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# The impact of academic advising on developing purpose and selecting a major through exploratory studies

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**THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ADVISING ON DEVELOPING PURPOSE AND  
SELECTING A MAJOR THROUGH EXPLORATORY STUDIES**

by

Michalina Zelazny

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
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at  
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Thesis Chair: Burton R. Sisco, Ed. D.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all students in higher education who do not believe in their abilities. It takes an unremitting devotion and self-discipline to the things you want to see happen.

## Acknowledgments

I am very fortunate to have gone through this challenging yet valuable journey with so much support from my family, colleagues and professors. With their support, I was able to complete this step in my life.

I would first like to thank my husband, Sebastian, for his constant support and sacrifice to be able to continue my education. Our marriage was challenged and our family was occasionally neglected due to my ambition and hard work to succeed as a graduate student. I could succeed in this journey because of his love, generosity, presence, humor, and support. I am truly grateful for having him in my life.

I also want to thank my parents for raising me the way they did. Their constant encouragement for doing things better has helped me to become the person I am today. Without them, I would not be able to understand the value of education and independence that it offers. For that, I am forever thankful for having been blessed with parents like them.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my professor and thesis mentor, Dr. Sisco, for supporting me in my development as an adult student and planting the seed of going further on with my ambitions. With his guidance and expertise, I have been able to reach my educational goals and become passionate about higher education.

## **Abstract**

Michalina Zelazny

### **THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ADVISING ON DEVELOPING PURPOSE AND SELECTING A MAJOR THROUGH EXPLORATORY STUDIES**

2016-2017

Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Higher Education

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of academic advising on students in exploratory studies. This study focused on the impact of academic advising on developing a purpose through exploratory studies. It also focused on effectiveness of academic advisors in guiding students to select a major that fulfills students' interests and needs as well as students satisfaction regarding academic advising guidance in exploratory studies. This was a qualitative research and a total of six face-to-face interview sessions were conducted to gather data. The research questions presented in Chapter 1 of this study focused on demographic information, advising assistance and guidance, satisfaction, and student - academic advisor relationship within an exploratory studies program. Qualitative technique was used to categorize information. Data analysis was presented through tables and descriptive methods. Qualitative data analysis confirmed findings from previous studies for the most part regarding academic guidance through the exploratory studies program and student satisfaction from academic advising. There were mixed results regarding finding purpose through exploratory studies due to a variety of factors presented in the discussion section.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

College has long been viewed as a transition place, where students find purpose in life through their academics to use as a solid foundation for their future careers. However, many students do not always find declaring a major an easy task. Therefore, exploratory studies programs have been created for students who need more time to explore their preferred area of study that connects students' interests and goals with their career path. Although the "out in four years and get a job" incarnation has replaced "explore and follow your passion" (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015, p. 100), effective academic advising in exploratory studies is very important to help students in finding their purpose and to declare an academic major that fits with future goals.

There is very limited current research on the impact of academic advising on students enrolled in exploratory studies; therefore, with such a large gap in the knowledge base, more research is critical in order understand the job that academic advisors do for students in helping them find purpose and selecting a major. As the field of professional academic advising grows, the demand for knowledge and interest in the area grows as well.

This study sought to investigate the impact on developing purpose through exploratory studies, as well as academic advisors' effectiveness in guiding students to major declaration. It also discusses the role of academic advising in student development and investigates exploratory studies students' satisfaction of academic advising.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Limited research is available on students enrolled in exploratory studies about their academic advisor's guidance in developing purpose and selecting a major. Also, limited research is available on how exploratory studies academic advisors use selected advising approaches to guide students in finding a major that fulfills their interests and needs. Lastly, available research is limited about students' satisfaction of academic advising in exploratory studies and how both student and advisor approach academic advising. Rowan University has currently two professional academic advisors at the University Advising Center who assist 209 sophomore students with major exploration. Because limited research is available on how academic advising impacts students in exploratory studies and what is an academic advisor's role in finding purpose through exploratory studies, this research could provide more knowledge on how academic advising impacts students enrolled in exploratory studies.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact and role of academic advising on selected students enrolled in Rowan University's exploratory studies program. Specifically, this study focused on how academic advisors helped students find purpose through exploratory studies. In addition, this study investigated the advisor and student approach to academic advising, effectiveness of academic advisors in guiding students to select a major that fulfills students' interests and needs, as well as students' satisfaction with the academic advising received in exploratory studies. These aspects were assessed through qualitative research methods and analysis.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study investigated the impact of academic advising on students developing purpose through exploratory studies. Student engagement in general education continues to be a challenge for students for a variety of reasons (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015). One way of increasing students' engagement in exploratory studies is helping them find meaning and purpose in their lives and exploring the "big questions" (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015, p. 100). Academic advisors who regularly talk with students about their goals and interests and advise them on the entire curriculum, can assist students in searching for meaning and purpose in their lives (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015). The findings of this study could support how academic advising helps students to develop purpose in exploratory studies through effective approaches and relationship with students.

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

This study was limited to six Rowan University students enrolled in exploratory studies who took advantage of the University Advising Center and received academic advising. A limitation of the study is the focus on how students' perspectives on academic advising helped them develop purpose through exploratory studies as well as their satisfaction of academic advising guidance. Satisfaction can be subjective. In addition, the study was conducted at Rowan University; therefore the academic advising impact on developing purpose through exploratory studies should not reflect academic advising at other higher education institutions. Limitation of research to one higher education institution of the study, as well as researcher perspectives, may have presented

potential bias in the findings. There is an assumption that all participants responded truthfully to the interview questions.

### **Operational Definitions**

1. Academic Advising: Act of providing guidance, information, and counseling to students primarily regarding academics but occasionally concerning personal and social matters (Kuhn, 2008).
2. Academic Advisor: Institutional representative performing academic advising. The Academic Advisor is tasked with helping students identify their goals and setting an educational path that will help realize those goals (NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, 2006b).
3. Appreciative Advising Model: The intentional and collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that helps students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their goals and potentials (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008).
4. Developmental Advising Approach: A systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources (Grites, 2008).
5. Exploratory Studies: Refers to a transitional program for students at Rowan University who have not yet declared a major. The program connects students with campus resources, services, and people to help students to select an academic major (Rowan University, 2016).

6. Prescriptive Advising Approach: An authoritarian approach where student occupies a passive role in the relationship.
7. Sophomore Student: A student who collected 24-57.99 credits toward the graduation requirement (Rowan University Undergraduate Catalog 2015-2016, 2015).
8. Student Development: “The ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 6).
9. Rowan University Advising Center: “A collaborative, learning-centered environment committed to engaging students in the development and implementation of meaningful educational goals, informed academic planning, and major selection consistent with personal values, interests, and abilities” (University Advising Center, 2016, para. 1).

### **Research Questions**

This study explored the following research questions:

1. What do selected students report about the activities provided by the academic advisor in Exploratory Studies?
2. What is the level of students’ satisfaction regarding academic advisors providing guidance through Exploratory Studies?
3. What do selected students report about their academic advisor’s assistance in developing purpose through Exploratory Studies?

## **Overview of the Study**

Chapter II provides a review of scholarly literature critical to this study. The literature begins with explanation of the historical evolution of academic advising. Then, it broadly explains the definition of academic advising and selected approaches and models specifically; prescriptive, developmental, and appreciative advising. Next, a theoretical framework emphasizes student development, stressing the importance of finding purpose. In addition, the theory of transition is explained from perspectives of support. Then, the role of an academic advisor is explained with emphasis on advisor's self-efficacy, and the relationship between the student and academic advisor and the importance of student's involvement. Finally, the chapter describes the impact of academic advising on student development.

Chapter III describes the methodology and procedures of the study. Included is a description of the context of the study, the population and sample selection, as well as demographics, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and analysis of collected data.

Chapter IV presents results the findings of the study through narrative and tabular description. The focus of this chapter is to address the research questions and provide summaries of analysis of the data collected.

Chapter V summarizes the study and discusses major findings. The results of the findings are analyzed and conclusions based on the findings are presented. Chapter V concludes with recommendations for practice and for further research.



## **Chapter II**

### **Review of the Literature**

The academic advising field in the United States of America has gone through many transformations as the demands of a postmodern world dictate new endeavors. The role of academic advisor has changed from being a tutor to becoming a professional in roles of a teacher, facilitator and guide, supporting students through the college journey. According to Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995), “academic advisor for any student presumably holds the key to progress by coaching new and continuing students through [exploratory studies], major selections, minors and possibly certificate options” (p. 33). Therefore, in order to meet the students’ academic and social needs, academic advisors must be creative in using a variety of strategies and approaches to guide students effectively. Effective advising results in helping students find purpose and selecting a major academic area that links students’ interests and goals with skills and abilities.

This study explores the historical development of academic advising, emphasizing the main turning points in its evolution. Then, it defines the concept of academic advising and informs about selected academic advising approaches and models. Next, it reports on a conceptual framework and how it corresponds to specific areas of student development. Attention then focusses on analyzing the role of an academic advisor, the importance of building relationships between students and the academic advisor, and explores the impact of academic advising on student development. Lastly, the chapter describes the exploratory studies program at Rowan University and examines students’ satisfaction with academic advising.

## **The Evolution of Academic Advising**

**The first advising era.** The history and development of academic advising reaches back to the time of inception of higher education in America in the late eighteenth century when its first colleges were founded: Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, New Jersey, King's, Philadelphia, Rhode Island Queen's, and Dartmouth (Gillispie, 2003). These institutions were influenced by the English model of Cambridge and Oxford and were created to educate young men to become ministers, doctors, and lawyers as American society was emerging (Kuhn, 2008). The collegiate faculty took the role of academic advisors who were called tutors at the early phase of higher education development and were responsible for the moral and intellectual development of the student (Gillispie, 2003). Students and teachers often shared residence to provide a close disciplinary relationship with the students in all aspects of college life (Kuhn, 2008).

The period between 1636 – 1870 was identified as “Higher Education Before Academic Advising Was Defined” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 4) because all students took the same courses and no electives were available. Early colleges did not have student service professionals and administrators. The president and faculty served students with all aspects of college life. Kuhn (2008) claims that there was also a tutor who supplemented the instructional staff who was typically “a young man in his early twenties who had himself only recently graduated from the institution where he was employed ... [and] his chief duties were to hear student recitations and act as a disciplinarian and overseer of students under his charge” (p. 4).

The late nineteenth century brought a new shift to higher education which was influenced by the social climate that evolved into a more formal and “rigid structure with

the introduction of a system of rules, regulations, and punishments” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 4). At the same time, colleges introduced academic guidance to offer students more detailed help with course selection. Faculty that were specialized in certain curricula took charge of guiding students within the study area to secure their place in education. The need for vocational guidance emerged with Frank Parson’s contribution to the field by stressing the importance for personal development (Kuhn, 2008). Parsons was a professor, social reformer, and public intellectual who believed in three imperatives for personal development:

First a clear understanding of yourself, aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources, limitations and other qualities’ second, a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of different professions, and thirdly, the opportunities and advantages of each field ... [and third] the comparison of the first two needs or a comparison of the self and the vocational interest. (Gillispie, 2003, para. 3)

It was certainly a time when advising groups began to emerge as the third imperative lead to the idea of counseling and advising in higher education.

**The second advising era.** Kuhn (2008) noted that between 1870 and about 1970, academic advising was defined as “unexamined activity” (p. 5) due to an emerging definition of advising but there was little done in terms of evaluating the process of advising. It was a time when students were treated as responsible individuals for their own developmental choices. Higher education institutions introduced more practical courses for students. Students could have a choice in what they wanted to study but the fear of less focused education emerged caused by unwise students’ decisions. In 1872, Harvard established a Board of Freshman Advisers, which guided students in making

appropriate decisions in choosing elective courses (Kuhn, 2008). Johns Hopkins University introduced the first system of majoring which gave students an option of choosing courses from several groups of courses.

During World War I, counseling and advising were strengthened due to psychology practices in the U.S. Army based on skills and intelligence (Gillispie, 2003). Higher education institutions adapted some of the practices and established vocational guidance centers that helped students with occupational assessments as a tool for advising students with academic pursuits. It was the second advising era when the word “adviser” was used in reference to a person who offered assistance with academic choices, social, and personal matters (Kuhn, 2008). Although advisers had specific expectations from students, the process of advising paid little attention to the relative success of advising process.

World War II once again exposed the importance of advising and strengthened practices in higher education specifically classifying students’ interests. In the 1960s and 1970s with the influx of ‘baby boomers’ advising and counseling emphasized the importance of student development addressing issues of social justice, usefulness, access and accountability (Gillispie, 2003). The exposure to social changes influenced higher education in many aspects, thereby to eventually define academic advising and assess its performance.

**The third advising era.** The period of 1970s to the present was characterized as “Academic Advising as a Defined and Examined Activity” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 7). Academic advising was no longer only assisting students with course selection and registration but it perked in the awareness of the importance of evaluation and assessment. The

examination of academic advising performance began to be implemented in many colleges and compared its practices to other higher education institutions.

The first formal comparison occurred during a national meeting on academic advising in 1977 in Burlington, Vermont. Two years later, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was officially established (Kuhn, 2008). National and regional conferences, active research and professional staff influenced the development of academic advising. There were different advising models created in order to reach to all students.

Today, advising services emphasize the approach to facilitate and support student development. Measurement and assessment continues to be practiced in terms of validity, efficiency, and accountability. The historical components offer advisers valuable insights to practice. In addition, theory framework serves as a tool to understand student development and the need for adequate advising approach. According to Gillispie (2003), higher education professionals need to implement an advising conceptual framework and to keep up with current research in order to create more effective ways to assist college students.

### **Defining Academic Advising**

Historically, the academic advisor's major role was to direct a student toward a major or career path (Crookston, 1994). Today, according to Kuhn (2008), academic advising refers "to situation which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter" (p. 3). Going further into more detailed definition of advising, O'Banion (1972) states that, "advising is a process in which advisor and advisee enter a dynamic relationship respectful of the

student's concerns. Ideally, the advisor serves as teacher and guide in an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness and fulfillment" (as cited in NACADA, 2006a, para. 4).

Although there is no single definition of advising, many higher education institutions define academic advising according to their institutional mission. Literature shows that despite numerous academic advising definitions, concepts of developmental process, decision-making, educational potential and life goal clarification are present in the general framework of the definition. According to White (2015), within the context of academic advising the goals and mission of an institution should be communicated to students. The importance of implementation of successful academic advising is the premise to reaching out to all students.

### **Selected Approaches and Models of Academic Advising**

**Academic advising.** In order to be able to understand academic advising more clearly, it is crucial to look at the advising field through a theoretical lens. Academic advising borrowed its fundamental pillars from multiple theories within social sciences and developmental theories (Hagen & Jordan, 2008; McClintock Brenner, 2010). Some professionals argue that there should be a comprehensive common theory used in advising, However, Lowenstein (2014b) states that institutions differ in mission, demographics and professions; therefore, different settings in which advising takes place calls for different approaches and strategies that originate from different theoretical background. Lowenstein (2014b) explains that a 'comprehensive theory' which is a unified theory would not be significant to the practice of all advisers because of different behavioral spectrum of students. A 'common theory' which would be another

interpretation of unified theory eliminates the possible expansion of the range of ideas that emerge in the advising field from the social sciences and humanities.

Having a broad palette of available theories, the academic advising field has developed its structure according to the needs of particular higher education institutions. Based on a theoretical framework, colleges and universities have assimilated certain academic advising approaches that define the purpose of academic advising. There are several approaches and models of academic advising; however for the purpose of this study it is essential to emphasize developmental and prescriptive approaches along with the appreciative advising model.

**Developmental advising approach.** According to Hagen and Jordan (2008), developmental advising “focusses of the needs of the student in determining how the advising interaction shall transpire” (p. 20). It reflects the idea of the progress and movement through advising sessions by not only offering information but emphasizing the importance of guidance and monitoring student’s major life settings. Raushi (1993) suggests, “to advice from a developmental perspective is to view students at work on life tasks in the context of their whole life settings, including the college experience” (as cited in King, 2005, para. 2).

It is important for higher education institutions to provide opportunities for students to develop an academic plan that facilitate student’s personal growth. Crookston claims that:

developmental advising is concerned not only with specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student’s rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, problem-solving, decision-

making, and evaluation skills. Not only are these advising functions but...they are essentially teaching functions as well. (as cited in King, 2005, para. 3)

Developmental academic advising is holistic because it acknowledges educational, career, and personal dimensions and it is impossible to treat one dimension without influencing and/or affecting other dimensions (Grites, 2008).

**Prescriptive advising approach.** In contrast to developmental advising, prescriptive advising is “based on authority; the advisor is the doctor and the student is the patient (Crookston, 1994, p. 78). Research shows that prescriptive advising seemed to be a traditional approach in the past where students occupied a passive role (Easterday, 2013). As the academic advising field continues to grow more proactive approaches are being practiced in higher education during the third advising era.

**Appreciative advising model.** According to Bloom, Hutson, and He (2008), Appreciative Advising Model (AAM) is constructed for guiding advisors to provide better than good service for students. It empowers advisors and students to build trust, uncover their strengths, inspire each other’s hopes, construct plans to achieve goals, provide mutual support and challenge for each other in setting high educational expectations (Bloom et al., 2008). AAM basic foundation was adapted from social constructivist philosophy to enrich the interaction between students and advisor (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016). Damarose-Mahlmann (2016) states that focusing on students’ strengths instead of weaknesses, encourages advisors to ask positive questions about students’ successes, not their failures.

According to Bloom et al. (2008), AAM consists of six phases to help academic advisors to guide students that include: disarm, discover, dream, design, deliver, and do



not settle. Although it is not necessary to go through all six phases in each advising session, it is highly recommended to employ them sequentially (Bloom et al., 2008). Bloom et al. (2008) argue that in order to reach academic success, it is essential to develop metacognitive, cognitive, and affective skills. According to Damrose-Mahlmann (2016), AMM helps students look at their lives as a series of opportunities and encourages them to become leaders. In contrast, based on AAM, academic advisors go beyond their traditional advising practices and become more creative, shifting away from prescriptive advising. Overall, AAM requires a reflective, systematic and adaptive framework based on six phases to facilitate a healthy advising environment. Furthermore, academic advisors should support their advising practices with student developmental theories, in order to approach each student individually knowing the ability of the student accordingly to his or her developmental phase.

### **Conceptual Framework**

**Chickering's theory on student development.** Arthur Chickering's well-known book *Education and Identity* is considered as one of the most important books ever written about the development of a traditional student. Chickering and Reisser (1993) proposed that:

- (a) college students experience seven vectors "major highways for journeying toward individualization" of development throughout their college experience; (b) college students move through these vectors at different rates; (c) college students deal with issues from more than one vector at the same time; (d) navigating vectors is not necessarily linear; (e) the vectors build upon each other and lead to greater complexity, stability, and integration; (f) college students in order to

achieve identity must proceed along these vectors developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. (pp. 34-52)

Chickering's theory helps to explain students' development in college through social, emotional, physical, and intellectual lenses of development. Multiple sources show that Chickering's theory is widely accepted as a foundation for many higher education programs. It can be useful in understanding how traditional college students develop, how students' own development affects their decisions, and which academic advising approach should be applied to guide students in developing purpose.

**Developing purpose.** Although most students progress and develop through all seven vectors in college years, for the purpose of this study, Chickering's developing purpose vector will be more emphasized and linked to academic advising. Chickering's fourth vector is described as understanding and developing purpose in life in general. In application to college life, it is a focus on vocational and lifestyle goals and involves personal interests and intentional decisions (Hagen & Jordan, 2008).

Often, students that need most help in developing purpose are found enrolled in exploratory studies. These students have little or no purpose and struggle to declare a major (Stuart, 2007). In an academic advising setting, the developing purpose vector can definitely be useful as a tool to assist students with major selection and career exploration. However, Higbee (2002) stated that, "career choice may be an important aspect of clarifying purpose, but students must also consider leisure interests and lifestyle preferences" (p. 31).

**Schlossberg's Transition Theory.** Schlossberg's theory is often viewed from psychosocial perspectives due to its nature of interaction of three variables: individual's perception of the transition, characteristics of pre-transition and post-transition environments, and characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Because college is a transition for students, it is crucial to understand each student's perception and coping mechanism in transition. Schlossberg frames this process in the 4S's system: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

Within the situation aspect, the following factors are considered important: trigger, time, control, role change, duration, previous experience with similar transition, concurrent stress and assessment (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Self is categorized into either personal and demographic, meaning how the individual views life in terms of SES, age, gender, stage of life, culture and health or psychological resources which are the ways of coping, self-efficacy, commitment and values, spirituality, and resiliency. Support refers to social types of support that include intimate relationships, family units, friends, institutions and communities and is framed in three factors: types, functions, and measurement. Strategies consider three categories in reaction to coping responses: those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of a problem, and those that help in managing the stress (Schlossberg et al., 1995). According to Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011), support is perhaps the most essential factor in college student life.

**Schlossberg's 4S's system - support.** Academic advisors are a part of the support system in higher education. According to Schlossberg et al. (1995), support is a major resource in handling stress during the transition process. Schlossberg emphasizes

four types of support: intimate relationships, family units, network of friends, and the institution (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Therefore, advisors' responsibility is to provide guidance to students on their academic progress. However, in exploratory studies, it might demand more involvement into the advisor and advisee relationship to provide adequate support in discovering students' interests, vocational abilities, and guidance to a successful choice of major. The transition from not knowing of what to major in to declaring a study area might have a significant impact on a student's life. Therefore, an advisor who can become a mentor is able to provide support that might result in student's success and satisfaction of academic advising (Easterday, 2013).

### **The Role of Academic Advisor**

Academic advisors play significant roles in guiding students' to find their purpose and reach their potential. According to Darling (2015), "the advisor is arguably the most important person in the student's educational world" (p. 94). Moreover, advising supports the centrality of the academic curriculum (Darling, 2015). Hemwall and Trachte (2005) state that academic advisor's role is to enable students to align their learning with the college mission. Most higher education institutions emphasize learning and helping students to find purpose in college (Hemwall & Trachte, 2005). In addition, academic advisors assist in developing higher thinking skills, acquiring tools that are needed to achieve goals and facilitating the advising environment in order to understand the meaning of education (Hemwell & Trachte, 2005). Therefore, true advisor's role should not be limited to prescriptive advising as it was practiced at the beginning of academic advising development. It is an area of higher education where significant relationships are built. Easterday (2013) argues that advising provides students with the environment

where they can explore professional goals, as well as discuss personal interests and plans. Thereby, such advisor's involvement might have a positive impact on college students in developing purpose in the college journey.

**Self-efficacy.** Albert Bandura's self-efficacy refers to a person's belief about the capabilities for a specific task. It is perceived not through the skills and abilities that the individual possesses, but more of a belief to perform adequately using skills and abilities that an individual has under certain circumstances (Pajares, 1996). According to Damrose-Mahlmann (2016), when academic advisors experience a high level of confidence in their abilities and credibility, they have a higher level of self-efficacy through the perception of themselves as being more prepared to cultivate success as a student. Bloom et al. (2008) state that realizing that an academic advisor is in the position of having the ability to, "positively impact other peoples' lives and the future of the country" (p. 30) enhances the academic advisors' belief system that the academic advisor is adequately using the skills and abilities they have (Bloom et al., 2008; Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016). Research shows that academic advisors who are effectively engaged in the advising setting are more effective in their practice, positively affecting students' development (Elliot, McGregor, & Thrash, 2002).

### **Relationship between Student and Academic Advisor**

Relationship between an advisor and student is important in a college setting. The students have an opportunity to build a relationship with an advisor over the course of several years during which the student is invited to address concerns about academics, social life, and career explorations and even have private discussions. Numerous studies have found that an effective relationship between student and academic advisor positively

influences a student's development (Darling, 2015; Hemwall & Trachte, 2005; Higbee, 2002; Pajares, 1996; Pargett, 2011). In addition, advising relationships that were formed during the college journey are the ones that are most effective in student's pursuit of academic goals (Wielinski, 2008).

Academic advisor's role of mentoring students throughout their academic career and providing the adequate advices and resources definitely enhance students learning and development. However, it should be a mutual involvement into the relationship. The evidence suggests that the relationship between advisor and student is important for student's success. According to Pargett (2011), if the advising is viewed as an educational process and if it is well done, academic advising plays a critical role in connecting students with learning opportunities to foster and support their success.

According to NACADA (2006a), advising interactions where relationship between advisors and students is fundamental and is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and ethical behavior leading to greater learning outcomes in multiple aspects of college life. Notwithstanding, some researchers believe that in order to obtain positive outcomes from advising, it is up to students to seek and maintain a relationship with an advisor while others argue that the advisor should reach out to the student (Pargett, 2011). However, it is critical for both parties to have the responsibility of mutual effort and involvement in order for an effective relationship between advisor and student. Student effort is as important as the advisor being reachable and approachable. In order to build a meaningful relationship, the student needs to put a lot of effort to focus and prepare for each meeting with an advisor.

**Student involvement.** Alexander Astin's Involvement Theory describes the importance of student involvement in college. According to Astin (1999), student involvement is the "amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). Astin emphasizes the behavior of students as a key component of student involvement (Poolos, 2016). Students who get involved in relationships with faculty become more involved in many different aspects of college life.

According to Stuart (2007), sophomores are the ones who are at least involved in both social and academic aspects of college life. In addition many sophomore students have not yet selected a major. The failure to choose a major also reduces the amount of faculty involvement that the students will have because, "for many students, their involvement comes from faculty within their major" (Stuart, 2007, p. 14). Astin (1999) recommends that academic advisors among other student personnel should focus on what the student is doing and create one-on-one relationships to track student involvement. That way, the academic advisor is not only helping students to guide them in academic aspects but also involving students into a meaningful relationship. If a meaningful relationship is built, students are on the successful journey to develop purpose as a student and individual.

### **Impact of Academic Advising on Student Development**

The Concept of Academic Advising (2006a) states that through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community, to think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students, and to prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and global community (NACADA). Academic advising unquestionably has a large impact on student's college experience and thereby

on student's development and finding purpose in education. However, in order to have a positive impact, students must be satisfied with the advising approach and quality of academic advisor.

Research confirms that advising effort connects the student with the institution and has a significant effect on student involvement, motivation (Crookston, 1994; Easterday, 2013; Higbee, 2002; King, 2005; White, 2015), and finding purpose in education.

According to Chiteng Kot (2014):

Academic advising is the only structured service on our campuses that guarantees students some kind of interaction with concerned representatives of the institutions [...]. Advisers play a key role in helping students become integrated within the academic and social systems on campus, which in turn contributes to student growth, satisfaction, and persistence. (p. 529)

Unquestionably, academic advising not only influences students' academic performance but also social life. Its impact on student development is not limited to college years as it extends beyond higher education. Because academic advising provides guidance and assistance from many different perspectives in different student's fields, academic advising spreads into almost all aspects of an individual's life and leaves permanent traces on student development.

### **Exploratory Studies at Rowan University**

Exploratory studies at Rowan University is a program for students who have not declared a specific major. There were 209 native to Rowan University students enrolled in Exploratory Studies for 2016/2017 academic year (C. Eigenbrot, personal



communication, October 20, 2016). Students in exploratory studies have an opportunity to explore not only their first career choice but also alternative majors as well (Rowan University, 2016). Academic advisors regularly talk with students about their aspirations, goals, and interests to help them to create an understanding of their career path. It is a very crucial time for both advisor and student to build a relationship that would effectively impact students' decisions (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015).

NACADA (2006b) suggests that academic advisors must go beyond the selection of courses and ask open-ended questions to put students' education in a context of their needs and interests. According to Eigenbrot, the Rowan University Advising Center supports its academic advising mission on three approaches to advising: developmental, prescriptive, and appreciative (personal communication, October 20, 2016). Through appreciative advising, academic advisors listen to each student carefully and are fully present for them (personal communication, October 20, 2016). The center's philosophy is based, among others, on the Appreciative Advising Model that include: disarm, discover, dream, design, deliver and don't settle (personal communication, October 20, 2016). During the disarm phase, academic advisors are focused on making a positive first impression with students to eliminate any fear and suspicion that students may have. In discover phase, advisors use positive open-ended questions to learn about students' strengths skills and abilities. Within the dream phase, advisors inspire students to share their dreams and goals for the future. Next, in the design phase, academic advisors identify students' life and career goals in order to make a first step toward creating a plan for action. In the deliver phase, students' take responsibility to execute their plans. Lastly,

don't settle phase is all about the continuation for encouragement to improve students' performances (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008).

Academic advisors at Rowan University Advising Center use a developmental approach to advising to help students with life goal exploration and goal setting, and focus on student development. They also implement prescriptive advising during which emphasis is put on following a program guide and taking a predetermined set of courses (personal communication, October 20, 2016). In addition, for students in Exploratory Studies there are workshops available to learn more about particular colleges, programs and majors. There are workshops for College of Education, The Rohrer College of Business, College of Communication and Creative Arts, College of Performing Arts, Henry M. Rowan College of Engineering, College of Science and Mathematics, School of Health Professions, College of Humanities and Social Sciences and School of Earth and Environment, as well as special opportunities such as: education abroad and student leadership (personal communication, October 20, 2016). Kirk-Kuwaye and Sano-Franchini (2015), insist that "academic advisors, who have established trusting relationships with students and broad knowledge of general education, are in a key position to help students make this connection between their search for meaning and purpose and being engaged in [exploratory studies]" (p. 104).

### **Envisioning the Future**

Thoughts about the future of advising should consider the historical context of the role of advising in higher education, current social emergences that influence education to a high degree, and future scope of inspirations for advising. Understanding the

importance of advising should not be limited to higher education. Academic advising influences college students who develop into individuals valuable to American society.

Keeping in mind that students are central to advising, it is important to emphasize the relationship between advisor and advisee and the quality and effectiveness of advising sessions. The description of future advising is philosophical at this moment but understanding that it is central for student growth, development, finding purpose and becoming a successful individual in college settings and beyond will help to understand the importance of academic advising.

Advising should not be portrayed by the lenses of service. According to Lowenstein (2013a), advising “is a locus of learning” (p. 243). Advisors’ work should consist of helping students select learning experiences and identify their goals. Advisors are teachers and advising sessions should be a teaching-learning experience (Lowenstein, 2014a).

Lowenstein states that (2014a) through advising:

student should be able to recognize and create linkages and logical relationships between and among their various courses, comparing and contrasting ways of knowing, understanding how one body of knowledge builds on another, reflecting constantly on how courses and groups of courses contribute to meeting educational goals, even as new experience may change their goals. (p. 246)

Although literature describes advising that emerged with the birth of American higher education, advising has its roots in ancient Greece where philosopher and founder of an Academy in Athens, Plato, was one of the first to present a paradigm of advising rooted in humanities discipline (Lowenstein, 2014b). Research shows that for many

centuries philosophers and scholars argued that the core purpose of advising was to facilitate learning through adequate curricula selection and understanding the logic of true curricula (Lowenstein, 2014b).

In the past, advising was represented by checking off the curricular worksheet requirements. Through centuries academic advising has gone through many transformations, new model adaptations, and practice approaches. As it is still growing, academic advising is developing into a profession and distinguishing itself as a separate field (Kuhn, 2008). According to Thurmond and Miller's (2006) predictions, academic advising will continue to grow and develop as a profession to integrate both academic and student affairs. Cook states (1999) that students will increasingly expect advisers to be conversant with the job market opportunities of the future and types of knowledge and skills needed for success as a college graduate. Therefore, the liberal learning that a college experience serves must continue providing students the communication and problem-solving skills needed in any endeavor.

Kuhn (2008) emphasizes the importance of collaboration between academic advisors, faculty and researchers to further study and identify the necessary concerns to improve the quality and effectiveness of academic advising and meet students' satisfaction. Moreover, Kuhn predicts, the future history of academic advising will lie in its ability to create and use theory and applying its findings in practice and assessment in effective ways through research. It is necessary to combine research, theory, and practice to continue to make improvements in the field of academic advising to better assist students' needs in the future.

## **Summary of the Literature Review**

Professional academic advising is a growing field in American higher education. The academic practice is transforming and developing as new trends emerge in American society and higher education. Through its development, academic advising has changed from prescriptive where authority was the main concept to developmental and appreciative where students are central to academic advising.

As the pattern of theories emerged in humanities and social sciences, advising sets its foundation on a variety of developmental theories in order to understand students' growth and assist them more effectively in discovering interests, selecting a major, deciding on a career path, and developing purpose in college life and beyond.

Academic advisors play an important role in students' lives as they guide them through their academic and social explorations. Literature indicates that advisors with high self-efficacy are more effective in providing students proper support. Also, the more an academic advisor is involved in a student's life, the stronger the mutual relationship. Students' satisfaction relies on the quality of academic advising, thereby facilitating an adequate environment for student development in college and beyond.

The present knowledge gap in the research on the impact of academic advising on finding purpose through exploratory studies and student's satisfaction on advising shows how little is known in this area. More research is timely and critical on how academic advising impacts development of finding purpose through exploratory studies as academic advising grows as a profession. Also, more research is needed to investigate the impact of academic advisors on the student population enrolled in exploratory studies.

Finding purpose in college life is essential to student development; therefore, more theoretical framework of professional advising should be studied.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Context of the Study**

This study was conducted at the Rowan University Advising Center located on the main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey. Additional campuses are located in Camden and Stratford, New Jersey. Rowan University is a selective, medium-sized, public state comprehensive research university that offers bachelors, masters, and doctoral programs (Media and Public Relations, 2015) The total student enrollment is 16,155 and 908 professionals (Media and Public Relations, 2015). Rowan University has 14 academic colleges and schools: College of Communication and Creative Arts, College of Education, College of Health Sciences, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Performing Arts, College of Science and Mathematics, Henry M. Rowan College of Engineering, Rohrer College of Business, School of Earth and Environment, School of Health Professions, Global Learning and Partnerships, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Cooper Medical School of Rowan University, and Rowan School of Osteopathic Medicine (Media and Public Relations, 2015). In addition, Rowan University has partnerships with two community colleges that are named as Rowan College at Burlington County and Rowan College at Gloucester County (Rowan University Undergraduate Catalog 2015-2016, 2015).

The University Advising Center (UAC) is located in Savitz Hall. It is a collaborative, learning-centered environment committed to engaging students in the development and implementation of meaningful educational goals, informed academic planning, and major selection consistent with their personal values, interests, and abilities

(University Advising Center, 2016). UAC serves undergraduate students in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, which includes the Exploratory Studies (undeclared) population. Additionally, UAC assists students throughout the university who are seeking to transition from one college or major to another. There are 12 professional academic advisors. Two academic advisors are designed to assist students enrolled in Exploratory Studies Program. Professional academic advisors are available for individual sessions by appointment or during designated walk-in hours (University Advising Center, 2016).

### **Population and Sample Selection**

The target population for this study was all Rowan University students who were enrolled in the 2016-2017 academic year in the exploratory studies program. The available population was six students who came to University Advising Center to be advised within exploratory studies and who consented to participate in an interview. My focus was on the impact of academic advising on developing purpose through exploratory studies; therefore, first, I compiled a list of all students enrolled in exploratory studies that got advice from academic advisors at the University Advising Center, and then with assistance of the Associate Director of Rowan University Academic Advising Center, e-mails were sent asking students to volunteer to participate in the interview. Each e-mail sent to a student had an attachment with interview questions (Appendix C).

A total of seven students from exploratory studies agreed to participate in an interview but six committed students showed up for the face-to-face interview session with me on a previously scheduled date. All students participated in the exploratory studies program during the 2016-2017 academic year.



## **Instrumentation**

The interview protocol, to assess students satisfaction of academic advising and finding purpose through exploratory studies was developed by me. Each interview question was crafted based on knowledge from previous research and influenced by the *Academic Advising Inventory* developed by Roger Winston and Janet Sandor. The interview consisted of nine major questions, which include: (1) Did Exploratory Studies academic advisor discuss your interests and values in order to more effectively assist in finding a major? (2) Did your academic advisor facilitate higher thinking skills and challenge you to make adequate decisions in finding the right major? (3) What activities or support programs did your academic advisors discuss with you in order to help you to declare a major? (4) What can you tell me about your satisfaction with Exploratory Studies academic advisor in terms of providing guidance through the program? (5) How can you describe your relationship with your academic advisors? (6) Were you actively involved in the academic advising sessions or was it based more on prescriptive advising, meaning telling you what you needed to do in order to declare a major? (7) Did your academic advisor assist you to reflect on your life tasks in the context of your whole life settings including college experience and future career development that would match your interests and passion? (8) What do you think about the Exploratory Studies academic advisor's assistance in helping you to develop purpose of college and post-graduation life? (9) Were you offered support and challenge to uncover your strengths, construct plans to achieve your goals and promote personal growth? There were also additional questions depending upon participants' comments to clarify the responses.

The interview instrument (Appendix F) consists of a separate demographic section which included background information, ethnic identification, gender, current college level, academic performance measured by GPA, and participation in academic advising sessions per academic year. The interview questions aimed to provide information on research questions of this study. Interview questions 1-3 relate to research question number one and they aim to provide information on students' reports on different activities provided by an exploratory studies academic advisor. Interview questions 4-6 report on research question number two and aimed to provide information on students' satisfaction regarding academic advising guidance through exploratory studies. Lastly, interview questions 7-9 were created to report on research question number 3 which related to academic advisor's assistance in developing purpose through exploratory studies. There was also an optional open-ended question that asked about additional comments and specifics if the participant desired to add to the already provided information.

### **Data Collection**

Prior to the collection of any data, Rowan University's Institutional Review Board approved my study (Appendix A) on April 25<sup>th</sup>. An e-mail was sent to the Associate Director of Rowan University Academic Advising Center (Appendix B) asking for permission to conduct research. The permission to conduct this research was granted. An informed consent form for interview participation (Appendix D) was provided to each participant along with an audio addendum consent form (Appendix E). Then a recruitment e-mail (Appendix C) was sent to students enrolled in exploratory studies, asking to participate in the interview. The e-mail provided an overview of the study and

the purpose of the research. The e-mail also stated that the interview time would take no longer than 30 minutes and all participant information would remain confidential. Seven students enrolled in exploratory studies responded on my e-mail and were willing to participate in my study but a total of six students showed up for the face-to-face interview session with me on a previously scheduled interview date. The informed consent form was given to the participants who volunteered to be interviewed. The consent form stated information about the purpose, procedure, confidentiality, and the risks and benefits involved with this study. An audio addendum consent form asked for permission to allow me to use audiotape (sound) as part of data collection and agreeing to use the recorded information in my analysis section of this study. All participants were required to sign an informed consent form (Appendix D) and an audio addendum consent form (Appendix E) which was required to be signed by both the participant and the researcher before each interview. Each interviewee received a copy of the signed informed consent form and an audio addendum consent form. I conducted interviews (Appendix F) with each of the six exploratory studies students who volunteered to participate in the study. Interviews took place in room 324 at the University Advising Center. Students' responses were recorded using a Toshiba laptop and on paper. Identities of participants were not recorded during the interview to ensure confidentiality. Respondents were to be identified by a created fictional name.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis was used in this study to analyze students' reports on activities provided by an exploratory studies academic advisor, students' satisfaction on guidance

through exploratory studies, and students' reports on academic advising assistance in developing purpose through exploratory studies. Dr. Sisco's (1981) document (Appendix G) about rules and procedures for logical analysis of written data was used to guide me through the content analysis process. Data were subjected to content analysis to identify emergent themes in the student's responses. Analysis of the data involved summarizing data into smaller number of categories guided by the interview questions. Once data were coded and summarized, I analyzed the data looking for convergent and divergent themes.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

#### **Profile of the Study Participants**

The subjects of this qualitative study were Rowan University students enrolled in Exploratory Studies during the fall 2016/spring 2017 academic year. The interviews were conducted exclusively with exploratory studies students during a two week period in April 2017. All six students were enrolled in exploratory studies program at Rowan University, Glassboro main campus, NJ. There were five females and one male participant. There were two freshman students and one sophomore. Three participants self-identified as White/Caucasian, one participant self-identified as White/Caucasian, Black/African-American and other, specifying as Bermuda descent, one self-identified as Black and one self-identified as Hispanic. The students' interview responses are referred to under fictional names for confidentiality purposes.

More detailed information of each of the six participants of this study enrolled in exploratory studies is listed below:

Aya is a White/Caucasian freshman female with cumulative GPA ranging from 4.0 to 3.7. She is interested in Human Resources Management or Psychology. She received three academic advising sessions during the academic year of 2016/2017.

Olivia is a White/Caucasian freshman female with cumulative GPA ranging also from 4.0 to 3.7. She is unsure of what study area she would like to pursue. She received only one academic advising session during the academic year of 2016/2017.

Abby is a Hispanic freshman female with cumulative GPA ranging from 3.6 to

3.4. She is pursuing the business school as a Marketing and Management major. She received four academic advising sessions during the academic year of 2016/2017.

Amy is a White/Caucasian, Black/African-American of Bermuda descent sophomore female with cumulative GPA ranging from 3.3 – 3.0. She is focusing on declaring as a business major. She received two academic advising sessions during the academic year of 2016/2017.

Remi is a Black freshman female with cumulative GPA ranging from 2.3 to 2.0. She is considering a sociology but is interested in exploring more fields as well. She received three academic advising sessions during the academic year of 2016/2017.

Oliver is a White/Caucasian freshman male with cumulative GPA of 1.3 and below. He is considering the business school as a Marketing major. He received four academic advising sessions during the academic year of 2016/2017.

Table 4.1 contains participant's background information including fictional name, gender, ethnicity, student classification, GPA range, and number of academic advising sessions received during 2016/2017 academic year.

Table 4.1

*Student's Background Information*

	Aya	Olivia	Abby	Amy	Remi	Oliver
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White	White	Latino	Other	Black	White
Student Classification	Freshman	Freshman	Freshman	Sophomore	Freshman	Freshman
GPA Range	4.0 – 3.7	4.0 – 3.7	3.6 – 3.4	3.3 – 3.0	2.3 – 2.0	1.3 & Below
Number of Academic Advising Sessions Received During 2016/2017 Academic Year	3	1	4	2	3	4

**Analysis of the Data**

**Research question 1.** What do selected students report about the activities provided by the academic advisor in Exploratory Studies?

“Did Exploratory Studies academic advisor discuss your interests and values in order to more effectively assist in finding a major?”

In order to analyze the qualitative data, content analysis was used to code transcribed interviews allowing categories to emerge and be identified. Content analysis

was used in order to determine themes related to students' interests and values discussed with an academic advisor in order to more effectively assist them in finding a major. The most common theme related to discussions with an academic advisor about the student's interests and values which related to selecting the required courses in the study area. Five out of six students already had some idea of their study interest; therefore, discussions were based on the interest of taking general education courses that would match students' interests and were accepted by the planned major requirements. Abby said, "I have already known what I wanted to do; Marketing, so we didn't really discussed specific interests [...]. We just talked about my schedule, like what classes I needed to take, not really about what I was going to do." Aya spoke about how her academic advisor helped her select courses either for Human Resources Management or Psychology as she was interested in both majors. Oliver received help with enrolling in Exploratory Studies Program when he came to Rowan University as a transfer student with Math major which he did not want to continue. He stated that: "I wanted to go to business major [they] helped me to make sure to where I wanted to go, so I became Exploratory Studies." Olivia did not discuss her interests with an academic advisor yet as she only had one academic advising session and it was focused on course selection for the upcoming registration deadline. Olivia and Abby claimed that they did not meet with an exploratory studies academic advisor during the first semester of their freshman year because they did not know that there was an academic advisor for exploratory studies students. In regards to discussion of values, none of the participants reported any discussions of that kind during academic advising sessions.



“Did your academic advisor facilitate higher thinking skills and challenge you to make adequate decisions in finding the right major?”

Content analysis was used to determine whether an exploratory studies academic advisor facilitated higher thinking skills and challenged students to make adequate decisions in finding the right major. Three students indicated that their academic advisor did not facilitate higher thinking nor challenged them in making a decision of choosing the right major. Oliver mentioned that his academic advisor did not facilitate higher thinking because he knew what he wanted to do and the advisor accepted his decision. Aya said that there was no challenge to the thinking process. However, her academic advisor, “tried to help me in what I would be more interested in, like which classes I would like to take” because she was deciding between two majors. Amy and Remi showed a common theme that related to higher thinking facilitation and the challenge of decision-making. Both participants indicated that their academic advisors facilitated a conversation in a way of thinking ahead of time and considering a post-graduation life. There were questions that helped them to reflect on how and where they see themselves after college graduation, consideration of the job market, and long term life plans. Amy said, “we definitely spoke about what my plans are and how they will affect me in a long run.” She continued by explaining how her academic advisor, “asked me if I see myself doing that career and if I am liking it. He asked me questions if I consider the job market for the majors I was considering and how much go with it.” She continued, “he asked me questions that I couldn’t even think about it when I considered a major.” Although Olivia agreed that her academic advisor facilitated higher thinking and challenge in selecting a major, she was the only one who talked about the higher thinking process and challenge

related to course selection and reflection on different options instead of, “just trying to get over it and be done.”

“What activities or support programs your academic advisors discussed with you in order to help you to declare a major?”

Content analysis indicated that the academic advisors provided different activities and support programs to students that would be helpful in declaring a major. There were two emerging themes that related to the question. One common theme was add/drop course activities that would support students’ decision-making in making a major declaration. The other common theme was information about the study abroad program that exploratory studies advisors discussed with their students in order to help them to declare a major. Other less consistent options were internships, clubs, different events like a presentation on being a History major, and alumni talks and specific programs like Focus2.

Both Olivia and Amy commented about receiving information about study abroad which could add to their studies. Amy said her academic advisor informed her about study abroad and she could still, “definitely keep on track with my major.” Remi and Oliver received support in add/drop course options in order to stay on the track of declaring a major. Olivia was very pleased to receive the information on being a History major during the presentation. She was very unclear of the kinds of jobs available within the history field; therefore, she was thankful to get information about that option. Amy said, “we spoke about some internships, especially because business programs do offer a lot of internships within entertaining as well, as for an entrepreneur major.” She was satisfied with receiving this information because, “the business world is very broad so

you can focus on specific things.” She has also discussed available clubs on campus within her interest area. Aya and her advisor discussed the Focus2 program that aims to help students to match their interests with a career and to declare the right major. Because she could not decide between Human Resources and Management and Psychology, Focus2 helped her to lean more towards Human Resources and Management. She stated, she “was happy [to take that quiz] because Human Resources was in it.”

Table 4.2 provides information on activities offered by the academic advisors in exploratory studies and how the themes correspond to the ranking of students’ comments on specific activities. It also includes the frequency of a specific activity provided by an academic advisor.

Table 4.2

*Activities Provided by Academic Advisor in Exploratory Studies (N=6)*

Category	Frequency	Rank
Required Course Selection	5	1
Support Programs Provided by Academic Advisor	5	1
Discussion of Interests	4	2
Facilitation of Higher Thinking	3	3
Challenge of Decision Making	2	4
Discussion of Values	0	5
Total Frequency	19	

**Research question 2.** What is the level of students' satisfaction regarding academic advisors providing guidance through Exploratory Studies?

“What can you tell about your satisfaction with Exploratory Studies academic advisor in terms of providing guidance through the program?”

Content analysis were used to determine students' satisfaction with Exploratory Studies academic advisor related to guidance received through the program. The most common theme was that all six participant stated that they received guidance through the program in terms of course selection. Three of the students were very satisfied with the guidance they received from their academic advisors in exploratory studies. Two students stated that their needs were met and one participant said that there was barely any guidance other than course selection. Abby said that her academic advisor, “didn't know much about what I wanted to do,” and “she ended up giving me wrong advice for my registration.” However, Amy and Remi expressed high satisfaction with the academic advising guidance they received in exploratory studies. Amy stated, “I definitely got a lot of satisfaction behind planning,” and then continued, “having an academic advisor in regards to whatever I choose in a long run, definitely helped me to plan what is the best option for me.” Remi expressed her satisfaction by saying, “he definitely helped me in areas where I really needed help.” In addition, she said, “when I talk to him and when I leave, my head is actually clear about what I have to do [...]. He breaks everything down and he doesn't mind to spend half an hour or even an hour with me if he has to help.” She expressed her gratitude by saying, “I really appreciate that.”

“How can you describe your relationship with your academic advisors?”

Content analysis probed participants’ opinions on their relationship with academic advisors in exploratory studies. The most common theme was that all participants have a good relationship with their academic advisors; however, some participants are satisfied less or more with the relationship. Abby and Remi expressed about the same opinion on their relationship with an academic advisor which is relatively good. Olivia stated that her relationship with an academic advisor is pleasant and respectful, while Oliver said, “it is nice that he recognizes my face.” The last two students, Aya and Amy declared that their relationship with an academic advisor is pretty strong with constant communication. Amy stated that her academic advisor, “reaches out and asks what are my plans for the rest of my semester and if I am interested in applying for the major now. We definitely have a good relationship and good communication.” All students gave a relatively short but clear answer to the relationship question.

“Were you actively involved into academic advising sessions or was it more based on prescriptive advising, meaning telling you what you need to do in order to declare your major?”

Content analysis was used to ascertain the approach of academic advising used by exploratory studies academic advisors. Five participants indicated they received prescriptive advising, meaning informing them about requirements, deadlines, and courses. Oliver stated, “it was more prescriptive but he gave me my options and other things that connect to school, so I knew if I did not go down with business, I knew what other routes I could take.” Amy said, “definitely our meetings were more prescriptive based, focused on what needs to be done.” Only Remi offered a divergent view; namely,

she declared that her academic advising sessions were “more active.” She said that, “it wasn’t only about telling you to have only these courses...and that was it. NO! He made sure I chose specifically what I wanted, like to do, and what would actually benefit me.”

Table 4.3 presents information on students’ satisfaction on guidance they received through exploratory studies. It contains specific themes with frequencies and rankings depending on students’ responses to the interview questions related to that area of the study.

Table 4.3

*Students’ Satisfaction on Guidance through Exploratory Studies (N=6)*

Category	Frequency	Rank
Assistance in Course Selection	6	1
Good Relationship with Academic Advisor	6	1
Prescriptive Advising Approach	5	2
High Level of Satisfaction	3	3
Moderate Level of Satisfaction	2	4
Low Level of Satisfaction	1	5
Appreciative Advising Model	1	5
Total Frequency	19	

**Research question 3.** What do selected students report about their academic advisors' assistance in developing purpose through Exploratory Studies?

“Did your academic advisor assist you to reflect on your life tasks in the context of your whole life settings including college experience and future career development that would match your interest and passion?”

Content analysis was used to ascertain what students thought about the assistance of their academic advisors in terms of reflecting on life in the context of their college experience and future career development. The students reported mixed thoughts when describing conversations with their exploratory studies academic advisors about reflecting on their college experience and its impact on future career development. Two students shared their reflections on the lack of such conversation; however, Aya stated that her academic advisor would have talked about it had she asked. There were similarities between Olivia and Abby in their descriptions as their exploratory studies academic advisors touched on that subject in short but mainly about the aspect of interest and passion and its relation to their majors. Olivia said that her advisor paid specific attention to my trying some art programs that would help me to clarify my interests and eventually to declare a major. Abby stated that her academic advisor also offered assistance in joining some art clubs and graphic design clubs that could relate to her fashion interest but she was unfamiliar with the field so there was no reflection on her post-graduation life. Remi stated that her academic advisor facilitated a conversation about her future career. He asked questions like, “how do you see yourself in four years?” or, “what do you find yourself interested in?” She also added that her academic advisor

talked about her interests and passion that would be beneficial in the future instead of focusing on her hobbies. Amy expressed her complete satisfaction over her conversation with her exploratory studies academic advisor on the aspect of college experience and its impact on her future career development that would match her interests and passion. She said:

“That was one of our biggest interests during our meetings, just focusing on what I plan in the future for myself, so we always spoke about what needs to be done and what to do to get there. We always talked about it and then I did reflect on myself on what I want from my career, or what I want after a college career is over. That was really a big aspect of our meetings.”

She continued that the advising she received has positively impacted her transition to Rowan and her academic performance.

“What do you think about exploratory studies academic advisor’s assistance in helping you to develop purpose of college and post-graduation life?”

What students thought about assistance in developing purpose of college and post-graduation life from exploratory studies academic advisors was found using content analysis. Five of the six participants stated that they received some assistance in helping them to develop purpose of college and post-graduation life. Each of them described the assistance differently but they all had a similar theme which was the importance of college. Aya and Oliver specifically mentioned how important college is in order to learn about what to do with the rest of their lives. They also realized that the assistance in declaring a major impacts students’ post-graduation life because choosing a major is also choosing, “a job you want to be able to work in,” Aya said. Olivia also expressed her



thoughts in terms of the purpose of college and its relation to the future. Remi stated that her academic advisor helped her to develop purpose of college from the perspective of gaining confidence in what she wanted to do and sticking to it after college. Amy described the assistance of finding a purpose in college from her academic advisor in relation of shaping positive thoughts and planning ahead. She added that her academic advisor encouraged her to look forward and pay attention to what she is going to be able beyond the college years. Only Abby was unsatisfied with her academic advisor's assistance stating, "they were really about what I have to take to get into the major. There was nothing like post college."

"Were you offered a support and challenge to uncover your strengths, construct plans to achieve goals and promote your personal growth?"

Content analysis was used to find patterns in participants' descriptions of the support they received from their exploratory studies academic advisors to uncover strengths, construct plans, and promote personal growth. Four of six students stated they received support and were challenged to some degree in uncovering strengths and using them to construct plans and goals. Amy specifically said,

"I was definitely offered a support to promote personal goals. And it once again, it reflects on that negative mindset that I came in that I thought I wasn't going to be able to. So definitely it was a challenge to understand that I will grow from everything that I have learned but definitely my personal growth has grown a lot over the time during being here because of the Academic Advisor. I have since focused on a lot of positive things, going forward, doing what I should do to pursue my career. We always put the future in the aspect ... we never really

reflected on the past, and it helped a lot because it kept me motivated, so I can definitely say that there was a lot of support in that aspect. Just trying to stay where I am and pursue my plans. Yeah! I had a lot of support.”

Olivia also stated that she received support, specifically in the form of different perspectives that were available for her. Aya said, “advisors do support you and try to help you decide which path you want to go down. Or if you are stuck in the middle between two majors or like you have no idea at all, they do support you, and they like help you to find a right path.” Abby and Remi both said that they did not receive the kind of support but for two different reasons. Remi confessed that she actually knew her strengths before seeing her exploratory studies academic advisor and her academic advisors did not really help her to realize that. Whereas, Abby said that she did not receive much support and she did not think about its importance. She also gave a recommendation of what would have helped her if her academic advisor was more involved in the academic advising sessions. She said that it would help if her exploratory studies academic advisor would do things like: “Let’s look at it right now, let’s see what you can do, what interests you...”

For the commentary section of the interview only one of six students desired to express more thoughts on academic advising in the exploratory studies program. The student stated that her exploratory studies academic advisor helped her to get where she wanted to go in a positive way. Amy concluded, “I have only been here for a year, so it speaks of the value of my Academic Advisor. I came only with low 20 credits and now I have about 60 credits and it is just within a year. I got that push and positive energy that she gave me. All was really great. It was a positive experience.”

Table 4.4 includes information on the assistance in developing purpose through exploratory studies that the interviewed students received. The table contains five thematic categories through which the assistance was offered by an academic advisor, its frequency and ranking depending on students' responses on the related interview questions.

Table 4.4

*Assistance in Developing Purpose through Exploratory Studies (N=6)*

Category	Frequency	Rank
Importance of College	5	1
Reflection on College Experience	4	2
Assistance in Uncovering Strengths	4	2
Life Post-Graduation	4	2
Support in Construction of Plans to Achieve Goals	4	2
Total Frequency	21	

## **Chapter V**

### **Summary, Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **Summary of the Study**

This study investigated the role of academic advising on selected students in exploratory studies. The study was designed to determine the impact of academic advising on developing a purpose through exploratory studies. It further explored the effectiveness of academic advisors in guiding students to select a major that fulfills students' interests and needs as well as students satisfaction regarding academic advising guidance in exploratory studies. The six students, who participated in the study, were selected through purposive sampling by volunteering to participate in an interview. Each student was enrolled in exploratory studies program within the academic year of 2016/2017 and met with an exploratory studies academic advisor.

Interviews were conducted with each of the six participants, during a two week period in April 2017. The interview questions were created in relation to the research questions of this study. The interview instrument consisted of three separate sections. The first section asked background information, ethnic identification, gender, current college level, academic performance measured by GPA, and participation in academic advising sessions per academic year. The second section consisted of nine interview questions that aimed to provide information on the research questions of this study. The last section included an open-ended optional question that asked about additional comments and specifics if the participant desired to add to the already provided information. Each interview was taped and later transcribed, allowing for appropriate qualitative analysis of data. Content analysis was used with the transcriptions to determine convergent and

divergent themes which were organized into a descriptive format. Direct quotes were used to further support the main themes that emerged from the data analysis.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

**Research question 1.** What do selected students report about the activities provided by the academic advisor in Exploratory Studies?

Qualitative analysis revealed that selecting required courses for students' interests of a study area was the most common activity practiced during academic advising sessions with exploratory studies academic advisors. The analysis is consistent with the study by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) which state that, "academic advisor for any student presumably holds the key to progress by coaching new and continuing students through [exploratory studies], major selections, minors and possibly certificate options" (p. 33).

Darling (2015) stated that advising supports the centrality of the academic curriculum. However, Hemwell and Trachte (2005), add that academic advisors assist in developing higher thinking skills and acquiring tools that are needed to achieve goals and facilitating the advising environment in a way to help students to understand the meaning of education. As mentioned in Chapter I, academic advising should not only be prescriptive as it was in the beginning of academic advising development. According to Easterday (2013), advising provides students with the environment where they can explore professional goals, as well as discuss personal interests and plans.

According to the interview findings, only three students confirmed the previous research stating that their academic advisors facilitated higher thinking and challenged them in their decision-making. The conversation with their exploratory studies academic

advisors helped them to think ahead of time, plan accordingly, and consider a post-graduation life. Amy said that her academic advisor, “asked me if I see myself doing that career and if I am liking it. He asked me questions if I consider the job market for the majors I was considering and how much go with it,” She continued, “he asked me questions that I couldn’t even think about it when I considered a major.”

NACADA (2006b) suggests that academic advisors must go beyond the selection of courses and ask open-ended questions to put students’ education in a context of their needs and interests. Academic advisors are part of a support system in higher education; therefore, advisors’ responsibility is to provide guidance to students on their academic aspect. However, in exploratory studies, it might demand more involvement into advisor and advisee relationship so as to provide adequate support in discovering students’ interests, vocational abilities, and guide them to a successful choice of major. The transition from not knowing of what to major in to declaring a study area might have a significant impact on student’s life.

According to interview findings, students received different support program information that would help them to discover their interests and vocational abilities in order to successfully choose a major in the near future. Two students talked about receiving support in the area of add/drop courses which would help them to more effectively plan a major declaration and meeting major requirements. Two other students discussed the importance of receiving information about study abroad which could help them to get a learning experience from different perspectives. Other, less consistent options were internships, clubs, different events a like presentation on being a History major, and alumni talks and specific programs like Focus2. Amy said, “we spoke about

some internships, especially because business program does offer a lot of internships within entertaining as well, as far as entrepreneur major.” She was satisfied with receiving this information because, “business world is very broad so you can focus on specific things.” She also discussed clubs availability on campus within her interest area.

Overall, the interview findings confirm previous research on the importance of providing exploratory studies students different support programs that discuss their interests and values in order to more effectively assist them in finding a major. In addition, my study confirms previous research in the area of facilitating higher thinking skills and challenge in making adequate decisions as a critical part of the advising sessions. Academic advisor’s role of mentoring students throughout their academic career and providing the adequate information and resources definitely enhanced students learning and development. According to Pargett (2011), if the advising is viewed as an educational process and if it is well done, academic advising plays a critical role in connecting students with learning opportunities to foster and support their success.

**Research question 2.** What is the level of student satisfaction regarding academic advisors providing guidance through Exploratory Studies?

Qualitative analysis revealed that students’ satisfaction regarding academic advisors providing guidance through Exploratory Studies depends on several factors and the level of satisfaction goes along with meeting students’ expected needs. Generally, all six students showed appreciation for the guidance they received from their Exploratory Studies Program academic advisor. Three of them were very satisfied with the guidance they received in terms of course selection. Two students declared that their expectations were met and one student said that there was a lack of guidance beyond course selection.

Interview findings confirm previous research from several perspectives. NACADA (2006b) suggested that academic advisors must go beyond the selection of courses and ask open-ended questions to put students' education in the context of their needs and interests which is also consistent with Easterday's (2013) findings. According to Easterday (2013), an advisor who can become a mentor is being able to provide support that might result in student's success and satisfaction of academic advising.

Another perspective on students' satisfaction was found through interviews that confirmed previous research that relates to the quality of relationship the student has with the academic advisor. Interview analysis revealed that all students had a good relationship with their academic advisors described by different reasons. Olivia stated that her relationship with an academic advisor was pleasant and respectful, while Oliver said that, "it is nice that he recognizes my face." The last two students, Aya and Amy, noted that relationship with their academic advisor was pretty strong with constant communication. Amy stated that her academic advisor, "reaches out and asks what are my plans for the rest of my semester and if I am interested in applying for the major now. We definitely have a good relationship and good communication."

Students' responses on relationship with their academic advisors confirmed what NACADA established in terms of the relationship between students and their academic advisor. According to NACADA (2006a), advising interactions where relationship between advisors and students is fundamental and is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and ethical behavior leads to greater learning outcomes in multiple aspects of college life. In addition, Astin (1999) added that that academic advisors among other



student personnel should focus on what the student is doing and create one-on-one relationships to track student involvement.

Lastly, another perspective on student satisfaction was found through the interviews that revealed prescriptive advising is the most common academic advising approach practiced by exploratory studies academic advisors at Rowan University. Five students indicated that they received prescriptive advising, meaning informing students' about requirements, deadlines, and courses. Only one student indicated that her academic advising sessions were "more active." She said, "it wasn't only about telling you to have only these courses...and that was it. NO! He made sure I chose specifically what I wanted, like, to do, and what would actually benefit me."

According to NACADA (2006a), in order for an academic advisor to have a positive impact, students must be satisfied with the advising approach and quality of academic advisor. Interview findings showed that there is no one single effective approach to academic advising as students have different expectations and needs which confirms previous research done by Lowenstein. Lowenstein (2014b), explained that a "comprehensive theory" which is a unified theory, would not be significant to the practice of all advisers because of the broad behavioral spectrum of students. Previous research showed that prescriptive advising seemed to be a traditional approach in the past where students occupied a passive role (Easterday, 2013); however, it still continues to be the case at Rowan University within the Exploratory Studies Program.

Although prescriptive academic advising approach is dominant with exploratory studies, there is an evidence of implementing developmental advising and using the appreciative advising model. Amy said that her exploratory studies academic advisor and

she, “never really reflected on the past, we always put the future in the aspect which helped a lot because it kept me motivated.” Amy’s statement confirmed what Damarose-Mahlmann (2016) found through his research in which he stated that focusing on students’ strengths instead of weaknesses, encourages advisors to ask positive questions about students’ successes, not their failures. Moreover, Raushi (1993) suggested, “to advise from a developmental perspective is to view students at work on life tasks in the context of their whole life settings, including the college experience” (as cited in King, 2005, para. 2).

Conversly, students’ satisfaction of academic advising also depends on the degree of student involvement they had with the academic advising sessions. The only student who was at least satisfied with her academic advising session confessed that she was rather uninvolved in her academic advising session which confirmed findings in previous research done by Astin. Astin (1999) emphasized the behavior of students as a key component of student involvement. Although some researchers believe that in order to obtain positive outcomes from advising, it is up to students to seek and maintain a relationship with an advisor, others argue that the advisor should reach out to the student (Pargett, 2011). However, it is critical for both parties to have the responsibility of mutual effort and involvement in order for an effective relationship between advisor and student. Student effort is as important as the advisor being reachable and approachable. In order to build a meaningful relationship, the student needs to put a lot of effort to focus and prepare for each meeting with an advisor.

**Research question 3.** What do selected students report about their academic advisor’s assistance in developing purpose through Exploratory Studies?

Qualitative analysis revealed that all six students had different thoughts when describing conversations with their exploratory studies academic advisors about reflection on the college experience and its impact on their future career development. Two students confessed that they did not have a conversation with their academic advisors on college experience and its impact on their future career development. Two other students mentioned about having conversations with their academic advisors about passion and interests but not specifically on college experience in terms of developing purpose through exploratory studies. In contrast, one student expressed satisfaction with her academic advising sessions during which her academic advisor facilitated a conversation about the future career. And another student expressed high satisfaction over her conversation with her exploratory studies academic advisor on the aspect of college experience and its impact on her future career development that would match her interests and passion. She also said that the advising she received had positively impacted her transition to Rowan and her academic performance.

Interview findings show that Rowan students enrolled in exploratory studies did receive some assistance in developing purpose through exploratory studies by facilitating conversations that helped them to reflect on their college experience and its impact on future career development, but it was not as intensive as they expected. According to Chickering, developing purpose in college is a focus on vocational and lifestyle goals that involve personal interests and intentional decision-making (Hagen & Jordan, 2008). The interview findings confirm previous research by Stuart noting, students that need most help in developing purpose are found enrolled in exploratory studies. These students have little or no purpose and struggle to declare a major (Stuart, 2007). Although five of six

students said that they talked sparingly about the purpose of college, most of them stated that it was not stressed enough to make them think about more deeply. Only one student said that her academic advisor helped her to develop purpose of college from the perspective of gaining confidence in what she wanted to do and sticking to it after college.

From the perspective of providing support and challenge to uncover strengths and constructing plans to achieve goals, previous research suggests the importance of viewing students from psychosocial perspectives as well, meaning to look at students' environment of transition. According to Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011), support is perhaps the most essential factor in a college student's life. Academic advisors are a part of the support system in higher education; therefore, advisors' responsibility is to provide guidance to students in their quest to find purpose. However, in exploratory studies, this outcome might demand more involvement between the advisor and advisee relationship to provide adequate support in discovering students' interests, vocational abilities, and guiding them to a successful choice of major. The transition from not knowing what to major in to declaring a study area will have a significant impact on a student's life.

Interview findings show that four students received support and were challenged to some degree in uncovering strengths and using them to construct plans and achieve goals. Aya specifically said, "advisors do support you and try to help you decide which path you want to go down. Or if you are stuck in the middle between two majors or like you have no idea at all, they do support you, and they like help you to find a right path." Previous research by Kirk-Kuwaye and Sano-Franchini (2015), and interview findings

confirm that academic advisors should regularly talk with students about their aspirations, goals and interests to help them to create an understanding of their career path. It is a very crucial time for both advisor and student to build a relationship that effectively impacts students' decisions because it is a time of multiple challenges that students face (Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015). Moreover, Kirk-Kuwaye and Sano-Franchini (2015) state, "academic advisors, who have established trusting relationships with students and broad knowledge of general education, are in a key position to help students make this connection between their search for meaning and purpose and being engaged in [exploratory studies]" (p. 104). Academic advising plays a critical role in connecting students with learning opportunities to foster and support their success; therefore, advising should be viewed as an educational process (Pargett, 2011).

## **Conclusions**

The results of this study for the most part confirmed findings from the previous research. The data analysis show that students received support in terms of gaining information about different activities available on campus for them to better support their academic and social learning. Common themes emerged during interviews such as studying abroad, add/drop courses, joining different clubs, and attending university events. A majority of students also agreed that conversations with their exploratory studies academic advisors about their interests and values helped to facilitate a different level of thinking about their decisions to choose a major that would fulfill their passion and match their interests. The results of the study also indicate that students in exploratory studies program were exposed to higher thinking and challenge.

Conversations with their exploratory studies academic advisors helped them to think ahead of time, plan accordingly, and consider a post-graduation life.

In terms of students' satisfaction of providing guidance through Exploratory Studies Program, students revealed mixed thoughts. The level of guidance was different with almost every student and it depended on various factors such as student involvement during the academic advising sessions, academic advisors' knowledge on specific major requirements, timing of the advising session in relation to the semester period, relationships with the academic advisor, and the advising approach in use. The results of the study revealed that all students had a healthy relationship with their academic advisors; however, some of them suggested that academic advisors could have been more engaging and definitely more knowledgeable about different major requirements.

Previous research showed that academic advising is a growing field and more proactive academic advising approaches are being implemented into advising sessions to better assist students in their college journey; however, interview findings revealed that the majority of academic advisors in exploratory studies still practice prescriptive advising which misses the crucial opportunity to bond with the student and guide the student through the choice of making a major declaration. Most of the students stated that their academic advising sessions were based on requirements and deadlines with some conversations about interests. Therefore, the results of the study confirm previous research on the aspect of students' satisfaction on academic advising. The more the student receives from academic advising sessions, the more he or she gets involved, resulting in a greater college success. The relationship with an academic advisor is crucial

for being able to accept the challenge of higher thinking and constructing goals and planning ahead.

Lastly, exploratory studies students revealed various thoughts on the facilitation of reflection on life tasks and college experience. Only one student noted having such conversation with her academic advisor while the others either only touched a little on that subject or did not have any conversation about the importance of college experience and its impact their post-graduation life. Along with that theme, only one student said that she discussed the purpose of college with her academic advisor which reflects on the practice of the academic advising model in practice at Rowan University within the Exploratory Studies Program. Although research shows that more stress is being put on the importance of developmental academic advising approach or the appreciative advising model, my findings show that exploratory studies academic advisors at Rowan still practice prescriptive advising as the leading approach to assisting students with making a major declaration. Although, interviewed students said that their advisors helped them to uncover their strengths and construct plans for the future, the majority clearly stated that their academic advising sessions were mainly based on course selection, add/drop courses, and registration guidelines.

A limitation of this study, and a possible skewing of the data in students responses to the interview questions could reflect the following: (a) how many academic advising sessions a particular student received by the time of the interview, (b) level of involvement and engagement during an academic session, (c) knowing what expectations a student has from an academic advisor, (d) an open approach to accept advising assistance and guidance from an academic advisor, and (e) being open to creating a

meaningful and mutual relationship with an exploratory studies academic advisor. That being said, the study still found that academic advising has an important impact on students enrolled in exploratory studies in various aspects. Overall, students were satisfied with their academic advisor and found them as helpful guides through the Exploratory Studies Program but there is much more that needs to be done in order to more effectively assist students developing purpose through the Exploratory Studies Program at Rowan University.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings of the current study, the following recommendations can be made for practice in the academic advising within the Exploratory Studies Program at Rowan University:

1. Higher education institutions should more effectively reach out to exploratory students in order to guide them adequately from the beginning of the college journey.
2. Higher education institutions should create a more involving academic advising program for exploratory studies students as these students need the most advising guidance.
3. Rowan University Academic Advising should re-evaluate its academic advising approaches and practice more developmental academic advising approach, appreciative advising model, and other approaches to academic advising in order to meet all students' needs.
4. Rowan University Academic Advising should create a specific schedule of advising sessions for exploratory studies students in order to not only discuss



prospective major requirements but create the unique student – advisor relationship that would benefit both parties.

5. Rowan University Academic Advising should introduce the mandatory academic advising sessions for exploratory studies students in order to be able to discuss students' interests and adequately match their interests with their plans and goals to eventually declare a right major for them. In addition, during these sessions, academic advisors should be able to assist students in finding purpose through exploratory studies in order to make the most of their college experience that would benefit them post-graduation.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based upon the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Further studies, using a mixed-method, should be conducted with a larger population to confirm the findings in this study.
2. Further studies should be conducted to replicate this study, but include some students during their senior year.
3. A longitudinal study should be done to investigate any changes in academic advising within Exploratory Studies Program at Rowan University.
4. Further study should investigate how academic advising in exploratory studies program impacts students during their college years as well as beyond.
5. Further study should investigate how academic advising in Exploratory Studies Program helps students in developing purpose and finding a major.

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# Appendix A

## Institutional Review Board Approval

### Rowan University eIRB: Modification Request Approved

eIRB@rowan.edu

Tue 4/25/2017 9:30 AM

To:Zelazny, Michalina <dulm21@rowan.edu>;



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**DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier:** FWA00007111

**IRB Chair Person:** Harriet Hartman

**IRB Director:** Sreekant Murthy

**Effective Date:** 4/22/2017

**Study Expiration Date:** 3/7/2018

### eIRB Notice of Approval

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#### STUDY PROFILE

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**Study ID:** [Pro2016001236](#)

**Title:** THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ADVISING ON DEVELOPING PURPOSE AND SELECTING A MAJOR THROUGH EXPLORATORY STUDIES

**Principal Investigator:** [Burton Sisco](#)

**Study Coordinator:**

**Co-Investigator(s):** Michalina Zelazny

**Other Study Staff:** There are no items to display

**Sponsor:** Department Funded Internal / Institutional Funding

**Approval Cycle:** Twelve Months

**Risk Determination:** Minimal Risk

**Device Determination:** Not Applicable

**Review Type:** Expedited **Expedited Category:** 7 **Exempt Category:** There are no items to display

**Subjects:** 209 **Specimens:** 0 **Records:**

#### CURRENT SUBMISSION STATUS

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<b>Submission Type:</b>	Modification ( <a href="#">Mod20170000097</a> )	<b>Submission Status:</b>	Approved
<b>Approval Date:</b>	4/22/2017	<b>Review Type:</b>	Expedited
<b>Pregnancy Code:</b> No Pregnant Women as Subjects <b>Pediatric Code:</b> No Children As Subjects <b>Prisoner Code:</b> No Prisoners As Subjects			
	Appendix B.docx	0.01	
	Appendix C.docx	0.01	
	Appendix D.docx	0.01	
<b>Protocol:</b>	Appendix E.docx	0.01	<b>Consent:</b> There are no items to display <b>Recruitment Materials:</b> Appendix C.docx 0.01
	Guidance_audio_videotape_addendum_to_consent_form_v02-10-2015-Final.docx	0.01	
	New Protocol Final.docx	0.01	
<b>Modifications:</b>	Changes to Advertisements/Recruitment Materials Changes to Consent Form(s) Changes in Subject Enrollment Other changes		

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**\* Study Performance Sites:**  
Glassboro Campus 201 Mullica Hill Road Glassboro, NJ. 08028

There are no items to display

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**ALL APPROVED INVESTIGATOR(S) MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING:**

1. Conduct the research in accordance with the protocol, applicable laws and regulations, and the principles of research ethics as set forth in the Belmont Report.
2. **Continuing Review:** Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses in approval, submit a continuation application at least eight weeks before the study expiration date.
3. **Expiration of IRB Approval:** If IRB approval expires, effective the date of expiration and until the continuing review approval is issued: **All research activities must stop unless the IRB finds that it is in the best interest of individual subjects to continue. (This determination shall be based on a separate written request from the PI to the IRB.) No new subjects may be enrolled and no samples/charts/surveys may be collected, reviewed, and/or analyzed.**
4. **Amendments/Modifications/Revisions :** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, including but not limited to, study procedures, consent form(s), investigators, advertisements, the protocol document, investigator drug brochure, or accrual goals, you are required to obtain IRB review and approval prior to implementation of these changes unless necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.
5. **Unanticipated Problems:** Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <http://www.rowan.edu/som/hsp/>
6. **Protocol Deviations and Violations :** Deviations from/violations of the approved study protocol must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <http://www.rowan.edu/som/hsp/>
7. **Consent/Assent:** The IRB has reviewed and approved the consent and/or assent process, waiver and/or alteration described in this protocol as required by 45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 50, 56, (if FDA regulated research). Only the versions of the documents included in the approved process may be used to document informed consent and/or assent of study subjects; each subject must receive a copy of the approved form(s); and a copy of each signed form must be filed in a secure place in the subject's medical/patient/research record.
8. **Completion of Study:** Notify the IRB when your study has been stopped for any reason. Neither study closure by the sponsor or the investigator removes the obligation for submission of timely continuing review application or final report.
9. The Investigator(s) did not participate in the review, discussion, or vote of this protocol.

**CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE:** This email communication may contain private, confidential, or legally privileged information intended for the sole use of the designated and/or duly authorized recipients(s). If you are not the intended recipient or have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately by email and permanently delete all copies of this email including all attachments without reading them. If you are the intended recipient, secure the contents in a manner that conforms to all applicable state and/or federal requirements related to privacy and confidentiality of such information.

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Study.PI Name: Study.Co-  
Investigators:



**Appendix B**  
**Permission to Conduct Research**

April 6, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter to verify that in my function as Associate Director and Coordinator of the Academic Advising Center at Rowan University, I am aware and am in accord with the research study that Michalina Zelazny plans to conduct with students in the Exploratory Studies Program, ESP.

I have discussed the purpose of this research with Michalina Zelazny and will support her research.

Michalina Zelazny has assured me this research study involving human subjects will be conducted using an informed consent for interviews and given to all voluntary participants. All participants will remain anonymous. Furthermore, this research will be conducted in accordance with the Institutional Review Board's guidelines.

If you have any questions regarding this, please feel free to contact me at 856-256-4228.

Respectfully,



Carol A. Eigenbrot

Associate Director

University Advising Center  
Savitz Hall  
201 Mullica Hill Road  
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701

856-256-4459

**Appendix C**  
**Recruitment Email**

Dear Exploratory Studies Student,

My name is Michalina Zelazny and I am a graduate student pursuing a Masters of Arts in Higher Education in the Department of Educational Services and Leadership at Rowan University. In order to fulfill my thesis requirement, I am conducting a qualitative research study titled *The Impact of Academic Advising on Developing Purpose and Selecting a Major through Exploratory Studies*. My study attempts to investigate the impact and role of academic advising on selected students enrolled in Rowan University's exploratory studies program. Specifically, this study focuses on how academic advisors help students find purpose and select a major through exploratory studies. It also investigates effectiveness of academic advisors in guiding students to selecting a major that fulfills students' interests and needs as well as students' satisfaction with the academic advising received in exploratory studies.

Interviews will take a place at Rowan University Advising Center and will be scheduled at your convenience. Interviews will take about 30 minutes to complete and all participants will remain confidential.

Participation in my research will greatly aid in the success of my study. If you are interested in participating in my study, please email me at [dulm21@rowan.edu](mailto:dulm21@rowan.edu) as soon as possible.

Best,

Michalina Zelazny  
Graduate Assistant, Achieving the Dream Scholarship Program  
Graduate Intern – University Advising Center  
M.A. Higher Education Academic Advising Track  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
Rowan University  
[dulm21@rowan.edu](mailto:dulm21@rowan.edu)

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent Form

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#### The Impact of Academic Advising on Developing Purpose and Selecting a Major through

#### Exploratory Studies

#### **Informed Consent for Interviews or Interviews with Record Reviews (Expedited Review with identifiers)**

**Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.**

You are invited to participate in a research study about understanding the impact of academic advising on exploratory studies students. This study is being conducted by researchers in the Department of Educational Services and Leadership at Rowan University. My name is Michalina Zelazny and I am conducting research for my thesis requirement in the M.A. in Higher Education Program at Rowan University. The Principal Investigator of the study is Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you would be interviewed for about thirty minutes. The number of participants in the study is six.

The interview questions will focus on demographic information, advising activities provided by advisors, satisfaction of academic advising, academic advising assistance, and any suggested changes.

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number that is unique to this study. No one other than the researchers would know whether you participated in the study. Study findings will be presented only in summary form and your name will not be used in any report or publications.

Participating in this study may not benefit you directly, but it will help us learn the impact of academic advising on finding purpose and selecting major through exploratory studies. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate in this study, this will have no effect on the services or benefits you are currently receiving. You may skip any questions you don't want to answer and withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

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If you have any questions about this study, please contact Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Rowan University SOM IRB Office at (856) 566-2712 or Rowan University Glassboro/CMSRU IRB at 856-256-5150 or 856-256-4058.

**YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM WHETHER OR NOT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE.**

**Social and Behavioral IRB Research Agreement**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and **I have received a copy of this description.**

Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Audio Addendum to Consent Form

#### ROWAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Burton R. Sisco, Ed. D. We are asking for your permission to allow us to use audiotape (sound) as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for:

- Analysis by the research team

The recording(s) will include the unique identifier assigned to each participant (S#) and interview questions and answers.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet labeled with the unique identifier assigned to each participant. The recordings will be retained for six years and then destroyed.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

#### **Social and Behavioral IRB Research Agreement**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Interview Protocol

**Participant's Name:**

**Participant Identifier:**

**Interview Location:**

**Date and Time:**

**Pre-Interview:** Thank the participant for taking the time to come in for the interview. Ask how her/his week is going thus far. Ask if the participant has any questions or concerns before we begin the interview.

**Study Synopsis:** Let the participant know a synopsis of this study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of academic advising on selected students enrolled in exploratory studies program. Specifically, this study focuses on how academic advisors help students find purpose and select a major through exploratory studies. It also investigates effectiveness of academic advisors in guiding students to selecting a major that fulfills students' interests and needs as well as students' satisfaction with the academic advising received in exploratory studies.

**Background Information:**

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your cultural background?
3. How many academic advising sessions have you had this academic year?
4. Have you declared your major yet?

**Interview Questions:**

1. Did Exploratory Studies academic advisor discuss your interests and values in order to more effectively assist in finding a major?
2. Did your academic advisor facilitate higher thinking skills and challenge you to make adequate decisions in finding the right major? (role of academic advising section lit review)
3. What activities or support programs your academic advisors discussed with you in order to help you to declare a major? (financial aid, study abroad, drop or add a course, early registration, extracurricular activities, internships, clubs)
4. What can you tell about your satisfaction with Exploratory Studies academic advisor in terms of providing guidance through the program?
5. How can you describe your relationship with your academic advisors?

6. Were you actively involved into academic advising sessions or it was more based on prescriptive advising, meaning telling you what you need to do in order to declare your major?
7. Did your academic advisor assist you to reflect on your life tasks in the context of your whole life settings including college experience and future career development that would match your interest and passion?
8. What do you think about Exploratory Studies academic advisor's assistance in helping you to develop purpose of college and post-graduation life?
9. Were you offered a support and challenge to uncover your strengths, construct plans to achieve goals and promote your personal growth?

Do you have anything else to add or comment on?

Post-Interview: Thank you for participating in the interview today. Do you have any additional questions or concerns?

## Appendix G

### Rules and Procedures for Logical Analysis of Written Data

#### Analysis of Written Data

The following decisions were made regarding what was to be the unit of data analysis (Sisco, 1981):

1. A phrase or clause will be the basic unit of analysis.
2. Verbiage not considered essential to the phrase or clause will be edited out-- e.g., articles of speech, possessives, some adjectives, elaborative examples.
3. Where there is a violation of convention syntax in the data, it will be corrected.
4. Where there are compound thoughts in a phrase or clause, each unit of thought will be represented separately (unless one was an elaboration of the other).
5. Where information seems important to add to the statement in order to clarify it in a context, this information will be added to the unit by using parentheses.

The following decisions were made regarding the procedure for categorization of content units:

1. After several units are listed on a sheet of paper, they will be scanned in order to determine differences and similarities.
2. From this tentative analysis, logical categories will be derived for the units.
3. When additional units of data suggest further categories, they will be added to the classification scheme.
4. After all the units from a particular question response are thus classified, the categories are further reduced to broader clusters (collapsing of categories).
5. Frequencies of units in each cluster category are determined and further analysis steps are undertaken depending on the nature of the data-- i.e., ranking of categories with verbatim quotes which represent the range of ideas or opinions. (p. 177).