

MAR Proposal

Faculty-Student Advising Relationship

Leanne Nemeth

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Faculty of Education, Yorkville University

Fredericton, New Brunswick

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Dee Flaherty

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Abstract

The interaction of faculty-student advising relationships in adult education are something that happen daily and need to be examined carefully. This is a research proposal for a major academic report in which I intend to identify and analyze literature on the experiences of faculty-student advisors relationships and interactions. From a constructivist and interpretive paradigm, a qualitative methodology in the form of phenomenology, the study of past research and academic findings will be used to expand as well as strengthen inquiry into faculty liaisons and student relationships in a discourse analysis method. The preliminary literature review suggests that faculty-student advising relationships are multifaceted relationships driven by many aspects, which may or may not benefit the student or the faculty. The results also suggested gaps currently exist in research, and that further research is needed on the effect of assigning students or having students assigned to a faculty advisor.

Keywords: faculty-student advising, faculty liaisons, qualitative methodology, phenomenology, discourse analysis, literature review

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Faculty-Student Advising Relationship

Noddings (1984) inspired me to see that at the heart of adult education are educators who care about their students and their learning. Adult education is a complex field where humans interact, and it is the interaction of faculty-student relationships that center on care that I find important. Teaching involves relationships between students and educators, and because no matter how much an educator plans or structures the relationship, it is often controlled by the responses of students; it is a true emotional journey (Schwartz & Snyder-Dutch, 2018). Recently, my institution has introduced a faculty liaison program with the hope of improving student retention. A faculty member will work as a liaison or advisor to a group of assigned individuals. This position of contact and relationship is not something new to faculty. I know that even before this was introduced, on a daily basis, I would advise students on academic issues, such as course work, and also non-academic matters such as wellness services. Now there is a much more prescribed relationship between a student and a faculty member, and I began to wonder how this relationship between faculty and students creates relationships of care and a sense of belonging for a student within a school.

Being a liaison to students is viewed as either a role that faculty naturally already perform and are well suited for, or is regarded as another duty in a long list of duties already required by faculty. Central to the learning experience is understanding the interaction between faculty and students (Jarvis, 2006). I wondered how perhaps the viewpoint of having more assigned duties would affect the relationships between students and faculty. Furthermore, because this relationship and interaction are new to my institution, I wondered about the challenges and benefits of having faculty advisors or liaisons, as well as other institutions' experiences with the

relationship or interactions. I wondered how do other institutions define the role of a faculty liaison, a mentor, and an academic advisor, and what are the differences between these roles.

Description of Inquiry

In my current role as a faculty liaison, I have observed faculty and students who have benefited from the relationship, as well as faculty and students who seem challenged by the relationship. Whether the challenge is a beneficial one, much like transformational learning, is something that is worthy of continued exploration. The complicated relationship of faculty–student advising is an experience that, in this context, could be beneficial to both students and faculty if given the right environment. One particular element that seems essential in the study of the relationship is whether or not the student is assigned to a faculty member or whether instead, a student can choose a faculty member in a more organic or natural manner (Birkeland et al., 2019). Faculty play a significant role or relationship in helping students to become successful in clarifying their goals and objectives, as well as listening to concerns or questions and referring them to additional support systems (Snyder-Dutch, 2018). In fact, some would say the relationship is so important that have given it a name, *systemocentrism* (Robertson, 2018). Faculty connecting with students in an advising role might be viewed as an extension of teaching and requiring similar skills (Chory & Offstein, 2017). The connections made with students can build a foundational relationship of care, trust and belonging. This leads me to what research would enhance this relationship.

Research Questions

From a lens of adult education, I intend to explore the challenges, opportunities, and benefits for faculty and students in an advising relationship. My main research question is: what

are the challenges, opportunities, and benefits of having faculty advisors? The following sub-questions supplement the main research question:

- How do faculty–student relationship interactions benefit students in adult learning?
- Does the relationship differ if the students are assigned to the faculty or if they choose their faculty advisor?
- How does a faculty liaison or advisor create a relationship of care or belonging within adult learning?

My plan, after the capstone project is to bring my findings to the institution I currently work for, in the hope of improving and furthering the study of the relationship of faculty–student advising. I am interested to see where the relationship and interactions within my own institution evolve over time and hope to keep studying its importance with perhaps action research based on findings from this capstone project.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is the way in which I will understand, analyze, design, and investigate the phenomenon of faculty-student advising relationships. The most challenging part of researching so far is participating as an instrument in the research process (Reid et al., 2017). I find myself moving back and forth between the data and perceptions, individual concepts, and research justifications. Research requires self-awareness and the reflection of approaches, not only of those researching, but those viewing the research (Bell & Waters, 2018). Awareness of philosophical assumptions creates a holistic view that can increase the quality and creativity of the researcher (Patel, 2015). Furthermore, stating one's theoretical lens or framework aides myself as the researcher in bracketing any bias, personal experiences, and assumptions brought to the research (Fischer, 2009).

My theoretical perspective is framed in part from being an educator for over 20 years, with daily interactions with students from all walks of life. As before mentioned, this past year, additional assigned student advising obligations have been added to my responsibilities, and this has sparked my interest in this subject. As an educator and a researcher, I view the world within a constructivist theory, teaching and learning is a process of negotiation involving the construction of personally applicable and practical meanings (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Educators are intermediaries of students and environments, not just presenters of information, and directors of behaviour (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). I also view my world through an interpretive paradigm, where there is no single truth or reality. Reality is created by the individual, and therefore, the reality of the faculty-student relationship must be interpreted by gathering information from other's experiences to construct and interpret understanding (Cao Thanh & Thi Le Thanh, 2015). Epistemologically, in order to understand the phenomenon of faculty-student advising relationships, there needs to be a discovery of the underlying meaning of the events and activities in discourse analysis. The theoretical perspective will be an interpretation of reality using the realities of the phenomenon from the faculty viewpoint as well as the student viewpoint. Using this theoretical framework will allow for an embodied experiential intersubjective focused on the phenomenon, where reality can be constructed.

Methodology

For my proposed research, a phenomenological methodology will be used to study the concept and context of faculty-student relationships. Phenomenologically-based research reveals how people experience a particular situation or phenomenon, which corresponds with a constructivist paradigm of observing and attempting to make sense of or interpret the meanings of different realities (Creswell, 2007). The constructivist paradigm aligns well with

phenomenology because the methodology is concerned with how the world appears to a particular person or group of people depending on their personal experience and viewpoint (Chiari & Nuzzo, 1996). Phenomenology can also be used as a heuristic methodology in a transcendental way to view the phenomenon from a new way, and in its entirety (Moustakas, 1994).

Method

The method used to gather data and answer research questions is a discourse analysis of the reviewed literature. A literature review is a comprehensive understanding summary of the current state of research relative to the research questions being studied (USC, 2019). Through discourse analysis, I am able to capture the relationships, the revealing intentions, significances and subjectivities, which are essential elements of processing and comprehending the world (Vaughan, 2012). Tying back to the methodology on phenomenology as well as the constructivism paradigm, to have a transcendental bracketed viewpoint of my research, I need to first view existing viewpoints and literature on the phenomenon to gain a better understanding of its totality (Moustakas, 1994).

Literature Sources to be Searched

There are a variety of academic sources that are available to support my research question. I plan to begin with search engines available to me through the Yorkville University Library and my institution's library, including ProQuest, EBSCO, ERIC and Sage. I also will explore Google Scholar. In addition, inter-library loans will be used to access literature on educational research. In my preliminary literature review I had selected these sources to search for supporting and relevant information on my research questions and I will continue to do so in my actual research project as I had promising results.

The search terms used alone or in combination include: faculty advisor, advisor, faculty, student, relationships, interactions, mentor, liaison, impact, evaluation, strength, weakness, challenge, care and belonging. The criteria used for selecting information included the age of the articles, 10 years or less, as well the location of research had to be done in a higher education setting. Other criteria used were relevance to research questions asked, reliability of the information, and lastly, the purpose of the information. I have saved all searches thus far. In addition, I am using Zotero as a way to collect and organize findings.

Method for Reviewing Literature and Method for Applying Literature Results

The method for reviewing the literature thus far has been to formulate my research questions and purpose of the research, search the literature sources mentioned above, evaluate material based on previously mentioned criteria, determine information found to be a valid or invalid source, and assess literature to be quality research. This helped me to focus my proposed research. In this context, consultation with my supervisor for the capstone will also determine further methods for reviewing and applying the literature material or results. Attached as Appendix A is a proposed timeline for the capstone.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is defined as a norm of conduct that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Resnik, 2010). Ethics is a moral guideline that I am committed to and addresses how I will perform my research. My research will be respectful, resolute, sincere and reflexive. As a researcher, I bring my experiences, ideas, prejudices and personal philosophies, and when they are accounted for in advance of the research, enhance the transparency of possible research bias (Šimundić, 2012).

My own positionality within the research as an educator, and now faculty-student advisor is acknowledged and transparent. I will exercise bracketing to guide my research and thereby

lessen my own personal bias and underlying assumptions. I am keeping a research journal in which I will record my thoughts and actions. I do not intend to falsify, mislead, or leave out data that does not fit my research question or underlying assumptions. I will ensure that I do not plagiarize by keeping detailed notes of where all thoughts, records and any ideas resulted from. I am conducting a literature review; therefore, there are no ethical concerns with working with human participants.

Preliminary Literature Review

The study of faculty-student advising or mentoring is not a new subject, and a substantial amount of research has been done to study the interactions and relationships between faculty and students, it is an important issue that was verified by my preliminary literature review multiple times (Birkeland et al., 2019; DeAngelo et al., 2016; Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Interestingly, there are many perspectives and contexts to consider when examining this relationship between faculty and students. While this is a preliminary literature review, it is unlikely that without a lifetime of research time and effort, one researcher would be able to cover all the contexts and viewpoints, and therefore I focused on considerations that were connected to my research questions.

Benefits of Relationship

The benefits of the faculty-student relationship were mainly focused on the benefit to the students as well as the overall institution, in aspects such as retention and enrollment (D'Amico Guthrie & Fruht, 2018; Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018). The benefits of this interaction for the mentee or student ranged from a sense of belonging or connection (D'Amico Guthrie & Fruht, 2018; DeAngelo et al., 2016), sense of support or care (Hawk, 2017; Synder-Duch, 2018), or advice on academic and non academic matters (Walker et al., 2017). Also noted was research on

the infrequently mentioned benefits of this relationship to a faculty member (DeAngelo et al., 2016), making the relationship or viewpoint to which to observe this issue not so one-sided. Furthermore, evidence in the research also considered the cost of either emotional support or flawed advice, as a lack of caring by the faculty and students alike (Birkeland et al., 2019; Chory & Offstein, 2017; Hawk, 2017).

Challenges of the Relationship

Time was a challenge that was mentioned in multiple studies of faculty-student relationships within advising or mentoring. The majority of the research focused on the learner-centred or student view that students valued or needed more time with their advisor or mentor to make this a beneficial relationship (Birkeland et al., 2019; Chory & Offstein, 2017; D'Amico Guthrie & Fruiht, 2018; Walker et al., 2017). There was, however, research results that also indicated time may be a barrier or challenge to the faculty, primarily when the faculty viewed this relationship as an additional role to their already demanding professions (DeAngelo et al., 2016). However, Schreiner and Tobolowsky (2018) suggested that perhaps the quality of the relationship and interaction should take prominence over the time aspect of the relationship.

Another challenge of advising or mentoring that have been mentioned by students and faculty is lack of training in the advising role, this included an academic advising role or a developmental or informal advising role (Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018; Synder-Duch, 2018; Vespia et al., 2018). Lack of training of faculty when it comes to advising leads to discussions of not caring by some students (Walker et al., 2017), and it also leads to discussions of being overwhelmed and feelings of extra-role assignments by faculty (DeAngelo et al., 2016); both these dynamics will play a factor in the interaction or relationship between faculty and students.

Developmental versus Prescriptive Advising

Advising relationships have been in place for many years, and have a significant history. Much research has been done on what is called *prescriptive advising*, where advisors or faculty are there to disseminate information about policies, schedules, and academic procedures (Synder-Duch, 2018). The prescriptive advising can also be referred to as academic advising, formal or direct advising (Vespia et al., 2018). The body of knowledge about developmental advising is where I may find more possible answers to my research questions. Developmental, informal or indirect advising is concerned with a relationship that focuses on facilitating students not only on academics but also on emotional and mental health support (Birkeland et al., 2019; Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018). The developmental view of advising is often cited as an extension of what an educator's everyday role includes (Hawk, 2017; Synder-Duch, 2018), which has an effect on how the relationship or interaction is viewed by faculty and students (Birkeland et al., 2019).

Prescribed or Organic Relationship

Another aspect of the relationship that is of particular interest to me is whether having an advisor or mentor assigned to a student plays a significant role in the relationship. Some researchers mentioned in passing whether the role was assigned, or prescribed, versus natural or organic, in somewhat of a descriptor rather than a significant factor playing a role in the relationship (D'Amico Guthrie & Fruht, 2018; Walker et al., 2017). Other researchers focused specifically on the importance of the mentee having a prior relationship with faculty or being able to pick a faculty member that they felt a connection with (Birkeland et al., 2019). Further research that would be of interest in a constructivist paradigm is to find research that views this not only from the student-centred viewpoint but also from the faculty lens.

Perspectives

Crucial to the constructive paradigm of my theoretical viewpoint is that the research reviewed came from a variety of viewpoints, and not solely from the perspective of the student or the faculty. All literature surveyed reflected qualitative research methods, although the qualitative methods differed from study to study. One research project used the narratives of the faculty exclusively to explain the importance of faculty-student relationships (Zhang et al., 2019). Another study done used a combination of group interviews and individual interviews to create a thematic analysis of the data that revealed a reality that may not have been identified in a myopic quantitative study (Walker et al., 2017). Of particular interest was the size of the groups studied; for example, one study had 994 respondents (D'Amico Guthrie & Fruiht, 2018), and another only four individual narratives were used (Zhang et al., 2019). The difference in methods of qualitative will only add to the realities interpreted and constructed.

Another emergent theme from reviewing the literature on the advising relationship was the group composition or the participants included in the studies. Zhang et al. (2019) used themselves as participants, which was curious and at times, confusing. In another study, the authors acknowledged that their participants came to the study by recruitment, given extra credit or refreshments, and therefore the students who participated may have been more aware or appreciative of advising or there for entirely the wrong reasons (Walker et al., 2017). Another limitation with participation was group composition; one group was composed mainly of Caucasian people (D'Amico Guthrie & Fruiht, 2018). Also interesting was that only one study mentioned gender as a factor in the relationship, stating that male students tended to benefit more from the interaction than females (Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018). A large group of one culture, gender or race would make it difficult to get a holistic view of the research question posed.

Significance of the Research

In researching the relationship of faculty-student advising or mentoring, some critical gaps are present. Firstly, there is a gap in information that is current, and this could be simply because academic advising as a prescriptive role has a long history, not warranting new research. Secondly, developmental advising, which focuses on a more holistic view of caring for a student, is often focused solely on retention and enrollment issues (Walker et al., 2017). This relationship is of significance and importance, and more research needs to be done looking into the care and sense of belonging that developmental advising may create for students. Furthermore, through an examination of the relationship between faculty and students in advising or mentoring roles, I hope to extend my capstone into further action research within my own institution's journey of faculty advising.

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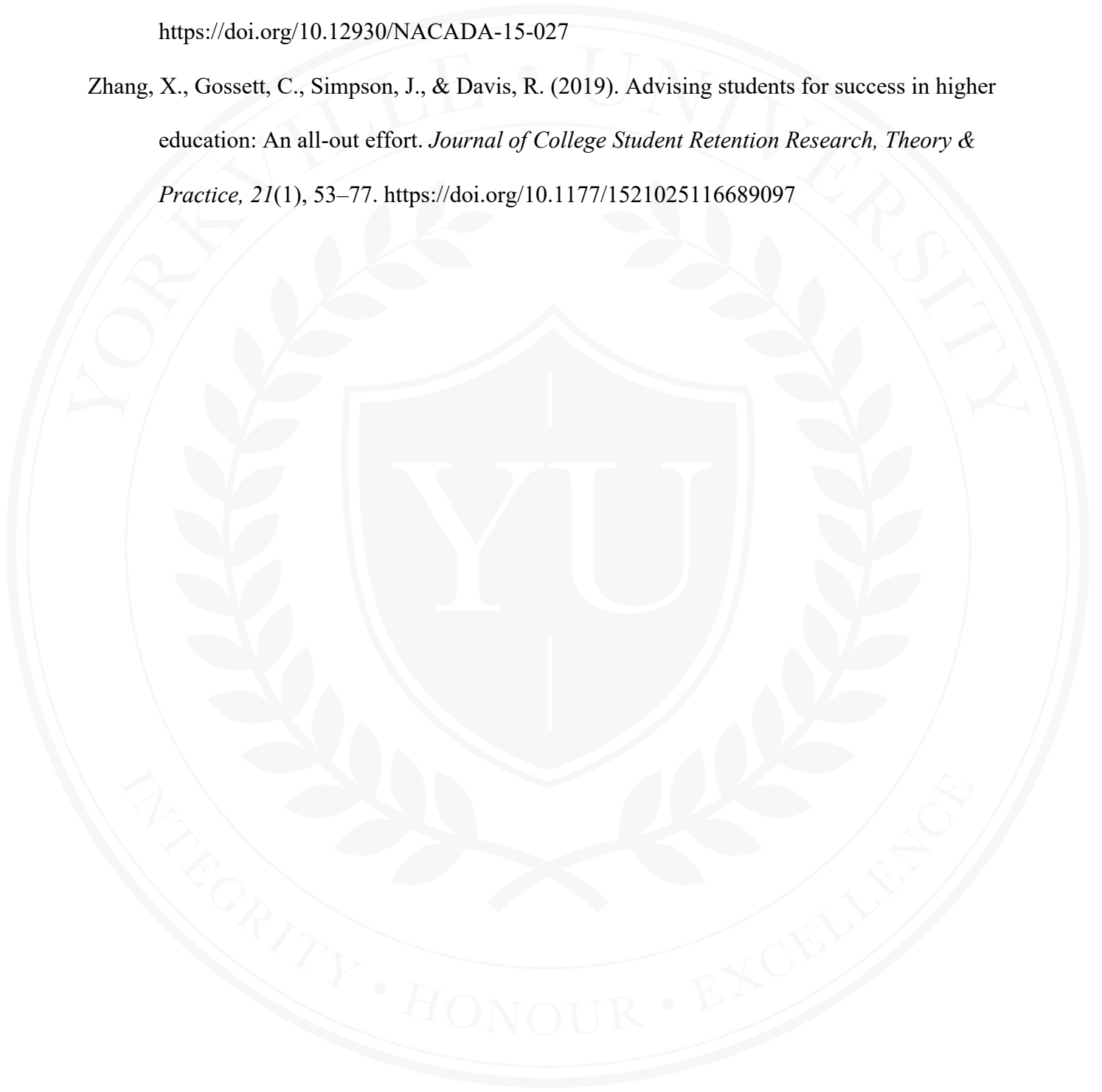
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Appendix A: Proposed Research Timeline

Tasks	Timeframe	Dates
Phase 1: Inquiry	Weeks 1–4	Jan 7–Apr 19, 2019
Confirm topic for inquiry	Week 1	Jan 7–11
Conduct a preliminary literature search	Weeks 1–2	Jan 7–18
Draft proposal and submit to supervisor	Week 3	Jan 19–25
Supervisor reviews draft proposal	Week 4	Jan 26–Feb 1
Revisions based on supervisor feedback	Week 4	Jan 26–Feb 1
Submit proposal to Capstone Office	Week 4	Jan 26–Feb 1
Phase 2: Data Collection and Analysis	Weeks 5–8	Feb 2–Feb 29
Complete proposal revisions and resubmit	Week 5	Feb 2–8
Continue to draft literature review	Weeks 6–7	Feb 9–22
Critique literature	Week 8	Feb 23–29
Phase 3: Writing	Weeks 9–15	Mar 1–Apr 18
Draft report	Weeks 9–10	Mar 1–Mar 14
Submit full draft to supervisor	Week 11	Mar 15–Mar 21
Revisions based on supervisor feedback	Weeks 12	Mar 22–Mar 28
Supervisor reviews the final submission	Week 12	Mar 22–Mar 28
Submit to the second reader	Week 12	Mar 22–Mar 28
Make revisions based on feedback	Week 13–14	Mar 29–Apr 11
Submit final report	Week 15	Apr 12–Apr 18