not complain about that. And when people do complain, 'Oh gosh, I don't get paid enough,' I think I'm just happy to be here!

The other advisors interviewed did not believe they were paid appropriately for their work in advising. The reasons fell into three categories. As Beth, Brenda, and Maggie explained, the first is that for the level of education required (master's degree), the pay was not appropriate. Beth said, "For a master's degree to be required, our salary is quite low, especially in comparison to other positions on campus...of course, we know that the world does not pay based on the importance of the position." Brenda had similar thoughts, "As far as the education level and experience for most of us around here, it's pretty limited, the pay is not satisfactory." Maggie explained that, "For the level of education, having a master's degree, and a number of years of experience, I would have to say I wish the compensation were a little more in keeping with what my background and degree is." Maggie also admitted that the situation could be worse. "The lower salaries are obviously not enticing, but then there are the other things...the benefits, the annual leave, and just health benefits, sometimes compensate for some of the lack of pay." She went on to say that

> I think there's a lot to be said for just working in a fairly stress free environment. I think sometimes we feel like we're under a lot of stress, and we don't realize what a lot of the rest of the world is coping with stress wise. There are...pretty stressful jobs in corporate America where people are working...fourteen hours a day. And, I think compared to that, it's not so bad.

Others mentioned the pay was not appropriate considering the level of responsibility of an advisor. John voiced his concern saying,

> When you begin realizing the results of your advisement and saying, if a student comes in and says, well, you've made me stay here an extra semester or an angry parent that says you misadvised my son or daughter, then you want to make sure you have the best people in those positions [advising].

Hillary suggested that pay and morale levels were intertwined.

> Here you are at this institution that says it's very important to have all this education and encourages it and then says, oh, yes, you can do this and you can do this and we're going

to add this to it. And there's a breaking point, you know, if you're not compensated, it drives the morale down and increases the potential for negative comments and lower production of work. I just don't think that my salary is commensurate with my duties, with my responsibilities.

Patricia voiced an understanding of the limitations under which institutions operate, but she was still dissatisfied with her level of compensation.

I have to say this. I think for the level of responsibility and looking at the level of responsibilities of other individuals across campus that have less education, less experience, sometimes it's hard for me to understand. So, I guess, if I have to say, am I happy with the level of compensation, no. And that's comparatively speaking from - and then I know that there is a limit to what this university and the size of university it is - but the equality is not here on this campus with like credentials. It's like, in other words, you have someone who is maybe doing the same thing that you're doing, doesn't have a master's, has a master's degree maybe a year ago that's not even in the area it's supposed to be, and the salaries are higher. And, evidently that has to do, I mean I understand this although this doesn't make it any better, it has to do with the unit itself and what leeway they have in giving their own employees, counselors, advisors, the individual raises.

Lewis said, "My salary's inadequate for what we do...for the level of professional responsibility that we're held to and accountability plus hours, commitment and so forth the salary's not where it should be." Karen explained her viewpoint:

I believe that we aren't being paid for the professionals that we are and the work that we do. When you can be a manager at McDonald's graduating from high school and make what we make, then I think there's something wrong here.

The third category was general dissatisfaction. Leigh said simply, "The salaries for professional advisors on this campus stink." Carla had a similar comment,

I'm not sure that anybody on this campus is appropriately compensated...Some of the upper senior staff I'm sure are well compensated. There are plenty of faculty who are well compensated, but they'd never tell you that. But I don't think advisors are fairly compensated on this campus, especially since I've seen salaries from other places. And I know comparably in my position in [my department] I am not similarly compensated as other academic professionals are in [other institution's similar departments].

Ruth and Frank mentioned pay specifically as one of the things they disliked about advising. Ruth said simply that she disliked "the low pay." Frank explained,

Probably the pay. [Advising] has its stressful periods I guess, but I mean every job does, so I don't think anything about the work itself is unappealing. I've only been doing it for six months, so that might change. But, so far, I enjoy the work itself. Just, it's hard to

make this a career choice when they don't pay very well. It pays about what I got when I was teaching without a doctorate like as a full-time temp.

Frank continued with both positive and negative comments about the level of compensation.

I think a slight raise would be good. Normally I think it's fairly stress free and...there's a lot of freedom that most jobs wouldn't have so that off sets most of it, but I think...it's barely enough to live on. I would like to have a little bit of money left at the end of the month...I would like a certain level of living where you're not counting your pennies the last week of the month.

Robert seemed uncomfortable with the topic but admitted his concern over his level of compensation was more personal.

I guess I have some issues about [the pay] and I don't know if other folks would have issues about this. This is my issue because when I came here to this job I took a major pay cut, and there are issues that it brings up in me. I guess that you become used to a certain lifestyle, and when you have to retract on that lifestyle, you harbor feelings about that. I know that there's really not a lot that can be done in our office about it, but I think that, that I feel under-compensated...I'm not talking a small pay cut. I'm talking, it was a sizable one, and I probably won't get back to the level I was for many, many years, if I even get there. And even though at a family level that we're able to make up the difference, in my head it's not made up. So, again, I think this is more of a personal thing that I have a problem with because I'm geared towards pulling my weight. And, having lost that, that bit, I'm not pulling my weight anymore.

Support for professional development. Marriott, Sexton, and Staley (1994) suggested that financial support for continuing education was another aspect of their jobs that employees were least satisfied with, so I also asked the advisors about the financial support they received for professional development opportunities. None of the advisors interviewed stated they were receiving strong support for professional development. John explained that his office did not have "a great deal of financial resources. Our office does not have a separate budget line so anything that we need comes through the dean's office." He did say he had attended on-campus training sessions but the only off-campus training he received was related to "a software program used to extract information from our student database system." Beth said lack of funds for professional development had been pretty consistent during her time as an advisor.

I have attended a couple of conferences since I've been in advising, but that would be over the past five years I've been to a couple of conferences. For the most part there's not

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a lot of money available for that. As our division has grown...we haven't received any extra monies for supplies or professional development...so we're doing more with less.

Leigh said her supervisor had been supportive of her professional development activities but that the financial support had been limited. "The only thing she told me I couldn't do was go to the NACADA Institute...it wasn't that she didn't want me to go, it's just that she felt there wasn't the money to spend."

Brenda, Trish, Maggie, and Robert said that current budget constraints at their institutions had created a reduction in opportunities for professional development Brenda explained how the budget situation had effected a change in her unit.

It's a little more tight these days than it has been and we've kind of set a rule...if you want to present at a conference...then you'd be allowed to go and funding would be there and that kind of thing...and everybody certainly can't go every year.

Trish's situation was much the same. "Until this year everybody who's wanted to go to a conference, it's not been a problem. You just make your request...and the money has been there." Robert described the similar situation at his institution.

With the state of affairs right now with [the] state budget...we've experienced a lot of cut backs and reductions...there is kind of a hold on any unnecessary workshops and travel...certainly during normal circumstances we're allowed to be able to conduct those types of endeavors so that we can broaden our knowledge and abilities.

Maggie lamented the missed opportunities for involvement.

What I get is a trip every other year to the national conference...It's just a little hard to stay very active in an association if you're going to their main conference only every other year. There's only so much you can do then.

Sally said that although her unit's fund were limited, "…we're encouraged to attend certain conferences, but I feel as though if we wanted to attend something and we felt as though we could justify attending a meeting or a conference, then certainly that's encouraged." She went on to say that she had not attended conferences because of "time and just really...there hasn't been the occasion to do that." Time was an issue for Carla who reported not receiving any support for professional development.

To be honest with you, I don't have time to do it because I'm a one-woman show. If I left for four days, I think the world would fall apart. Maybe that's just the control freak in me...so it would be really hard for me to leave for a week to go to a conference.

Karen explained that she did not receive much financial support for professional development but that could be related to her own lack of interest. "I don't know if it's more that we don't express much of an interest...perhaps as we could...but it's not been something that we've really been pushed or...feel that is not a high priority right now." Lewis did not feel strongly encouraged either. "There is a budget [for professional development]. Most of that goes to the director...Money could be scraped together but it would not cover the full price of going to a convention or going to a meeting." He also said he would be "not strongly but moderately encouraged if we want to pay for it ourselves." Ruth also brought up the possibility of footing the bill herself.

We went to one conference...but we're told that the budget, it's not there for us to have that anymore...I was looking at going to a conference which I would assume if I did that I would have to pay for it myself, but I don't know that I'm going to go.

Relationships with Colleagues

Advisors do not work in a vacuum, nor can they isolate themselves from contact with others by the simple fact that an advisor's job responsibilities include direct contact with others. Although the business literature (Igbaria, Parauranman, & Badawy, 1994; Lau & May, 1998) focused on the worker's relationships with colleagues as one of the elements of work life, as I developed questions to address this area, I chose to expand relationships with colleagues from just other advisors to include other staff, faculty, and students.

Within the unit. Maggie was the exception, having less than positive comments about her relationships with her colleagues. Although she declined to explain in detail fearing her voice would carry in the office acoustics, she did say that, "The office had been in some degree of turmoil...had a lot of problems between the two counselors that were here, so there were still some residuals...hurt feelings...when I started in this office." As the other advisors described the

positive relationships they had with their colleagues, two major themes emerged to categorize the relationships: personal and professional.

Within the broader theme of personal relationships, three sub-themes emerged. The first was family. John described his situation as "We have a very good team family type atmosphere here in the office." Judy said, "It's one of the best environments I've ever worked in as far as everybody...getting along and feeling kind of like a family." Beth explained that,

> I feel like we have a sense of community here cause we care for each other and support each other, not a competitive environment. We joke a lot, so that's good. We listen to each other. We're like a family in a way because we can tease each other about our issues...without upsetting each other...we have professional interaction but also sort of a familial interaction, too.

The second sub-theme was friends. Brenda described being friends with her colleagues both in and out of the office.

> I don't know if we're a strange unit or what, but we are friends. You know, a lot of us are really close friends and really pretty much all of us...are...on a friendly basis and do things outside of the office as well as in-office.

Ruth expressed similar feelings, "I think we're all friends, and if I needed something, I feel like I could count on these people." Carla described her situation much the same way.

> I think we're all pretty much just friends there. We work well together, but we're also friends for each other because we that we're in the same boat, that we're all...pretty much pulling the load for each of our individual divisions, so you have to be friends and support each other that way.

Sandy reported that, "We have friendships and we talk in the hallways and socialize together...I feel like I have a really neat group of friends...there are some really deep relationships here."

Community emerged as the third sub-theme within the category of personal relationships. "We are always hollering at each other through the doors, asking questions, lots of hall talk, just a real good group of folks to work with, real supportive of each other," said Trish. Hillary described her office as

> very pleasant because the majority of the people have similar priorities. Everyone has experienced family life and what that means, how it impacts your work life...that's very

important to me...they care enough about you to ask about family and how you are and all those kinds of things, and they mean it.

Patricia talked about the levels of respect among colleagues in her unit.

We all get along...our personalities are different but we all get along and we respect each other and respect the privacy and also respect what each one brings to the center...I think we have probably the best of all worlds. One is that we all do get along and respect each other. So on a personal level I think we have a very good rapport.

She also described her office atmosphere as "very upbeat and...very positive and...student oriented. We're here to help the students and it's not that people come in with problems we've got to solve. They come in with issues that sometimes we're going to have to work through."

Cynthia reported that her relationships with her colleagues were "very good. I think in our whole department that's what I think makes it a great environment to work in. I think we have a great group that really blend well."

Hillary, Robert, and Karen described their collegial relationships as professional rather than personal. Hillary had described her relationships as personal, but also described them professionally.

I think there's a lot of respect professionally among each other. We're very capable people who share the commitment of helping our students get what they need. There are definitely different work styles, but I think there's an appreciation of each other's abilities. And that's good.

Robert said that his interactions with his colleagues

are on a professional basis...I really don't interact with folks outside of the office much unless it's at a sporting event...or something like that...but that doesn't mean that it's all business, certainly, depending on personalities, the interactions vary with the different folks in the office.

Karen said that she and her colleagues "work real well together" but that the relationship is definitely professional rather than personal. Lewis's experience was similar as he explained. "Most interaction on a day to day basis is internal within our office."

With advisors outside the unit. Interactions with fellow advisors in other areas on campus appeared to be more limited. John described his relationships with other advisors as cordial.

> I don't know that you'd say extremely close. I feel real comfortable though picking up a phone to ask them a question if it's related to an issue in their major or some other ruling that I may not be familiar with just to verify something.

Patricia said her relationships with other advisors are "pretty much all strictly professional as opposed to personal." Brenda said her contact was primarily via email. "We do a lot of emailing and questioning and asking them things for these specific colleges...we contact them quite often as we need to." Trish, Sandy, and Lewis all expressed a degree of isolation from their cross-campus advising colleagues. Trish commented that there "hasn't been a lot of across campus involvement and that's been something that some of us miss." Sandy reported that

> It feels sort of like an island sometimes because we do student affairs work but we're considered academic affairs and so you're kind of 'where's your identity?' and I don't think academic affairs does quite the job, at least here, of having their departments connect across campus like student affairs does.

Lewis said he was connected primarily through periodic meetings "so we're not operating on a complete void, but I do see that there's a lot of compartmentalization between the various colleges and offices, perhaps geographic isolation."

Hillary had worked at her institution for over ten years and described her relationships with other advisors differently.

> I've developed a lot of relationships across campus through those [years] through my connections on the different advising responsibilities and I've had a lot of good experience...I feel that if they know me, my work speaks for itself and they know they can depend on me. You know, it's just like human relations, you treat someone nice and well consistently and it usually comes back to you, so that's how I like to operate...And I need those people you know? They're important to me and I think what they do is important and I respect them.

How the advisor developed relationships. When I asked the advisors how they had developed relationships with their colleagues, Robert said, "Going to make me think on this one a little bit aren't you? It's not something that you really think about, how you interact with people, how do you develop relationships with them?" and Ruth said similarly, "I guess nothing

that I thought about consciously." Karen said, "Gosh, that's a hard question to answer because things I do, I guess I don't really think about how I just kind of do them." Even if the advisors had not put conscious thought into how they developed relationships, they were able to describe how their relationships had developed. Serving on committees or on team projects was one way of developing relationships. Trish explained how her relationships developed through committee work.

> Probably just... being around each other all the time...learning people's interests, kind of finding out who you like to talk to about particular things. We can decide which work teams we want to work on, and so you kind of get to know each other within that context that leads to some relationship outside the work team as well based on just how people work, the values that they express as they're carrying out their work.

Beth talked about committees also saying, "Some of that [relationship development] would be through committee types of work, through working together on special projects." Brenda talked about committee work as well.

> Certainly the work teams do a lot for that because you generally get to know your colleagues much better if you're on a work team with them or some kid of work situation with them where you are expressing your needs or your questions or you feelings on something than if you don't work real closely with them.

Sandy mentioned other work situations in addition to committees that created a connection with her colleagues.

> I think through volunteering for different things that come up. We have search committees once in a while and special projects that come up that you can volunteer for...we work at the open houses for incoming potential students and...that's a fun way to do something besides advising with your colleagues. I think just spending time together in the halls talking and seeking each out when we have to time to develop our relationships a little bit.

> Judy said she initially developed relationships with others in her unit simply by asking questions when she did not know the answer to something, "just going and sitting down and talking to somebody and saying, 'Okay, I have a question about this situation and if this happened what should we do'...just a continued process of that...so just constant interaction." Cynthia said, "We're just constantly checking and beginning to build a relationship with each

person, offering assistance." Lewis also described work related situations and said, "We all sort of depend on each other, so you have to develop pretty close relationships with your key contact people to keep you abreast of any changes, anything that may be changing." Still in the work context, Ruth described how she adjusted to the culture.

> I try to make an effort to be friendly to people when I talk to them and when I call up somewhere I try to ask how they are, you know before I bombard them with 'why didn't you do this for my student.' So I try to make an effort especially since I'm in the south now.

Leigh and Patricia had contacts at their institutions prior to becoming advisors. Leigh explained:

> I had a lot of relationships established before I came here...because of my previous job. I knew people in financial aid. I knew people in admissions. I knew people at the counseling center. I knew people who are now in the [advising center]. I knew people in career placement. I mean, I just knew a whole lot of people prior to being hired here, and that made my situation very comfortable coming in.

Patricia described an even wider circle of colleagues than advisors.

> I guess maybe because I've been here so long and just know so many people...I've always had the thought that we all have to work, we're here for one reason, the students. We need to get along and I'm not really one to find fault with people...and it's mainly because I respect what they're doing whether or not they are a custodian or whether it's the president of the university...it's just like you're part of a big family, and you're here for...the main goal of taking care of the students and the university.

Three advisors, Hillary, Frank, and Sally, mentioned that someone had "paved the way" by introducing them around when they were first hired. Hillary said that her predecessor

> sort of paved my way...dealing with the major offices and the people, knowing who to contact. Having someone tell you who to contact is wonderful, so I think that's how it all started, but [now] I think it's just the frequency [of contact].

Frank credited his supervisor for his comfort level.

> I think it's almost been kind of natural...[my supervisor] really made it easy for me and kind of prepared the way for my arrival and told everyone what I was doing, so when I came it's almost like I just fit right in. It hasn't been anything conscious on my part. I think people have just really accepted me.

Sally went a step further and after being introduced around by her supervisor, she said she, "sent out a letter to our faculty and introduced myself and said okay, I'm here, this is what I do, and if you have a student in need of this, this, or this, send them to me." She laughed as she described how she ended up meeting many of the people where she worked.

> Just based on my location [near the copy machine], I tend to come in contact with a lot of people. A lot of times, if somebody is new, they don't realize that I'm the academic advisor, so they'll come in and ask me about copier problems. And, so, then I introduce myself, and we develop a relationship based on they had copier problems.

John explained that the staff in his office had worked together for years and that "…we've kind of grown together." Karen said that she started relationship development even before someone was hired into her office.

> When we're looking for someone we try to look at not only credential wise what they have or what they can bring professionally but we look for a good fit with the office climate. Those are things we look for so that it won't be such a big transition.

Robert, although he admitted he had not thought much about it, took a less serious approach.

> I consider myself to have a pretty fair sense of humor, and that's probably my icebreaker, a lot of times, is being able to break the ice with some kind of crack...just lighten the mood a little bit which allows people to be able to open up and talk.

> *With other staff.* Of the 18 advisors interviewed, only Leigh, Hillary, Frank, and Carla reported having concerns about working with their staff colleagues (how the advisors interpreted the definition of staff seemed to depend on their situation or structure). Leigh expressed concern about the information the staff members in her office were disseminating,

> I feel like I'm sitting in this office with my ear always attuned to what's being said in the outer office for fear that somebody's going to be told something inappropriately and practically on a daily basis that occurs even from our staff, and the staff has been here for a long time.

Hillary was worried that her comment would sound funny.

> Sometimes I feel like I've said something that was sort of my idea that somehow kind of got through and came out somebody else's idea. I'm not concerned with that but I guess every once in a while that can be a frustration.

Frank said that, "Certain people have their own little territories and if you kind of cross the line, then they are less likely to do stuff for you." Carla expressed concern that other staff thought her students received preferential treatment from the university when in fact they did not.

> I've had this expressed to me that athletes have all this preferential treatment and athletes get this and athletes get that, and I know for a fact that it's not true. We don't have nearly the resources that a lot of other departments do, and we don't have nearly the staff that a lot of other departments do.

With faculty. The advisors who reported having contact with faculty members at their institutions had either negative or positive things to say about working with faculty, although a few had both positive and negative comments. John compared the faculty advisor to the professional advisor.

> Faculty tend to...absolve themselves of any advisement responsibility...For the most part, I guess it is safer for the faculty to send [students] to us, but I'm not sure that they always realize all the pieces, parts that go into the advisement process... The faculty advisor may be dealing with a smaller group of students, and depending on the major, very small, and sees that as part of their job rather than their job in its entirety. I guess the professional advisors feel a little more sense of ownership into the [advising] process because we do it all day long, more a sense of providing stability for the students...I feel like the professional role is a little stronger both for the university and for the students.

Patricia admitted she had not been aware of everything advisors do prior to becoming an advisor, but expressed a similar attitude to John's; however she also tempered her comment. "I feel that they're...letting the students down and sometimes I guess I can't blame the faculty. They have a lot of responsibilities, but it bothers me that they're not responsive to their advisees and they're not available." Beth said her contact with faculty was limited but positive, yet she also had a perception about the faculty as a whole.

> Faculty that I initiate interaction with are very willing to share and work with me. Through our learning contract program...we are in touch with the faculty on a regular basis, they're very willing to share. I guess it would be a...perception of the faculty as a whole...there are many of them that really have no idea what we do here and then as a result they don't value it...but the ones that I have contacted...I have good working relationships [with].

Trish said that although the faculty/advisor relationship at her institution had not always been

positive, she thought that was changing.

> There is a history of some resentment of our unit because we take a lot of resources and...some faculty see us as hand holding...and being mothering...but I think through the years we've kind of overcome that and that they do see the role that we play in that by the time students get to the upper division and have faculty advisors hopefully they're seeing students who are pretty well able to manage their own program 'cause that's certainly our goal.

Sandy described a similar experience and credited the advisors' role in the classroom for the

improved relationship.

> I think there's the constant struggle of wanting to be seen as part of the academic arm, but because some of us don't teach or some folks are just teaching...learning skills classes or speed reading or something, we're not really recognized as that by some of the faculty. Now, we're making major headway...because...we're going into the classroom quite a few times into freshman seminar classes and we've developed, through our learning communities...a team approach to helping new students where a freshman seminar instructor, another faculty member from a course linked to freshman seminar...and advisors create the support team for students. We've had regular meetings this semester with faculty members and that's really improved our relationships, I think, and increased our understanding of one another.

> Others had negative experiences to relate. Hillary talked about her experiences with

faculty in her role as advisor for student athletes.

> What comes immediately to mind is the biggest challenge with dealing with faculty came when I was in athletics because I had to establish that I had academic integrity and I was coming at it from academics not from get the athlete through at all costs...because they have a lot of stereotypes...that that's what happens in athletics...it goes back to there's always some that understand advising more than others and I think there's always that group that probably sees [advising] more as clerical.

Carla, who also worked with athletes, voiced a stronger opinion.

> I absolutely don't like faculty advising. I like the fact that the students get to know a faculty member in their department but...they don't participate on a level that the professional advisors do and I can tell such a huge difference. From working [with] all the different programs around campus, I can tell a difference between departments with professional advisors [where] that is their job and departments where they have faculty advisors, just because faculty have other responsibilities and they don't stay on top of the changes that are going on on campus or the academic requirements. I don't think that they don't want to. I just think that they don't have the time.

Judy and Karen were concerned that faculty members were not knowledgeable about advising or up to date on information. Judy reported that

> from an advising standpoint, sometimes I don't think they know very much about advising...we've gotten word back from different places, different departments that a student may have been told this or that or the other and it's not correct. I guess my concern and I guess all of our concerns at this point about faculty is that they're advising the students correctly...That's why we keep files on students, we make notes in there. Some of us think that when they get to the department they just throw stuff away. I don't think they do, but you know, we try to make it as clear as possible what they need and what they've had and where they stand, and I just hope that the faculty advisor that they work with uses that information...

Karen thought the faculty advisors were knowledgeable about their individual departments but less so about general information. "Those who advise generally know what's going on in their department, but they're not all the time up on the general requirements, the core curriculum and things like that." She also explained how her office held informational workshops for the faculty.

> We typically get the same people each time. The ones who are really concerned will come, but the others just kind of blow it off and think it's not important...not taking advantage of the options that we provide to make them better informed about the general requirements.

Advisors also reported positive experiences with faculty. "The longer I'm here the better I feel about faculty understanding information and also the faculty has been great about calling me," Leigh stated. Trish made a similar comment, "They'll call on us and ask things. We're calling on them and asking them things all the time...so it's much more collaborative and collegial than maybe it was, say, ten years ago." Brenda said simply, "to the extent that I've had contact with them, it's been a very positive experience." Sally said that "I've always had a very positive experience...I find that people want to help me because then in return I help them by helping the student [here]." Robert, unlike Hillary and Carla, reported having more positive interactions with faculty in his role in advising student athletes although he said that his contact was more related to information gathering.

> I work with a lot of faculty in the role with athletes...so I have to make sure that they're given the right classes and make sure classes count towards what it's supposed to, so I do have contact with faculty in making sure that class is what it's supposed to be and that it's

doing the job it needs to do. I feel fairly confident in my interactions with [faculty] in that respect.

Maggie described her proactive approach in taking steps to enhance her relationship with the faculty by

> empowering them to be able to do some of the things that we do, that they're actually pretty afraid of doing...they are probably even more afraid of screwing up a student's academic record because they aren't as hands-on all the time with advisement like we are in this office. I think they view us as the experts...some of them come to us for everything. Some of them can handle...a lot of what they're doing, but I think just empowering them with knowledge as opposed to just doing something for them where it's not really a learning experience.

> *With students*. Each advisor had one or more concerns about working with students. John talked about culpability and student responsibility.

> I guess in this job culpability is always an issue. When a student comes in and says, 'It's your fault, you didn't tell me this.' I don't really see it as being a threat of litigation or anything like that but more of anger and frustration on their part. Trying to develop a sense of responsibility for the students to make sure that they realize that once they leave college that someone may not be there to double check everything they do, that the employer may not be as forgiving.

Hillary had concerns about being uncomfortable with certain students.

> There are some [students] that I'd rather not be sitting in a room alone with...this has popped into my mind, I guess, because of a student that came in a few days ago...I know that he is unstable emotionally and mentally and...to have to be by myself, and especially because I'm...farther away from the rest of the group.

She also said she used to be concerned about legal issues, but she was less so now.

> I'm always concerned that I give them accurate information, did I really make a judgment that's best for them and refer them well...I used to be concerned about maybe some legal issue or something coming back to me if I happened to misadvise...unknowingly, but I don't feel that so much anymore. Probably the level of my comfort of knowledge has increased over the years.

Cynthia also had concerns about legal issues.

> I guess my only thing that I am always conscious of, but it's not any major concern, is just being sure that I document everything that I communicate with the student because of the legality of what could happen...every now and then I might think a disgruntled student, you know, leaving here and saying, 'Oh, this lady...' and coming back and blessing me out or something.

Robert's previous work experience in the mental health arena made him cautious about the information he provides to students.

> One concern I have is telling them the wrong information. I try to always back that up, so when I tell something to a student, I'll say I'm not sure. I always add a qualifier. I think I've learned that through my experiences with mental health that you always put a little qualifier in there or you make a note of it or you do something like that that will CYA. But how I usually do that with the student is I'll tell them something and I'll say I'm not really sure about that you need to check up on this or you need to follow up with this or I'll do it while they're here in the office or I'll make a call to that department and just find out for sure. I want to make sure that I know the information that I give them and I'm not giving them false information so that they don't come back at a later time and say, 'Well, this advisor told me this and it was wrong.' Although I know I'm wrong and I make mistakes, I try to minimize those.

Ruth was concerned about passing on information that she was given incorrectly. "One [concern] is if I tell them the wrong thing based on erroneous information that I've been given."

Keeping up-to-date was a concern for Sandy, Sally, Karen, and Maggie, although Sandy's concern was about the students and

> keeping up with what our students really are about each year. The trends change so fast and I still consider myself pretty young and not that far out of undergraduate, but you know, fourteen years makes a pretty big difference. I think maintaining a realistic understanding of our freshmen, I think it's real easy for me to make assumptions and so figuring out ways to stay on top of that [is my concern].

Sally, Karen, and Maggie focused on information. Sally described her concern about being up to date.

> I guess my biggest concern would be maybe there is a change in policy or maybe a change in academic programs and being unaware of it...occasionally that will happen and I really have no idea the change has taken place until a student informs me...I find that...to be very uncomfortable, awkward, and embarrassing.

Karen said that she sometimes heard new information from students.

> Just trying to be up on everything is a concern because sometimes departments don't even think about the fact that when they make [a] change that because we're over here and we're advising students in general, we might need to know that information. Many times I find out things from talking to students.

Maggie's response was similar. "I guess just keeping abreast of curriculum changes, know that I'm giving them really up-to-date [information], staying current on changing requirements, knowing that I'm giving them accurate information." Maggie also had a concern related to the selective admissions program for which she advised.

> We're seeing a lot of second degree students as well as traditional aged students coming to this major for the wrong reasons a lot of times, people who don't really have the aptitude for [it] but they're doing it just purely because it's going to be a good market and they know they can get a job...and there needs to be something innate in your personality, I think. As well as getting the training and the skills, you have to have an authentic sincere desire, and I think that a big concern of mine in working with this population is getting out what...what motivates them. Those other factors...in their lives, like family, just outside pressures, trying to get at those, those things that they don't always like to come in and start telling you about.

Patricia's concern about keeping up with students had a different slant. "I guess sometimes working with students...they do have a lot of energy and sometimes I don't have that energy, and it's just like I have to force, force myself to at least appear that I have..."

> Beth, Brenda, Trish, and Ruth all had concerns about referring students to other services or offices or about the assistance students were receiving. Beth explained:

> There are times when you know the student's probably not telling you the whole truth and just some boundaries there, I guess as far as what you can ask, what you can do, how far you can go with those things. Some limitations with, you can refer a student, but you can't make them go somewhere...there are times when you know things that parents really should know, but you can't...clue them in.

Brenda said she worried about getting her students help and still dealing with a large caseload.

> I worry about them, you know? Getting the help they need and listening to me and actually going to the counseling center and getting the help they need there...I'm trained as a counselor, but that's not really what my job is and that's not really what I have time to do, but it's such a conflict because I...can't get to sleep at night if I feel like I didn't do my best with that student...So that's been a real eye opener for me to try and figure out a way to make sure that they are getting their needs met and then while you still have three hundred and eighty in your case load, trying to make sure, okay, did I follow up with that student?

Trish had similar comments about her caseload and meeting the needs of the students.

> We have pretty big caseloads and I always feel like somebody's slipping through the cracks...our freshman focus has been to get as much information so that we have some

early warning about new students who might be having difficulties and might be at risk of not coming back. And it's been hard to figure out how to best use all of that information while serving all of the [students]...I don't like feeling like I'm working in triage, you know, like I've got to be aware of students in trouble and focus all of my time on that.

Leigh had her own concerns about meeting students' needs.

My primary concern is feeling comfortable that every student leaves this office complex understanding what needs to be done to progress through [this program]...I just worry sometimes when people leave that there are questions that the students haven't asked and things that I haven't addressed that might be important. If students don't understand what they need to do to get through [this program] then they're very handicapped and I know that there are people who are afraid of asking questions. They're afraid their questions are dumb, or...they are afraid of asking something that's already been told them, sounding silly for asking or just, there are some students who plain don't understand and I worry about that.

Lewis, Frank, and Carla expressed concern about making sure students were on the right track. Lewis explained that his advisees were primarily non-traditional students and contributed to his concerns.

My primary concern is just to make sure that a student understands fully what they're expected to do as far as their general education and making sure that they understand all the policies and procedures that they have to follow. More often than not, the students that I see are highly disconnected from the university environment because I would say sixty to seventy-five percent of students that I see...are people who sort of rushed in under the carpet as it were through other admission processes. These are people who decide on the first of December, for instance, wake up one and day and decide, 'Oh, I think I will go back to college after fifteen years, well, it must be time to start.' These are people that it never occurred to them that you apply six months in advance to get into a university, so they have no clue about social structure and the organizational structure of being a university student. They are absolutely babes in the woods, so a major concern is just to make sure that they would literally find the bookstore and show up to class on the first day...so we literally see people who seem like they're bouncing around without any idea of what they are doing. Our major concern is just to make sure they're actually on track, that they're moving towards their goal, which is to graduate.

Like Lewis, Frank was also concerned about whether his non-traditional students were on-track.

I think my main concern in this program is just that I'm actually steering them in the right direction. [This] degree is so open and they can really kind of make of it what they want. They can make it into a useful degree or they can make it into something completely meaningless. I want to kind of steer them in a way that'll make them get something out of the degree without forcing them into it.

Carla voiced the similar concern of "being too invested in someone who doesn't have the goals for themselves that we have for them which is ultimately graduation."

Students' lack of responsibility was the greatest area of concern for Judy who described a recent experience at length.

> I think I probably hold the record for advisor with the most students to withdraw or something. I don't know, they keep coming in and even this week they've been withdrawing. I'm thinking, what in the world? Some of them I know it has nothing to do with me. I mean, I did not get their girlfriend pregnant. It's just really some bizarre things, well, not bizarre, I guess they're really common, but it just breaks my heart, you know, when they're sitting there saying, 'I have to leave school' and I'm going, 'Why? Why?' you know? I'm thinking, 'Could you have made a better decision?' but I just, I guess I care about them too much or something. But knowing that some of these students are just, well, I'm not going to say ruining their lives 'cause that's a pretty drastic thing, and they may finish school somewhere else. I know they have all great intentions and purposes...when they're sitting in my office [saying], 'I'm going to leave but...will plan to come back in the fall...' and just knowing that the chances of that happening are just slim to none. Slim's gone home and None's not showing up, you know? It just really kills me that...something about their decision making abilities or something are just real lacking or...they don't think through...what are the consequences of this or what might happen or just using real reality checking.

With supervisors. Lee et al. (1996) and Pettit, Goris, and Vaught (1997), as mentioned in Chapter 2, reported on the important role one's supervisor plays in the work setting and satisfaction. Because the advisors participating in this study were employed in a variety of settings, from central advising centers to departments to colleges to special population centers, I found it necessary to allow for the various levels of supervision the advisor may have. I asked the advisors for their perceptions of the guidance and support they received from their unit as well as from the university administration.

Although John, Leigh, Cynthia, Beth, and Ruth described the support of their units rather than the support of their supervisor directly, because of Sandy's comment that "I feel like our supervisors are incredibly supportive and we support each other as well" one could infer that the supervisor had something to do with creating the atmosphere of support within the unit. John said, "We have a very good team family type atmosphere here in the office." Leigh's comment was that "I find the collegial atmosphere here supportive and people are really good

about complimenting or offering words of support." Cynthia said she felt supported by "the camaraderie here, the team approach to getting things done." Beth explained, "Everyone as a whole is very supportive in the decisions that I do make or any advising efforts that go on." Similarly, Ruth said, "It seems to be [a] pretty good support system just right here in our own unit."

Others described the support they received specifically from their supervisors. Frank said he could go to his supervisor any time and that "there's been a whole lot of support." Patricia described her supervisor as "extremely good in making sure that we all have gotten whatever training that's available on campus and passes along information, very good at assimilating information...we're sort of considered as equals." Trish described how her supervisor recognizes senior advisors

> by giving us some oversight of some particular aspects of what goes on in the unit. That's been real helpful, too, and I think has done a lot to curb any restlessness [we] might feel at having done a job for a lot of years. She works hard to give us ways to keep it new, ways to keep us feeling like we've got room to grow instead of just stagnating and getting bored.

Sally explained how her supervisor supported her by being open to her ideas and suggestions. "Any time I have an idea and it's a good idea, then my supervisor is willing to explore it and we've acted on just a lot of different ideas that I've had. We try anything once to see if it works." Robert said his supervisor requests his input as well.

> He will ask our input about certain issues and how we feel that they need to be done and we're able to give that information to him and that's taken into consideration which I appreciate...rather than have somebody from higher up saying, 'This is what you need to do, like it or not.' It's more of a democratic type of system...We're front line people, so we often see what's best or how to better handle situations and that's taken into consideration.

Brenda described her supervisor as being "incredible as far as support and guidance and dropping everything when you go in to ask a question or there's a situation that you're uncomfortable with and not really sure how to handle it." Carla said her supervisor trusted her.

> He does not have to watch my every move like he has to do with some of the other departments because he has a lot of trust in me, and he knows that he can send me over to talk to the vice presidents about problems and things and I'm going to represent the

department well and speak for him...he trusts my professional judgment a lot because he knows I have good experience and a good background and he sees how the students respond to me.

Hillary also talked about the trust her supervisor had in her.

He pretty much says, 'Just do it.' He really trusts the professionalism and the judgment and lets you go with it...He has initiated this semester one-on-one meetings with him on a weekly basis. Part of that is because of him giving me these new responsibilities, but that has been very helpful so that I can constantly know I have a time to discuss those issues and anything I need to.

Maggie and Lewis expressed they did not feel a great deal of support from their supervisors, but they did offer suggestions for the lack of support. Maggie explained that

[The supervisor] is one on one very supportive, but she is pulled in a lot of different directions and doesn't have a lot of time to spend just directly with us, so I think sometimes she doesn't realize all the demands that are made on the office...I would say I guess she wants to support us however she can and she tries when we bring things up, but we're kind of on our own.

Lewis reported that while he had the equipment and supplies he needed, he had "none for academic advising. She just directs." He admitted that his supervisor encouraged his participation in different organizations but that those were "really geared more toward adult students and social issues that affect adult students, returning student issues, but not really directly related to being an academic advisor."

Moving up the chain of authority, the level of support was more disparate. Beth stated that, "I am supported as an advisor but I'm not sure that my ideas or suggestions are valued." Patricia commented that she believed the level of support was limited higher up although the dean over her area "wants to support us, you know, tries the best that he can with what he has because he's certainly aware of the importance of this center." She explained that the guidance may be stronger in that they have a lot of it, but "we're not always given what we need to work with to perform the duties...expected" including additional staffing. Leigh said that although she felt very supported within her unit, support from higher up "is situational. I don't feel it continuously." Robert expressed a similar feeling that his supervisor was very supportive and asked for his input, but in terms of being supported by the administration, he said, "For the most

part, yeah, I think so. I don't know that I have sufficient evidence to back that up other than the fact that I'm still here."

        Karen reported that the chief academic officer at her institution

> is a big, big proponent of academic advising and the quality of academic advising... and under her command we've established a committee...which sort of pulls together advisors from all the colleges...I think it's one of the biggest forms of support that she could, or that level...the [chief academic officer] level could really show us.

Sandy was happy that she had just gotten a raise.

> We feel very supported...financially and personally and professionally in what we're doing by the administration of the institution. We just got recognition for some of our freshman programs and that has, I think even caused more effort to support us because...our jobs are recognized as really important in the student's transition here.

Judy described a similar experience at her institution. "We've gotten feedback from the higher ups that [we're] doing a great job...really helping out here...doing a good job with the students and all that, so I think they're very supportive."

        Carla explained that the administration had hard data to look at regarding the student population she advised.

> I think people are taking my position a lot more seriously now because they've seen the numbers and they saw the numbers when we had a professional person in place previously. Then they saw the numbers dip when they didn't have that position in place. And now the numbers are going back up again, I think they understand how important a support person is for athletes.

Commitment to the Organization

        Harkins (1998) listed the 'listening factor', or whether or not employees believe they are being heard, as a factor in organizational commitment. I asked the advisors about their involvement in the decision making process for advising related issues at their institution and received varying responses. The advisors who said they were not particularly involved in the decision making process gave varied reasons for why they were not involved. Frank said he felt he had not been advising long enough to have any influence. "I wouldn't feel that I have any influence at all upon the university in general...eventually, once I figure out what I'm doing here maybe then...I'd feel better about extending it." Cynthia said that although she had some degree

of involvement within her unit, her lack of involvement was her own choice. "My interest isn't in, I don't have a high interest in highly administrative kinds of activities." Lewis said that he was "not at all [involved]...that's not a political reality." When I pressed as to whether he wanted to be more involved he responded, "It would not even be a consideration." Hillary reported that while she made her own decisions about how she advised her students, when it came to being involved in the process as it related to advising at orientation or special events she did not feel involved in any decision making. She described how she felt about being asked for input related to a particular event.

> I felt like there was an attempt to get input [from advisors] but in the end, that input, I didn't see where it really made an impact to much extent. But maybe again, I think it had some little inroads and maybe that's one of those things that down the road will help. But, I did appreciate, because never before, and that was frustrating, had they asked for input, so that was nice to be asked.

Carla described being left out of the decision-making process.

> I've never been asked...I participate in the [advising committee] but that's just giving us information that's coming out. I don't remember ever having any hot discussions over why we should or shouldn't [do something]. I have an opinion that on our campus there is a big round table that somebody sits at...some of the things that they come up with you can tell they don't work with students. You can tell they just say, 'We've not done anything to mess up people's lives...what could we do this week?' And if they actually had people who are out there working with students doing that [sitting at that table], I think sometimes we'd probably have better results right off the bat instead of this trial and error that we like to do around here for some reason.

However, other advisors had markedly different responses. Leigh described her level of involvement.

> I am very involved with [the advising committee]...I feel like decisions have been made based on my input and the input of others...I believe that we're, that advisors are heard. Now that's on a university level. Within [my unit] I believe that I have a lot of influence, a tremendous amount of influence as to how...the changes in advisement, how advising occurs [here].

Sally was completely satisfied with her involvement.

> Anything that impacts advising I certainly have a say so in. My supervisor's wonderful. She desires to have my opinion on anything and everything that affects advising...I'm

completely satisfied. I can't imagine having any more. If I had any more I would be in the director position.

Robert, Patricia, Beth, Brenda, Trish, and Sandy explained that their level of involvement was primarily through the directors in their units. Robert explained how his unit operated.

If there's something that we need to address, it's proposed to my supervisor and then that's passed on...our opinions are important, I think. It's considered...maybe in the final say we may or may have been able to effect a change in it, but at least we've had the say in it...I think that level of involvement satisfies me.

Patricia described a similar situation. "I think definitely I am...through the discussion with our director...Then she takes what we have talked about...to the next level in decision making. I feel like that, yes, we have input as far as it can be implemented."

Brenda and Trish described similar experiences. Brenda talked about the team effort in her unit and said, "Most anybody that wants to have a hand in the advising process, advising decisions, certainly can." Trish also described being involved but admitted her unit could get upset if they felt left out.

We really can have some input into decision that are being made...There are times when things just come down on us. We're just told this is the way it's going to be, and we are a real good staff about dealing with that. We get a little snippy if we feel like we've not been kept in the loop about these things...There's not much top down stuff that happens anymore, and when it does happen [it] is made real clear to us the reason why...So mainly, yes, we are involved, and when we're not, we're pretty well informed about what needs to be done and why.

Sandy's experience was related to teamwork in her unit but she also said that

pretty much our directors act as advising center advocates out there on the campus...They listen and they participate in work teams and then they take that information up and hopefully effect the decisions...we don't always feel like the decision that we want is made, but we feel like we're part of the process.

Judy also had involvement through her supervisor but expressed some dissatisfaction with the lack of advisor involvement at a higher level. "Usually we go through [the director] if we want things to change or we want to try to make things change...there are some pretty significant areas where we would like to have more input that we haven't." She went on to describe a recent decision made at a higher level in which advisors were not included.

We're trying to get them to open up so that at least one advisor can be in there and so that we can have more voice. So, some things like that, even though we have a way of getting that information to them, it'd be nice to kind of be in on it from the beginning.

Karen talked about being included but not having a vote.

We sit in on things like the committee on general education...the [committee members], they're faculty people and they're looking at it from their standpoint, but they don't always consider how it's going to impact the student. So we sort of advocate for the student in those situations...but we don't actually have a voting voice on anything like that.

In Maggie's situation, a lack of leadership in her office created opportunities for her.

I've probably, since being here, because there's not a lot of leadership within this office per se, I've been able to make some in-roads...I organized a training for faculty on a new web-based...student information system...so I've been able to suggest things like that that would relieve some of the burden on the office here. That has been very helpful in that so far faculty have been real receptive...and just other suggestions about office process, procedures, you know, administrative things, how we keep files, how we document student contacts.

Organizational commitment is not limited to the employee's feelings of being involved. Four advisors specifically described their commitment to their respective institution. John said that having attended school at his institution he "wanted to stay on campus if possible." Leigh also described a commitment to her alma mater. "I just had felt this connection, this loyalty or whatever to [this institution] for years." For Patricia, her years of service to the institution had meaning. "After I finished [my master's] program, at that point I had worked at [this institution] for 15, 16 years, so I felt like I was not at a point where I could leave the university...I wanted to stay." Brenda, having worked other places than her current institution, described her connection.

I'm close to my home. I mean I'm five minutes away from here. I can walk to work and I like working for the state and like working for this particular university where I'm very comfortable and have been since I was a freshman. So it just feels like a great fit. I've been in other work settings, other colleges and other settings like the public schools, and this is the best fit for me.

Performance

Performance is related to the skills and talents an individual brings to the job and to what extent the individual is using those skills and talents in his or her work (Koonce, 1997;

Schwalbe, 1985). The advisors had little difficult listing their skills and talents and nearly all of them included personality traits or characteristics in their list. The combined list of skills and talents was long but the items fell into the major categories of communication/people skills or traits, work style, and knowledge and experience. Table 1 below includes the list of skills and talents the advisors mentioned by category.

Although I would not have thought about experience as a skill, 10 of the advisors mentioned their experience, either at the institution or from previous jobs, their contacts on campus, and their accumulated knowledge of the institution as one of their skills or talents.

Table 1

Skills and Talents Advisors Bring to the Job

Communication/people	Work style	Knowledge/experience
'People person' (7)*	Detail oriented/organized (6)	Experience (4)
Good listener (5)	Problem solving (4)	Experience at the institution (2)
Compassionate (3)	Flexibility (3)	Contacts/relationships (2)
Optimistic/positive (3)	Creative (3)	Knowledge (2)
Communication skills (3)	Writing (2)	Quick learner
Humor (2)	Idea person	
Outgoing	Analytical	
Straightforward	Proactive	
Nurturing		
'Challenge and support person'		

*The number in parentheses is the number of advisors who mentioned having this skill, characteristic or trait.

The advisors did not limit themselves to the skills, talents, and traits listed above. They also described traits that would be difficult to categorize in a list, such as John's doing "a good job taking care of the students, making them feel wanted and respected and that they should belong here." Beth also described being concerned about her students.

> I have a real concern to make a difference with the students instead of just doing my job and making sure that they know the policies and that they follow the rules. I want to know...that it mattered to them...if some way or the other they were able to feel better about the university or feel better about themselves or that it made a difference in their lives.

Leigh struggled with how to characterize a compliment she had received as a skill but said, "I was told about a year after I came here that, this person said, 'I never thought one person could change the atmosphere in a whole college, but you did' and I thought that was just a wonderful compliment." Sandy's response may have best described advising in relation to skills or talents needed.

> I [have] a desire to be here and a desire to help see students grow. [That's] kind of general. But, you can have a lot of the skills in this work, but I think you have to have the right heart to do it.

Having asked the advisors to list the skills and talents they brought to their jobs, I asked if they believed they were using the full spectrum of those skills and talents. Leigh, Trish, Karen, and Sally said simply that they were using the full spectrum of their skills and talents although Sally credited her supervisor with her ability to do so.

> I have been able to, yes, simply because of the encouragement I've received from my supervisor. She will not settle for just lamely go in and do my daily advisement responsibilities. She wants me to always be thinking about new things that we can do and so I'm always, always challenged.

Beth, Sandy, Robert, and Judy all said they were using as much of their skills and talents as they wanted to at the time and that they were satisfied with that at least for now. However, the other 10 admitted to not using or not being able to use their full spectrum. John said he could do better in certain areas, but he also implied that other things were more important.

> I'm sure there are things I could do better...keeping a neater desk, I'm not the best at filing and the records...I know where [they] are, but I don't know if everyone else could find [them]. I do feel like I do a good job taking care of the students, making them feel wanted and respected and that they should belong here.

Patricia said she had talents she would like to be able to use in her job.

> I think that...there are other talents that I have that, and maybe are not even appropriate for this job, but that I would like to be able to use...such as being able to...develop programs and do more writing things on retention or advising and that's just not something that you have time to do.

Lewis's approach was different.

I have a little bit more drive than is required in academic advising. Academic advising is a very passive position. You're effectively presenting the options to a person and then they either act on it or not, and in many cases they'll expect you to act on it for them where you can't do that. You can't go to class for the student.

Brenda, Hillary, and Ruth wanted to use more of their creativity as Brenda explained.

The only thing that disappoints me a little bit about this job, and it would disappoint me about most any job in education is I'm creative and I like artsy kind of things and just creating things and [I] don't get to do that at all here really.

Hillary had much the same feelings.

There's a big part of me that actually wants to be much more creative in a more hands-on way, which has nothing to do with academic advising. So the part of me that wants to paint and draw and has a little ability there [I] would like to work with that.

Ruth, whose background was in advertising, said that while she wasn't using her full spectrum of skills and talents, "[It's] probably the closest...the best match of any I've had." She also said that "I think that maybe some of the creativity skills maybe aren't being used fully. I think that I am more creative than I'm given a chance to express." Maggie, who said she believed she was using her full spectrum of skills to a certain degree, looked at a new job responsibility as a creative outlet. "I am overseeing our web site which is kind of a creative outlet...That's actually a huge extra thing in my job when it comes down to it, but that could end up being a good thing, web design."

Cynthia wanted to use more of her teaching skills. "I would use my teaching ability. I think I just have the gift of teaching and while I can do some of that in the realm of advising, but...this just isn't the profession to be able to do that." Teaching was an issue for Frank as well. He said he missed teaching. "I kind of miss it sometimes just since for five or six years before I came here, my life was basically reading books and thinking about ways to talk about them." However, he also said that in relation to using his full spectrum of skills and talents, "Teaching is kind of an outlet as long as I don't have to do it too much."

Finally, Carla said that her leadership skills were not being used.

[I'm not using] the full leadership capabilities that I have and the ability to get people to go in a good direction with each other. I've supervised staffs of forty and fifty before and

here I have one person and a work-study [student]. So, I'm not allowed to utilize what I know I can do because there's not the resources there. The program's not large enough.

Variety

The literature (Marriott et al., 1994; Raelin, 1985) suggests that employees in professions similar to advising desire variety in their jobs. The advisors interviewed for this study had no complaints about lack of variety in their work. Although the number one work responsibility was advising students, the advisors described a variety of advisees, from traditional age to adult, to international, to honors, to transfers, to first time, to athletes, to those at risk in their caseloads. Patricia described the level of variety and challenge in her caseload as "almost like a puzzle...it's putting the pieces to this puzzle together at different speeds and...different ways...it's a challenge...it's kind of hard...nothing's the same." She went on to talk about how two students may have some of the same needs, but their situations can be so different that "you just can't...rubber stamp." Beth described her work in a similar manner.

> There's a variety basically because of each student being different and then also the time of year brings different tasks. At many times the variety has to come...from us in that we're initiating new ways to deal with students, new ways to help with their attitudes and the adjustment and transition to college.

Trish had a sense of humor about the variety of people she encountered. "You're dealing with different people throughout the day [who] provide unending variety and entertainment and interest." Sandy also talked about the variety inherent in her case load but said that "what we do with the students can be pretty repetitive."

Leigh described a list of job responsibilities including advising, teaching, assisting with administrative responsibilities, being involved in accreditation issues, working with people at other institutions, and supervising graduate assistants and said, "I get to do a variety of tasks, and that's also very stimulating."

All advisors mentioned attending meetings, participating in committee work or on project teams, and generating reports as standard for the job. Outside of these areas the advisors described a slightly different set of responsibilities that created their individual positions. Leigh,

Robert, Karen, Hillary, and Carla said they taught classes either in study skills, freshman seminar, or a course in their discipline. Maggie was involved in the selective admissions process for her program. Karen, Carla, Sally, and Hillary mentioned developing programs or workshops for various audiences including students, faculty, or other staff. Sally, John, and Lewis said they were involved in recruitment activities. Robert and Carla said part of their responsibility included monitoring the eligibility of student athletes. Robert also mentioned having to learn new computer skills and Ruth, Sally, and Hillary said they created newsletters or brochures or wrote copy for other publications. Sandy, Judy, Trish, and Brenda discussed being involved in projects or programs specific to their units or divisions.

Only Lewis expressed dissatisfaction with the level of variety in his job, "I'm personally not satisfied with it, but I think that in the average selection of people you would find a certain number would be satisfied with it." However, the reasons he gave for his dissatisfaction were unrelated to the level of variety in the position.

> For the level of professional responsibility...and accountability plus hours, commitment, and so forth, the salary's not where it should be. That's number one. Two, in the organizational structure that we have, there's no room for advancement.

The other advisors all reported they were satisfied with the level of variety in the their jobs. Patricia laughed and said

> Oh...I don't think I'm going to need more in addition to what I have! I wouldn't want to have to take on any more responsibilities without maybe trading...I might want to do something different but maybe sort of switch or exchange it.

John said that the level of variety "does make it interesting coming to work." Carla had difficulty with the support she received for having such variety.

> I'm satisfied with the level of variety. I'm not satisfied with the support that I get to do it. I think I took a lot on myself...and I'm not compensated for it. And I really feel like I'm being used professionally because they know I will do it for free so to speak.

Maggie said, "I think sometimes I'm satisfied with the variety if the variety could spread itself out more evenly. It's a lot of switching gears." Trish, Karen, and Ruth said that they did not want

any more variety but that they did not want any less either. Sally said "I can't imagine having any more variety, but I guess I would welcome it." Brenda said, "I feel like this job in [this] particular university is very balanced with variety."

Autonomy

Autonomy, the final area of work life, is not a problem for these advisors who described a high level of autonomy in their work. "The dean has left our office alone to do its job. I guess that's because they feel like we are doing it properly and don't need to interfere," explained John. Trish described how she and her colleagues operate.

> We have the same expectations in terms of the service we provide, but we all do everything a little bit differently in terms of managing our caseloads. But...that's nice, too, that you don't have people just over your shoulder everyday being sure you're doing [what] you need to do.

Brenda said much the same thing about her level of autonomy. "We kind of all want to do things in the same vein, but it doesn't have to be exactly the same way and that is really rewarding." Beth also mentioned specifically being able to carry out the duties of her job without any one looking over her shoulder.

> I guess because of my experience...I have a general idea of what's acceptable and what's not. We have some limitations based upon policy and so forth, but no one is checking over our shoulder to make sure that I'm doing all that properly...I feel good about the autonomy.

Ruth said basically the same thing. "There's a lot of things that I do on my own and without anybody really telling me how to do it or really necessarily checking it after I'm done." Patricia described her experience similarly. "We are given the responsibility and the confidence...that we're taking care of students...We're given that permission to take care of things." Sandy also said her level of autonomy was high. "You can pretty much work on your own and do your own thing about as much as you want to...I feel like it's pretty autonomous and I've got control of my life."

Judy said simply that her level of autonomy was high, as did Hillary who said, "Very high...I'm very self-directed." Sally also described a high level of autonomy.

I experience quite a bit of freedom to be able to make decisions that affect advisement or just me in general. For example, when I started, my supervisor immediately said, 'Set your own hours, whatever you think this kind of work does for you and the students.

Karen explained that her unit ran smoothly and enjoyed a high level of autonomy

We pretty much run it down here as far as the advising center...the associate dean...indicated that he's not interested in the day to day activities...so we pretty much have a good deal of autonomy and as long as things are going smoothly, that'll probably continue.

Lewis said he saw no reason to change his level of autonomy either.

In the academic advising aspect, I don't think there's any need for changing it. I have enough autonomy with academic advising to effectively do it. There are no major constraints that are put on me that prevent me from doing the best job possible as an academic advisor.

Leigh, satisfied with her level of autonomy, saw it as a tradeoff.

I've always been given a job to do and expected to produce the results, and that's it. But within that feeling of autonomy, I still have a feeling of responsibility...I know that there are things that I do that would impact everybody in this complex and maybe a lot of people within the college, so I won't do anything...won't make changes, institute new advising procedures without conferring.

Only Robert, Cynthia, and Maggie, although satisfied with their level of autonomy, had

concerns. Robert explained his concern as

I like being able to have a task and just finishing it, doing it on my own without having somebody watch over my shoulder...You're expected to do certain things and to get those things done and you're held accountable in some respects for those things. But I'm also one that if I don't have something in front of me immediate that I know that I need to work on, I kind of have trouble sometimes thinking about what I need to do...I'm more goal directed and...you give me something to do and I'll work to get that done and I'll have it done by the deadline or whatever and I'll do a good job on it. So I need a little bit of direction in essence, but I like a little bit of direction.

Cynthia reported that despite a good level of autonomy, problems did occur. She did not give a specific example but explained that because people were able to do things on their own without necessarily having to clear them through the supervisor, the lines of communication sometimes broke down.

One person is doing something here, and it could be something that could affect all of us or it could be something that, even if it's just information that some of us should have or would be helpful for us to know but we don't always get the information.

Maggie explained that the staff in her office

function very independently...we don't have somebody like right leaning over our shoulders at all...[but] we're kind of out there sometimes and may not have the power to make some of the decisions that we need to on our own because we don't have...one person designated within our office as like lead person or office manager or anything like that.

These advisors said they were satisfied with their level of autonomy and Frank joked that "I think it would be hard for them to give me any more [unless] I wanted to take two hour lunches and come in at 11:00 a.m.!"

Career Plans

I asked each advisor if he or she planned to stay in advising and why or why not. The responses varied. Patricia, Hillary, Cynthia, Lewis, and Carla indicated they were looking to move on to something new. With the exception of Carla's reason, "I don't intend to stay here. This is probably the last few months that I'll be in this position. If something's not done, I'll go somewhere else where I can be compensated," the others gave reasons that supported Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman's (1959) theory that responsibility and advancement, two of what they term "satisfiers", "reward the needs of the individual to reach his [or her] aspirations" (p.114). Patricia said she hoped "to be able to move out of it, advising, into more of an administrative position after I finish my doctorate." Hillary said that she needed "a new challenge...I have increased my [level of] education. I have increased my experience...I think that it's time to get out of that little box and use more of that education or experience and knowledge." Cynthia wanted to get back into her main love, teaching. "I want to go back into full-time teaching. I want to go back to school and get done with my Ph.D. actually." Lewis claimed, "I can do better...I believe that once a person has been in one position for a certain amount of time they're doing a little more than enabling the office or the department or the college that they're in."

Six of the advisors said they planned to remain in advising but only for the time being and again the reasons varied. Beth said she would not stay in advising forever, "but I don't really foresee anything else right now. If I get an opportunity to be executive director of the national Red Cross I might go do that." Karen said she would remain at the university even if she were not an advisor. "I think I'll remain at the university, if not being an advisor somehow involved with [advising] because I've developed an interest in it and...commitment to making sure that it's done properly...because I see how important it is." Maggie said she planned to remain in advising but added

> I don't know for how long. I'd like to continue working with students in some capacity...I don't want to get like the advisor of the lifetime achievement award. No, I like changing...I think professionally I'll probably want a couple more changes.

Robert explained his feelings on his career.

> I don't have the desire to move into any type of an administrative position. Obviously, with my degree I can't move into a teaching position, so I'm not sure where that leaves me. But whether I think I will stay an academic advisor for the rest of my working career, I doubt it.

Frank said he planned to remain an advisor "for the time being...I have been toying with the idea of getting a Ph.D. ...I do like this a lot better than I like teaching, but if I really got burnt out or something I might go back." Ruth said she was definitely in advising for the short term, but for the long term she also mentioned teaching. "Actually I could teach psychology right now at the community college, but I've thought about doing that, or I thought about getting my Ph.D. and teaching in a similar field as advising and that sort of thing some day."

The remaining seven said they were in it for the long haul or had no plans to leave advising. Brenda's response was a simple "I do" in response to my question about whether she planned to remain in advising. John reported that his commitment was more to the institution than to advising.

> When I was hired, I was told, 'You'll probably only do this for five or six years,' and I'm getting ready to have my tenth anniversary of doing it. For me personally, I see it more institution commitment more so than professional.

Leigh said that an interesting advising position at another institution could entice her to leave the institution but that "my degree won't allow me to do anything else on campus." Trish said that having taken over some of the administrative responsibilities of her unit, she has little ambition to move into administration and that, "I really do like this work [advising]. I feel good at it." Sandy said, "I could stay in this role for quite a while." Sally said she planned to stay in advising until June of 2029. When I asked what the significance of that date was, she responded, "That's my retirement date...outside of what I'm doing right now, I can't think of anything I would rather do in the higher education arena." Judy said

> I intend to be here for a long time. I'll be on of these people, I'll be seventy and they're like telling me, 'You need to retire, you know? These students don't want to feel like they're coming to their grandmother'.

Why They Would Leave

I asked the advisors if there were things about the job of advising that made them want to leave. Lewis's reasons for leaving included lack of a career ladder.

> There's no space for advancement...Even if a person were to develop themselves into being the greatest academic advisor possible, and even if a person picked up extra degrees, doctorate degrees and were a member on a national level of every advising organization under the sun, there is no room for advancement.

Frustration was another reason as Carla explained.

> Sometimes you just beat your head against the wall with certain students or certain programs or certain policies. That's...the down side of the advising part...just the obstacles that are in the way to helping somebody be successful or keeping someone here that shouldn't be here and the ability to recognize that not all people need to be in higher ed.

Karen said she would want to leave advising if her autonomy was reduced. "I guess the only thing is if it got to the point where we had to be monitored." Maggie said monotony could be a reason for leaving.

> Sometimes just the monotony of it...where it's like you are doing the same thing kind of repetitively and not having a lot of control over your day, that kind of redundancy or repetitiveness at times is something that would make me want to change.

Money was a reason to leave for Ruth, Leigh, Frank, and Robert. Ruth said, "Partly, I think it's the money." Leigh smiled as she said she would leave advising "If I won the lottery." As Frank described it,

> It's one thing if you're twenty-nine or thirty to have an apartment and one car, but if I were forty and things were about the same, then I think I would start getting disillusioned with it. I would want to improve the quality of my life somewhat. I don't want to live like a student forever.

Robert, having described the degree of burn-out he had experienced in his previous job said, "It really, really feels shallow of me to say that I would change just for the income. But that would probably be my only reason to leave."

Why They Would Stay

I also asked each advisor what about the job made him or her want to remain in advising. Sally said simply, "I just feel like it's my calling in life." John said that staying was

> more institution commitment...than professional. If I were not working [here] I would probably be doing something other than advising...Having gone through the academic program here...I feel more of a sense of kinship with it and understanding it. I don't know if I would want to go learn a new set of rules in a new institution.

For Trish, the appeal of advising was the opportunity to be on a college campus and to work in a student development arena. "I just love working on a college campus, and I like working in student development and the advising responsibility of student development has just always felt the most comfortable and most fulfilling for me."

> Sandy described the nature of the job as her reason to stay in advising.

> When I took the job, they asked me what my career goals were, and I said to be an academic advisor. My family is really important to me, and the nature of this work and this particular office both lend themselves to be allowing me to prioritize my family and still do what I love and not be totally empty at the end of the day for my family. And that's just unique. I mean, it's really unique...I could stay in this role for quite a while.

Beth's reason was related to the nature of the job as well. "When I go home at the end of the day I'm not taking my job with me. That's important to me." Robert also described the nature of the job as reason to stay in advising.

I have a hard time thinking about getting another job that would pay more but that would offer less in the other aspects, the flexibility that we have, the level of contact with students and with faculty and with other staff. I really enjoy the aspects of this job.

Judy mentioned similar factors in why she wants to remain an advisor.

Just all those things we talked about like having variety, having autonomy, but really the main thing [is] feeling like I'm helping or being helpful to students and hoping to make a difference in somebody's life even if it's just one person that has a good experience and remembers who I am in ten years.

Maggie also talked about having an impact on students.

The impact that I can have on a student's life in helping them, guiding them to other resources, definitely not providing all of that information...myself but letting them know where they can find [it]...things that they can do that will help them become better decision makers. I think that's the thing that keeps me at it.

Ruth talked about being able to help students as well.

I feel like I've accomplished something when students are glad that I helped them and when I was able to do something for them that maybe I don't think...a lot of other people might have known or just that they feel comfortable...I'm fairly satisfied by it. I enjoy it.

Carla, Patricia, Leigh, and Brenda also credited their work with students as the primary reason to stay. Carla described her role as connector between the student and institution.

If you believe all the literature, you've got to have connections to keep students here...and I'll be a connection for a long time if I stay here. For alumni and people who are graduating, I'll be...the person that these people come back to see when they are in town because I was good to them and treated them respectfully and treated them fairly, and even though I had to fuss at them a lot, you know, I was the one person that knew, cared about what was going on with them outside of how fast they ran.

Patricia, who had previously said that students were hard to keep up with because of their energy, said she drew energy from them.

No two people are the same...their problems, their issues, their concerns, their schedules. So it's almost like it's this fresh sort of gust of air that hits you when somebody comes in. And, sometimes it can be a cloud, but hopefully by the time they leave...the cloud's gone away. It would be...the energy that the young people have and that's almost like, okay, can I get some of that? Draw some of that energy from them.

Brenda described how seeing students set goals and work towards them was rewarding for her.

It's terribly rewarding working with students and seeing them set goals for themselves and achieve them...Rarely do I see a student just totally flop that never recovers or never comes back. Some of them leave, take their year away or whatever and come back, but many times I've seen them come back and be successful. So that is a very rewarding part of the job. So that makes me want to stay.

Leigh explained that working with students was a learning experience.

The students inspire me. The students excite me. The students frustrate me, but I love every aspect of advising and I learn so much every day from my students. You know, I learn about myself, I learn about them, I learn about life. I gain some academic knowledge. It's just a wonderful experience and I just cannot see myself not being involved with students.

Karen related that her reasons for staying are because of the importance of the position. "I see how important [advising] is. I mean, the university wouldn't be here unless we had the students. That's what it's all about...I see how critical the process is...it's very elemental to the student's success..."

Summary

This chapter began with the variety of stories of how these 18 advisors initially entered the arena of academic advising. Following how they became advisors was, in their own words, the descriptions of how they experienced the six areas of work life - job satisfaction, relationships with colleagues, commitment to the organization, performance, variety, and autonomy- in their roles as professional academic advisors. The chapter concluded with their career plans and their reasons for wanting to leave or to remain in advising. The next chapter presents the conclusions I drew about how these 18 advisors experience their work life and how these experiences affect their career plans.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Institutions are concerned about their student retention rates and conduct research to determine ways to better retain their student population; however, these same institutions may not be addressing the issues of what may be a key factor in retaining students, academic advisors. I was unable to locate any studies that addressed or investigated the work life of the professional academic advisor, so I concluded that their voices were not widely heard. Because the academic advising literature base was missing any qualitative, or even quantitative, studies of the advisor's work life, I reviewed the business literature for information on work life in general and also the literature on professions such as social work, with similar pay, caseload, responsibilities, and stature. To gather information on how the professional academic advisor experiences his or her work life I interviewed 18 professional academic advisors employed by four four-year institutions in a limited geographic area in the southeast. With the exception of Lewis who appeared to be the negative case (Patton, 1990), the advisors described relatively similar experiences; therefore, I determined that I had interviewed at least to the point of redundancy if not beyond.

The purpose of this study was to learn more about how these advisors experienced their work life and to illuminate ways in which institutions employing professional academic advisors can create environments in which advisors are encouraged to maximize their potential. This study is significant because institutions continue to emphasize the role of the advisor in meeting the connection, retention, academic, and emotional needs of the institution and its students and yet little is known about the advisor's needs. This study is giving advisors, albeit a small number, a voice.

When I began this study, I had concerns that my own experiences as a professional advisor would create some biases and possibly compromise the interview process and information gathering. I was concerned that the frustrations I had been experiencing for some

time would result in my own inability to remain objective. I was also concerned that I would allow the interviews to focus on those negative experiences I had been dealing with rather than on the experiences of the interviewee. In effect, I was concerned that I would steer the interview inappropriately.

Perhaps because of these concerns, or maybe just in spite of them, I concentrated on remaining objective and allowing the interviewees to tell their stories with a minimum of interference from me. The interviews were draining physically but more so emotionally. And yet, without exception, they were inspiring. Even the "negative case" interview, the one that did not fit the general pattern (Patton, 1990), was not without humor and feeling.

That being said, several caveats must be considered prior to reading the conclusions. 1) I was able to recruit participants for this study from a limited number of four-year institutions despite an extensive search for professional advisors in a multi-state area. 2) There are only 18 voices heard here. I cannot assume that these 18 speak for the entire population of professional advisors. However, as previously mentioned in this chapter, I believe I interviewed past the point of redundancy. 3) The experiences of these advisors may be a reflection of the campus culture or of their employment setting (department, central advising center, college, off-campus center, division, special population center). This study did not include a large enough number of advisors in each of the various settings to begin to compare and contrast responses. A study with a much larger number of participants that included both qualitative and quantitative information could begin to address this issue; however, that was not the focus of this study. 4) Only the advisors' words can be presented here; their body language, their tone of voice, their facial expressions are missing and having interviewed each person and been witness to these things, I believe this study is limited without them. A study in which the participants are videotaped as well as audio-taped could use the visual information to strengthen the spoken words.

Findings

Although the purpose of this study was to learn how professional academic advisors experience their work life, I included information on how the advisors became advisors and what

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training they had received in order to round out of the picture of the advisor's experience in academic advising.

<div align="center">*Entrance to the Field and Training*</div>

The only pattern that emerged for how these individuals became advisors is lack of one. The advisors in this study reported having taken various paths to their academic advising positions, some direct, some less so. Ten of the 18 advisors talked about their previous jobs or educational background and how they were related to advising (counseling, student personnel, teaching, social services, psychology). Five had backgrounds that were distinctly unrelated (business, law, advertising, public health). None of the advisors reported having had any advisor-specific training prior to becoming an advisor, although Cynthia did say she had taken one class in graduate school about advising. All advisors reported their advising training was strictly on the job.

<div align="center">*How the Advisor Experiences the Elements of Work Life*</div>

Job Satisfaction

The ability to work with students in some capacity emerged as the primary reason the participants liked advising. They liked the contact with college students and the ability to interact with students one-on-one, helping them or guiding them through their academic careers. Their colleagues; situational elements of the job, such as having a set schedule, having an administrative rather than clerical position, and being in a college environment; and task specific elements such as ability to be involved on campus, and having a variety of job tasks were the other things the advisors liked about being an advisor. The advisors had dislikes about the job as well. They disliked the myriad paperwork responsibilities including reports, check-sheets, or other forms and the documentation required for student folders. Scheduling also came up as a dislike where it was related to evenings, weekends, and summer programs requiring additional time on the job. The third area of dislike was related to the organizational structure or nature of the position. Advisors mentioned specifically disliking committee work, their lack of supplies and equipment, inconsistencies in materials distributed throughout the campus, and having

responsibilities not required by the job description but expected by the students. The fourth area of dislike was related to the high volume work periods and the heavy caseloads of students. The final area was the lack of student responsibility. Leigh was the sole advisor who claimed there was nothing she disliked about advising.

When I raised the question about whether the advisor believed he or she was appropriately compensated for their work as an advisor, only three advisors, Judy, Ruth, and Sally, expressed satisfaction with their level of pay. Ruth appeared to contradict herself somewhat having said earlier that she disliked the low pay; however, because the question was about appropriate compensation, and because she had said that she felt like she did not have a huge level of responsibility in the university, the possibility remains that while she thinks the pay is low, it is appropriate for what she does. The other 15 did not believe they were paid appropriately for their work. They said that the pay was not sufficient based on the level of education required and the level of responsibility they had. None of the advisors reported receiving strong financial support for professional development opportunities, although four did describe how their institutions' current budget situation had created a reduction in opportunities compared to what they had previously experienced.

Relationships with Colleagues

In the aggregate, these advisors reported good collegial relationships where they and their colleagues were like family or friends or were part of a community. Hilary, Robert, and Karen reported their relationships were on a more professional than personal level, but that the relationships were still positive. The advisors described developing their collegial relationships through committee work or team projects, by seeking assistance or answers to questions, or by just talking to each other in the office. Hillary, Frank, and Sally each described how someone had paved the way for them by introducing them around when they initially came on the job. The supportive environments in which most of the advisors reported working apparently contribute to their level of satisfaction with their jobs and supports the assertion from Chapter 2 that supportive work environments are particularly important in the helping professions (Abraham,

1999a; Poulin, 1994; Schor, 1997; Turnipseed, 1994). Only four of the 18 expressed any concerns about working with other staff members. Their concerns were related to other staffers disseminating incorrect information, being territorial, and passing off another's ideas as their own.

The advisors who described having contact with faculty members had both negative and positive things to say about the faculty, although the primary concern that emerged was the lack of understanding on the part of the faculty about what goes into the advising process and the role the professional advisor plays in that process. Those who had concerns also talked about how the faculty does not always stay up to date on requirements and policies, particularly outside of their departments. Four of the advisors said they had positive experiences and one, Maggie, took an active role in building her advisor/faculty relationships by empowering the faculty in her area with knowledge.

While the work environment and positive relationships with colleagues is an important part of the advisors' work lives, what the advisors emphasized most strongly was the advisor/student relationship. When I asked about their work with students, they spoke with passion, excitement, and a degree of intensity that I was not expecting. They are first and foremost committed to their students. In fact, the frustrations they mentioned were primarily related to situations or circumstances or things that limited their ability to serve or connect with their students.

Sixteen of the advisors reported that they felt support from their unit or area or from their supervisor (depending on the structure of the office in which they worked). Only Maggie and Lewis talked about not feeling much support from their supervisors, although both offered suggestions for why their supervisors were not particularly supportive. Going up the institution's chain of command, there was greater disparity in the level of support the advisors reported having from higher up.

Commitment to the Organization

I received mixed responses to the question about the advisor's involvement in decision making at his or her institution. One third of the advisors explained that their involvement was indirect through their supervisors. Frank and Cynthia admitted they were not seeking that kind of involvement at the time and Lewis said his involvement was "not a political reality." Two others said they did not feel involved in any decision making. The remainder of the advisors reported being very involved or being involved to a limited degree.

In addition to describing the involvement they had within the ranks of their institution, with no prompting from me, four of the 18 advisors talked about the commitment they felt on a personal level to their respective institutions. They described wanting to stay at the institution or choosing to remain there.

Performance

In the literature, Koonce (1997) and Schwalbe (1985) discuss how one's performance is related to one's skills and talents and the extent to which one is using those skills and talents in his or her work. I let the advisors interpret the meanings of skills and talents and they provided a long cumulative list of skills and talents that ultimately fell into the three categories of communication and people, work style, and knowledge and experience. In addition to these skills or talents, they also described traits or characteristics related to their attitudes or concern for students that I chose not to categorize in a list.

Eight of the advisors reported that they were either using their full spectrum of skills and talents or using all they wanted to at that time. The remaining 10 talked about the skills or talents they felt they were not using to the full extent, including creativity, teaching, and leadership.

Variety and Autonomy

In general, these advisors appeared to be highly satisfied with the levels of variety and autonomy in their jobs. The variety they described certainly supports Tuttle's (2000) suggestion that the lack of advising research is related to their "overwhelming responsibilities." No two advisors, even those employed within the same unit or office, described totally similar job

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responsibilities. Several advisors described how what they actually do is more involved than what is officially in their job description. As Carla said, "If I went by what my job description said I'm supposed to do, I would sit in my office and help people drop and add classes all day and do schedules, and if that's what the university actually needed from me, they'd be in big trouble." She went on to say that advising is "so beyond the job description because you've got to be one of the people that students know they can come to."

The level of autonomy these advisors reported experiencing is high and is indicative of the level of support they felt they had from their supervisors. The advisors reported they felt no one was looking over their shoulders or always checking up on them and they felt they had control over how they do their jobs. This confirms Dodd and Ganster's (1996) assertion that autonomy is linked to job satisfaction. The only concern any of the advisors expressed about their level of autonomy was related to there being too much at times when some direction was needed.

Advisor Retention

Thirteen of the 18 advisors interviewed for this study declared that they either planned to remain in advising, at least for the time being, or were in it "for the long haul." The five who reported their plans did not include remaining in advising said they were looking for a new challenge or greater responsibilities. Whether they planned to remain in advising or to go on to something else, the advisors gave reasons for what would make them want to leave the field. The reasons were varied and ranged from the lack of career ladder, to frustration over policies, reduction of autonomy, and level of pay. However, the advisors also had reasons for remaining in advising; the reasons for staying were echoes of what they liked about being advisors with the loudest echo being the students.

Conclusions

The general consensus of the advisors participating in this study is that it is because of the work life that they stay in advising. The supportive environments, the high levels of autonomy and variety, the opportunity to use their skills and talents, their strong relationships with

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colleagues, and the one-on-one relationships with students coupled with their commitment to helping students create an almost ideal work situation. These factors fall into what Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) described as "hygiene factors," or those that "will serve to remove the impediments to positive job attitudes" (p. 113). Although the advisors did not use this terminology, they appear to be either productively or pleasantly plateaued (Leibowitz et al., 1990) as described in Chapter 2. The advisors who believe they have found their calling, or who are doing what they love, who feel appreciated and supported by their colleagues, and who feel they are making appreciated contributions would be considered productively plateaued and those who expressed that they are doing good and interesting work, who are satisfied with their level of responsibility, and who feel a minimum level of stress related to their job would be considered pleasantly plateaued.

In addition, the attitudes of the advisors participating in this study may be somewhat different from the suggestion in the literature and from anecdotal evidence from personal discussions, that career mobility is a concern of professional academic advisors. As discussed in Chapter 2, career patterns in non-faculty positions in higher education are usually shorter and less clear than those in the business sector (Evans, 1988) yet employees still place advancement opportunities high on their job related factors of importance list (Moore, 1998). For those who did express a desire to leave the academic advising arena, the reasons were less about the job or advising tasks, but rather about wanting a new challenge, or wanting an opportunity to have a more administrative experience. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this supports the "Two-Factor Theory" (Herzberg et al., 1959) that responsibility, achievement, and advancement lead to self-actualization or realization of one's potential. Interestingly enough, when I asked what they would be doing if they were not advising, with the exception of Lewis who said his career goal was confidential and who would not disclose what he wanted to be doing, nearly all of the others said they wanted to be doing work in a helping/service related area such as teaching, community service or non-profit organization, environmental, or something still within a college setting.

Compensation, Caseload, and Cachet

Despite the positive attitudes and high level of enthusiasm for the job exhibited by the advisor participants, the picture is not all rosy. The advisors, with few exceptions, as noted previously in this chapter, were most dissatisfied with their level of compensation particularly as it related to the level of education and experience they had or in comparison with what others with similar credentials were making at the same or other institutions.

The second area of dissatisfaction lay in the large number of students assigned to professional advisors. Although I did not ask the advisors specifically if they adhered to the developmental model of advising (Crockett, 1985), from the way they described their responsibilities, one could infer that they do. Following this model, including helping the students clarify their life and career goals, assisting them through the maze of academic options and requirements, developing a relationship with students in order to enhance the advising process, maintaining communication with them throughout each semester, and keeping up with their academic progress and status in addition to completing the various other duties of the job of academic advisor, becomes a Herculean task with large numbers of advisees.

The third primary area of dissatisfaction was related to the decision making process. While the advisors reported a high level of involvement at their unit level, there was a disparity among the responses about how involved they were at higher levels. For those advisors who were not involved outside their units but who expressed a desire to be, the lack of involvement appeared to be a source of frustration.

The work life of the professional academic advisor varies from one individual to the next depending on where one works, with whom one works, and even how one works. How the advisor experiences his or her work life varies accordingly. However, there appears to be great consistency in these advisors' commitment to their work and, most of all, to their students. Perhaps it is because of this commitment that advisors are "professionally being used by the university" as Carla described it. Institutions employing professional advisors are apparently getting the best end of the bargain. In one person, they have an advisor, counselor, teacher,

monitor, mentor, and information gatherer and disseminator, who has good communication, organization, and 'people' skills and who has the flexibility to work with just about any student or situation. The institution has to do little beyond allowing the advisor autonomy to do his or her job and the advisor, on his or her own, may even develop new programs and services or find other ways to increase his or her work responsibilities, all without additional pay.

How long this situation will last is anyone's guess. If what I heard from these 18 advisors is any indication, although some will stay, a good number of them will eventually take their skills, talents, and abilities elsewhere where the pay is better.

Recommendations for Institutions

With the rate of pay being the greatest dissatisfier for these advisors, institutions employing professional academic advisors should take a serious look at how their advisors are being compensated, particularly in light of the educational requirements for the position, level of responsibility, and the demands of the job. Although some advisors, like Maggie and Patricia, justified their level of pay by comparing their level of stress to employees in the corporate world or by voicing an understanding of the financial limitations of their institution, 15 of the 18 advisors had strong opinions about their pay rate. As Karen pointed out:

> I believe that we aren't being paid for the professionals that we are the work that we do. When you can be a manager at McDonald's graduating from high school and make what we make, then I think there's something wrong here.

These institutions may also need to take a look at what their advisors are actually doing and not just at what the job description says they are. John told about a friend of his who thought he might want to become an advisor. John said his friend, "has this mentality that I sit here with my feet propped on a desk till a student walks in and says, 'Help me out'." Maybe the institution's administration has the same perception. This could be a lack of understanding about the job or a lack of knowledge about the people who become advisors. If the latter is true, then advisors need to be better advocates for themselves. They will advocate for their students, but maybe they are less likely to do so for themselves. As Carla said, "The university needs to recognize...how

pivotal this position can be and how important this position could be, but in order to keep a person that's really good at it, [they're] going to have to upgrade the job from just academic counselor."

Along this same vein, administrators at the institutions with professional advisors should educate the faculty on the roles and responsibilities of professional advisors. If advisors claim to have little contact with faculty, then the reverse would also be true, and this lack of contact could lead to a lack of understanding. Even where advisors have contact with faculty, if the faculty perception is that advisors fulfill primarily clerical functions, as Hillary mentioned, then a lack of understanding still persists. Institutional administrators should realize that faculty and professional advisors are part of the same team, a team that is concerned about the students' academic careers and all that entails.

Karen pointed out that on her campus the decisions are often made by people who "don't always consider how it's going to impact the student." The institution with professional advisors would be well served, if not already doing so, to include advisors in any decision making related to advising and that involves just about everything. The advisors are the ones in the trenches. They are the ones who talk to the students, who are expected to 'fix' any problems that arise, who must be knowledgeable about everything from admission requirements to graduation requirements and a great deal in between, who must juggle the sometimes conflicting responsibilities of being an advocate for the student and a representative of the institution.

Recommendations for Further Research

As a result of this study, I have several suggestions for further research, primarily qualitative, in the area of academic advising. This study should be replicated with a larger number of advisors from a wider geographic area to explore the possibility that the advisors in this study are the exception rather than the rule. A quantitative section could be added for analysis of responses by various demographics, such as work setting, gender, age, and education level.

I would also suggest a comparison of the experiences of professional versus faculty advisors and specifically address the variety of roles and responsibilities they have as advisors. Since not all institutions employ professional advisors, a qualitative study with administrators at institutions without professional advisors could shed light on why an institution chooses not use professional advisors. Further study could include interviews with students who have either a professional or faculty advisor or who have had both to gather their perceptions and stories regarding their level of contact with or connection to their advisor.

The final area of continued study concerns advising as a profession. Greenwood (1962) defined a profession as an occupation that meets the criteria of having systematic theory, authority over its members, community sanction, a set of ethical codes, and a culture. He also suggested that as an occupation moves toward professional status, "apprenticeship training yields to formalized education" (p.208-209). Gordon (1992) suggested that "advising doesn't qualify as a 'profession' (by a number of definitions)" (p.170); however, she argued that academic advising could be seen as an 'emerging' profession. Trish voiced a similar sentiment.

> I guess being an academic advisor you definitely feel like you're working in a profession and yet you wonder, it's amazing when you do get out to conferences and out and about how consistent our professional behavior is given that we are a profession with, I mean we've got standards, but there are no sanctions...it's kind of an interesting little profession to be in in that you feel real important and real defined in filling a niche, but the recognition once you get beyond your campus or even your unit sometimes is not always there. I think because it's, it's kind of a new, I mean, it's been around awhile, but in terms of professionalizing advising it's still going on. But...the fact that there is so much consistency across the country and across campuses in terms of what advisors do tell you that yeah, you are a functionary, but that's kind of interesting to deal with, perceptions and how you fit in.

I would suggest that more study be conducted to determine if advisors actually want to become professionals in the true sense of the word and if they are willing to be subject to all being part of a profession means.

These advisors gave me their stories and their voices. They described their experiences as advisors. They talked about their likes and their dislikes of their jobs. They let me in on their feelings about their students. I would hope that this study is the beginning of something larger,

particularly the recognition of the professional academic advisor and the pivotal (Carla's word) role they play in the success of the student's academic career and of the institution itself. I would hope that the institutions employing professional advisors would be as committed to providing environments and situations that promote advisors' success as the advisors are to providing the same for their students.

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APPENDIX A
Debriefer Certification

I, Ramona Milhorn-Williams, served as the debriefer for this study, The Work Life of the

Professional Academic Advisor: A Qualitative Study. I met with Susan Epps to discuss her

impressions and concerns about the interviews as well as any potential biases she noted. In

addition, we talked about the redundancy she had noted in the interviews as well as the 'negative

case' interview.

Ramona Milhorn-Williams, Ed.D.

February 26, 2002

APPENDIX B
Auditor Certification

The audit of Susan B. Epps's interviews with academic advisors and what is presented from them in Chapter four is complete. I found everything to be accurately represented and the process for determining how to present the results to be sound.

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Sally S. Lee, Ed.D.

March 26, 2002

VITA

SUSAN BRAMLETT EPPS

Personal Data: Date of Birth: January 8, 1966

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Marital Status: Married

Education: Public Schools, Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Johnson City, Tennessee;

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Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina;

English, BA, 1988

Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina;

Student Development, MA, 1995

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;

Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, EdD, 2002

Professional

Experience: Area Manager/Resident Manager, H.V. McCoy and Co., 1989-1990

Supplemental Programs and Services Director, Bad Kreuznach, Germany,

United States Army Child Development Services, 1992-1993

Graduate Assistant, Appalachian State University, Department of Human

Development and Psychological Counseling, 1994

Intern, East Tennessee State University, Office of the Vice President for

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Advisor/Selective Admissions Coordinator, East Tennessee State

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