

**OLIVET NAZARENE UNIVERSITY**  
**ACADEMIC ADVISING ASSESSMENT: PHASE ONE**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Retaining college students has emerged as a top priority for colleges and university administrators; therefore, postsecondary institutions have invested heavily in student success initiatives including retention software, centers for student success, mentoring programs, and academic coaching centers. All too often, however, colleges and universities fail to view academic advising as key to student success. In reality, academic advising should be central to institutional student success initiatives. Additionally, most colleges and universities have no consistent academic advising assessment activities, systematic academic advisor recruiting or training strategies, or incentive or reward programs for academic advisors. As an outcome of the 2014 HLC reauthorization of accreditation site visit, ONU designed and implemented a comprehensive academic advising assessment. The purpose of the assessment was to identify key stakeholders (e.g. traditional students, non-traditional students and academic advisors) in the advising process and collect information related to the nature and scope of advising sessions, evaluations of academic advisors, and student and advisor satisfaction with advising activities. The ONU academic advising assessment also collected comments from all key stakeholders relative to academic advising strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for improvement.

Key findings suggested that advisors and students did not view academic advising as a program. They perceived the ONU approach to academic advising as a series of loosely coordinated activities that may or may not contribute to student success. There were statistically significant differences between student and academic advisor perceptions of the nature and scope of academic advising sessions which may indicate the need for ONU administrators to develop an on-line credit-hour course with a curriculum designed to teach ONU students key academic advising concepts and strategies.

There were also statistically significant differences between how students, both undergraduate and non-traditional students, evaluated their advisors compared to how advisors evaluated themselves. ONU commitment to improving and standardizing institutional perceptions of the role of academic advisors and communicating that to students will likely close that perceptual gap.

While ONU administrators expect all full-time faculty to serve as academic advisors, academic advisors were only somewhat satisfied with their participation in academic advising activities. Should ONU develop incentives and rewards for those serving as academic advisors, it's likely that advisor satisfaction will improve.

Results from the academic advising assessment suggested that Olivet should develop a comprehensive advising program consistent with the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) and aligned with Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising (NACADA). An important first step would be to hire a Director of Academic Advising who could develop systematic policies and procedures for academic advising and a standardized academic curriculum for advising sessions. Olivet may also want to make a one-credit on-line academic advising course available to all students. Olivet should also invest in academic advisor training, make the distribution of advisees from advisor to advisor more equitable, and establish a system of reward and recognition for academic advisors.

Olivet Nazarene University has demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement of its policies, procedures and programs. The academic advising assessment is the first step toward developing an academic advising program that enhances student success and contributes positively to student retention.

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***“I thank God every time I remember you.”***

***Philippians 4:2***

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background .....	1
History of Academic Advising .....	6
Approaches to Academic Advising .....	7
Assessing Academic Advising .....	9
Statement of the Problem .....	11
Research Questions .....	12
Chapter 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	13
Advising Approaches .....	13
Advising Traditional Students .....	15
Advising Nontraditional Students .....	27
Advising Special Populations .....	31
Assessing Academic Advising Programs .....	34
Summary .....	41
Chapter 3: METHOD .....	42
Selection Procedures .....	42
Instrumentation .....	43
Data Collection Procedures .....	45
Participants .....	46
Research Questions and Data Analysis .....	52
Chapter 4: RESULTS .....	54
Academic Advising Mission Statement and Program Outcomes .....	54
Focus Groups .....	55
Academic Advising Assessment .....	62
Nature and Scope of Advising Sessions .....	62
Evaluation of Academic Advisors .....	65
Satisfaction with Academic Advising .....	67
Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations for Improvement .....	70

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Summary .....	82
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION .....	85
Implications for Academic Advising Program Development .....	85
Implications for Academic Advising Program Assessment and Review .....	92
Conclusion .....	96
References .....	98
APPENDIX A: Focus Group Consent Form and Script .....	115
APPENDIX B: Traditional Student Consent Form and Questionnaire .....	117
APPENDIX C: Nontraditional Student Consent Form and Questionnaire .....	122
APPENDIX E: Academic Advisor Informed Consent and Questionnaire .....	127

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Academic advising has long been accepted as an important component of collegiate student success programs; however, only recently has academic advising been strongly linked to student retention. Keeping students enrolled is emerging as a top priority for college administrators. As reported by Lederman (2013), findings from a recent survey indicated that most college and university CFOs cited retaining current students as critical for sustaining collegiate programs. Research related to retention and persistence resulted in a more sophisticated understanding of the factors affecting retention and persistence (Tinto, 2006). Unfortunately, most institutions have failed to access retention research findings and develop retention programs that result in improved student persistence and graduation rates (Carey, 2005). Further, the colleges and universities that do consider retention research generally have failed to include academic advising as an important part of a systematic approach to retention.

#### **Background**

Early research in retention suggests that a combination of student success factors is important for improving retention and persistence (Lotkowski, Robbins, North, 2004). Academic factors impacting student retention include freshman seminars, academic support, course evaluations and more recently, academic advising (Tinto, 2006).

#### **Freshman Seminars**

The freshman seminar has long thought to be an important retention strategy. As indicated by The Policy Center on the First Year of College (2002), 94% of four-year postsecondary required freshman to enroll in a freshman seminar. The emergence of first-year seminars as a viable student success strategy has been linked to (a) financial requirements, (b) reputation enhancement, (c) perceived stakeholder advantage and (d) mission fulfillment. Retention and persistence rates have become implicit measures of institutional quality.

More recently, Porter and Swing (2006) investigated curricular components of freshman seminars and their impact on student intentions to persist. They found that the learning skills and academic engagement components of freshman seminars emerged as the primary influences for the persistence of students. These findings are consistent with the foundational philosophy of most first-year seminars: “students need assistance responding to college-level study and academic expectations” (p. 106). Students who quickly develop academic confidence are more likely to continue their enrollment.

### **Academic Support**

Most academic support programs provide peer tutors and supplemental instruction to support the learning needs of students enrolled in postsecondary education. Both support strategies depend on capable students helping less capable students.

**Peer tutoring.** One of the primary reasons that students drop out of college is failure to pass college coursework (Tinto, 2006). In an effort to improve the retention and persistence of these students, many colleges have developed peer tutoring programs. Peer tutors are generally successful students who have demonstrated competencies in a particular subject area or areas and are willing to tutor students from their peer group who are struggling academically. Peer tutoring is a popular academic support strategy because it actively involves under-prepared students in the development of their own learning (Richard, 1995; Zhao & Kuh, 2004; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2007).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, peer tutoring in the freshman year positively impacted students’ grades, credits and persistence (Weinsheimer, 1998; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Further, peer tutoring programs that include the close collaboration of program administrators, faculty, and students improve the academic success of students (Spann, 1990; Smart, Feldman & Ethington, 2000). Studies of achievement gains, student satisfaction and persistence link peer tutoring to positive outcomes, and subjective student feedback about peer tutoring is generally positive (Topping, 1996; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

**Supplemental instruction.** One form of small group peer tutoring is Supplemental Instruction (SI). The University of Missouri-Kansas City started Supplemental Instruction to benefit their medical students (Martin, 1980). Since then, it has been adapted for students at all levels. Small group sessions



integrate learning strategies with course content. Different from traditional one-on-one tutoring programs, students with expertise in the SI content area lead small group instructional sessions. Student instructors collaborate with content area faculty to offer all of the components found to increase and measure learning: quizzes, tests, oral exams, and group study (Martin & Arendale, 1990). Because SI is directly related to course content, it averts some of the problems of non-transferability when study skills are taught in isolation (Stahl, Simpson, & Hayes, 1992; Dion, Fuchs and Fuchs, 2007; Stone & Jacobs, 2006).

Not only does SI provide opportunities for academic involvement, it also fosters the sense of community that students need for success (Tinto, 1993). Further, ongoing research on SI and affect (Visor, Johnson, & Cole, 1992; Visor, Johnson, & Schollet, 1995) indicated a possible relationship between SI and the development of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and an internal locus of control. The possibility of a reciprocal relationship between affect and SI (Visor et al., 1992; Stone & Jacobs, 2006) increased the relevance of the effect of SI on persistence and retention.

### **Course Evaluations**

Measuring quality in higher education is at best inexact. Emphasis on elite admissions requirements, the number of faculty with terminal degrees, the strength of library holdings and financial strength have long been the benchmarks for measuring excellence in postsecondary education (Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, 2001); however, these quality measures say nothing about the extent to which students learn from the instruction they receive in classes (Pascarella, 2001).

Research has investigated faculty time-management strategies, pedagogical approaches, and faculty satisfaction with teaching (Menges, 2000). Less is known about the relationship between these factors and student learning. Even less is known about how gains in student learning influenced retention. According to Chickering and Gamson (1987), the more students engaged with faculty in the learning process the more likely they were to persist.

Institutional efforts to improve retention and persistence rates should include a study of institutional and faculty engagement factors which promote student learning (Ewell, 1997; Smart,

Feldman, & Ethington, 2000; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2007). The course evaluation has long been the primary method for collecting students' assessments of the extent of their engagement with faculty (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991); however, Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) indicated that direct information such as course assessment data from faculty was needed to substantiate the effect faculty had on student engagement and subsequent retention rates. Findings from their research suggest that students are more apt to persist if they have (a) positive student-faculty interactions in class, (b) interactive and collaborative activities, (c) courses where faculty academically challenged their students, (d) classes where there is an emphasis on critical thinking skills, (e) opportunities to participate in faculty-sponsored enriching educational activities, and (f) faculty whose attitudes and behaviors exhibited a commitment to academic rigor.

### **Academic Advising**

Early researchers established academic advising as a key component in a strong retention model. As early as 1987, Tinto, an expert in retention and persistence, suggested that effective advising should be central to a strong institutional retention plan (Tinto, 1987). More recently, Rendon (1994) found that the two key factors supporting student retention and persistence included (a) strong transition activities (e.g. initial and extended orientation activities) and (b) strong advising programs that support student interaction with faculty and/or key college personnel in their first term.

Habley (2004) argued that rather than being one of an array of services for students provided to improve retention, academic advising should be foundational to an institutional model of retention. Further, Nut (2003) suggested that rather than being an ancillary spoke in a wheel containing other student success factors, academic advising should be:

... the hub of the wheel. The role of academic advisors is critical to student success. Academic advisors provide students with the needed connection to various campus services and supply the essential academic connection between these services and the students. In addition, academic advisors offer students the personal connection to the institution that the research indicates is vital to student retention and student success (p.2).

Clearly, academic advising is not the sole enterprise in a successful university retention model; however, retention programs that are not rested firmly on the foundation of academic advising are likely to fail.

### **History of Academic Advising**

Nearly since the inception of higher education in America, college and university administrators, faculty and staff have engaged in some form of academic advising. In the early days of higher education, students shared residential space with their professors, and professors had close disciplinary relationships with their students resulting in a paternal approach to academic advising (Gillespie, 2003). In time, faculty became less involved in the disciplinary needs of students and the paternalism that characterized academic advising disappeared.

As colleges and universities became larger and research-oriented in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the need for specialized academic guidance increased, so advising groups began to emerge (Gordon, 1992). After World War I, Army placement of soldiers into specific occupations based on their skills, intelligence and aptitude influenced colleges and universities to use psychometrics to make student placement decisions. They also established vocational guidance centers to help students in their academic pursuits (Gallagher & Demos, 1983).

In the 1920s the Progressive Education Movement emphasized the role of faculty as mentors who guided the self-direction and academic and social development of students. After World War II, there was a renewed interest in using measurement to classify students' interests and aptitudes (Zunker, 2002). The influx of the baby boomers on college campuses in the '60s and '70s resulted in increased focus on student advising and counseling. According to Gillespie (2003), student development issues advanced to the forefront of academic consideration. While other relevant academic issues including social justice, access, utility, and accountability were important considerations, academic advising became the focal point of student services (Komives & Woodard, 1996). According to Gillespie (2003), the services directed toward student development are an amalgamation of their historical components. Measurement and development are still practiced, but under the microscope of accountability, validity

and efficiency. An appreciation of the past is an important key to moving academic advising through the next millennium (pg.1).

### **Approaches to Academic Advising**

As the need for more sophisticated academic advising programs increased, a variety of approaches or models of academic advising emerged. Essentially, there are three general approaches to academic advising: prescriptive, proactive, or developmental advising.

#### **Prescriptive Advising**

Historically, prescriptive advising simply meant that faculty advisors helped students choose academic courses in a sequence that would presumably lead students toward meeting program requirements, attending to pre-requisites and ultimately graduating. Prescriptive models allowed for very little interaction between advisors and students (Frost, 2003). In a prescriptive model advisors focused on course selection, major and minor program requirements, prerequisites, satisfactory progress indicators and academic policies (Jeschke, M.; Johnson, K.E.; and Williams, J.R. 2001). In a prescriptive advising model, students make appointments to see advisors whose primary goal was to shepherd students through a selected course of study. Advisors play no significant role in the holistic development of students and generally have no interest in helping students identify long-term goals beyond their academic course of study. According to Crookston (2009), prescriptive advising is similar to the medical model guiding the doctor-patient relationship.

#### **Proactive Advising**

Proactive advising requires that advisors contact students at critical junctures in students' academic careers (Schwebel, Walburn, Jacobson, Jerrolds, and Klyce, 2008). These advisor touch-points may include (a) during the freshman year, (b) at the point of declaring a major, and (c) during grad-checks prior to graduation. Further, students viewed as academically at-risk or low-achieving benefit from closer scrutiny of their progress through intrusive advising. Vander Schee (2007) noted that students in intrusive advising programs had higher retention rates and persisted to degree attainment more than students who did not participate in a proactive advising approach. Finally, Jescke, et. al, (2001) found

that students preferred a proactive advising approach over a prescriptive advising approach although some students found the intrusive approach invasive.

### **Developmental Advising**

In his seminal work on academic advising, Crookston (1972) shifted the onus of responsibility for academic advising from the advisor to the student. This developmental approach emphasized the holistic development of students and focused on developing competence, autonomy and purpose primarily in undergraduate students. In this approach, students were asked to become involved in their own college experiences and take responsibility for their learning. A developmental advising approach marries academic and student development theory and practice and helps improve students' decision-making and problem-solving skills.

Regardless of the theoretical model used for advising, the most effective approach to academic advising includes face-to-face meetings between students and advisors (Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino, 2004). These meeting are most helpful if they include topics related to course sequencing, prerequisites, and career goals. Further, students have reported that face-to-face academic advising sessions with their academic advisor are more meaningful (Johnson & Morgan, 2005). Additionally, students reported that the nature of their relationship with their advisor was more important than any specific approach to advising (Mottarella, et al, 2004). Finally, when there are one-on-one meetings between advisors and students, student satisfaction increases and reports of students feeling isolated or disconnected from the institution decrease (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). High levels of student satisfaction and reduced feelings of isolation have been positively linked to strong university retention and graduation rates and lower attrition and withdrawal rates. These findings have been consistent for both traditional residential undergraduate student campuses and colleges and universities that offer programs almost exclusively online or through virtual formats (Drake, 2011).

The link between an effective advising program and improved retention, persistence and improved graduation rates has been firmly established. Colleges and universities seeking to improve the

quality of the academic advising program are best served when the academic advising program has received the scrutiny consistent with a comprehensive academic advising program assessment.

### **Assessing Academic Advising**

Although the terms evaluation and assessment are used interchangeably, there are important distinctions between assessment and evaluation in higher education (Robbins, 2009, 2011). Evaluation focuses on the individual performance of academic advisors while assessment considers the academic advising program overall and pays particular attention to the student learning outcomes of the academic advising program. Evaluation tends to be episodic and focuses on the individual while assessment is a cyclical systematic continuous process conducted at the program level (Robbins, 2011).

Any good assessment cycle has a beginning and an end that then starts a new assessment cycle. From the beginning to the end of the assessment cycle, institutions should identify key stakeholders who collaboratively (a) develop a program mission statement, (b) write program outcomes, (c) design satisfactory criteria for measuring each outcome, and (d) collect, report and share data (Robbins and Zargas, 2011).

### **Key Stakeholders**

Identifying the key stakeholders is an important first step in designing an authentic assessment plan for academic advising. The key stakeholders are those individuals engaged in the academic advising program (e.g. faculty, staff and students) as well as the advising program directors and administrators. Key stakeholders may also include parents, employers, internship site supervisors, and alumni. While not all key stakeholders will become members of a working assessment team, it is critical that all of the stakeholder groups have input during the assessment process (Aiken-Wisniewski, 2010).

### **Mission Statement**

Colleges and universities who engage in writing a mission statement for an academic advising program must attend to the vision, mission and values statements of the institution and should align them to the Concept and Core Values of the *National Academic Advising Association* (NACADA). The Concept of Academic Advising views the three components of an effective advising program as including

the advising curriculum, pedagogy, and learning outcomes. Further, according to NACADA, academic advising mission statements should address the Core Values of Academic Advising which state that “. . . advisors are responsible for themselves and their professional practices, to the individuals they serve, for involving others, to their institutions, to higher education, and to their educational community.” Finally, an institutional mission statement should be consistent with the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education: Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising (NACADA, 2016).

### **Program Outcomes**

Program outcomes for an academic advising program should be anchored in what happens during advisor-student interactions, the nature and scope of information that is shared, and the extent to which students are satisfied with the advising process. Strong program outcomes should generate student learning outcomes: statements about what students should know (cognitive development), do (behavioral development), and value (affective learning) as a result of their engagement in the academic advising program (Aiken-Wisniewski, 2010; Campbell, 2005; and Robbins, 2011).

### **Outcome Measures and Data Collection**

Clearly defined academic advising mission statements, program outcomes, and student learning outcomes allow for the more effective measurement of advising program outcomes. The best approach for measuring outcomes is to adopt a multiple measures approach that includes qualitative, quantitative, direct and indirect measurements.

Qualitative data is exploratory and involves collecting and analyzing responses to open-ended questions about the academic advising experience whereas quantitative data is descriptive and structured. Quantitative measures may be either direct or indirect measures. Direct measures collect empirical or first-hand observations while indirect measures collect second-hand already reported information (Robbins, 2011).

**Data collection.** Data collection involves using multiple measures to generate information to determine if established minimum criteria for success have been met. If assessment of advising is being

done for the first time, it is important to view the initial data set as baseline or benchmarking data as a comparison set for future data sets (Robbins, 2011). Ancillary institutional data such as retention rates, student grade point averages, attrition rates and other track data may also be utilized in the data collection process.

**Reporting and sharing data.** Once the assessment plan is implemented, data collection should be systematic and cyclical. Findings from the assessment cycle should be reported to an institutional assessment management system and shared with key stakeholders who will have a voice in a continuous improvement cycle.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Academic advising is an important part of a cohesive retention strategy for colleges and universities; however, a review of five national surveys of academic advising indicated that only 29% of postsecondary educational institutions assessed their academic advising programs (Habley & Morales, 1998). According to Upcraft, Srebniak, and Stevenson (1995), “the most ignored aspect of academic advising in general, and first-year student academic advising, in particular, is assessment” (p.141).

Assessing the effectiveness of academic advisors and advising programs sends a strong message to the university constituents that advising is an important professional function and that advisors play an important role in student success (Cuseo, 2014). Conversely, failure to systematically evaluate the institutional advising program sends the message that academic advising is not valued and is not an important student success service.

One important finding of the recent ONU self-study pursuant to the comprehensive Higher Learning Commission site visit in 2014 was that Olivet Nazarene University does not have a systematic approach to academic advising. There are no documents clarifying the meaning and purpose of advising; no evidence that there are incentives, recognition, and reward for effective academic advising; little evidence about how academic advisors are recruited; no information about the orientation, training and development of academic advisors; and no sense if students or faculty are satisfied with academic advising activities.



## **Research Questions**

The following research questions are proposed to assess factors associated with the academic advising program at Olivet Nazarene University.

1.     a.     How do students describe the nature and scope of advising sessions?  
       b.     How do advisors describe the nature and scope of advising sessions?  
       c.     Are there differences in how students and advisors describe the nature and scope of advising sessions?
2.     a.     How do students evaluate their academic advisors?  
       b.     How do academic advisors evaluate themselves?  
       c.     Are there differences in how students and advisors evaluate advisor performance?
3.     a.     How satisfied are students with academic advising activities at ONU?  
       b.     How satisfied are faculty with academic advising activities at ONU?
4.     To what extent do students and advisors identify:
  - a.     the strengths of the advising program,
  - b.     the weaknesses of the advising program,
  - c.     recommendations for improving the advising program.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Colleges and universities are operating today in a growing culture of student success. A key component of effective collegiate student success models is the academic advising program. Postsecondary educational institutions should periodically assess their academic advising programs to keep them relevant. Planning a formal assessment of an academic advising program requires an overview of best practices in the literature related to advising approaches and advising (a) traditional students, (b) non-traditional students, and (c) special populations of students. Included in the review are best practices for effectively assessing advising programs.

#### **Advising Approaches**

Over time the relationship of advisor to student has changed from an almost patriarchal approach in the early 1900s to a more interactive advisor-student approach today. A review of the literature indicated that three successful strategies have emerged from the various academic advising models and include the prescriptive, developmental, and proactive approaches.

#### **Prescriptive Advising**

Prescriptive advising, first described by Crookston (1972), is characterized as an autocratic approach that absolves students from decision-making and relies completely on the authority of advisor recommendations. VanderSchee (2007) notes that prescriptive advising does not promote the “development of independent problem-solving strategies needed to improve poor academic performance” (p. 51). Prescriptive advising generally involves the advisor telling the student what to do, an assumption that if the student follows the advising plan there will be no glitches. Interactions are primarily driven by the advisor and delivered in a question-and-answer format to the student.

#### **Developmental Advising**

Developmental advising refers to students and advisors sharing responsibility for planning strategies to advance students’ academic goals (Crookston, 1972). Developmental advising is more collaborative and fosters a mutual relationship where the student and advisor determine the academic plan

and share responsibilities related to exploring life goals, vocational aspirations, and determining which academic program, courses, and schedule the student will follow. Students and advisors share resources, make decisions and solve problems together. Because contact with the advisor is typically initiated when needed by the student, and interaction is reciprocal, this model of advising may not be appropriate for all students especially nontraditional students

### **Proactive Advising**

Proactive advising began with the work of Robert Glennen who worked to blend the aspects of academic advising with the fundamentals of counseling (Varnery, 2012). Proactive advising involves (a) purposeful interventions designed to enhance student motivation, (b) strategies intended to increase the probability of student success, (c) curriculum to educate students on all options, and (d) approaches designed to help students before negative situations develop. In short, proactive advising uses the best qualities of prescriptive and developmental advising by utilizing experience, incorporating an awareness of student needs, providing structured programming, and developing relationships with students to partner in the advising endeavor.

Proactive advising is characterized by advisors who initiate contact with advisees and establish a mentoring relationship. As explained by Fowler and Boylan (2010), proactive advising addresses the needs of students in order to provide the perfect conduit to relationship building. Advisors connect with students before they encounter obstacles to their learning and mandate advising for students who are reluctant to seek an advisor's help.

Earl (1988) describes proactive advising as an intentional structured approach to advising that combines the experience, awareness of student needs and structured programs characteristic of prescriptive advising with the consideration for students' total needs inherent in developmental advising. Brown and Rivas (1994) suggest that proactive advising can help advisors establish trust and is especially effective in building relationships with first-generation students who typically lack the traditional support systems available to students whose parents earned college degrees.

DiMaria (2006) indicated that students who are immersed in a variety of collegiate experiences and actively engaged with their peers and their professors are more likely to stay in school; therefore, proactive advisors may well be the primary connection to campus activities for students. Further, because proactive advising fosters positive relationships between advisors and students, proactive advisors are more likely able to help students identify and overcome obstacles to their success.

Proactive advising can positively affect retention and at-risk students' success (Varney, 2012). Proactive advising should outline scheduled communication strategies between the student and advisor that include goals of advising, frequency and modes of communication, and topics to be addressed. For new students, proactive advising should include welcome-messages, support-materials, timely messages that keep students connected, and alert messages that anticipate upcoming changes.

### **Advising Traditional Students**

Assessing the advising program requires a review of the best practices literature related to advising students in the liberal arts including advising for general education requirements, and advising freshmen, honors, and transfer students. It also includes advising students in professional programs.

### **Advising Students in the Liberal Arts**

Traditionally, faculty are the key advisors for students taking courses in liberal arts programs. Effective advising practices in the liberal arts depends on the institutional philosophy of advising, and advising for general education, or core courses including required religion courses at faith-based institutions, and freshman advising.

Research related to the philosophy of advising in the liberal arts emphasizes that advising is an academic experience and should be treated as such. Further, when non-faculty served as advisors, the advisor role should be very much a teacher/student role. The general consensus, however, is that faculty are preferred as academic advisors because of their knowledge in developing, modifying and teaching the curriculum (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Darling, 2015; Lowenstein, 2015; White, 2015). In addition, Campbell and Nutt (2008) supported using a syllabus for advising to clearly lay out the intentions and expectations of academic advising. Aiken (2011) emphasized the value of advising as an academic

experience and reiterated the role of teaching and learning in the academic advising. In addition, advising in the liberal arts should include activities that require reflection and integrated learning because the most important lessons need to be validated, reinforced, and deepened across multiple learning experiences (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; White, 2015; and Soper, 2015). Finally, according to White (2015), advising should not be viewed as a service which speaks to the inadequacy of satisfaction surveys. While they may be one useful piece of information, they are not the complete story on the effectiveness of academic advising.

Most and Wellman (2015) describe a very specific one-credit topically focused course that students would take each semester in which a significant portion was devoted to advising issues. But, it was not yet required for all students each semester because of the financial impact. Lowenstein (2015) recommended a one-credit hour advising course each semester but acknowledged the challenges of such a program. In the liberal arts, advising typically includes advising students for general education requirements and advising traditional freshmen, honors students and transfer students.

**Advising for general education requirements.** A key component of advising students in liberal arts programs is advising students to take required general education or core courses. Campbell (2008) and Lowenstein (2015) stressed the importance of advising as a forum for communicating the purpose for institutional general education requirements and explaining that general education classes are not discrete unrelated entities but are instead integral to the whole curriculum. According to Campbell and Nutt (2008), “An excellent advisor does the same for the student’s entire curriculum what the excellent teacher does for one course” (Campbell, 2008 pg. 4).

**Advising traditional freshmen.** Another component in an effective liberal arts advising model is advising new freshmen. According to Light (2001), “Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful first-year college experience” (pg. 81). In particular, the academic success of underprepared, undecided, and first-generation students depends heavily on good advising. A comprehensive approach to advising involves more than merely assisting students with

registration and scheduling of classes (Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Assoc., 2005). Numerous studies have found that clear, timely academic advising is a key to student retention and persistence to graduation (Pascarella, 2005). According to Vincent Tinto, Syracuse University scholar and author, colleges and universities who provide clear explanations of institutional expectations and program requirements are more likely to have students persist and complete degree requirements (Young and Jones, 2013). Retention and persistence are directly related to advising (Kot, 2014).

Traditionally, academic advising for freshmen has been a faculty responsibility, however, quite a number of institutions are using professional advisors to assist with first-year students. Regardless of the approach to advising, it is important for colleges and universities to provide training for academic advisors (Tinto, 1993).

Advising seems to be most effective when it requires freshmen to take advantage of the services available to them. Many institutions are utilizing a centralized location to better assist with first-year students and other specific student groups such as first-generation students (Kot, 2014). The Sixth Survey of Academic Advising reports that the number of academic advising centers rose from a mere 14% in 1979 to 73% in 2003 (Kot, 2014).

Advising sessions for freshmen should also include information on campus resources that will help a student succeed (Seidman, 2005). Many freshmen students are unaware of all the learning resources at their disposal on a university campus and need an advisor to point them in the right direction.

. Effective freshman advising outcomes should include: (a) the development of academic plans to help students realize career, personal, educational, and life goals; (b) intellectual growth and critical thinking skills; (c) an ability to make major decisions; (d) independence and healthy self-esteem; (e) honest self-appraisal and awareness; (f) clarification of personal values and positive interpersonal relationships; and (g) spiritual awareness and social responsibility (McClellan, 2013). These outcomes will likely be realized at institutions that develop systematic transition plans for new freshmen that include a strong emphasis on academic advising.

A key transition strategy is to keep a unified record of freshmen advising sessions. Valuable information is lost when a freshman switches advisors, and the new advisor is not able to access information from prior advising sessions. A unified record keeping system should enable any person working with a student to access what has been discussed in prior settings (University Leadership Council, 2009). Recording information from each advising session is the key to developing and maintaining seamless advising records for freshmen (Strickland, 2015). Clarifying and communicating clearly the purpose of academic advising, particularly freshman advising – for both the advisor and the advisee – will greatly enhance the effectiveness and success of each encounter.

**Advising honors students.** Typically, honors student programs are embedded in the traditional liberal arts program at most colleges and universities. As with other students, effectively advising honors students requires an understanding of the unique learning needs of these students. According to Gordon (1992), honors students differ significantly from other students and may be dealing with unexpected issues. For example, honors students may have inordinate fears of failure, or they may have difficulty focusing on a particular major since their interests are so diverse and “they have the potential to succeed in many areas” (p. 101).

An understanding of honors student characteristics is important for successfully advising these students. Honors students are characterized as creative and goal-oriented (Ender and Wilke, 2000). Further, it is important to help honors students to develop and validate life purpose. Most honors students are likely to attend graduate school and may be more inclined to pursue extracurricular activities and other enrichment opportunities than other undergraduates (Huggett, 2004). An alert advisor should look for opportunities to challenge students with exceptional abilities but at the same time help honors students not to overly commit themselves in personal pursuits to the detriment of their rigorous academic schedules.

Robinson (1997) cautions that some honors students may experience academic drift. Academic skills developed in high school may not be developed sufficiently to transfer to college scholarship. Performance indicators (e.g. grades, etc.) may not be true reflections of students' abilities especially if

they are above average. Honors students need advisors that help them work up to their true potential. Honors students benefit from proactive advising approaches that require advising contact appointments (Huggett, 2004).

Based on research findings, Huggett (2004) suggested that honors students are best served in a learner-centered approach to advising that begins early in the student's experience, often as early as the orientation to the honors program, and from the study findings several areas emerged that need attention in the development of an effective honors student advising program. These areas include early contact and multiple venues; encouragement, support and challenge; and forward thinking and basic skills.

Often honors students are inundated with invitations to participate in research projects and special seminars as they matriculate. They need astute advisors to help them sift through the plethora of opportunities and choose those opportunities that will advance their academic and career goals. Honors students expressed appreciation for positive advising encounters that took place in many venues including one-on-one group meetings, peer advising sessions, and e-mail dialogue with advisors. Advisors are cautioned to clearly indicate which venues were specific to the honors program.

Like all college students, students who are gifted and have significant academic potential still need encouragement and support. Certainly, freshmen honors students need encouragement, but it is important to note that honors students continue to need support as the rigors of their academic programs increase. According to Hugget (2004), "advisors should invite students to examine their academic goals, describe their aspirations, reflect on their decisions, or speculate on the possible outcomes of pursuing specific opportunities" (pg. 85).

The more that honors students have opportunity to consider and evaluate their career goals the better. Honors students welcome discussions about their postgraduate plans; therefore, advising honors students successfully requires that advisors have certain basic skills. Honors students are concerned that advisors listen to their questions, have accurate information, or care about their learning experiences. Hugget (2004), "characterized successful advising relationships as those grounded in respect, trust, confidentiality, humor, empathy, and good listening" (p.85).



**Advising transfer students.** There is not much agreement on what academic advising actually is and who should do it (O'Banion, 1972/2009). Even less scholarly attention has been paid to advising transfer students, despite multiple studies demonstrating that advising issues are a common problem (Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2014). Some of the activities associated with advising have been identified. An early scholar suggested it involves the exploration of life and vocational goals, program and course selection, and course scheduling (O'Banion, 1972/2009). Scheduling is less important in light of significant technical advances in the registration process. Others claim that integration, referral, information, individuation, and shared responsibility are essential elements in transfer advising (Allen, et al., 2014). In Webb, Dantzler, and Hardy's (2015) theoretical model factors related to the successful advising of transfer students consider the institution, culture, context, and specifically the advisor and student. It seems from these studies that transfer advising combines long-range planning, technical advice, information sharing, guidance, referral, and assisting students to transition to a new environment.

Much of the literature assumes that advising is done by professional staff, particularly the initial advising for transfers. There is widespread agreement that there should be specific advisors for the transfer population (Ellis, 2013; O'Banion, 2009; Poisel & Stinard, 2005; Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000). O'Banion claims that transfer students benefit from professionally trained counselors who help students explore life and vocational goals and argues that when faculty are involved, it should be on a voluntary basis, recognized as an important activity requiring specialized skills, limited as to the number of students, and involve training. Ellis (2013) also argues that maintaining a healthy ratio of advisors to students is essential.

Transfer student advisors serve a critical function as guides to transfer students who are learning to navigate a new environment, particularly in disseminating information to help them put the pieces together quickly (Flaga, 2006). In addition, it is helpful if transfer advisors have been a transfer student themselves; share other characteristics with the students they advise, such as being first-generation or near-peer in terms of age; and are emotionally invested in the process (Townsend, 2008; Webb, et al.,

2015). Transfers also indicated a strong desire for a personal, caring relationship where they are recognized for their individual goals and needs (Allen, et al., 2014).

At traditional, residential campuses such as ONU's, student success depends on both academic and social integration (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). This goes well beyond the classroom into the wide variety of interactions that occur on campus (Berger & Malaney, 2003). Developing policies to enhance integration, both before and after transfer is critical (Garda, Patona, & Gosselina, 2012). This is particularly challenging for transfer students who may have difficulty creating new friendships since most students already have well-established relationships (Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Transfers from two-year colleges may need special assistance learning how to balance their social life and their academic responsibilities at the university (Berger & Malaney, 2003). Strategies to promote academic and social integration include transfer orientation, peer mentoring, and a transfer seminar course.

The information received during orientation helps students navigate a successful transition to the new institution (Laanan, 2007). It should include learning about access to support services (Townsend & Wilson, 2006) as well as information about policies and processes, special assistance for undeclared majors, and technical advising on general education requirements and registration procedures (Poisel & Stinard, 2005). Empirical studies also find that, since transfer students are already familiar with college life, they want an orientation geared specifically to them as transfers (Flaga, 2006; Townsend, 2008). Connecting with other transfers during orientation also promotes social integration as students lay a foundation for friendships for the upcoming academic year (Flaga, 2006).

There is strong support for creating a formal peer mentor program (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Flaga, 2006; Poisel & Stinard, 2005; Rhine, et al., 2000; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Connecting new transfers to experienced students can facilitate learning about campus resources while linking them with their peers (Flaga, 2006; Townsend, 2008). Through sharing their own successful social and academic adjustment to the university as transfers, peer mentors serve as positive role models (Townsend, 2008). Mentors require training in order to assist transfers, especially as they provide

informal academic advising and refer students to campus services, and should participate in both orientation and the seminar course (Poisel & Stinard, 2005).

Similar to seminars designed for freshmen, transfer student seminars can benefit transfer students. Such courses help students identify available resources, connect with other students, and become familiar with the university (Flaga, 2006). Transfers indicate a desire for a course that prepares them for a new environment especially in understanding expectations for study habits and learning about campus services (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). However, transfers are also clear that although they feel like freshmen in many ways, they do not want to be treated as if they are first-year students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). It may be advisable for designated transfer advisors to be responsible for teaching transfer seminars.

Transfer students benefit from early access to advising; meeting an academic advisor prior to transfer reduces surprises, informs students about resources, and allows students to develop a relationship with an advisor prior to enrollment (Flaga, 2006). According to Poisel and Stinard (2005), transfer students are more successful if they have early exposure to good information. Familiarity with graduation requirements prior to transfer is a predictor of transfer satisfaction which in turn is a predictor of persistence (Berger & Malaney, 2003). Advising transfer students about specific major requirements prior to enrollment can also limit switching majors after enrollment (Rhine, et al., 2000). Transfers from feeder community colleges appreciate site visits with advisors who can help them learn how to navigate new systems (Garda, et al., 2012). Introduction to university personnel and offices prior to transfer provides access to resources and services before transitioning (Rhine, et al., 2000).

Advisors play a key role in the transition of transfer students into a new academic environment (Flaga, 2006; Poisel & Stinard, 2005). Flaga (2006) suggests that transfer students be introduced to and firmly connected to learning resources. As they develop familiarity with the university, this allows them to negotiate their environment and adapt their behaviors eventually leading to integration. The advisor is a critical element throughout the transition:

Advisors help their students to seek out formal and informal learning resources, and to be proactive and take initiative. Advisors also help students connect through the advising

relationship, as well as through other relationships that students develop as a result of seeking out learning resources (Flaga, 2006, p. 11).

Advisors assist transfer students by encouraging them to actively involve themselves at the institution by accessing academic resources and student services like health and fitness programs and by engaging in community service opportunities (Ellis, 2013). Students should be encouraged to be actively engaged in learning about degree requirements and various processes (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

Advisors should use email to provide incoming students with a paper trail to guarantee decisions about the transfer process and credit decisions; this also makes the advisor accountable (Ellis, 2013). They can help alleviate transfers' apprehensions and anxieties in adjusting to a four-year setting and should recognize that it takes some longer than others to feel comfortable (Laanan, 2007). Advisors should remember that although transfers are not first-year students, they may need a helping hand to figure out where things are and how they are done (Townsend & Wilson, 2006, p. 446).

The University should develop an advising program specifically geared towards transfer students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). As part of that program, professional development and in-service training should be required so all personnel working with transfers are on the same page (Ellis, 2013; O'Banion, 1972/2009). The university should leverage technology to give students access to advisors and to provide a convenient way to keep track of advising history. In this way students do not have to continually re-acquaint their advisor with their life goals and progress towards graduation (Allen, et al., 2014). Transfer students find champions across the faculty and staff (Ellis, 2013), and the university should proactively identify these champions to work with transfers. It is also important that advisors be held accountable for failing to meet students' needs (Rhine, et al., 2000). Articulation or similar agreements should be created and maintained (Townsend & Wilson, 2006) as well as an advising manual accessible to community college counselors and transfer students (Poisel & Stinard, 2005).

In addition to articulation agreements or course substitution guides, the university should encourage departmental faculty and transfer advisors to visit feeder community colleges on a regular basis to help create a smooth transition (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000). This enables community college

counselors to provide more assistance (Flaga, 2006) and to give students early advice about degree requirements (Poisel & Stinard, 2005). Faculty should meet with their community college counterparts to develop strategies for seamless transition and ensuring that students are prepared for the four-year setting (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Townsend, 2008).

Although the professional literature is helpful, transition to ONU should be based on the unique makeup of its transfer population (Townsend, 2008). Studying quantitative measures is not enough; students need to be questioned about their experiences. This qualitative research can be used to deepen the understanding of transfer students' specific situations (Laanan, 2007).

### **Advising Students in Professional Programs**

Academic advising in professional programs can be challenging (McNair, 2009). Professional programs are often accredited, required to meet specific educational standards, and paired with some sort of field placement experience where students must prove they have achieved educational competence while being observed by a professional in a clinical setting. Nakayama (2015) recommended using proactive advising in professional programs. He reported that advisors needed to be proactive when assessing students' competence in order to ensure that students' skills matched their desired professional aspirations. Nakayama also stated that advisors in professional programs should be transparent about academic and professional expectations and forthright about concerns they have about a student's ability to meet professional program standards. In fact, Nakayama recommended that advisors should: inform students of the established expectations for admission, maintenance, and graduation for professional programs; screen and eliminate students who do not meet the standards; and rate students' professional behaviors at the end of each advising session in order to catch any behavioral trends that may not match professional expectations.

Richardson (2013) stated that advisors in professional programs must instill realism, especially when a student's academic performance does not match the required professional standards. Furthermore, Richardson indicated that advisors are responsible for delivering direct messages about professional performance expectations and any short-comings a student might exhibit especially when the program

includes admittance into a graduate-level program where admission is highly competitive. Richardson concluded that advisors in professional programs must create advising plans that ensure students understand the program's mandatory requirements, strategize coursework where the timing of challenging curricula is well planned, consider a back-up plan in case the student fails to meet the requirements, and insist that students (not advisors) become familiar with the admission requirements of their graduate programs in order to ensure the students remain in sync with expectations, even as undergraduate students.

Hueske (2004) agreed that advisors for students enrolled in professional programs must be accurate, timely, and transparent regarding the stringent criteria expected in the program. In addition, advisors must directly communicate the realities of the profession and the need for mentors in the field of study. Carr, Junneau, Markee, and Pentecost (2010) suggested that advising in professional programs requires such careful oversight that universities should consider charging additional student fees to cover the costs of faculty advisor commitments in professional programs.

Steele (2008) found that academic advisors in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) programs should encourage students to enroll in time management seminars and remedial or review classes to strengthen knowledge, encourage the use of study groups, and refer students for tutoring when necessary. Steele also recommended that advisors provide career counseling to educate students about various STEM careers in case a vocational change should be pursued.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) included academic advising as one of the key elements in their *Standards for Accreditation* due to the strong association between academic advising and student satisfaction, recruitment, and retention (Harrison, 2012). Harrison concluded that academic disciplines have a specific language and world view that impacts advising and mentoring sessions between faculty and students; therefore, discipline-specific advising tools should be developed and utilized by faculty.

Harrison (2009) stated that university advisor-advisee relationships are often similar across most academic disciplines. However, Harrison asserted that there are unique differences within advisor-advisee

relationships in nursing because of the inflexibility of course sequencing, rigid course selection options for nursing majors, and higher grade point average requirements. Harrison indicated that these differences result in nursing students seeking out advising sessions more frequently than other university students.

In an effort to identify how nursing faculty described an effective adviser, Harrison (2009<sub>a</sub>) assessed nursing faculty across eight domains: knowledge, availability, communication, moral virtue, advocacy, authenticity, accountability, and approachability. Harrison found that nursing faculty felt that the most effective quality in an academic advisor in nursing was knowledge. More specifically, faculty felt that effective advisors had knowledge related to university programs, nursing curriculum, admission criteria and processes, and campus resources. Furthermore, nursing faculty felt that knowledgeable advisors were competent and resourceful, sought answers to questions, and were able to develop personalized academic plans of study for students. Nursing faculty identified spending time with students as the second highest characteristic of an effective advisor. They also noted that providing timely responses to emails and student requests, and demonstrating flexibility were important as well.

Harrison (2009) also collected information about how nursing students described an effective advisor and asked pre-nursing and nursing students to rank the following eight advisor characteristics: knowledgeable, nurturing, approachable, moral, effective communicator, available, organized, and authentic. Harrison found that pre-nursing and nursing students felt that the most effective quality of an academic advisor in nursing was knowledge. More specifically, students expected advisors to know course descriptions and correct enrollment procedures for courses. Further, students expected advisors to have answers to students' questions, good ideas, and relevant information. Finally, students expected their advisors to know them personally.

Boylston and Jackson (2008) recommended that universities develop a survey to capture which elements students view as important to their academic success. Further, they suggested that universities collect information about what students thought about what advisors knew and what students knew about advisors. Finally, universities should collect student opinions about classroom security, quality of

instruction, class convenience, advisor accessibility, the value of the investment in tuition, and ease of enrollment tasks, faculty fairness and bias, and timely faculty feedback.

After conducting their survey at a sample university, Boylston and Jackson (2008) discovered that advising was seen by students as highly effective. In the sample university, advising was facilitated by full-time faculty who advised entire cohorts. In fact, students reported that faculty created a sense of belonging within the advising cohort by sending emails, voice messages, online discussion boards, class visitations, and allowing after-hours availability by providing faculty home phone numbers for emergencies. Faculty who focus on providing service, quality education, and customer-oriented processes have the greatest impact on student satisfaction, often through advising interactions.

Klein (2012) found that nursing students have more frequent interactions with their academic advisors than other disciplines due to higher academic expectations and standards. Klein indicated that advisors need to provide nursing students with proactive advising which includes: outlining expectations upfront, creating a plan for managing the stress of the program, and encouraging students to create a strong support system. Klein also recommended that professional programs forecast and orient students to new aspects of the program, like clinical rotations, since students often underestimate the rigors expected. Lastly, Klein also recommended that before students were identified as at-risk they have access to tutoring, mentorship, and advising workshops specifically geared for nursing students.

### **Advising Nontraditional Students**

Nontraditional students are generally defined as older returning adult students or students in online programs. The advising needs of these students are different from the needs of traditional students in liberal arts or professional programs. Universities that have advising programs that attend to the unique needs of nontraditional students and students in online programs are likely to have strong retention and persistence rates of these students.

### **Advising Nontraditional Students**

The nontraditional student, often referred to as an adult student, is frequently defined as being 24 years old or older (Jinkens, 2009; Orgnero, 2013). According to Orgnero (2013), beyond age,



nontraditional students can be characterized by “financial independence, having a job, and/or having young or elderly dependents” (p. 165). Based on these broader characteristics, Choy (2002) reported that in 1999, 39% of all undergraduate students were nontraditional. Hess (2011) found that by 2011, 83% of all undergraduate students fit some piece of the expanded nontraditional criteria. However, current literature is challenging the notion that nontraditional learning can be reduced to demographic characteristics. Burns (2011) stated that nontraditional students are better characterized by the type of academic program they prefer based on the students’ lifestyle choices.

While enrollment of nontraditional students continues to grow, Markle (2015) reported that six-year graduation rates for nontraditional students are up to 48% lower than six-year graduation rates for traditional students. According to Burns (2011), nontraditional students are often also online students. Several researchers have concluded that the very reasons people take online courses are the same reasons that make them vulnerable to attrition in those programs (Pontes, Hasit, Pontes, Lewis, and Siefring, 2010; Gascoigne and Parnell, 2014; EAB, 2015). The Noel-Levitz (2015) study reported that careers, families, and other responsibilities cause nontraditional students to approach college in a vastly different manner than traditional students. In order to help nontraditional students succeed, student advising must reflect these unique circumstances.

According to Cross (2015), there are substantial gaps in the research on best practices in nontraditional advising. Common recommendations in the literature are maintaining regular contact and communication with students (Gaines, 2014; Cross; O’Shea, Stone, & Delahunty, 2015), maintaining a dedicated and well-trained team of advisors (Wyatt, 2011), and communicating warmth and care towards advisees (Mottarella, Fritzsche, & Cerabino, 2004; Thompson & Prieto, 2013; Cross). McQuestion and Abelman (2004) recommended that institutions provide long-term academic scheduling for their nontraditional students so that those students could make long-range plans during their schooling.

As the Noel-Levitz (2015) study suggested, academic advising for nontraditional students should be differentiated. Differentiation occurs first at the level of traditional and nontraditional differentiation (Wyatt, 2011; EAB, 2015). Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino (2004) reported that traditional students

received more advising support than did nontraditional students. Orgnero (2013) stated that nontraditional students tended to be ambitious upon first returning to school. These ambitious nontraditional students would try to take on too many courses in that first semester. Effective academic advising should encourage these students to move at a more sustainable pace. Kenner and Winerman (2011) stated that nontraditional learners tend to be extremely goal-oriented. These researchers recommended that academic advisors frame learning in a way that makes it relevant to those goals.

In 2015, the Education Advisory Board (EAB) recommended further differentiation based on academic program. However, EAB also recognized the expense of this level of support and acknowledged the difficulty in achieving this level of differentiation. Some schools, like Saint Leo University, Washington State University, and Empire State College have developed creative and inexpensive ways of providing this high level of academic advising.

Part of the differentiated advising should be based on gender. Markle (2015) concluded that women are at a higher risk of attrition due to their high standards for family and career performance. Markle demonstrated that women come back to school for different reasons than men, and these different motivations and associated risk factors should be reflected in the academic advising they receive. Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino (2004) found that all students preferred advisors who were warm and caring, but female students found such affective support to be more important than did males.

Finally, basic data collection and technology utilization was necessary for effective nontraditional student advising. Miller (2014) reports that the vast majority of institutions do not track basic data relevant to advising for nontraditional students, such as degree completion rates for those students. EAB (2015) reports that regional accreditors, such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), have begun asking institutions to collect this data. EAB recommended the use of predictive analytics to identify risk levels of individual students in order to provide individually differentiated support.

In many regards, best practices for nontraditional student advising reflect best practices for online student advising: a dedicated and trained team providing personalized advising based on data analytics.

Practices recommended for adult students such as program and gender differentiated advising would apply to online students, particularly because nontraditional students make up a large portion of online enrollments. The collection and interpretation of data in order to identify risk levels and provide targeted intervention is approaching a mainstream expectation.

### **Advising Students in Online Programs**

According to Maxson (in press), historically, online learning can be defined as learning that occurs independently of time and space and is facilitated by the Internet. According to Puzziferro and Shelton (2008), the value of online education is its ability to be customized to the needs of students. Burns (2011) stated that the flexibility of the online classroom lends itself to nontraditional and adult students. Ke and Xie (2009) reported that most online students are nontraditional students. In 2006, half of all adult students were enrolled in online courses and increasing numbers of high school students were taking online college courses. Burns predicted that traditional, residential students would increasingly turn to online course options (Burns, 2011).

The demographic factors that drive online enrollment are not age-related but lifestyle and/or values-related factors. Pontes, Hasit, Pontes, Lewis, and Siefring (2010) noted that many of the reasons people gave for enrolling in online courses are often associated with risk factors for retention. Gascoigne and Parnell (2014) affirmed that “what has drawn them to the format may also be an obstacle to their success” (p.25). Multiple researchers found online student drop-out rates tended to be higher than those of traditional, residential students (Hall, 2009; Park and Choi, 2009; Gravel, 2012). In Poulin’s (2013) study, online course completion rates were 78% compared to 81% for on-campus courses. The difference is important enough that, according to Allen and Seaman (2015) “44.6% of chief academic officers reported that they agreed that retaining students was a greater problem for online courses than for face-to-face courses” (p. 24).

In 2016, online student advising was increasingly turning to predictive analytics to support interventions with students at academic risk (Hall, 2009; Phillips, 2013; Vendituoli, 2014). Learning management systems had the potential to provide deep learning analytics, down to specific learning

activities and lessons. Some online advising systems, like eAdvisor used by Arizona State University (ASU), aggregated student data from across the enterprise allowing data from student accounts, student affairs, student life, and other systems to better inform predictions of student success or student risk. In addition to providing on-demand advising for majors and degree progression and supporting academic interventions, ASU uses eAdvisor to intervene in situations when students were at risk for violence against themselves or others (M. Crow, personal communication, February 2, 2016). While predictive analytics of this kind have not achieved wide industry adoption, their potential value is strong. Even without a fully integrated predictive analytics tool, Stewart et al., (2013) recognized the importance of keeping data and logs for student advising.

Online academic advising has always been present in the literature, but it was not until 2007 that this topic became a major subject of research and reporting (Burnette & Conley, 2013). Across the majority of studies, the most widespread best practice in online student advising was a team of dedicated and trained advisors (Gravel, 2012; Colvin, 2013; Stewart et al., 2013; Sapp & Williams, 2015; Schroeder & Terras, 2015; Sogunro, 2015). This team of academic advisors provides assistance with enrollment and registration, course adds or drops, academic planning, assistance with academic policies, transfer support, and a first stop for academic needs or questions. A dedicated team of academic advisors provided not only the personalized attention that online students seek, but as institutions built out predictive analytics tools, it was the academic advisors who most often acted on the analytics reports.

### **Advising Special Populations**

College students are increasingly diverse and are coming to college and university campuses with specialized learning needs. Effective advising programs must consider how to advise at-risk students. As enrollment numbers increase in colleges and universities, so do the number of students at-risk for academic success. Best practices for effective academic advising when advising at-risk students generally addressed the specialized needs of developmental students, first-generation students and students with disabilities. These students have an array of specialized needs; therefore, advisors who work with them need a clear understanding of the barriers to success that these students encounter.

## **Advising Developmental Students**

Developmental students are students described with under-developed or pre-collegiate learning skills. The need developmental courses to help them develop the collegiate skills they need cope with the rigorous learning requirements of college course work. Because their skills are lacking, these students often struggle to feel that they are part of the campus community. They may feel rejected and have difficulty adjusting to the academic challenges associated with college life. Many are undecided about choosing a major resulting in a greater likelihood that they may withdraw from school or perform poorly academically.

The increasing numbers of students who are at-risk for academic failure, suggest that academic advisors should strive to be more proactive in their interactions with developmental student advisees. While both prescriptive and developmental strategies have been proven useful, institutions of higher education recognize that at-risk students benefit from integrated proactive strategies specifically designed to meet the needs of at-risk students.

Boylan (2002) maintains that academic advisors of developmental students should be well-briefed in the nature and purpose of various academic support services so that they can appropriately refer students to these services as part of the academic advising process. According to Boylan, advisors must accept the importance of developmental education if they are to wholeheartedly support student participation in it and counsel students accordingly.

## **Advising First-generation Students**

First-generation students are defined as students whose parents or legal guardians have not attended college or completed a college degree. These students are the first in their families to attend college and generally lack any first-hand information about college life or the the rigor of college learning. Effective advisors for first-generation students should be knowledgeable about academic programs and curricula and give accurate and correct academic guidance (Creamer & Scott, 2000). For first-generation students, this may be especially important. Unfortunately, most advisors focus primarily on academic information and ignore or overlook other important student needs (Frost, 1991). At-risk and

underrepresented students on college campuses often have not developed an appropriate commitment to higher education.

According to Tinto (1993), the single most important factor in advising at-risk students, is to send a strong message that the institution cares for them and is interested in their success. The success of first-generation students depends on the extent to which academic advisors have training appropriate for addressing the diverse needs of these students. According to Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot (2005), “Because academic advising has evolved from a course scheduling activity to a complex process requiring comprehensive knowledge and skills, advisor training is critical to the success of the program” (p. 329). Recommendations based on a review of the literature include the need for an advising plan that incorporates proactive advising with adequate advisor training when advising at-risk students at colleges and universities.

### **Advising Students with Disabilities**

Another at-risk group of students contributing to the diverse population of college students includes students with disabilities. While traditional advising approaches have utility for advising students with disabilities, advisors should include strategies to help these students develop both self-knowledge and self-advocacy skills. Because of the legal ramifications of serving individuals with disabilities, effective advisors will also help students with disabilities understand their rights and responsibilities.

**Self-knowledge.** Advisors should be aware that not all students with disabilities have complete information related to their disability. Further, faculty staff, and peers may have limited experience in dealing with the nature and scope of individual student’s learning needs or may operate under false assumptions (Cox & Klas, 1996; Hodge & Preston-Sabin, 1997). Advisors should work closely with Disability Services providers to ensure that the advice proffered is appropriate.

**Self-advocacy.** While most students with disabilities have strong self-advocacy skills, many do not. Self-advocacy requires that students are able to articulate their needs and desires (Gadbow & Dubois, 1998; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). Advisors should assess the extent to which students with

disabilities are strong self-advocates and understand that students' perceptions about advocating for themselves differ based on (a) their ability to understand dependency and stigma and (b) the extent to which they understand and accept their disability (Barga, 1996; Hourihand, 1980). Advisors should be alert to and adept at helping students request accommodations, participate meaningfully in program planning, and establish and maintain rapport with faculty and staff (Knight, 2000).

**Rights and responsibilities.** Academic advisors working with students with disabilities need at least a cursory knowledge of the legal rights and responsibilities associated with the students with disabilities who enroll in college classes. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are the key pieces of legislation to protect and support individuals with disabilities in higher education. Between these key pieces of legislation, students with disabilities are guaranteed the right to postsecondary program access, reasonable accommodation, support services and assistive technology (Knight, 2000). In addition, they have a right to expect that colleges and universities keep their personal information confidential, sharing information only with key service providers including academic advisors. Because more and more students with disabilities are entering higher education and overcoming barriers to their education (Skinner & Schenck, 1992), colleges and universities have an obligation to properly train advisors who work with these students. Properly trained advisors who are aware of the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities are key to the long-term success of students identified as having a disability.

### **Assessing Academic Advising Programs**

As a precursor to designing an academic advising program assessment plan, it was important to review the literature relative to (a) academic program mission statements and learning outcomes, (b) the professional development of academic advisors, (c) characteristics of effective advising programs, (d) organizational models for advising, and (e) student satisfaction with academic advising programs.

### **Academic Advising Program Mission Statement and Program Outcomes**

Multiple authors including Campbell (2008), Aiken (2011) and White (2015), stressed the

importance of the assessment of academic advising as flowing from missions statements and goals of the university. In addition to authentic assessment being continuous and holistic, Robbins (2011) stressed the importance of developing measureable learning outcomes, having multiple measures for each outcome, having a minimum criteria for success and not attempting too much initially. Koch (2010) pointed out that satisfaction surveys, a common collegiate practice, do provide initial assessments of advising, but authentic assessment should also include clear definitions of what constitutes basic, good, and mentor advising. Aiken (2011) breaks down the need to have tools that provide evidence of understanding (know), performance (do), and appreciation (value) and also identified retention and graduation data as useful but limiting in measuring effective advising. White (2015) points out that assessment can and should be made immediately upon the completion of the advising session.

### **Professional Development for Academic Advisors**

Effective academic advising obviously provides significant benefits for the student. An effective advisor can help a student maximize time at the institution, develop skills for the job market, and grow as a person. Advisor contact can be influential in student satisfaction (Filson & Whittington, 2013) and in retention (Kennemer & Hurt, 2013). Additionally, advising can benefit the faculty advisor. O'Banion argued that the knowledge about the institution and its students that an advisor gains during academic advising sessions can even help faculty become better teachers (as cited in Hutson, 2013).

Despite these benefits, most faculty do not have training in academic advising principles or strategies (Hutson, 2013). New faculty come to their professorial role as experts in their fields, and sometimes as expert teachers, but they seldom bring advising expertise. Moving from novice to master advisor requires significant development.

A number of sources (Folsom, Yoder & Joslin, 2015; Folsom, 2015; Hutson, 2013) described the successful academic advisor and, therefore, the need for faculty development in advising. Habley (1995) recommended three key components necessary for developing effective academic advisors: the conceptual component, the informational component, and the relational component. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2014) provides additional detail regarding the three



components by identifying core competencies for academic advisors and mapping them to each of Habley's three components: foundations knowledge (conceptual), knowledge of college student characteristics and career advising (informational), and communication and interpersonal skills and knowledge of application of advising at local institutions (relational).

The conceptual component includes theories and concepts (about advising, the role of an advisor, models of advising, expectations for advising, FERPA, etc.). Hutson (2013) argued that the conceptual component includes a clear understanding of the relationship between advising and the institutional mission as well as an understanding of the impact of advising on various stakeholders. An element of the conceptual component might be NACADA's six "core values of academic advising." The core values highlight an advisor's responsibilities:

1. to the individuals they advise;
2. for involving others, when appropriate, in the advising process;
3. to their institutions;
4. to higher education;
5. to their educational community;
6. for their professional practices and for themselves personally. (NACADA, 2005, Declaration section).

The informational component includes knowledge (about the institution, programs, policies, students, etc.) that the advisor needs to give the student effective guidance. Filson and Whittington (2015) identify a collection of internal and external information that an advisor needs, and they provided a series of steps for acquiring that information. Elements from NACADA's competencies list that map to the information component include: knowledge about the major, graduation requirements, technology use, and other institutional information, as well as information about relevant occupations and workplaces (NACADA 2014). The informational component is the basis of most faculty development in advising (Hutson 2013).

The relational component includes an advisor's ability to communicate with the student and

build a relationship. Elements from NACADA's competencies list that map to the relational component include: the ability to relate to students as individuals or in groups, as well as skills in communicating, helping, and solving problems (NACADA 2014). Key to effectiveness in the relational component are interpersonal skills such as listening, asking effective questions, and helping a student manage his/her expectations.

An effective advisor has strength in all three components, though Folsom (2015) recognizes that it takes significant time and effort for faculty to develop mastery of them. Folsom suggests a learning path through the levels of Bloom's taxonomy in order to reach mastery.

Key to the professional development of academic advisors is the need for appropriate training. Building an advising training program requires planning, delivery and evaluation. Hutson (2013) identified the following phases: clarify the institution's expectations for advising, assess needs (including faculty load, available training, advising practices), determine the time and space needed for effective training, identify the mode of delivery, build the training content, evaluate the training, and recognize and reward faculty outcomes.

Many options are available to deliver faculty training. Yoder and Joslin (2015) recommended two phases for a comprehensive faculty development program in academic advising, beginning with a focused period of training, then supplementing that with additional training to move the faculty toward mastery of the conceptual, informational, and relational components. Where resources for full training programs are not allocated, they recommended a self-directed training plan. Training academic advisors is critically important to a collegiate academic advising program, and an effective academic advising program is critical to institutional efforts to improve retention and persistence.

### **Characteristics of Effective Advising Programs**

NACADA has recognized eight collegiate academic advising programs as exemplary (Hutson, 2013). Each of the commended collegiate programs stresses the importance of academic advisor training. In general, program components of training programs include, strong collaboration between university agencies, university level support for advising activities, academic advising workshops, consistent and

systematic program evaluation, monetary reward and recognition for advisors, and a designated program coordinator.

Table 1

Effective Advising Programs as Recognized by NACADA

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Program Components</b>
Utah Valley University	Designate trainers to design training materials and coordinate training session. Provide comprehensive, experiential training for all advisors on campus including faculty mentors.
University of Central Florida Table 1 (continued)	Advisor training as a collaborative effort among Divisions of Academic Affairs, Student Development and Enrollment Services, and Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning. . Online advising website, training materials, and advising handbook are provided.
Purdue University - Indianapolis	Provides a standardized advisor training program, professional portfolios for advisors, an annual campus-wide advising symposium, a graduate-level seminar in academic advising, and a campus-wide list-serve for advisors. Consists of assessment, evaluation and research components in training.
Kennesaw State University	Provides an Advising Certificate program in conjunction with the Learning Center for Faculty and Staff. Completion of the certificate is recognized by department chair/director and dean/vice-president. A presentation was developed to familiarize students with general academic policies and procedures and can be requested by faculty to integrate into courses.
Fox Valley Technical College	Students are advised by both the counselors in Student Services and faculty through a “dual advising” system. Counselors work with students from time of application through their first semester, and serve as consultants to faculty. Faculty advisors follow students through to graduation.
Table 1 (continues) Southwest Missouri State University	Provides a Master Advisor Program where faculty and staff advisors are trained, evaluated and recognized. The program focuses on faculty and staff’s ability to relate with students to understand basic advising concepts and to have a strong working knowledge of academic information and campus resources
Coffeyville Community College	Institutes summer advisor training. Offers monetary award for attending training, helping with new student orientation, teaching orientation course, advising at-risk students, and participating in the early academic warning system. Faculty meet monthly with at-risk students,
Monroe Community College	Developed a comprehensive Faculty Advisor Workshop Series. Monthly workshops are offered.

Regardless of the delivery model, one should expect obstacles. Kennemer and Hurt (2013) identified three major challenges to faculty development in advising: (a) the weight given to faculty advising in reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions; (b) the solitary nature of faculty advising; and (c) the availability of training and development activities related to academic advising. These challenges are present at Olivet, and any faculty development in advising will need to address this unique context.

### **Organizational Models for Advising**

The strength of an effective advising model depends not only on a clear understanding of the characteristics of effective advising program, but also on the organizational models for delivering advising services to students. In the current postsecondary climate, resource allocation for student service programs is carefully scrutinized and linked to program contributions to overall student retention and persistence; therefore, the structure of an advising program becomes more significant (Pardee, 2004).

Models for delivering academic advising services are typically categorized as (a) centralized, (b) decentralized, or (c) shared. According to Habley (2004), findings from the Sixth National Survey on Academic Advising conducted by ACT, suggested that more than half (55%) of the institutions surveyed used a shared model of advising service delivery compared to 32% of schools who use a centralized approach and 14% who have a decentralized structure.

**Shared structure.** The most popular structure for academic advising service delivery at both four-year and two-year colleges is the supplementary model of shared structure service delivery. In a supplementary model there is generally a central advising center with professionals trained to support departmental academic advisors by providing services such as transfer course evaluations or degree audits.

Another type of a shared structure advising model is the split model. In a split model, departmental faculty advise students and professional staff assist by advising sub-groups of students such as undecided students, freshmen, students on probation or students preparing to enter professional programs.

**Centralized structure.** A centralized structure advising model uses the self-contained model. In a self-contained model all advising occurs in a centralized location. This model, used by 14% of the schools in the 2003 ACT study (Pardee, 2004), uses professional advisors or counselors and designated faculty.

**Decentralized structure.** A decentralized academic advising structure is the faculty-only model. This model, most popular with four-year private colleges, assigns students to a departmental advisor, typically a professor in the student's preferred academic discipline.

Each of the three organizational models for advising has its strengths and weaknesses. A possible outcome of an academic advising program may be a shift from one advising model to another; however, administrators are cautioned to consider (a) institutional enrollment, (b) institutional structure, (c) the extent to which faculty serve as advisors, (d) academic policies, curriculum, and degree programs; (e) institutional mission; and (f) the composition of the student body before adopting any particular organizational model for advising.

Increasingly, the literature suggests that a shared organizational structure may be beneficial to institutions seeking to enhance student retention and persistence. Ideally, a shared organizational structure would benefit from the expertise of faculty advisors who are supported by professional advisors who meet the needs of students in unique groups such as at risk students, student athletes, minority students or students who are undecided. Students who are advised through appropriate academic advising organizational structures may be more satisfied with their advising experience.

### **Student Satisfaction with Academic Advising Programs**

A thorough assessment of academic advising programs should focus on the many dimensions of the advising process and not focus solely on student satisfaction. Unfortunately, many colleges and universities rely solely on student satisfaction surveys to assess the viability of their academic advising programs (Hurt, 2004).

According to Soria (2012), the successful transition of students, particularly freshmen and transfer students, depends in large part on the quality of the academic advising they receive. Earlier,

Light (2001) suggested that satisfaction with the academic advising experience is an important part of a successful college experience. Further, students who are satisfied with the advising experience feel better about the institution they attend and develop more positive relationships with their advisors (Nadler & Nadler, 1999; Peterson, Wagner, & Lamb, 2001).

Positive relationships between students and advisors is dependent on student satisfaction. If students are dissatisfied with their advisor, they are less likely to access support services, engage in campus activities or develop a sense of belonging to the institution (Soria, 2012). According to Noel-Levitz (2011), 81,094 students from 87 four year public colleges and universities rated academic advising as among their top collegiate priorities; Allen and Smith (2008) reported that students responding to national surveys consistently rate academic advising lowest in student satisfaction. Since student retention is linked to satisfaction, it behooves postsecondary administrators to gauge student satisfaction with academic advising at their institutions.

### Summary

Good academic advising is critical to the transition, integration, and long-term success of students matriculating on college and universities campuses. Although changes to the advisor-advisee relationship have occurred over time, the nature of the advising relationship affects student's sense of belonging on campus and academic advising is strongly linked to retention and persistence numbers.

Several different advising approaches have been mentioned in the literature review each with its own strengths and weaknesses. All approaches to advising agree that face to face meetings between students and their advisors are most effective. Regardless of the nature of the student, traditional or non-traditional, liberal arts majors or majors in professional programs or at-risk students, all benefit from knowledgeable, well- prepared, and well-trained advisers.

Assessing an academic advising program necessarily needs to have a beginning that establishes the assessment cycle. Program assessment should include identifying key stake holders, developing a mission statement, writing program outcomes and collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. An effective well-developed academic advising program is the key to any collegiate retention plan.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

Early in the assessment process it was evident that the advising program assessment needed to be a three-phase process. Phase one, launched in the Fall 2016 semester, required the formation of an interdisciplinary task-force whose members collaborated on writing an academic advising program mission statement and subsequent program outcomes. In order to investigate how students with particular learning needs felt about academic advising at ONU, Phase Two convened focus groups of students from particular student groups with unique characteristics. Phase Three, completed in the spring 2017 semester, collected information from the key stakeholders involved in the advising process. A questionnaire was developed and sent during the spring 2017 term to traditional students, non-traditional students and academic advisors.

At Olivet Nazarene University little is known about how satisfied academic advisors and students are with the advising program. The purpose of the academic advising assessment was to (a) gauge the extent to which faculty were satisfied with the academic advising program mission statement, program outcomes, policies and procedures for recruiting academic advisors, and strategies to support the professional development of academic advisors. Student satisfaction with various aspects of the academic advising process were also assessed. There was also interest in differences in advisor and student responses related to the nature and scope of advising meetings. Finally, the academic advising program assessment collected information from advisors and students and compared responses from both groups relative to the strengths and weaknesses of academic advising and recommendations for improving advising activities.

#### **Selection Procedures**

The key stakeholders in the assessment process included faculty and students. Selection procedures recruited participants from both faculty and student groups for each phase of the assessment process. Students selected to participate in the academic advising assessment had completed at least 12 hours of course work at Olivet.

## **Phase One**

In Phase One of the assessment process, an interdisciplinary task force of faculty was recruited to meet and develop a mission statement and program outcomes for academic advising. The taskforce met periodically during the Fall 2016 term. They produced an academic advising mission statement and program outcomes that were subsequently sent to all the faculty for feedback and approval.

## **Phase Two**

Phase Two began in the Fall 2016 term and involved recruiting faculty and staff and training them to conduct focus groups with representative students from groups identified as needing special advising consideration: student athletes, developmental students, freshmen, first-generation students, transfer students, minority students, non-traditional students, and students with disabilities. Focus group training was conducted in the Fall 2016 semester. After training, focus group leaders recruited ten students who were identified as being members of one of the groups requiring special advising considerations. Students accepted into the focus group must have completed a minimum of twelve credit hours at ONU. Focus groups were convened and participant responses were collected in the Spring 2017 term.

## **Phase Three**

In Phase Three a questionnaire was sent in March and April, 2017 to all full-time traditional and non-traditional faculty, adjunct faculty, staff serving as family advocates in the traditional undergraduate program, and academic support personnel at the graduate school. In addition, questionnaires were sent to all traditional and non-traditional students who had completed 12 credit hours by the end of the Fall 2016 term. While demographic versions of the questionnaire were created for each specific group, the common purpose of each questionnaire was to collect participants' views about (a) the nature and scope of advising meetings, (b) satisfaction with the academic advising process, (c) the strength and weaknesses of academic advising and (d) recommendations for improving academic advising.

## **Instrumentation**

Effective program assessment depends on a multiple measures approach to collecting information



from key stakeholders. Information from the Academic Advising Assessment Task Force, academic advising focus groups, and the academic advising questionnaires was collected. Each of the instruments developed for data collection met ONU IRB requirements for approval.

### **Academic Advising Task Force**

In the Fall 2016 term an interdisciplinary faculty taskforce met in a series of sessions to develop a mission statement and program outcomes for a prospective academic advising program at Olivet Nazarene University.

### **Academic Advising Focus Groups**

The purpose of the focus groups was to collect information from specific groups of students with particular characteristics (e.g. student athletes, commuter students, students with disabilities, etc.) as to: (a) how they described their first experience with academic advising, (b) how satisfied they were with advising outcomes (e.g. schedule, academic advice, instruction, etc.), c. how sensitive their advisor was to their particular needs, and (d) what recommendations they would make for improving the academic advising program at ONU. Student consent forms and the focus group script may be found in Appendix A.

### **Academic Advising Questionnaire**

A review of the literature indicated that both academic advisors and students have clear expectations about the role each should perform. Both groups expected that they should exhibit certain characteristics to facilitate academic advising. Academic advisors should be, among other things, relatable, knowledgeable about program requirements and available to answer student's questions. They should foster a sense of belonging for students and facilitate a smooth transition to the collegiate learning environment. Students should actively engage in the advising process. Further, they should be proactive in obtaining correct information and diligent about following advice from academic advisors.

In order to assess the extent to which advisors and students exhibited characteristics thought to facilitate academic advising, three versions of the Academic Advising Questionnaire were created and distributed to academic advisors and both traditional and nontraditional students.

**Academic advising advisor questionnaire.** To collect information from academic advisors who met selection criteria, a questionnaire was designed to collect advisor's views about factors associated with academic advising. The questionnaire consisted of six parts. Part I collected demographic information to describe the advisors who responded to the questionnaire. Part II asked academic advisors to describe the nature and scope of advising sessions. Part III asked advisors to evaluate themselves as academic advisors. Part IV asked academic advisors to indicate how satisfied they were with the academic advising program at ONU. Part V asked advisors to indicate their preferred organizational model for academic advising, and Part VI asked advisors to comment on (a) resources they accessed to help them as advisors, (b) strengths of the academic advising program, (c) weaknesses of the academic advising program, and (d) recommendations for improving the academic advising program. Prior to data collection, a draft of the Advisor Questionnaire was sent to five academic advisors for feedback on the clarity of the questionnaire and subsequently revised.

**Academic advising student questionnaire.** A questionnaire, similar to the advisor questionnaire, was developed to collect student responses to items related to academic advising. The student questionnaire consisted of five parts. Part I collected demographic information to describe student respondents. Part II asked for responses to items related to academic advising sessions. In Part III students evaluated their advisors, and in Part IV students indicated how satisfied they were with the advising program at Olivet Nazarene University. Part V asked students to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the advising program and to recommend improvements to the academic advising program. A draft of the student questionnaire was sent to five ONU faculty and staff who work directly with students for feedback on the clarity of the questionnaire. Feedback from the reviewers resulted in editorial corrections and revisions for clarity.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

For the Academic Advising Program Assessment, data collection was conducted in three phases. Phase one consisted of an Academic Advising Taskforce who met throughout the fall term to develop an academic advising program mission statement and program outcomes. An account for assessment data

was opened on TaskStream, the ONU assessment management system, and the final version of the academic advising mission statement and program outcomes were entered into the system.

In February 2017 focus groups were convened and information was collected from participants in each of the focus groups. Findings from the focus groups were summarized and presented in Chapter IV.

In phase three a questionnaire was distributed to traditional undergraduate students, non-traditional students enrolled in courses in the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies, and all full-time family advocates, faculty, or academic support professionals serving as advisors via SNAP technology. Traditional and non-traditional students who had completed 12 credits at ONU by the Spring 2017 term and advisors were sent questionnaires over three separate intervals in March and April, 2017.

### **Participants**

The academic advising assessment included participants in the academic advising taskforce, focus groups and as respondents to the academic advising questionnaire. A description of the participant groups follows.

#### **Academic Advising Taskforce**

Eleven full-time faculty and staff members served on the Academic Advising Taskforce. The purpose of the taskforce was to develop an academic advising mission statement and program outcomes. Those serving on the taskforce were faculty or staff from Social Work and Criminal Justice, Theology and Christian Ministry, Education, The Center for Student Success, Psychology, the Registrar's office, the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies, Office of Assessment, Business, and English.

#### **Focus Groups**

The goal for each focus group was to have ten students participate in the group sessions. While the goal for focus group participants was not reached in most cases, the information gleaned from the focus groups contributed positively to the academic assessment findings. The qualitative focus group methodology contributed to the multiple measures requirement for the academic advising assessment. Table 2 describes the focus group participants by category.

Table 2

Focus Group Participants

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>Majors</b>	<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>Percentage Participation</b>
Student Athletes	Recreation, Sports & Fitness, Economics, Accounting, Nursing, Dietetics, Computer Science, Business Administration, Social Work/Criminal Justice, Spanish Education, Engineering	14	140%
Developmental Students	Criminal Justice, Biology/Chemistry, Intercultural Ministries, Finance	4	40%
Freshmen	Marketing Management, Criminal Justice/Psychology, Pastoral Ministries, Business Administration, Biblical Studies	5	50%
First-generation Students	Marketing/Biochemistry, Criminal Justice/Psychology, Pastoral Ministries, Business Administration	6	60%
Transfer Students	Public Relations, Computer Engineering, Nursing, Biology, Exercise Science, International Business	8	80%
Minority Students	Electrical Engineering, Criminal Justice, Psychology, Biology, Actuarial Science	5	50%
Non-Traditional Students* See <u>Note</u>	READ, BBA, BBA/MOL, BBA, ASBN, ABSN	7	70%
Commuter Students	Psychology, Civil Engineering	2	20%
Students with Disabilities	Special Education, English, Nursing,	5	50%
International Students	Engineering, Biology	2	20%

\*Note: Nontraditional Student Majors: READ – Master of Arts in Reading Education, BBA – Bachelor Business Administration, MOL- Master of Organizational Leadership, ABSN – Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing

### Academic Advising Questionnaire

Respondents to the Academic Advising Questionnaire included traditional students, non-traditional students and academic advisors. A brief description of each groups follows.

**Traditional students.** Questionnaires were sent to 2,669 full-time undergraduate students who had completed 12 credits. Of those 907 (34%) completed a questionnaire. Table 3 presents demographic characteristics of traditional students.

Table 3

#### Demographic Characteristics of Traditional Students

Characteristic	Frequency N=907	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	284	31.5%
Female	617	68.5%
Age		
18-20	483	53.6%
21-24	391	43.4%
25 or older	27	3.0%
Status		
Full-time Residential Student	800	89.5%
Full-time Commuter Student	94	10.5%
Classification		
Freshman	178	19.8%
Sophomore	212	23.6%
Junior	272	30.3%
Senior	237	26.4%

Table 3 (continued)

Demographic Characteristics of Traditional Students

Transfer Students			
Yes	121	13.8%	
No	753	86.2%	
Ethnicity			
African American/Black	39	4.3%	
Asian American	15	1.7%	
Biracial/Multicultural	14	1.6%	
Hispanic American/Latino/Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	55	6.1%	
White/Caucasian	55	6.1%	
Other (1 Bahamian, 4 Asian)	4	0.4%	
Decline to Answer	28	3.1%	

As a group traditional students who responded to the survey reported being engaged in academic majors as follows: Art and Digital Media (n=36, 4.0%), Behavioral Science (n=38, 4.2%), Biblical Literature (7,4.2%), Biological Science (n=73, 8.1%), Business (n=134, 14.8%), Christian Education (n=40,4.4%), Communication (n=47, 5.2%), Computer Science (n=10,1.1%), Education (n=72, 7.9%), Engineering (n=82, 9.1%), English/Modern Language (n=14, 1.5%), Exercise and Sports Science (n=51, 5.6%), Family and Consumer Science (n=43, 4.7%), History and Political Science (n=13, 1.4%), Mathematics (n=20, 2.2%), Music (n=22, 2.4%), Nursing (n=96, 10.6%), Physical Sciences (n=13, 1.4%), Social Work/Criminal Justice (n=85, 9.4%) and Undecided (n=10, 1.1%).

**Non-traditional students.** Non-traditional students are typically adult students in the ONU School of Graduate and Continuous Study bachelor's degree completion programs, master's degree programs or a doctorate in Ethical Leadership. Of the 2,131 non-traditional students who had completed 12 credits or more, 452 (21%) responded to the questionnaire. Table 4 presents the demographic characteristics of non-traditional students.

Table 4

Demographic Characteristics of Non-traditional Students

Characteristic	Frequency N=452	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	83	18.9%
Female	357	81.1%
Age		
Under 18	0	0.0%
18-25	74	16.7%
Older than 25	357	81.1%
Status		
SGCS degree completion	103	23.3%
Master's degree student	303	68.6%
Doctoral student	36	8.1%
Employment Status		
Full-time	310	72.4%
Part-time	118	27.6%
Ethnicity/Race		
African American/Black	46	10.4%
Asian American	21	4.7%
Biracial/Multicultural	5	1.1%
Hispanic American/Latino	28	6.3%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
White/Caucasian	323	72.7%
Other (mixed race)	6	1.4%
Decline to Answer	14	3.2%

As a group non-traditional students (n=450) who responded to the affiliation section of the survey reported being engaged in academic programs as follows: Accelerated BSN (n=31, 6.9%), Bilingual Education (n=9, 2.0%), Business Administration BA (n=33, 7.3%), Business Administration MA 30, 7.3%), Curriculum and Instruction (n=28,6.2%), Criminal Justice (n=4, 0.9%), Degree Completion (n=1,

0.2%), Driver's Education Endorsement (n=2, 0.4%), Ed.D. in Ethical Leadership (n=36, 8.0%), Engineering Management (n=1, 0.2%), English as a Second Language (n=50, 11.1%), Library Information Specialist (n=2, 0.4%), Ministry MA (n=23, 5.1%), MSN Education (n=18, 5.1%), MSN Family Nurse Practitioner (n=103, 22.9%), MSN Leadership (n=6, 1.3%), Organizational Leadership(n=13, 2.9%), Reading Specialist (n=33, 7.3%), RN-BSN (n=21, 4.7%), or Teacher Leader in Education (n=6, 1.3%).

**Advisors.** The questionnaire was sent to all full-time faculty, family advisors and members of the academic support leadership team in the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies, in all, a total of 199 potential participants. Of those, 128 academic (64%) responded to the questionnaire. Table 5 presents characteristics of faculty and staff serving as academic advisors.

Table 5

Characteristics of Academic Advisors

Characteristic	Frequency N=128	Percentage 100%
<b>Status</b>		
Administrator	7	3.5%
Faculty	104	52.5%
Staff	8	4.0%
SGCS Academic Support Team	2	1.7%
<b>Years of Service at ONU</b>		
Less than 5	47	38.3%
6-10	29	24.2%
11-15	15	12.4%
16-20	11	9.1%
21-25	9	7.4%
26-30	5	4.1%
More than 30	5	4.1%



Table 5 (continued)

Characteristics of Academic Advisors

Characteristic	Frequency N=128	Percentage 100%
Number of Advisees		
None	8	6.6%
Less than 10	27	22.3%
10-20	25	20.7%
21-40	36	29.8%
41-60	10	8.3%
61-80	7	5.8%
More than 80	8	6.6%
Student Advisees		
Traditional students	111	93.3%
Non-traditional students	8	6.7%

Academic advisors reported primary affiliation with the following departments: Admissions (n=7, 5.8%), Art and Digital Media (n=5, 4.1%), Behavioral Science (n=6, 5.0%), Biblical Literature (n=0, 0.0%), Biological Science (n=6, 5.0%), Business (n=5, 4.1%), Center for Student Success(n=3, 3.3%), Christian Ministry (n=1, 0.8%), Chemistry/Geosciences (n=4, 3.3%), Communication (n=3, 2.5%) Computer Science (n=0, 0.0%), Education (n=10, 8.3%), Engineering (n=4, 3.3%),English (n=8, 6.6%), Exercise and Sports Science (n=8, 6.6%), Family and Consumer Science (n=3, 2.5%), General Studies (n=1, 0.6%), History and Political Science (n=3, 2.5%), Mathematics (n=7,5.8%), Modern Languages (n=2, 1.7%), Music (n=5, 4.1%), Nursing (n=13, 10.7%), Registrar (n=1, 0.8%), School of Graduate and Continuing Studies (n=2, 1.7%) Social Work and Criminal Justice (n=10, 8.3%), and Theology (n=5, 4.1%).

### Research Questions and Data Analysis

A multiple measures approach was designed to collect information from key stakeholders.

Qualitative measures included the Academic Advising Taskforce and Focus Groups. A quantitative questionnaire was developed around four major questions and series of sub-questions. Questions were related to (a) the nature and scope of advising sessions, (b) evaluations of faculty advisors, (c) satisfaction with academic advising activities, and (d) strengths and weaknesses of academic advising at ONU and recommendations for improving academic advising activities.

The Academic Advising Taskforce produced a mission statement and subsequent program outcomes to guide future assessment of academic advising. Focus group findings are summarized and reported in Chapter Four. Findings from the questionnaire were analyzed and means and standard deviations were computed for the Likert-type scale items. For comparative analysis ANOVAs (analysis of variance) and subsequent Tukey HSD Post-hoc tests were computed to assess statistically significant differences. Alpha was set at  $\alpha=.05$

Advisors and students, both traditional and nontraditional students, were asked on the aforementioned questionnaire to describe strengths and weakness of academic advising and to make recommendations for improving the advising program. Participant responses were coded and descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were computed to describe findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to investigate factors associated with academic advising at Olivet Nazarene University. The research was conducted in three phases which include (a) developing an academic advising mission statement and program outcomes, (b) conducting focus groups to collect information from groups of students who often encounter barriers to their learning, and (c) comparing responses from advisors and students to the academic advising assessment including the nature and scope of advising sessions, evaluations of academic advisors, satisfaction with advising sessions, and comments about strengths and weakness of academic advising plus recommendations for improving academic advising.

#### **Academic Advising Mission Statement and Program Outcomes**

The work of the Academic Advising Taskforce resulted in the following mission statement and subsequent program outcomes. Both the mission statement and the program outcomes were approved by the faculty in the fall 2016 term.

#### **Academic Advising Mission Statement**

The mission of the academic advising program at Olivet Nazarene University is to recruit and train academic advisors who will partner with students as they develop and work toward their academic, professional, and personal goals.

#### Academic Advising Program Outcomes

1. ONU administrators will:
  - a. recruit Christ-like academic advisors who support the mission of the University,
  - b. ensure that academic advisors understand major, minor and general education requirements and stay abreast of changes to the curriculum, and
  - c. train academic advisors to give accurate and timely advice, develop and sustain positive relationships with advisees, and advocate for students as appropriate.
2. ONU Students will:

- a. know their academic advisor and seek academic advice as needed,
- b. use campus resources to effectively navigate the University,
- c. differentiate between short-term and long-term goals,
- d. develop an educational plan consistent with their abilities, interests and values,
- e. understand major, minor and general education requirements, policies and procedures, and
- f. understand course sequence and select courses appropriately for their educational plan.

An important outcome of the process of developing an academic advising mission statement and subsequent program outcomes is that now all individuals giving academic advice will be referred to as academic advisors. Prior to the work of the Academic Advising Task Force, personnel at the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies who were engaged in academic advising were referred to as academic support leaders. Now, both the undergraduate and the graduate programs will use the standard reference academic advisor for individuals engaged in standard academic advising activities.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus group participants were recruited from ten groups of students thought to have particular academic scheduling needs. These groups included student athletes, developmental students, freshmen, first-generation students, transfer students, minority students, nontraditional students, commuter students, students with disabilities, and international students. A summary of each student groups' responses is presented.

#### **Student Athletes**

Fourteen student athletes participated in the student athlete focus group. Most have a positive first experience with academic advising. One had an initial schedule that had to be re-done. Most students indicated that they were satisfied with the academic advice they received although many said that they consulted peers before taking final schedules to advisors. Many appreciated the sensitivity that advisors had in developing schedules that allowed student athletes to make practice times. Some

suggested alternative courses or summer school when courses were offered during practice time or to lighten the academic load during playing season. Some felt that advisors should be more attentive to the academic schedule rather than just saying “This looks good . . .”

Recommendations for improvement included giving athletes priority registration, clarifying advisor and student responsibilities, and knowing which classes required practicum hours early in the process. Students want easy access to major requirements that are updated and accurate. Most felt that students would benefit from developing and following a four-year plan. Students also wanted knowledge about prerequisites in their major, help to prepare for graduate school, and help with internships.

### **Developmental Students**

Four developmental students spoke of their experience with academic advising. One student indicated that no formal meeting with an advisor occurred, and another indicated that information from advisors was only forthcoming if the student initiated a request for information. One student changed majors three different times and had three different advisors. A student reported that his Biology major was changed to undecided without his knowledge. Students reported that professors rather than advisors had been helpful in developing academic schedules.

Recommendations for improvement included making sure that students have pertinent information. Most felt that Freshman Connections should be the ideal place to learn valuable advising information including scheduling and how to navigate the freshman year. Students want a more user-friendly process for adding and dropping classes and indicated that the information regarding policies should be accurate and available from the Registrar’s office.

### **Freshmen**

Two of the freshmen reported meeting their academic advisors during Purple and Gold days or another campus visit prior to enrolling at Olivet. The rest of the students met their advisors through Connections, the freshman seminar course. All five freshmen in this focus group reported high levels of satisfaction with their advisors. One said, “I was kind of nervous going in; nerves were calmed by the first meeting. I left the meeting feeling a lot more comfortable with class schedule and the scheduling

process as a whole.” All of the freshmen reported that their advisors were attentive to their particular needs, and most felt that their advisors created relaxed, non-threatening, comfortable advising sessions. All agreed that their advisors helped them overcome barriers to their success by helping them (a) develop four-year plans, (b) overcome procrastination, and (c) know which classes overlapped when students pursued a double major.

Students recommended that there be a more structured way to set up a meeting with an advisor especially when student and advisor schedules do not align. Students should be able to make appointments digitally, and the process should be standardized from advisor to advisor. Advisors need to prepare students for advising meetings and clearly articulate expectations.

### **First-generation Students**

Two of the six students in the first-generation focus group were transfer students. One of the transfer students felt that because of the lack of an advisor in the Biology department, it was a confusing experience. Once she finally had an advisor, she was reassured and ended up having a positive experience. The rest of the first-generation students reported having positive academic advising experiences initially. Some of the transfer students were dissatisfied that some of their prior credits did not transfer, but overall the first-generation students reported positive experiences when advisors provided guidance that parents could not, and reassured them that the courses they were taking were appropriate for meeting their educational goals. Generally, the first-generation students were satisfied and felt that advisors helped them overcome barriers to their success.

Recommendations for improving academic advising included meeting with an advisor before classes started, clarity on program requirements, information about FAFSA and other required forms, and general information about what to expect in college. These students also recommended that advisors be knowledgeable about where to send students for specific student services (e.g. financial aid, housing, and/or counseling).

### **Transfer Students**

Most of the eight student who were in the transfer student focus group initiated their

first contacts with Olivet through phone calls and had positive first experiences. Initial phone calls generally resulted in an appointment with a transfer counselor who answered questions about financial aid, course requirements, and scholarships. Students generally scheduled a campus visit. Many reported that the transfer counselors facilitated a smooth transition. All students reported that transfer admissions counselors were sensitive to their needs. Questions were answered in a timely fashion, counselors were reassuring, and information was accurate. Students reported that they encountered no significant barriers to their success; however, two of the nursing majors reported that advising in the nursing program itself was not as helpful as advice from the transfer counselors.

Transfer students recommended that there be more information about the technical processes (e.g. how to register for class, alternate year classes, using Canvas, etc.) in advising. Some felt that there was a disconnect between transfer admissions and the advisors in the nursing program. Other students expressed frustration with prescriptive general education requirements like Western Civilization, Fine Arts, and Nutrition.

### **Minority Students**

Five students participated in the minority student focus group. As a group, these students reported “feeling lost” and confused during their first semester. They reported that the group advising session at orientation was satisfactory, and all reported that when they met individually with their advisor to sign up for classes, they had a satisfactory experience. Most confessed that they still don’t have a clear understanding of the process. Because of the environment they came from, most students reported being intimidated by the process and the thought of working with an advisor, but once they met their advisor, they found that their advisor was authentically interested in them and their educational goals. Most reported that their advisor was helpful in giving advice that was specific to their major. One student reported interest in changing his major for the third time. The advisor was very helpful in “getting things figured out” and even did some research to help this student make a wise choice.

Feedback for improvement indicated that because many of the students had no idea what academic advising was, individual advising is preferential to group advising particularly for freshmen. As

a group they recommended that students have a time when they could just check in with an advisor mid-semester. The minority students agreed that each student is different and though one student may be satisfied with a quick in-and-out meeting, others would appreciate a longer interaction with their advisor. For this demographic in particular, more guidance would be helpful both in goal setting and academic advising. They also suggested that the process of choosing a major seemed overwhelming, and students should be allowed to remain undecided until they are certain of their major. Most reported that their high school did little to prepare them for what would be expected in college.

### **Nontraditional Students**

The nontraditional student focus group had seven participants enrolled in an array of SGCS school programs. A key finding from this group is that most of the students preferred having a single point of contact. These students also expressed frustration with the lack of information they received early in the process. They all clearly wanted an advocate that could help them navigate the admission process and an advisor who understood program requirements at all levels. Students expressed frustration with the prescriptive schedules they received. In general, students reported that they were dissatisfied with the schedule, advice and instructions they were given. Students in the ABSN program described transactions with the SGCS as parent-to-child rather than adult-to-adult. BBA and MOL students wanted more consistent feedback from professors and more interaction with advisors. It appears that the nontraditional students in the focus group had trouble differentiating the role of course instructors from the role of academic advisors. Many of the student comments from this group related to frustration with course faculty performance. Students were satisfied with Student Success services including but not limited to help in dropping classes and taking two classes at a time in order to finish the program early. Students were not pleased, however, with having no one return calls or respond to calls on the Student Success line.

Recommendations for improvement from the nontraditional focus group included: implementing a single contact person for information, Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) that were accurate and considered prerequisite courses, consistent delivery of information regarding possible trips, and timely



feedback when there are questions or issues. Most students felt that the admission and pre-start activities went smoothly, but access and support was lost once courses started.

### **Commuter Students**

Two commuter students comprised the focus group. Both received prescriptive schedules prior to enrollment, but both students changed majors and were stuck with schedules that did not advance their degrees. The process of completing a class schedule seemed complicated and overwhelming. Once connected with a one-on-one advisor, there was opportunity to express concerns and ask more in-depth questions. Both students reported that talking to an advisor reduced anxiety. The Freshman Connections video about how to use the portal was helpful. Both students felt that their advisors were sensitive to their particular needs. Advisors were reportedly flexible and willing to accommodate a commuter student's schedule. One student reported that her advisor encouraged her to attend the Academic Coaching Center (ACC) to connect with other students, and to engage in the block party and other events to improve social connections. Both students reported that their advisors were willing to help them develop time management skills, access campus resources and create study groups.

Recommendations included earlier clarification for how to register for classes and helping students connect with advisors and establish a positive rapport. More formalized meeting times would be appreciated.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Five students with an array of physical and cognitive disabilities participated in the focus group. These students reported that their interactions as freshmen with the family advocates and their advisors were positive. One transfer student reported that his experience with admissions and advising were positive as well. Most were satisfied with their class schedules; however, this group was dissatisfied with the add and drop process, the availability of classes especially for classes offered every other year, and advisors that were not as hands-on as the students would have liked. Because the Disability Compliance Officer handled accommodations and services for students with disabilities, all of the students in this focus group reported that the nature of their disability was not a barrier to the advising process. Most of

these students felt that their advisors went the second mile encouraging them to re-take required standardized tests after they had failed, giving good advice about how to prepare for graduate school, and encouraging them to succeed.

Students with disabilities would like for the process to add or drop classes to be automated. Those with physical disabilities have difficulty going from building to building to collect signatures. Changes to program requirements should be immediately and clearly publicized. Advisor training is needed so that academic advice is consistent from advisor to advisor. Academic advisors need to be available as per posted office hours and allow more time for pre-registration advising sessions. The required course for freshmen, Connections should emphasize academic advising and require a four-year plan. Connections should also address practical issues like accessing shuttle buses, how to manage issues related to IT, mail, phones, bookstore, and the health office. There should be an orientation for transfer students. The information given in JumpStart and the Connections course is redundant and should be condensed or eliminated.

### **International Students**

Two international students participated in this focus group. One student completed a four-year plan as a freshman, and the other student, a transfer student, was assigned an advisor who was on sabbatical. This student ended up with an advisor who had never served as an academic advisor. One student had a positive initial experience with academic advising, but the other student was left more confused than when he arrived. He felt that he was left on his own to figure out his schedule. He reported that his advisor was insensitive to his needs, unaware of his background, lacked knowledge about transfer work, and offered no information specific to the needs of international students. Both students reported receiving good academic advice relative to career opportunities in engineering and the challenges of working every other year courses into the schedule.

These student suggested that it would be helpful if advisers followed a similar process so that international students could “understand what was happening along the way”. Both students recommended that international students be given an overview of the American college structure and a

definite rationale for major and general education requirements. Opportunities to build a relationship would make advising more valuable. Transfer students especially need a strong academic plan that clarifies course options. Advisors should develop a Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) list for students and discuss those questions at the first advising session. Advisors should know where to refer students for assistance and create a mentoring relationship.

### **Academic Advising Assessment**

As part of assessing academic advising at Olivet, questionnaires were electronically distributed to key stakeholder groups to collect information relative to the nature and scope of advising sessions. Members of three groups, traditional undergraduate students, non-traditional graduate school students, and advisors received questionnaires. In this section, findings from the questionnaire are reported relative to research question one and its sub-questions.

#### **Nature and Scope of Advising Sessions**

##### **Research Question One A & B: How did undergraduate and non-traditional students and advisors describe the nature and scope of advising sessions?**

Of the undergraduate students (n=907) who responded to the questionnaire, most (79.9%) reported that they had no group advising sessions this year. Those who met as a group once (11.9%) or twice (6.1%) reported that the length of the advising session averaged thirty minutes. More than half of the undergraduate students reported that they met individually with their advisor at least once (26.4%) or at the most twice (47.1%) this year. For the majority of students (88.3%) who met individually with their advisors, the length of the meeting averaged less than 30 minutes.

At the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies, of the non-traditional students (n=452) who responded to the questionnaire, more than half (52.8%) reported having one to three contacts from someone from the Academic Support Leadership Team generally lasting less than 15 minutes. The most frequently reported method of contact reported was via e-mail (64.4%).

As a group, 121 advisors (57%) responded and most (81.1%) ONU academic advisors reported having between 10 and 60 advisees. Some advisors (n=7, 5.8%) report advising 61-80 advisees and other

advisors (n=8, 6.6%) report advising more than 80 students per year. Of the 119 academic advisors who responded to this section of the survey, 93.3% reported that they had not met with their advisees as a group; however, 73.9% reported more than five individual advising sessions lasting on average 15-30 minutes.

**Advising topics.** All of the key stakeholders, traditional undergraduate students, non-traditional graduate students and advisors were asked how often they received advice on topics related to academic advising. Table 1 presents student and advisor descriptions of how often topics were addressed in advising sessions: 0=none, 1=1-2 times, 2=3-4 times, 3=5-6 times, 4=7-8 times, and 5=more than 8 times.

Table 1

Student and Advisor Descriptions of the Nature and Scope of Advising Sessions

Item		Traditional Student		Non-traditional Student		Advisor	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
		n=907		n=452		n=121	
<hr/>							
How often did you receive advice on:							
1.1	academic policies	2.0	1.9	1.7	1.0	3.4	1.8
1.2	personal values	2.1	1.3	1.5	1.1	2.7	1.5
1.3	career goals	2.6	1.4	1.5	1.0	4.0	1.6
1.4	possible majors or concentrations	2.3	1.3	1.6	1.0	3.8	1.7
1.5	content of courses	2.7	1.3	2.2	1.5	3.5	1.7
1.6	transfer credit and policies	1.8	1.1	1.4	0.8	3.0	1.6
1.7	career alternatives	1.8	1.1	1.3	0.7	3.1	1.6
1.8	financial aid	1.5	1.0	2.3	1.1	2.0	1.4
1.9	study skills or study tips	1.9	1.2	1.6	1.1	2.9	1.6
1.10	degree or concentration requirements	2.9	1.3	1.9	1.1	4.6	1.6
1.11	personal concerns or problems	2.1	1.3	1.6	1.1	3.3	1.5

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Students				Advisor	
	Traditional <u>M</u> n=907	<u>SD</u>	Non-Traditional <u>M</u> n=405	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u> n=121	<u>SD</u>
How often did you receive advice on:						
1.12 cooperative education opportunities	2.1	1.3	1.3	0.8	3.2	1.7
1.13 course sequencing/prerequisites	2.3	1.2	1.6	1.0	0.4	1.7
1.14 study abroad	1.5	0.9	1.2	0.6	2.3	1.4
1.15 grades/gpa issues	1.8	1.1	1.5	1.0	3.5	1.6
1.16 academic petition or special request	1.7	1.0	1.2	0.7	2.8	1.6
1.17 course selection	2.6	1.2	1.5	0.9	4.6	1.6
1.19 dropping/adding courses	2.0	1.1	1.4	0.8	2.8	1.7
1.20 evaluating academic progress	2.1	1.2	1.5	1.0	1.7	0.2
1.21 identifying campus support agencies	1.6	1.1	1.3	0.8	3.0	1.5

Traditional students reported that topics most frequently covered were degree or concentration requirements ( $M=2.9$ ,  $SD=1.3$ ), content of courses ( $M=2.7$ ,  $SD=1.3$ ), career goals ( $M=2.6$ ,  $SD=1.4$ ), and course selection ( $M=2.6$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ). Topics engaging the least amount of time included identifying campus support agencies ( $M=1.6$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ), study abroad ( $M=1.5$ ,  $SD=.09$ ), and financial aid ( $M=1.5$ ,  $SD=1.0$ ).

Non-traditional student advising sessions spent more time on content of courses ( $M=2.2$ ,  $SD=1.5$ ) and financial aid ( $M=2.3$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ). The least amount of time was spent on academic petition or special requests ( $M=1.2$ ,  $SD=0.7$ ). Finally, academic advisors reported that they spent more time in academic advising sessions on course selection ( $M=4.6$ ,  $SD=1.6$ ), career goals ( $M=4.0$ ,  $SD=1.6$ ), and possible

majors or concentrations ( $M=3.8$ ,  $SD=1.7$ ). They spent the least amount of time on study abroad ( $M=2.3$ ,  $SD=1.4$ ), financial aid ( $M=2.0$ ,  $SD=1.4$ ), and course sequencing/prerequisites ( $M=0.4$ ,  $SD=1.7$ ).

**Question 1C: Were there differences in how students and advisors describe the nature and scope of advising sessions?**

Findings from Part C of the Advising Sessions section were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Tukey's HSD Post-hoc test to see if there were statistically significant differences between traditional and non-traditional student and advisor descriptions of the nature and scope of advising sessions. Alpha was set at .05 indicating that  $p$  values greater than .05 indicated statistically significant differences. The key finding from the ANOVA was that from the 21 responses only one response was not statistically significant. The rest ( $n=20$ , 95%) showed statistically significant differences. With the exception of non-traditional student vs. advisor responses to *evaluating academic progress* ( $p=0.17$ ) all other findings indicated statistically significant differences in how students vs. advisors described how academic advising sessions treated the following topics: *department or university academic policies, personal values, career goals, possible majors or concentrations, content of courses, transfer credit and policies, career alternatives, financial aid, study skills or study tips, degree or concentration requirements, personal concerns or problems, internships or cooperative education opportunities, course sequencing/prerequisites, study abroad, grades/gpa issues, academic petition or special request, course selection, dropping/adding courses, evaluating academic progress (traditional students only), and identifying campus support agencies.*

**Evaluation of Academic Advisors**

An important piece of the academic advising assessment sought to capture students' and academic advisors' opinions about how well academic advisors performed.

**Research Question 2A &B: How did students and advisors evaluate academic advisors?**

Traditional and non-traditional students and academic advisors were asked to use the following Likert-type scale to evaluate advisors: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat disagree,

4=somewhat agree, 5=agree, 6=strongly agree. Table 2 presents students and advisors evaluations of academic advisors.

Table 2

Student and Advisors Evaluations of Academic Advisors

Item		Students				Advisors	
		<u>Traditional</u>		<u>Non-traditional</u>		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
		<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
		n=907		n=452		n=129	
My advisor. . .							
2.1	was prepared for my appointments	5.1	1.1	4.7	1.2	5.3	0.8
2.2	seemed genuinely interested in me	5.2	1.1	4.7	1.3	5.8	0.5
2.3	listened to my concerns	5.2	1.0	4.8	1.2	5.8	0.5
2.4	provided me with accurate Information	5.1	1.1	4.8	1.1	5.5	0.6
2.5	referred me to campus resources as needed	4.9	1.2	4.7	1.3	5.5	0.6
2.6	was courteous and professional	5.4	0.9	5.0	1.1	5.8	0.4
2.7	clearly explained how an advisor can help students succeed	4.6	1.4	4.6	1.4	4.8	1.1
2.8	clearly explained what an advisor can do for me	4.5	1.4	4.5	1.4	5.2	0.9
2.9	was helpful in discussing my career plans and goals	4.8	1.3	4.5	1.4	5.2	0.9
2.10	followed up on unresolved issues	4.8	1.3	4.6	1.4	5.2	0.8
2.11	was a good source of advice	5.0	1.3	4.7	1.3	5.2	0.9

Findings from the academic advising assessment indicated that traditional students agreed that their academic advisors were courteous and professional (M=5.4, SD=0.9), seemed genuinely interested in them (M=5.2, SD 1.1), and listen to their concerns (M=5.2, SD=1.0). Non-traditional students agreed that their advisors were courteous and professional (M=5.0, SD=1.1); however, they only somewhat

agreed that their advisors listened to their concerns ( $M=4.8$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ) or provided them with accurate information ( $M=4.8$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ). Academic advisors were close to strongly agreeing that they were genuinely interested in their student ( $M=5.8$ ,  $SD=0.5$ ), listened to students' concerns ( $M=5.8$ ,  $SD=0.5$ ), and were courteous and professional ( $M=5.8$ ,  $SD=0.4$ ).

### **Research Question 2C: Were their differences in how students and advisors evaluated academic advisors?**

Findings from the Academic Advisor Evaluation were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Tukey's HSD Post-hoc Test to see if there were statistically significant differences between groups. On the variable *my advisor clearly explained how an advisor can help student succeed* there were no statistically significant differences between groups ( $p=0.28$ ). Further, traditional student vs. non-traditional student ( $p=0.99$ ), traditional student vs. advisors ( $p=0.27$ ) and non-traditional student vs. advisors ( $p=0.31$ ) showed no statistically significant differences as well. As for the rest of the findings, with the exception of traditional student vs. advisor responses to *my advisor was prepared for appointments* ( $p=0.13$ ), traditional student vs. non-traditional student to *my advisor clearly explained what an advisor can do for me* ( $p=0.99$ ), and traditional student vs. advisor responses to *my advisor was a good source of academic advice*, comparisons of the remaining variables ( $n=10$ , 91%) related to my advisor: *was prepared for my appointments*, *seemed genuinely interested in me*, *listened to my concerns*, *provided me with accurate information*, *referred me to campus resources as needed*, *was courteous and professional*, *clearly explained how an advisor can help students succeed*, *clearly explained what an advisor can do for me*, *was helpful in discussing my career plans and goals*, *followed up on unresolved issues*, and *was a good source of academic advice* showed statistically significant differences.

### **Satisfaction with Academic Advising**

### **Research Question 3A&B: How satisfied were students and advisors with academic advising at ONU?**

**Student Satisfaction.** Undergraduate and non-traditional students were asked to indicate their satisfaction with academic advising on the following scale: 1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied,



3=somewhat dissatisfied, 4=somewhat satisfied, 5=satisfied, 6=very satisfied. Table 3 presents traditional and non-traditional student satisfaction with academic advising.

Table 3

Traditional and Non-traditional Student Satisfaction with Academic Advising

Item		Traditional M      SD N=907		Non-traditional M      SD n=452	
How satisfied were you with:					
3.1	the quality of the academic advice you have received	4.9	1.1	4.8	0.1
3.2	information about courses/programs/requirements	4.9	1.1	4.7	1.3
3.3	information about institutional deadlines	4.7	1.2	4.7	1.2
3.4	availability of your academic advisor	5.0	1.1	4.7	1.3
3.5	amount of time spent in each advising session	5.0	1.0	4.8	1.2
3.6	accuracy of information from your advisor	5.0	1.1	4.8	1.2
3.7	advice for personal issues	4.7	1.2	4.7	1.3
3.8	time-management advice	4.17	1.2	4.6	1.3
3.9	financial advice	4.4	1.3	4.7	1.2

Traditional students were most satisfied with the availability of their academic advisor (M=5.0, SD=1.1), the amount of time spent in each advising session (M=5.0, SD1.0), and accuracy of information from their advisor (M=5.0, SD=1.1). Overall, non-traditional students were slightly less satisfied than traditional students. They were most satisfied with the quality of advice they received (M=4.8, SD, 0.1), the amount of time spent in each advising session (M=4.8, SD 1.2), and the accuracy of information from their advisor (M=4.8, SD=1.2).

**Advisor satisfaction.** On the following Likert-type scale: 1= very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=somewhat dissatisfied, 4=somewhat satisfied, 5=satisfied, 6=very satisfied, academic advisors were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with academic advising activities. Table 4 presents findings from the academic advisor satisfaction section of the advising assessment questionnaire.

Table 4

Academic Advisor Satisfaction

Item	Advisor		
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	
	n=129		
How satisfied were you with institutional or departmental:			
4.1	strategies for recruiting academic advisors	4.1	1.2
4.2	compensation for serving as an academic advisor	3.3	1.4
4.3	training for academic advisors	3.2	1.3
4.4	expectations for academic advisors	3.9	1.2
4.5	processes for assigning advisees	4.3	1.2
4.6	load credit for being an academic advisor	3.1	1.3
4.7	policies for advising students on general education requirements	4.1	1.1
4.8	policies for advising majors	4.5	1.1
4.9	policies for advising minors	4.0	1.2
5.0	information about institutional deadlines	4.3	1.1
5.1	information about course/programs/requirements	4.9	1.0

Advisor responses ranged from somewhat dissatisfied to somewhat satisfied. They were most satisfied with information about course/program/requirements (M=4.9, SD=1.0), processes for assigning advisees (M=4.3, SD=1.2) and strategies for recruiting advisors (M=4.1, SD=1.2). They were least

satisfied with compensation for serving as an academic advisor ( $M=3.3$ ,  $SD=1.4$ ), training for academic advisors ( $M=3.2$ ,  $SD=1.3$ ), and load credit for being an academic advisor ( $M=3.1$ ,  $SD=1.3$ ).

### **Organizational Structure and Resources**

Advisors were also asked about the organizational structure of academic advising and the resources they used as an advisor. Of the 121 respondents to this question, almost half (47.1%) preferred a shared organizational structure: that is departmental faculty advise students in the major and professional staff assist sub-groups of students such as undecided students, freshmen, or at-risk students (e.g. students with disabilities, first-generation students, developmental students, etc.).

Of the 118 advisors who responded to the question: *I use the following academic advising resources*: most indicated that they used both the ONU Catalog and Major Guides (94.9% respectively). Advisors also reported using one or more of these resources: colleagues (85.6%), Registrar's staff (75.4%), the department chair (74.6%), departmental advising guides (69.5%), the ONU Portal (62.7%) and minor guides (60.2%).

### **Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations for Improvement**

Each group of respondents were asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of academic advising at Olivet and give recommendations for improvements to academic advising. Comments were coded by subject matter and presented by group. The academic advising questionnaire captured a total of 2,946 comments from undergraduate students, non-traditional students and academic advisors.

**Undergraduate student comments.** Of the total comments, sixty-five percent ( $n=1,921$ ) came from undergraduate students. Of those 713 identified academic advising strengths, 636 related to weaknesses and 572 addressed recommendations for improvement.

Aside from no comment, topics addressed as strengths related to advisor characteristics, advisor knowledge, scheduling and prerequisites, advising sessions, and general program requirements. Table 5 presents undergraduate student response to the perceived strengths of academic advising activities.

Table 5

Undergraduate Student Comments Identifying Academic Advising Strengths

Topic	n	N=713	%
No comment	57		8%
Advisor Characteristics	231		33%
Advisor Knowledge	63		9%
Scheduling	116		16%
Contact with Advisor	62		9%
Advising Requirements	184		25%

Comments about advisor characteristics (n=231) emerged as the largest category. A sample of student comments indicated that advisors, were well prepared, genuinely cared about student well-being, were thoughtful, thorough and kind, and provided good advice. With respect to advising requirements, undergraduate student comments (n=184) suggested that advising activities helped students connect with their advisor and was a good way to build relationships with professors. Comments related to scheduling (n=116) included issues related to prerequisites and grad checks. One student indicated that “it was really nice having someone with experience provide insight into the chaos that is scheduling classes . . . my advisor always ended up improving my schedule.” Others suggested advising helps when it comes to class selection, and advising was helpful for setting up a course schedule to graduate on time and discuss future career options.

Students had less to say about advisor knowledge and contact with advisors as strengths. Student comments related to advisor knowledge (n=63) suggested that advisor knowledge was helpful, advisors had answers to questions, and academic advising sessions contained helpful information.

Positive student comments related to contact with advisors (n=62) suggested that students appreciated having advisors who made advising sessions more personal and encouraged feedback from group members. Finally, with respect to academic advising strengths, eight percent (n=57) specifically indicated that they had no comment.

Undergraduate student comments related to academic advising weaknesses totaled 636.

Table 6 presents student comments identifying academic advising weaknesses.

Table 6

Undergraduate Student Comments Identifying Academic Advising Weaknesses

Topic	N=636	
	n	%
No comment	119	19%
Advisor Characteristics	73	11%
Advisor Knowledge	136	21%
Scheduling	54	8%
Contact with Advisor	195	31%
Academic Advising Requirements	59	10%

While undergraduate students identified fewer weaknesses (n=636) in academic advising activities than they did strengths (n=713), most of their comments related to weaknesses that identified contact with advisors (n=195) as the area of most concern. A sample of student comments suggests that with respect to contact with advisors, students felt that advisors should plan sessions/appointment times that are not rushed, easy to schedule, fall more frequently in the semester, avoid the crunch time right before preregistration opens, allow for more career exploration, avoid large group sessions at night, consider commuter students availability, and give priority to juniors and seniors, athletes, and students

with special needs. Most notably, most student comments in this section expressed frustration with having to acquire an advisor's signature before adding or dropping a class.

Another area of student concern were comments (n=136) related to advisor knowledge. Students reported that advisors were not up to date of the curriculum taught in their department, unaware of program requirements for minors outside of their department, not well-versed on courses that are offered every other year, unaware of appropriate course sequences and prerequisites, and unfamiliar with the registration process. Interestingly, a large number of students (n=119) made no comment about academic advising weaknesses.

Students had less to say about advisor characteristics, scheduling and academic advising requirements. With respect to advisor characteristics, student comments (n=73) indicated that advisor seemed uninterested in them, had too many advisees and too little time, came to sessions late and unprepared, had no interest in the student's future plans, financial aid, or other topics not related to course scheduling, and made them feel like a burden. One student reported that the advisor was "trying to be too involved in my personal life." Student concerns (n=54) related to scheduling included comments that their advisor did not help prepare a four-year plan, failed to communicate changes in degree requirements, had little availability for scheduling classes, and failed to give adequate notice for signing up for advising sessions.

An important section on the academic advising assessment questionnaire asked for recommendations for improvement to the academic advising program at Olivet. Undergraduate student recommendations for improvement (n=572) to academic advising fell into categories similar to strengths and weaknesses and included comments related to advisor characteristics, advisor knowledge, scheduling, advising sessions/contact with advisors, program requirements, and no comment. Table 7 presents finding for undergraduate student recommendations for academic advising improvement.

Table 7

Undergraduate Student Recommendations for Academic Advising Improvement

Topic	N=575	
	n	%
Advisor Characteristics	72	13%
Advisor Knowledge	121	21%
Scheduling	53	9%
Contact with Advisor	159	28%
Program Requirements	65	11%
No Comment	105	18%

Undergraduate student recommendations for improvement dealt primarily with contact with advisors (n=159), and advisor knowledge (n=121). A sampling of comments related to contact with advisors (n=159) included recommendations that administrators improve the availability of busy advisors, increase the use of group advising sessions, hire additional advisors so more are available for students, hire more staff, increase the length of advising session from 15 to 30 minutes, meet with students on a monthly basis, answer their e-mail in a timely fashion, reduce the number of advisees for each advisor, increase job readiness sessions, and recruit more advisors who have time to give to their students. Students also recommended strategies for improving advisor knowledge (n=121). Among these were recommendations to combine registrar and advising services for a more comprehensive and cohesive knowledge base, create master advising plans by major for advisors to follow, provide periodic and systematic training for advisors, expose academic advisors to requirements for minors outside the advisor's discipline, create a comprehensive advising manual, give advisors access to students' schedules and transcripts, systematically assess the effectiveness of advisors, hold advisors accountable for the accuracy of the information they give to students, clarify for all key stakeholders the role of the advisor,

require that all advisors help students create a four-year plan of study, help advisors know where to refer students who are struggling academically for help, and train advisors to have a more holistic approach to advising that includes career readiness, transition to graduate school or employment, financial aid, internships, and other issues besides scheduling courses.

To a lesser extent students made recommendations related to advisor characteristics (n=72), program requirements (n=65), and scheduling (n=53). Recommendations related to advisor characteristics include recruiting advisors who care about their students, making sure that advisors are intentional about building a personal relationship with students, encouraging advisors to consider individual student's needs, teaching advisors good communication skills, having advisors that are organized, instilling in advisors a passion for advising, and hiring advisors who take advising seriously. Student recommendations related to program requirements included improving communication between the registrar's office and advisors, publishing important deadlines, making sure early on that students know how to contact their advisor, attending more carefully to the needs of transfer students, requiring more advising sessions, making clear degree requirements, and publishing procedures for changing advisors. Further, student recommendations related to scheduling included making students aware of all academic options: CLEP credits, summer courses, auditing courses and appealing denied credits; creating a website with resources or frequently asked questions about scheduling; helping students understand general education requirements; scheduling advising appointments earlier in the semester; allowing more time in advising sessions; making students aware that some courses are only offered every other semester or year; and starting freshmen out with a strong four-year plan. Finally, eighteen percent (n=105) of students respondents had no comment.

**Non-traditional student comments.** Non-traditional students enrolled in programs through the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies made a total of 633 comments related to advising strengths (n=219), weaknesses (n=214), and recommendations for improvement to academic advising (n=200). In summary, of the total comments made by non-traditional students 35% identified program strengths, 34% commented on program weaknesses, and 31% made recommendations for improvement.



Topics identified as strengths included advisor characteristics (n=155), advisor knowledge (n=25), program requirements (n=25) or no comment (n=25).

Table 8 presents student comments by topic.

Table 8

Non-traditional Student Comments Identifying Academic Advising Strengths

Topic	N=219 n	%
Advisor Characteristics	155	71%
Advisor Knowledge	25	11%
No Comment	25	11%
Program Resources	14	7%

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of the student comments in this section identified advisor characteristics (n=155) as a strength of academic advising in the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies. A sample of comments related to advisor characteristics included descriptions of advisors as very quick to respond, always open to talking with students and on-call when needed, friendly and caring, supportive and invested, professional, and polite and helpful. One student commented that "Everyone I have talked to has given great advice and tried to answer the questions that I ask. If they did not know the answer, they would try to find an answer to my questions." Other students suggested that SGCS advisors were very informative and answered questions in a timely manner. Further, students (n=25) felt that advisors in the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies were knowledgeable and that the information they received was accurate. Examples of student comments addressed advisors' ability to guide students through the academic processes, answer questions thoroughly, and provide quick informative answers in a timely fashion. Finally, while more than ten percent of the students in this section specifically stated that they had no comment, some (n=14) commented about program resources as strengths. Sample student

comments suggested that program resources were more than adequate, courses were enlightening, librarians were knowledgeable and helpful, and different learning modalities (e.g. lecture, video, on-line chat rooms, etc.) were available.

Thirty-four percent of the non-traditional student comments addressed perceived weaknesses in academic advising. Of the 214 comments to the weakness section of the survey, most (n=83) marked none in response to the question about program weaknesses. The remaining comments addressed information/communication (n=55), advisor knowledge (n=20), advisor availability (n=20), program resources (n=17), advisor characteristics (n=11), and technology (n=8) as program weaknesses. Table 9 presents non-traditional student comments identifying academic advising weaknesses.

Table 9

Non-traditional Student Comments Identifying Academic Advising Weaknesses

Topic	N=214	
	n	%
None	85	39%
Information/Communication	55	26%
Program Resources	34	17%
Advisor Knowledge	20	9%
Advisor Availability	20	9%

Most of the comments (39%) were in the no comment category. Twenty-six percent (n=55) of the rest of the comments addressed concerns with weaknesses in the information and communication students received. Comments suggested that response time to questions was too lengthy, it was difficult to get past voicemail, issues were not explained clearly, there was poor follow-up, no information on career opportunities, due dates for tuition payments were not clearly posted, information about scheduling was contradictory, and information from person to person was not consistent. Students expressed concern that communicating with so many different people in the graduate school was overwhelming and confusing.

Some students wondered why academic support leaders were not called academic advisors. Prior to Spring 2017 personnel filling traditional academic advising roles in the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies were referred to Academic Support Leaders. Now they are referred to as academic advisors. Seventeen percent of the comments addressed concerns with program resources. Comments related to program resources included syllabi that were often incorrect and internet links that were out of date. Eighteen percent, nine percent respectively, of the comments addressed either advisor knowledge or advisor availability. Several students charged that advisors were not sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities. Student expressed frustration with not being able to reach their advisor and with the mis-information advisors gave their students. One student reported that “the right hand didn’t seem to know what the left hand was doing.”

Thirty-five percent of the student comments fell into the no comment category indicating that students had no recommendations for improving academic advising. Of the remaining comments twenty-four percent (n=47) dealt with communication, thirteen percent (n=25) expressed concern with advisor availability, ten percent (n=20) addressed program requirements, six percent (n=12) focused on advisor characteristics, six percent (n=13) addressed advisor knowledge, and six percent (n=13) identified technology as a program weaken.

Table 10 presents non-traditional student recommendations for improving academic advising.

Table 10

Non-traditional Student Recommendations for Improving Academic Advising

Topic	N=200	
	n	%
None	70	35%
Communication	47	24%
Advisor Availability	25	13%
Advisor Characteristics	25	13%
Program Requirements	20	10%
Technology	13	5%

The bulk of student comments (n=70) indicated that students had no recommendations for improving academic advising. Of the remaining comments, twenty-four percent (n=47) expressed concerns with communication and suggested that the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies needs more academic advisors, on-campus meetings for online masters students to clarify important topics, direct phone numbers for support personnel, and more upfront information regarding tuition costs and options for financing. Thirteen percent (n=25) of the comments dealt with advisor availability. Specifically, student comments recommended increased interaction between advisors and students, early intervention when students are struggling and more direct contact with the financial aid team. Another thirteen percent (n=25) recommended that the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies attend more carefully to advisor characteristics. Recommendations included hiring advisors that have experience, a clear and consistent Christian witness, sensitivity for students' individual needs and an ability to establish rapport with students. Most (n=20) of the recommendations for improvement related to program requirements came from doctoral students. Recommendations included admitting students who were capable of doctoral work, clearly explaining the requirements and time necessary for writing the dissertation, and strengthening connections between students, dissertation advisors and readers. Finally, five percent (n=13) of recommendations for improvement were related to technology and included improving the ability to check financial aid or payments on-line, correcting malfunctions in Canvas, giving clinical instructors access to Canvas, sending timely notifications via e-mail, and providing comprehensive on-line tutoring.

**Academic advisor comments.** Academic advisor comments totaled 392. Of those, 140 related to academic advising strengths, 130 addressed weaknesses, and 122 were recommendations for improving academic advising

Advisors made several categories of comments related to advising strengths including no comment, advising was not a program, advisor characteristics, advisor knowledge, scheduling and contact, program characteristics, and mission. Table 11 presents academic advisor comments by topic.

Table 11

Academic Advisor Comments Identifying Academic Advising Strengths

Topic	N=140	
	n	%
Program Characteristics	45	32%
Advisor Knowledge	30	22%
Scheduling and Frequency of Contact	25	18%
No Comment	17	12%
Advisor Characteristics	13	9%
Not a Program	6	4%
Mission	4	3%

Excerpts of academic advisors comments identifying academic advising strengths addressed topics like the deep sense of mission that informs everything academic advisors do, faculty are attentive to individual student's needs, advisors genuinely care for their students, and faculty are committed to students and ensure that program guides are followed. Additional comments included having professors as advisors gives students knowledge in their major area that is accurate and up to date. Advising is personal and allows faculty to make one-on-one connections, and the *Degree Requirements* information online is helpful.

Of the total number of academic advisor comments related to academic advising weaknesses, 130 (33%) addressed topics including advisor knowledge/training, no comment, program characteristics, scheduling, contact with students, advisor characteristics, load/compensation, and advising not perceived as a program. Table 12 presents academic advisor comments identifying academic advising weaknesses.

Table 12

Academic Advisor Comments Identifying Academic Advising Weaknesses

Topic	n	N=130	%
Advisor Knowledge/Training	46		35%
No Comment	23		18%
Program Characteristics	20		15%
Scheduling	13		10%
Frequency of Contact with Students	13		10%
Advisor Characteristics	6		5%
Load/Compensation	6		5%
Not a Program	3		2%

Advisors made less comments identifying program weaknesses but generally advisors felt that they had too many advisees, not all advisors invest in the process as they should, there is not enough time between the distribution of the schedule of classes from the Registrar's office and class sign up dates, and there is very little communication about general education requirements. There appears to be a disconnect between the Registrar and advisors, there is scant information related to study abroad and course transfer, and advisors receive little or no training in how to be an effective advisor.

Academic advisors made recommendations for improvement (n=122) related to advisor knowledge/training, program characteristics, no comment, advisor load/compensation, scheduling/prerequisites, frequency of contact, and the need to create a program. Table 13 presents advisor recommendations for improvement by topic.

Table 13

Advisor Recommendations for Academic Advising Improvement

Topic	N	N=122	%
Advisor Knowledge/Training	44		36%
Program Characteristics	27		22%
No Comment	21		17%
Advisor Load/Compensation	15		13%
Scheduling/Prerequisites	6		5%
Frequency of Contact with Students	6		5%
Need to Create a Program	3		2%

Advisor comments included the need to train advisors in all areas: coaching, catalog requirements, and the careful advising of all students. Comments also recommended a University-wide consistent advising program that students trust, explicit guidance and training for new faculty, specific advising days when classes are suspended should be instituted, suspend Purple and Gold days visits during advising, start advising earlier in the semester to avoid the pre-registration crunch, train advisors to advise students in their minors, and designate a Director of Advising whose responsibility would be to train advisors, disseminate accurate information, and maintain an academic advising web page.

## Summary

The academic advising assessment was a comprehensive evaluation of advising activities at Olivet Nazarene University and related to creating an academic advising mission statement and program outcomes. A series of focus groups collected information from student who traditionally were at risk for academic success.

Quantitative information was collected on a survey designed to assess the nature and scope of advising sessions, student and advisor evaluations of academic advisors, and student and advisor satisfaction with academic advising at Olivet Nazarene University. The final section of chapter four addressed student and advisor descriptions of the strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for improvement of academic advising at Olivet.

A key finding, with implications for future academic advising program development, was that there was a strong sense that both academic advisors and students questioned references to academic advising activities as a program. Both advisors and students wanted an academic advising program that was structured and systematic. The development of a mission statement and program outcomes is an important first step in developing an academic advising program.

Focus group findings indicated that students with special circumstances (e.g. commuter students, athletes, students with disabilities, etc.) want academic advisors who are knowledgeable about developing academic schedules around their particular needs. All categories of focus group students wanted information from their academic advisors that was accurate and dependable. Finally, they wanted advisors that authentically cared about their academic success.

With respect to descriptions of the nature and scope of academic advising sessions, the key finding is that in most cases there were statistically significant differences in how traditional and non-traditional students and academic advisors described academic advising activities. Since statistically significant differences are generally not due to chance, interpretations of these differences and how to close the gap between key stakeholders' perceptions of academic advising activities are important.

With respect to satisfaction with the advising program, generally traditional students were more satisfied than non-traditional students. Advisors were more satisfied with their understanding of course and program requirements and less satisfied with academic advising training and compensation for serving as an academic advisor.

Recommendations for improving academic advising activities from all key stakeholders



indicated that the most attention should be focused on recruiting and training advisors, clarifying the role advisors should play in the advising process, standardizing academic advising operations, and improving communication. Findings from the academic advising assessment should inform the development of a comprehensive academic advising program at Olivet and contribute positively to student retention.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Academic advising has long been considered the key element in a strong retention model. As early as 1987, Tinto, an expert in retention and persistence, suggested that an effective advising program is central to a strong institutional retention plan (Tinto, 1987). After him, Nut (2003) and Habley (2004) reaffirmed the importance of academic advising to a strong institutional retention model; however, only 60% of postsecondary institutions had a written policy statement on advising (Habley, 1993), and a review of five national surveys of academic advising indicated that only 29% of colleges and universities assessed their academic advising programs (Habley and Morales, 1998). As noted earlier, assessing the effectiveness of academic advisors and advising programs sends a strong message to the university constituents that advising is an important professional function, and advisors are critical to student success (Cuseo, 2014).

One outcome of the recent Olivet Nazarene University self-study prior to the Higher Learning Commission site visit in 2014 was that ONU did not have a systematic approach to academic advising that was grounded in evidence. Therefore, evaluators at ONU conducted a formal academic advising assessment. The purpose of the assessment was to collect information from key stakeholders and evaluate factors associated with academic advising activities at Olivet Nazarene University. Findings from the ONU academic advising assessment have implications (a) for academic advising program development, and (b) academic advising program assessment and review.

#### **Implications for Academic Advising Program Development**

The ONU academic advising assessment clearly indicated the need to develop a comprehensive and systematic academic advising program which would be subject to ONU institutional assessment and program review policies and procedures. Program designers should develop the academic advising program as per the standards and guidelines developed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, CAS, (2008). Following the CAS Standards will ensure program stability and credibility.

In academic circles a program is generally referred to as a comprehensive, structured approach for delivering academic, career and technical education to prepare students for postsecondary education and career success; therefore development of a comprehensive academic advising program at ONU should address the following CAS Standards program components: mission statement and program outcomes, leadership and structure, human resources, ethics and legal responsibilities, equity and access, diversity, campus and external relations, financial resources, facilities and equipment, and assessment and evaluation.

### **Mission Statement and Program Outcomes**

The following mission statement and program outcomes for academic advising were adopted by the ONU faculty in the fall 2016 term:

*The mission of the academic advising program at Olivet Nazarene University is to recruit and train academic advisors who will partner with students as they develop and work toward their academic professional, and personal goals* (Academic Advising Task Force, Fall 2016).

Newly developed academic advising program outcomes state that:

1. ONU administrators will:

- a. recruit Christ-like academic advisors who support the mission of the University,
- b. ensure that academic advisors understand major, minor and general education requirements,
- c. help academic advisors stay abreast of changes to the curriculum,
- d. train academic advisors to give accurate and timely advice,
- e. help advisors sustain positive relationships with advisees, and
- f. encourage advisors to advocate for students as appropriate.

2. ONU students will:

- a. know their academic advisor,
- b. seek advice as needed,
- c. use campus resources to effectively navigate the University,

- d. differentiate between short-term and long-term goals,
- e. develop an educational plan consistent with their abilities, interests and values,
- f. understand major, minor and general education requirements, policies and procedures, and
- g. understand course sequences and select courses appropriately for their educational plan.

The mission statement and the program outcomes developed for the ONU academic advising program attend to the vision, mission and values statements of the University and are consistent with the core values of the *National Academic Advising Association* (NACADA, 2005). Further, the ONU program outcomes are anchored in what happens during advisor-student interactions, and should generate strong learning outcomes related to what students should know, be able to demonstrate, and value (Robbins, 2011; Aiken-Wisniewski, 2010; Robbins, 2009, and Campbell, 2005).

### **Leadership and Structure**

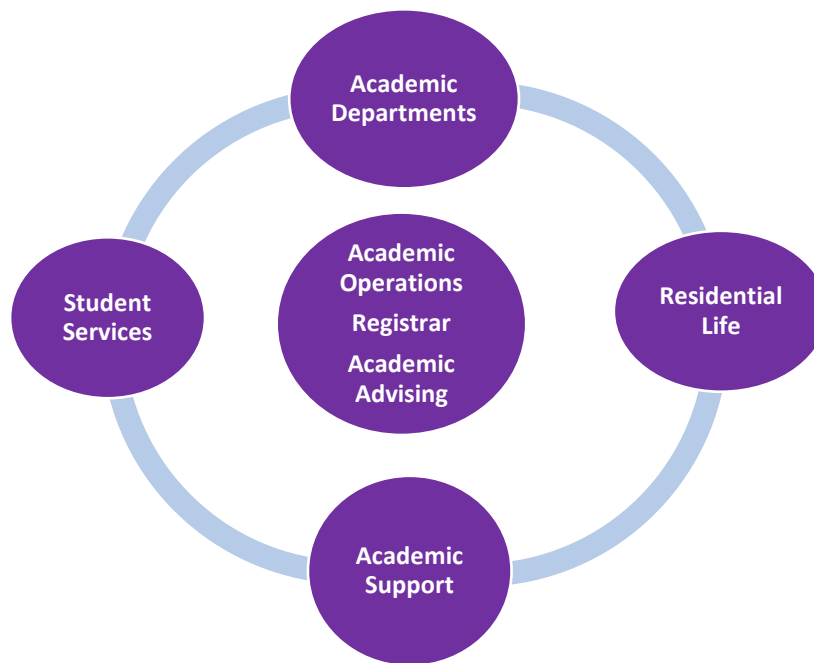
The ONU assessment suggested that nearly half (47%) of the academic advisors favored a shared organizational structure for academic advising: that is, departmental faculty advise students in the major and professional staff or designated advisors advise high-risk students such as undecided students, freshmen, or at-risk students. Further, advisors indicated a strong dependence on personnel in and materials from the Registrar's office to help them advise students. Finally, information collected from the focus groups clearly support the development of a central location where students could go to get authentic and accurate advising information.

Findings from the academic advising assessment support the hire of a Director of Advising who reports to the Dean of Academic Operations. The Director of Advising would be responsible for program development, assessment and review as well as engaging other student success agencies in the advising process. The recommendation is consistent with Habley's (2004) conclusion that rather than it being one of an array of services provided to improve retention, academic advising should be foundational to an institutional model of retention. Further, Nut (2003) suggested that academic advising should be: " . . .

the hub of the wheel (p.2)." Should the University accept the validity of academic advising functioning as the hub of the wheel, a conceptual ONU Retention Model with academic advising at the center may function as proposed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Olivet Nazarene University Retention Model



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## Human Resources

There is a need for ONU to systematically recruit, train and retain quality academic advisors. As noted earlier, revisions to the academic advising structure would support department chair efforts to recruit and train faculty advisors. Department chairmen need release time to effectively recruit and train good academic advisors.

Many academic advisors reported frustration with their introduction to serving as an academic advisor. Most had no formal training; many reported that they were “expected” to serve as academic advisors without a clear sense of how to be an effective academic advisor. There appears to be no definitive selection criteria for who should serve as an academic advisor, and there is a clear failure to identify who should serve as advisors to high risk students such as first-generation students, academically

underprepared students, undecided students, and transfer students. These findings are consistent with Habley (2000) who noted that only about one-third of college campuses require faculty training. Most rely only on the dissemination of factual information without attending to program objectives and goals, developing effective academic advising strategies or helping academic advisors develop strong relational skills. Academic advising training may well become an important function of college and school meetings.

Department chairmen seeking to recruit and train effective academic advisors need to attend to the ONU assessment findings that students want advisors who are (a) available and accessible, (b) knowledgeable and helpful, and (c) personable and approachable. Each one of these general qualities of effective advisors are consistent with earlier research findings (Winston, Ender, & Miller, 1982; Frost, 1991; Gordon, Habley, & Associates, 2000).

### **Ethics and Legal Responsibility**

As per CAS Standards, academic advisors at ONU should adhere to the highest principles of ethical and moral behavior and espouse the values, policies and procedures of the University and their respective departments. Advisors must be committed to maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of their students. Further, academic advisors should be aware of the needs of legally protected classes of students (e.g. students with disabilities and minorities). As per CAS Standards, academic advisors must avoid “any form of harassment or activity that demeans persons or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive campus environment” (pg.9).

### **Equity and Access**

While there is an ONU institutional expectation that all full-time faculty serve as academic advisors, there is often little equity in the number of advisees an academic advisor may be assigned. As reported by ONU academic advisors, the number of advisees range from a low of 10 to as many as 60. There is a need for a more equitable system for recruiting and training academic advisors.

Traditionally, Olivet Nazarene University has approached academic advising through academic departments. Such a model allows departmental faculty to work with students in their majors and attend

to important program requirements like course sequencing, prerequisites, and other important considerations like double majors and the role of study abroad. Olivet should maintain its departmental approach to academic advising, but the University should also develop (a) appropriate resources to support departmental advising efforts and (b) strategies for making the student advisee numbers more equitable from advisor to advisor.

With respect to particular student groups, the academic advising program must ensure physical and program access for persons with disabilities and must establish hours for advising sessions that allow commuter students, athletes, and others access to academic advisors. Further, the academic advising program must recognize the needs of distance learners and establish policies and procedures to accommodate their particular needs.

### **Diversity**

Within the context of our mission statement, Olivet must create and maintain environments that welcome and celebrate persons of diverse backgrounds. Academic advising policies and procedures must address the characteristics and needs of a diverse population. Open and honest communication deepens understanding between people groups and promotes respect among people from different historical and cultural contexts.

### **Campus and External Relations**

The CAS Standards require academic advising programs to develop and maintain effective relations with other campus agencies. The academic advising program must adhere to institutional policies for responding to threats, emergencies, and crisis situations. As per the CAS Standards,

Academic advising is integral to the educational process and depends upon close working relationships with other institutional agencies and the administration. The academic advising program should be fully integrated into other processes of the institution. Academic advisors should be consulted when there are modifications to or closures of academic programs (pg.12).

Academic advising programs are most successful when they are developed with attention to the principle of shared responsibility.

## **Resources and Technology**

According to the CAS Standards, the academic advising program must have adequate resources to accomplish its mission. The recent ONU assessment indicated that aside from the resources available through the Registrar's office (e.g. advising guides, grad check sheets and the Catalog), there are scant institutional resources available to help academic advisors effectively advise students. Advisors would clearly benefit from an academic advising web page where ancillary advising resources (e.g. publications, best practices in academic advising, checklists, and links to the National Academic Advising Association, NACADA) are easily available.

To retain good academic advisors there need to be incentives, recognition and reward for effective academic advising built into the advising program. At Olivet, there are no systematic incentives, recognition or reward for academic advisors. The finding is consistent with Creamer and Scott (2000) who noted;

The failure of most institutions to conduct systematic evaluations of advisors is explained by a number of factors. The most potent reason, however, is probably that the traditional reward structure often blocks the ability to reward faculty who are genuinely committed to advising (p. 30).

It is recommended ONU establish a budget for academic advising that allows for advisor incentives and recognition and resources the professional development of advisors.

ONU advisors have strong technology support for advising activities. For all students, including students in distance learning programs who receive on-line and technology-assisted advising, there are mechanisms for obtaining approvals, consultations and referrals.

## **Facilities and Equipment**

At Olivet traditional academic advising sessions are held in University classrooms or advisors' offices. All academic advisors at Olivet enjoy adequate work space that is well-equipped, appropriately sized, and private. Academic advising records are housed in secure spaces and confidentiality is well-maintained.



In the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies (SGCS) most advising occurs via telephone. Students expressed dissatisfaction with not reaching their advisor in a timely fashion. As noted earlier, the SGCS may want to develop an academic advising web page with interactive features so that nontraditional students can access academic advising information.

### **Implications for Assessment and Program Review**

A key requirement for accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission is that institutions provide substantive evidence of continuous program improvement. Further, an essential component of the CAS Standards in Higher Education is to require academic advising programs to “establish plans and processes to meet internal and external accountability expectations with regard to program as well as student learning and development outcomes (pg.13)”

Clearly colleges and universities need to carefully assess and review their academic advising programs. Unfortunately, most institutions only assess student satisfaction as an outcome of an academic advising program. As part of the ONU academic advising assessment, both the nature and scope of academic advising activities, evaluation of academic advisors, as well as student satisfaction were assessed. Findings from the ONU assessment relative to the nature and scope of advising activities and student and advisor satisfaction have utility for academic advising assessment and program review methodologies in the future.

### **Nature and Scope of Academic Advising Activities**

All key stakeholders, undergraduate students, nontraditional students and academic advisors were asked to describe the nature and scope of advising activities by describing how often topics thought relevant to academic advising were covered. Analysis of variance findings indicated that there were statistically significant differences in stakeholder perceptions of the content of advising sessions including how advisors treated department or university academic policies, personal values, career goals, possible majors or concentrations, content of courses, transfer credit and policies, career alternatives, financial aid, study skills or study tips, degree or concentration requirements, personal concerns or problems, internships or cooperative education opportunities, course sequencing and prerequisites, study abroad,

grades and gpa issues, academic petition or special request, course selection, dropping and adding courses, evaluating academic progress, and identifying campus support agencies.

A key component in quality educational program develop is the structure and content of the curriculum. Because there were statistically significant differences in how key stakeholders describe the content of academic advising, there is a need for the development of a standardized approach to advising that addresses at least core curricular content. Academic departments should have latitude to customize the academic advising curriculum to meet their needs, but there are core concepts and activities that all students regardless of their major should experience. These include an exposure to University policies and procedures, financial aid, course sequencing and prerequisites and campus resources to name a few. Olivet administrators may want to develop an on-line one credit-hour course to deliver academic advising content.

### **Evaluation of Academic Advisors**

The evaluation of academic advisors resulted in statistically significant differences in perceptions of how well advisors (a) help students succeed, (b) prepare for appointments, (c) give good academic advice, (d) discuss career plans, and (e) follow up on unresolved issues. Should Olivet adopt a standardized approach to academic advising that includes (a) a clear description of the role of academic advisors, (b) standardized expectations for student behavior, and (c) accessible links to institutional resources, it is likely that the gap in student and advisor perceptions of how academic advisors at ONU perform academic advising duties will close.

### **Satisfaction with Academic Advising**

The ONU academic advising assessment investigated both student and advisor satisfaction with advising activities. The ONU academic advising assessment presumes a logical link between high quality academic advising and student satisfaction. It also presumes a link between student satisfaction and retention. As noted in Cuseo (2000):

There is a well-established empirical relationship between students' level of satisfaction with the postsecondary institution they are attending and their rate of retention at that institution.

Unfortunately, research on the level of student satisfaction with the quality of academic advising reveals a pattern of disappointing findings (pg. 5).

Findings from the ONU academic advising assessment indicate that while traditional students were slightly more satisfied with academic advising activities than non-traditional students, both groups of students reported only moderate levels of satisfaction with academic advising activities. Both groups of students were most satisfied with the quality of the academic advice they received. Given these findings, it is likely that modification to the current approach to academic advising at ONU will improve student and advisor satisfaction and contribute positively to University retention efforts.

According to Donnelly (2009), as academic advising role clarity increases, so does academic advisor satisfaction. It is clear that academic advisors need clarity of institutional expectations to be satisfied in their role as an academic advisor. Further, results from the ONU academic advising assessment suggest that at best, ONU academic advisors are only somewhat satisfied with information about course or program requirements, processes for assigning advisees, and strategies for recruiting advisors. They are even less satisfied with compensation for serving as an academic advisor, training for academic advisors, and load credit for being an academic advisor.

Academic advisor recommendations for program improvement included stronger strategies for improving advisor training, the development of a systematic advising program, and scheduling advising days that do not compete with Purple and Gold days or other University events. Further, should ONU implement a reward and recognition program and improve communication and resources, academic advisor satisfaction will likely improve.

### **Academic Advising Assessment**

The comprehensive ONU academic advising assessment provides ONU administrators with benchmark data for the development of an advising program and the subsequent assessment and program review of a new approach to academic advising. Assessing the academic advising program, however, depends on how the program is structured. The ONU assessment suggested that nearly half of the academic advisors favored a shared approach to academic advising. As defined in the academic advising

questionnaire, in a shared structure model, departmental faculty advise students in the major and professional staff assist sub-groups of students such as undecided students, freshmen, or at-risk students (e.g. students with disabilities, first generation students, developmental students, etc.). At ONU, a shared approach means that departmental advising would be the standard for advising most students, but key personnel would be recruited to share advising responsibilities for students needing special consideration. Further, findings from the ONU assessment also suggest that all of the key ONU stake-holders would support the adoption of a developmental approach to advising that encourages students to take more responsibility for their own learning and play an active role in the advising process. These findings are consistent with Crookston's (1972) seminal work on academic advising that shifted the onus of responsibility for academic advising from the advisor to the student.

Data from the ONU academic advising assessment also suggested that both undergraduate and graduate students prefer face to face meetings with academic advisors. Graduate students, in particular, wanted more opportunity to meet their academic advisors and interact with them on an individual basis. Going forward, the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies may want to consider building more interactive sessions into the advising process through discussion boards, chat rooms, or Skype sessions.

The development of assessment instruments should include both quantitative and qualitative measures and include both direct and indirect assessment. Assessment instruments should be closely linked to the academic advising mission statement and program outcomes. Academic advising assessment data could be collected through end-of-course evaluations (EOCs) and/or as part of the preregistration process. Findings from the academic advising program assessment measures will be stored in Taskstream, the University repository for assessment data, and assessment data will be a key part of a systematic and cyclical institutional program review cycle.

### **Academic Advising Program Review**

An academic advising program should be subject to program review as per University policy. As noted in the University *Program Review Manual*, the purpose of program review at ONU is to foster academic excellence through the systematic analysis of academic programs. Program review outcomes

should include (a) an authentic and current description of program policies and procedures, (b) evidence of program effectiveness, (c) data relative to program strengths and weaknesses, and (d) recommendations for program improvement. The ONU Program Review Model has a systematic process for managing the program review, engaging stakeholders, determining the program review focus, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data, and using and disseminating program review findings.

The ONU Program Review Model is a three-phase process. Phase one is devoted to managing the review, engaging key stakeholders, and developing the evaluation design for the program review. Phase two includes collecting data and analyzing and interpreting findings. Phase three team members include the Director of Advising, faculty peer reviewers and the Dean of Academic Operations. The Director of Advising will write the program review report and peer reviewers will read and respond to the report. A revised report will be sent to the Dean of Academic Operations who will close the assessment loop with a written action plan for program improvement. The current academic advising program assessment findings will provide benchmark data for the continuous improvement of the academic advising program. The academic advising program will be assessed annually and reviewed again beginning with the Fall 2020 school term.

As noted earlier, since Olivet has not had a systematic or structured academic advising program, it would be prudent for the University to develop a comprehensive academic advising program framed in the context of the CAS Standards in Higher Education. Adherence to the CAS Standards will ensure that the ONU academic advising program (a) is linked to the ONU academic advising mission statement and program outcomes, (b) provides authentic training, incentive and reward for advisors, and (c) systematically assesses and reviews program components for continuous improvement.

### **Conclusion**

Olivet Nazarene University is committed to the continuous improvement of University programs. As an outcome of the last HLC accreditation visit in 2014, it was noted that ONU did not have a systematic approach to academic advising. There was no evidence that the University had ever assessed

academic advising activities or academic advisors; therefore the University designed and implemented a comprehensive assessment of academic advising.

The assessment indicated that Olivet did not in fact have an advising program. Students described their advisors as caring and interested in their academic success. There was considerable variance in how undergraduates, graduate students and academic advisors described the nature and scope of academic advising sessions. Students were generally more satisfied with academic advising activities than were academic advisors.

Several recommendations emerged from the assessment. ONU should hire a Director of Advising whose role would be to develop an academic advising program, framed in the context of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education Guidelines for Academic Advising Programs. A program that follows the CAS Standards would effectively train and resource academic advisors, and encourage students to actively engage in the advising process. The Director of Advising should also develop meaningful advising assessment instruments and systematically collect and post program review information. Comprehensive development and systematic assessment and review of the academic advising program will enhance academic advising efforts and Olivet Nazarene University and result in continuous program improvement.

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## APPENDIX A

### Focus Group Consent Form and Script

#### INVITATION TO A FOCUS GROUP SESSION

February, 2017

Dear Olivetian:

We value your opinion. You are asked to participate in a focus group with other ONU students. **This focus group is scheduled for Friday February 24, 2017 from 10:00 -10:50 in (insert location)** and is intended to get your opinion about the academic advising program at Olivet Nazarene University. Refreshments will be served.

The focus group is part of an overall assessment of academic advising at Olivet. You may email Sue Rattin, [srattin@olivet.edu](mailto:srattin@olivet.edu), any questions you have to help you understand the purpose of the focus group.

Information from all focus group sessions will be held in the strictest confidence. Findings from the focus group will be kept in the Assessment and Learning Support Services office for five years and then destroyed. Refusal to participate in the focus group will have no effect on your future with the University.

Please indicate if you are willing to participate in the focus group and e-mail this form to me as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration.

#### Informed Consent

I \_\_\_\_\_ am willing to participate in the focus group. **I will arrive at the focus group session meeting room no later than 9:55 on Friday February 24, 2017.**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.**



Academic Advising Program Assessment  
Focus Group Questions  
(Facilitators: Please do not depart from the script.)

**Greet students and invite them to have refreshments      (5 minutes)**

**Engagement Questions:              (5 minutes)**

1.      What is your major and how long have you been at Olivet?
2.      Do I have your signed informed consent form? (have forms ready if they forget to bring them)

**Exploration Questions              (30 minutes)**

3.      What was your first experience with academic advising at Olivet?
4.      How satisfied were you with the outcomes (schedule, advice, instructions, etc.) of that first advising encounter?
5.      How sensitive to your particular needs as a (enter nature of focus group: freshmen, developmental students, student athletes, etc.) students?
6.      Did the academic advice you received help you overcome any barriers to your success academic success?
7.      What recommendations would you make for improving the academic advising program at Olivet Nazarene University?

**Exit Questions:                      (10 minutes)**

8.      Is there anything else you would like to say about your academic advising experience at Olivet?

## APPENDIX B

### Traditional Student Consent Form and Questionnaire

#### Informed Consent

Spring 2017

Dear ONU student,

You are asked to participate in an assessment of the academic advising program at Olivet. The assessment is conducted through the Office of Assessment and Learning Support Services. The University requires that you give your consent to participate in this project.

The purpose of the Student Questionnaire is to collect information from you as to how you: (a) describe your advising experiences, (b) evaluate your advisors, (c) indicate how satisfied you are with the academic advising program at Olivet, and (d) comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the advising program at Olivet Nazarene University. If you have any questions about the assessment, e-mail Dr. Sue Rattin, project evaluator, at [srattin@olivet.edu](mailto:srattin@olivet.edu).

You are asked to respond to a series of questions on a questionnaire which should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. There are no known risks to participating in this research. Findings from the Academic Advising Program Assessment will help improve the academic advising program at Olivet Nazarene University.

All participant information will be held in the strictest confidence. Identifying markers such as e-mail addresses and student ID numbers will be removed from the final data set. Findings from the research will be kept in the Assessment and Learning Support Services office for five years and then destroyed. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you choose to participate in the assessment project:

**CLICK HERE TO START THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**PART I DEMOGRAPHICS:** Please indicate the items that describe you.

**Gender:**            Male            Female

**Age:** 18-20 21-24 25 or older

**Status:** full-time residential student full-time commuter student

**Classification:** freshman sophomore junior senior

**Transfer Student:** Yes No

**Ethnicity:** African American/Black Hispanic American/Latino/Hawaain or Pacific Islander

Native American Asian American White/Caucasian

Biracial/Multicultural Other Decline to Answer

**Major:** Please indicate the department/program that oversees your major or course of study.

Art and Digital Media	Communication	Family/Consumer Science	Physical Sciences
Behavioral Science	Computer Science	History/Political Science	Soc.Work/Crim Justice
Biblical Literature	Education	Mathematics	Undecided.
Biological Science	Engineering	Modern Language	
Business	English	Music	
Christian Education	Ex/Sports Science	Nursing	

**PART II ADVISING SESSIONS:** Please describe the advising sessions you participated in this year.

**A. How many group academic advising sessions have you had this academic year?**

none  
one  
two  
three  
four  
five  
more than five

**B. On average, how much time was spent in each group advising session this academic year?**

less than 15 minutes  
15-30 minutes  
31-45 minutes  
46-60 minutes  
more than one hour

**C. How many individual academic advising sessions have you participate in this year?**

none  
one

two  
three  
four  
five  
more than five

**D. On average, how much time was spent in each group advising session this academic year?**

less than 15 minutes  
15-30 minutes  
31-45 minutes  
46-60 minutes  
more than one hour

**C. Please indicate how often you received advice from your advisor this academic year on any of these topics. Advice may have been given in an academic advising session, in person, through a phone call or via e-mail. Please use the following scale to indicate frequency.**

**0 = none**

**1 = 1-2 times**

**2 = 3-4 times**

**3 = 5-6 times**

**4 = 7-8 times**

**5 = more than 8 times**

department or university academic policies	0	1	2	3	4	5
personal values	0	1	2	3	4	5
career goals	0	1	2	3	4	5
possible majors/concentrations	0	1	2	3	4	5
content of courses	0	1	2	3	4	5
transfer credit and policies	0	1	2	3	4	5
career alternatives	0	1	2	3	4	5
financial aid	0	1	2	3	4	5
study skills or study tips	0	1	2	3	4	5
degree/concentration requirements	0	1	2	3	4	5
personal concerns or problems	0	1	2	3	4	5
internships or cooperative education opportunities	0	1	2	3	4	5
course sequencing/prerequisites	0	1	2	3	4	5

study abroad	0	1	2	3	4	5
grades/gpa issues	0	1	2	3	4	5
academic petition or special request	0	1	2	3	4	5
course selection	0	1	2	3	4	5
dropping/adding courses	0	1	2	3	4	5
evaluating academic progress	0	1	2	3	4	5
identifying campus support agencies	0	1	2	3	4	5

**PART III. ACADEMIC ADVISOR EVALUATION:** Using the following Likert-type scale, please indicate the item that describes your academic advisor.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = somewhat disagree
- 4 = somewhat agree
- 5 = agree
- 6 = strongly agree

**My advisor . . .**

was prepared for my appointments	1	2	3	4	5	6
seemed genuinely interested in me	1	2	3	4	5	6
listened to my concerns	1	2	3	4	5	6
provided me with accurate information	1	2	3	4	5	6
referred me to campus resources as needed	1	2	3	4	5	6
was courteous and professional	1	2	3	4	5	6
clearly explained how an advisor can help students succeed	1	2	3	4	5	6
clearly communicated what an advisor can do for me	1	2	3	4	5	6
was helpful in discussing my career plans and goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
followed up on unresolved issues	1	2	3	4	5	6
was a good source for academic advice	1	2	3	4	5	6

**PART IV. SATISFACTION:** Using the following Likert-type scale, please indicate how satisfied you are with the advising program at Olivet Nazarene University.

- 1 = very dissatisfied
- 2 = dissatisfied
- 3 = somewhat dissatisfied
- 4 = somewhat satisfied
- 5 = satisfied

6 = very satisfied

**How satisfied are you with:**

The quality of the academic advice you have received	1	2	3	4	5	6
Information about courses/programs/requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
Information about institutional deadlines	1	2	3	4	5	6
Availability of your academic advisor	1	2	3	4	5	6
Amount of time in each advising session	1	2	3	4	5	6
Accuracy of information from your advisor	1	2	3	4	5	6
Advice for personal issues	1	2	3	4	5	6
Time-management advice	1	2	3	4	5	6
Financial advice	1	2	3	4	5	6

**PART V. COMMENTS:** Please answer each of the following questions.

How would you describe the strengths of the advising program?

How would you describe the weaknesses of the advising program?

What recommendations would you make for improving the advising program?

Adapted from Szymanska, I. (2011). *Best Practices for Evaluating Academic Advising*, doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Used with permission. Permission on file in the office of Assessment and Learning Support Services.

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE ACADEMIC ADVISING PROGRAM STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

## APPENDIX C

### Non-traditional Student Consent Form and Questionnaire

#### Informed Consent

Spring 2017

Dear ONU student,

You are asked to participate in an assessment of the academic support program in the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies at Olivet Nazarene University. The assessment is conducted through the Office of Assessment and Learning Support Services. The University requires that you give your consent to participate in this project.

The purpose of the Graduate Student Questionnaire is to collect information from you as to how you: (a) describe your academic support experiences, (b) evaluate academic support personnel, (c) indicate how satisfied you are with the academic support program at Olivet and (d) comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the academic support program at Olivet Nazarene University. If you have any questions about the assessment, e-mail Dr. Sue Rattin, project evaluator, at [srattin@olivet.edu](mailto:srattin@olivet.edu).

You are asked to respond to a series of questions on a questionnaire which should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. There are no known risks to participating in this research. Findings from the Academic Support Program Assessment will help improve the academic support program at Olivet Nazarene University.

All participant information will be held in the strictest confidence. Identifying markers such as e-mail addresses and student ID numbers will be removed from the final data set. Findings from the research will be kept in the Assessment and Learning Support Services office for five years and then destroyed. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you choose to participate in the assessment project:

**CLICK HERE TO START THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**PART I DEMOGRAPHICS: Please indicate the items that describe you.**

<b>Gender:</b>	Male	Female	
<b>Age:</b>	under 18	18-25	older than 25
<b>Status:</b>	SGCS degree completion	masters degree student	doctoral student
<b>Employment Status:</b>		Full-time	Part-Time
<b>Ethnicity:</b>	African American/Black	Asian American	Hispanic/Latino
	Native American	Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	White/Caucasian
	Biracial/Multicultural	Other	Decline to Answer

**Major: Please indicate the SGCS program that oversees your course of study.**

Accelerated BSN	English as a Second Language
Bilingual Education	Library Information Specialist
Business Administration BA	Ministry BA
Business Administration MA	Ministry MA
Curriculum and Instruction	MSN Education
Criminal Justice	MSN Family Nurse Practitioner
Degree Completion	MSN Leadership
Driver's Education Endorsement	Organizational Leadership
Ed.D. Ethical Leadership	Reading Specialist
Engineering Management	RN-BSN
	Teacher Leader in Education

**PART II ACADEMIC SUPPORT CONTACTS: Please describe the academic support contacts you participated in this year.**

**A. On average, how many academic support contacts (online, over the phone, via e-mail or in person) have you had this academic year?**

none  
one  
two  
three  
four  
five  
more than five



**B. On average, how much time was spent interacting with academic support personnel this academic year?**

none  
less than 15 minutes  
15-30 minutes  
31-45 minutes  
46-60 minutes  
more than one hour

**C. Please indicate the PRIMARY method of interaction with School of Graduate and Continuing Studies (SGCS) personnel.**

Online  
Over the Phone  
Via E-mail  
In Person

**D. Please indicate how often you received advice (online, over the phone, via e-mail, or in person) from academic support personnel this academic year on any of these topics. Please use the following scale to indicate frequency.**

**0 = none**

**1 = 1-2 times**

**2 = 3-4 times**

**3 = 5-6 times**

**4 = 7-8 times**

**5 = more than 8 times**

department or university academic policies	0	1	2	3	4	5
personal values	0	1	2	3	4	5
career goals	0	1	2	3	4	5
possible majors/concentrations	0	1	2	3	4	5
content of courses	0	1	2	3	4	5
transfer credit and policies	0	1	2	3	4	5
career alternatives	0	1	2	3	4	5
financial aid	0	1	2	3	4	5
study skills or study tips	0	1	2	3	4	5
degree/concentration requirements	0	1	2	3	4	5
personal concerns or problems	0	1	2	3	4	5

internships or cooperative education opportunities	0	1	2	3	4	5
course sequencing/prerequisites	0	1	2	3	4	5
study abroad	0	1	2	3	4	5
grades/gpa issues	0	1	2	3	4	5
academic petition or special request	0	1	2	3	4	5
course selection	0	1	2	3	4	5
dropping/adding courses	0	1	2	3	4	5
evaluating academic progress	0	1	2	3	4	5
identifying campus support agencies	0	1	2	3	4	5

**PART III. ACADEMIC SUPPORT PERSONNEL EVALUATION:** Using the following Likert-type scale, please indicate the item that describes your academic support person.

1 = strongly disagree  
2 = disagree  
3 = somewhat disagree  
4 = somewhat agree  
5 = agree  
6 = strongly agree

**My academic support person . . .**

was prepared for my appointments	1	2	3	4	5	6
was genuinely interested in me	1	2	3	4	5	6
listened to my concerns	1	2	3	4	5	6
provided me with accurate information	1	2	3	4	5	6
referred me to campus resources as needed	1	2	3	4	5	6
was courteous and professional	1	2	3	4	5	6
clearly explained how an academic support can help students succeed	1	2	3	4	5	6
clearly communicated what academic support can do for me	1	2	3	4	5	6
was helpful in discussing my career plans and goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
followed up on unresolved issues	1	2	3	4	5	6
was a good source for academic advice	1	2	3	4	5	6

**PART IV. SATISFACTION:** Using the following Likert-type scale, please indicate how satisfied you are with the academic support program at the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies at Olivet Nazarene University.

- 1 = very dissatisfied
- 2 = dissatisfied
- 3 = somewhat dissatisfied
- 4 = somewhat satisfied
- 5 = satisfied
- 6 = very satisfied

**How satisfied are you with:**

The quality of the academic advice you have received	1	2	3	4	5	6
Information about courses/programs/requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
Information about institutional deadlines	1	2	3	4	5	6
Availability of academic support person	1	2	3	4	5	6
Amount of time in each advising support session	1	2	3	4	5	6
Accuracy of information from your academic support person advisor	1	2	3	4	5	6
Advice for personal issues	1	2	3	4	5	6
Time-management advice	1	2	3	4	5	6
Financial advice	1	2	3	4	5	6

**PART V. COMMENTS:** Please answer each of the following questions.

How would you describe the strengths of the academic support program?

How would you describe the weaknesses of the academic support program?

What recommendations would you make for improving the academic support program?

Adapted from Szymanska, I. (2011). *Best Practices for Evaluating Academic Advising*, doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Used with permission. Permission on file in the office of Assessment and Learning Support Services.

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE**

## APPENDIX D

### Academic Advisor Informed Consent and Questionnaire

#### Informed Consent

Spring 2017

Dear Academic Advisor:

You are being asked to participate in a program assessment conducted through the office of Assessment and Learning Support Services. The University requires that you give your agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask Sue Rattin, External Evaluator, any questions you have to help you understand the project. E-mail me at [srattin@olivet.edu](mailto:srattin@olivet.edu) if you have questions. A basic explanation of the program assessment is written below.

The purpose of the Academic Advising Program Assessment Advisor Questionnaire is to collect information from you as to: (a) how you advise your students, (b) how you evaluate yourself as an advisor, (c) how satisfied you are with institutional support for the academic advising program at Olivet Nazarene University, (d) your preference for an academic advising organizational model, and (e) how you feel about the strengths and weaknesses of the ONU academic advising. Findings from the questionnaire will help establish a baseline for the continuous assessment and improvement of the academic advising program at Olivet Nazarene University. Risks associated with responding to this 20 minute questionnaire are minimal.

All participant information will be held in the strictest confidence. Identifying markers such as e-mail addresses will be removed from the final data set. Findings from the survey research will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Assessment and Learning Support Services office and destroyed in May 2020. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

If you agree to participate in this program assessment,

**CLICK HERE TO START THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**PART I DEMOGRAPHICS:** Please indicate the items that describe you.

**Gender:** Male Female

**Status:** Administrator Faculty Staff

**Years of service at ONU:** less than 5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 more than 30

**Rank (Faculty Only)** Instructor Assistant Professor Associate Professor Professor

**Ethnicity:** African American/Black Hispanic American/Latino/Pacific Islander

Native American Asian American White/Caucasian

Biracial/Multicultural Other Decline to Answer

**Departmental Affiliation:** Please indicate the primary ONU department/program that holds your affiliation.

Traditional Undergraduate Programs

Art and Digital Media	Behavioral Science	Biological Science	Business
Communication	Computer Science	Education	Engineering
English/Modern Languages	Exercise/Sports Science	Family/Consumer Science	
History/Political Science	Mathematics	Music	Nursing
Physical Sciences	Social Work/Criminal Justice	Biblical Literature	Theology
Christian Education			

School of Graduate and Continuing Studies

Undergraduate Programs

Graduate Programs

**Number of Advisees:** On average, how many advisees did you advise this year?

Less than 10 10-20 21-40 41-60 61-80 more than 80

**PART II ADVISING SESSIONS:** Did you meet with your advisees as a group? Yes No

If you met with your advisees as a group, how many times did you meet?

None

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

More than five

**On average, how much time was spent in each advising group session?**

Less than 15 minutes  
 15-30 minutes  
 31-45 minutes  
 46-60 minutes  
 More than 60 minutes

**Please indicate how often you advised your advisees on any of these topics this school year. Advice may have been given in a group session, in person, through a phone call or via e-mail. Please use the following scale to indicate frequency.**

**0=none  
 1=1-2 times  
 2= 3-4 times  
 3=5-6 times  
 4=7-8 times  
 5 = more than 8 times**

Department or university academic policies	0	1	2	3	4	5
Personal values	0	1	2	3	4	5
Career goals	0	1	2	3	4	5
Possible majors/concentrations	0	1	2	3	4	5
Content of courses	0	1	2	3	4	5
Transfer credit and policies	0	1	2	3	4	5
Career alternatives	0	1	2	3	4	5
Financial aid	0	1	2	3	4	5
Study skills or study tips	0	1	2	3	4	5
Degree/concentration requirements	0	1	2	3	4	5
Personal concerns or problems	0	1	2	3	4	5
Internships/cooperative education opportunities	0	1	2	3	4	5
Course sequencing/prerequisites	0	1	2	3	4	5
Study abroad	0	1	2	3	4	5
Grades/GPA issues	0	1	2	3	4	5
Academic petition or special request	0	1	2	3	4	5
Course selection	0	1	2	3	4	5

Graduate school requirements/opportunities	0	1	2	3	4	5
Dropping/adding courses	0	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluating academic progress	0	1	2	3	4	5
Identifying campus support agencies	0	1	2	3	4	5

**PART III Academic Advisor Self-Evaluation:** Using the following Likert-type scale, please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement.

1 = strongly disagree  
2 = disagree  
3 = somewhat disagree  
4 = somewhat agree  
5 = agree  
6 = strongly agree

I am prepared for my advising appointments.	0	1	2	3	4	5
I am genuinely interested in my students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
I listen to students' concerns.	0	1	2	3	4	5
I provide students with accurate information.	0	1	2	3	4	5
I refer students to campus resources as needed.	0	1	2	3	4	5
I am courteous and professional.	0	1	2	3	4	5
I clearly explain how an advisor can help students succeed	0	1	2	3	4	5
I help students discuss career plans and goals.	0	1	2	3	4	5
I follow up on unresolved issues.	0	1	2	3	4	5
I am a good source for academic advice.	0	1	2	3	4	5

**PART IV SATISFACTION:** Using the following Likert-type scale, please indicate how satisfied you are with the advising program at Olivet Nazarene University.

1 = very dissatisfied  
2 = dissatisfied  
3 = somewhat dissatisfied  
4 = somewhat satisfied  
5 = satisfied  
6 = very satisfied

**How satisfied are you with institutional/departmental:**

strategies for recruiting academic advisors,	0	1	2	3	4	5
compensation for serving as an academic advisor,	0	1	2	3	4	5
training for academic advisors,	0	1	2	3	4	5
expectations for academic advisors,	0	1	2	3	4	5
processes for assigning advisees	0	1	2	3	4	5
recognition for serving as an academic advisor,	0	1	2	3	4	5
load credit for being an academic advisor,	0	1	2	3	4	5
policies for advising students on general education requirements,	0	1	2	3	4	5
policies for advising majors,	0	1	2	3	4	5
policies for advising minors,	0	1	2	3	4	5
information about institutional deadlines,	0	1	2	3	4	5
information about courses/programs/requirements?	0	1	2	3	4	5

#### **PART V: ACADEMIC ADVISING ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS/ADVISING RESOURCES**

A review of the literature suggested that most colleges and universities utilize one of three academic advising organizational models. The first organizational model is a self-contained centralized structure where all advising occurs in a one location. The second model, a decentralized structure, assigns students to a faculty advisor in the department of their major. In the third shared structure model, departmental faculty advise students in the major and professional staff assist sub-groups of students such as undecided students, freshmen, or at-risk students (e.g. students with disabilities, first generation students, developmental students, etc.).

1. I prefer an academic advising organizational structure that is: (Choose one)

**1. Centralized**

**2. Decentralized**

**3. Shared**

2. I use the following academic advising resources: (check all that apply)

ONU Catalog, major guides, portal, department chair, colleagues, staff in the Registrar's office

#### **PART VI COMMENTS: Please answer each question.**

1. How would you describe the strengths of the current ONU academic advising program?
2. How would you describe the weaknesses of the current ONU academic advising program?
3. What recommendations would you make for improving the current ONU advising program?

Adapted from Szymanska, I. (2011). *Best Practices for Evaluating Academic Advising*, doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Used with permission. Permission available in the Office of Assessment and Learning Support Services at Olivet Nazarene University.