Experiential Learning: Perspectives from Undergraduate Peer-Advisors Pursuing Careers in Higher Education

by

Anika L. Hutchinson

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved February 2017 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Linda C. Caterino, Chair
Andre Brown
Linda Sullivan

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2017

ABSTRACT

The impact of peer-leadership programs on undergraduate students has been studied since the inception of higher education. Programs such as peer-mentoring, peer-counseling, and peer-advising are regularly used within the college environment as there are proven benefits to both student leaders and mentees. However, there is limited content on students who plan to pursue higher education careers and experiential programs that prepare them for the field. Thus, this action research study is designed to examine the influence of a peer-advising program on participants who have identified their interest in various careers in the college setting. Employing a mixed-method approach to inquiry, the study connects Kolb's (2005) Experiential Learning theory, and Chickering's (1964) Vectors of Student Development to a hands-on learning experience designed to improve participants' competency and clarity in their potential career choice. This study was conducted with the purpose of illustrating the role of experiential learning opportunities in higher education, particularly with a unique focus on undergraduate students desiring careers in the higher education field.

Four senior students were positioned as peer-advisors assisting fellow students with academic related matters over one semester as a means of gaining competency and clarity in their pathway toward working in higher education. The results of the study indicate that peer-advising participants attributed program participation to increased career competency and clarity. There were also 64 student-advisee participants who found the program to be beneficial to their overall advising needs, as well as one professional advisor who found the program to be effective in decreasing her advising load during the study. The results of this study align with outcomes of pinnacle research

and scholarship on experiential learning, and support the growing acknowledgment of the importance of applied learning experiences in higher education.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work to my husband, Damon, and my daughter, Mia. Your love, encouragement, patience, and sacrifice have influenced my life in ways that I could have never dreamed. I am so blessed that I get to share my life with you!

I love you very much!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge *all* of my family who support me in all that I do. Danielle and Lennox, thank you for the hugs and laughter that gave me reprieve from three years of writing. Aunt Maranda, thank you for your encouragement and expert advice while I pursued this degree. To my grandparents, Rev. Bernard and Joan Jackson, the "master teachers", you were the first innovators in education that I ever knew and I am proud to be walking in your footsteps. Lastly, to my dear Mom, Tracy, not only are you the smartest person I know, but you are such a shining example of all the good things here on earth. Thank you for giving me the tools to accomplish great things.

I'd like to thank my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Linda Caterino, Dr. Andre Brown, and Dr. Linda Sullivan for guiding me through this project. Additionally, I'd like to thank all of the professors in my doctoral program for your caring advice, suggestions, and overall encouragement toward completing this project.

To my doctoral cohort, this has been the longest three years of my life! I am so glad to know all of you and I'm excited for the work you are doing in education.

To my Father God in Heaven, thank you for your son Jesus Christ who has and continues to cover my life. I stand confident in the plans you have for me. Thank you, Lord.

~Jeremiah 29:11

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Today's college students are exposed to a society that requires considerable social awareness as well as advanced interpersonal, and intercultural skills. Such skills were often taught in a traditional classroom setting; however, student development can occur in a dynamic fashion at various junctures of their lives (Beard, 2006). Contemporary university curriculum is highly interdisciplinary, weaving together a tapestry of contexts such as civic engagement, ethics, leadership, entrepreneurship, responsibility, innovation and global awareness (Caulfield & Woods, 2013).

Historically, university professors have utilized a plethora of active learning techniques to prepare students to enter the workforce through "skill-associated practice" (Ernst, 2013, p. 31); however, postsecondary education relies heavily on conventional teaching methods that lack the development of "palpable skills" (Ernst, 2013, p. 31). Unfortunately, the result of relying solely upon traditional, in-classroom, teaching approaches produces graduates who may be knowledgeable about given contexts, but may also be inexperienced in applying theoretical knowledge in real-life settings. Equally important, employers are becoming increasingly concerned about the preparation and development and of recent college graduates entering professional fields (Clark & White, 2010).

According to Wurdinger and Carlson (2010), students often feel that inspired learning experiences occur through direct involvement in the learning process. Internships, fieldwork, and discussions with teachers and fellow students are examples of active learning techniques that challenge students' ideas about various topics and can be

implemented in real world settings. These events provide "andecdotal evidence, which emphatically supports the notion that students are most excited about learning when they are actively involved in applying information outside of the classroom" (p. 2).

To mitigate this issue, institutions are implementing applied aspects to their curriculum to promote the integration of conceptual knowledge and applied competencies. Developing meaningful learning experiences while maintaining institutional-required learning competencies is challenging, particularly for curriculum developers. Thus, hands-on learning components are popularly infused with traditional curriculum deliverables (Clark & White, 2010), to improve students' critical thinking skills in ways that are not actualized in traditional classroom settings. While research has yet to provide a direct link between experiential learning and degree satisfaction, students, particularly those nearing graduation, desire hands-on learing opportunities where theoretical knowledge can be demonstrated and applied, thus, solidifying the value of their degree. (Caufield, 2013).

Yet, few pre-graduation opportunities exist for undergraduate students pursuing careers in higher education. Generally, such training is the result of graduate education in higher and posecondary education, or through entry-level adminstrative positions in a higher education environment. For these reasons among others, peer-advising and mentoring programs in college settings have increased. Implementing the use of undergraduates as paraprofessionals in this manner greatly benefits the overall university community in a variety of ways (Habley, Bloom & Robbins, 2012).

Situated Context

The study took place at a large public research university in the southwestern region of the United States referred to in this study as Large Southwestern University (LSWU). LSWU maintains an overall student population of nearly 100,000 students on its four ground campuses and in online programs. There is a 1:1 ratio of female to male students on all five campuses combined. Over 55% of the student population identifies as Caucasian, 20% as Hispanic or Latino, nearly 6% as Asian, 5% as African or African American, and 1% as American Indian. Additionally, over 7% of its students enroll as international students, which is a projected area of desired growth in the future. LSWU is classified as a top-tier research university through the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Indiana University, 2015), and it is consistently ranked among the nation's top institutions for innovation, abundant degree options, affordability and access: these qualities are rooted in its philosophy as the New American University (LSWU, 2015). LSWU houses 11 academic colleges offering approximately 400 undergraduate degree programs.

In recent years, several academic departments have reformulated their degree curricula to include an experiential learning requirement. Internships, practicums, capstones, and study-abroad experiences are now commonly viewed as critical requirements of the overall degree. While students readily locate applicable experiences on their own to meet such requirements, academic departments are continually encouraged by the university administration to implement more experiential learning opportunities within their own environments that foster leadership, social responsibility, entrepreneurship, and innovation skills for students.

This research project was conducted in an academic unit of LSWU which will be referred to as The School of Human Studies (SHS) for the purpose of this study. Formerly known as the Anthropology department, the SHS was founded in 2005 and is globally known as a top model for transdisciplinary study in fields that address human problems at local and global levels. This academic unit boasts world-renowned faculty and is comprised of over 60 paleoanthropologists, evolutionary anthropologists, archaeologists, bioarchaeologists, and medical anthropologists who offer students learning opportunities that range from the most traditional to contemporary modes of instruction.

As an assistant director of academic services, my position requires me to manage all student services functions within SHS. We provide advising services to approximately 900 students pursuing degrees in Anthropology, Global Health, and Applied Mathematics. There is a 3:1 ratio of female to male students in the school's population. Over 65% of the student population identify as Caucasian; 22 % as Hispanic or Latino; 6% as Black or African American; 5% as Asian, and 1 % as American Indian. Part of our responsibility as advisors is to connect students with applied learning opportunities to fulfill practicum and internship requirements as well as provide hands-on learning experiences to foster career development.

Personal Connection to the Research

I was considered a non-traditional college student, having transferred from my local community college to the four-year university where I graduated at the age of 32. After twelve years of switching majors and struggling to define my career goals, I realized that I enjoyed being in a college environment and decided to carve out a career

for myself as an administrator in higher education. I received a bachelor's degree in General Studies, and completed a master's degree in higher and postsecondary education. While studying for my master's, I realized that while I was learning theoretical components of higher education administration, I lacked practical knowledge and preparation in the field and that I might struggle to find employment upon graduation.

I secured my first university position as an entry-level customer service representative for graduate programs assisting current and potential students with applications, forms, petitions, dissertation and thesis formatting, and graduation questions. While the work was fulfilling, working only with graduate students limited my understanding of the broader college community. Thus, I pursued a position as an academic advisor advising undergraduate students on various student-services issues such as selecting courses, transferring credits, petitions, graduation requirements, studying abroad and more. While I counseled many students on differing career paths, there were a select number of students who asked me about how they could become academic advisors in the future. I discussed my personal experience with those students and pointed them toward graduate programs to obtain accredited training; however, I often struggled to find suitable transitional experiences that prepared undergraduate students for careers in higher education.

As a student services leader within an academic unit at LSWU overseeing both undergraduate and graduate student support services within a social sciences department. I continue to meet with current students and alumni about potential careers in advising and higher education as college enrollment and the need for practitioners is increasing.

Statement of the Problem

This study addresses the current lack of developmental learning opportunities for undergraduate students pursuing careers in higher education. University practitioners generally enter the field through professorships in a specific discipline, through graduate work in education or in another discipline, or through various staff positions within the university. Thus, this study seeks to examine the development of employable competencies and career clarity in undergraduate students pursuing careers in the college setting.

Intervention

The SHS Peer-Advising Program, based on experiential learning theory, is the intervention used in this study to support developmental and transitional opportunities for students pursuing a career in academia. These students were trained to serve as peer-advisors assisting fellow students with general advising-related questions. Peer-advisors were available to meet with students on a "walk-in" basis without the need to meet with a professional advisor. Assumed benefits of this intervention for peer-advisors is the acquisition of both appropriate knowledge and applied experience in a collegiate setting in preparation for academic careers through the cycle of experiential learning. Students who utilized the peer-advising center, student-advisees, can also benefit from the innovation through positive social and academic interaction with upper-classmen attending the same university and majoring in the same or related degree programs. Providing hands-on learning experiences for undergraduate students is an important component of the overarching college experience (Victor, 2013).

Purpose Statement

Given the powerful benefits that come from experiential learning, it is reasonable to predict that such opportunities will grow among U.S. campuses in a variety of disciplines (Caufield, 2013). Thus, it is imperative that postsecondary institutions equip students with adequate knowledge, skills and experiences to prepare them for various roles in their chosen career fields (Acai, Cowan, Doherty, & Sharma, 2013). This research study was designed to contribute to the growing acknowledgment of the value of practical learning methods; however, its focus on preparing undergraduate students for careers as higher education professionals is novel in this regard. The primary goal of this study was to detail the personal perspectives of peer-advisors and examine their development during program participation. Therefore, this study was conducted within the framework of an active research model in which participants learned, engaged, acted, and reflected in a supportive learning environment to promote the value of experiential learning experiences in higher education. (Victor, 2013).

Research Questions

Using an action research approach, this study seeks to answer three important research questions. The research questions that will guide the conduct of the study are:

1. To what extent does the peer-advising program influence: a) career competency, and b) clarity of career selection in peer-advisors?
2. In what ways do peer-advisors perceive the influence of the peer-advising program on their a) career competency, and b) clarity of career selection?

3. To what extent do student advisees perceive the program as beneficial to their overall advising needs?

Summary

The primary focus of this study is to examine the influence of a peer-advising program on the employable competencies and career development of participants who are pursuing careers in higher education. The secondary focus of this study is to determine the impact peer-advising has on students who seek advice and interaction with peers. Kolb's (2005) theory of Experiential Learning provides insight as to how effective situational learning is achieved in academic and professional settings, while Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Vectors of Development provides the framework with which to examine the peer-advising program's influence on career competencies and career decision-making in peer-advising participants. This study is conducted with the purpose of illustrating the role of experiential learning opportunities in higher education, particularly with a unique focus on undergraduate students desiring careers in the higher education field.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP

The peer-advising program, based on Kolb & Kolb's (2005) Experiential Learning theory and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Vectors of Student Development, was designed to provide an applied learning experience for undergraduate students who have declared an interest in pursuing careers in higher education. Theoretical perspectives and other relevant supporting constructs guiding the research project are presented in the following sections.

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential Learning Theory has been recognized as one of the most notable trends in higher education within the last thirty years (Austin & Rust, 2015). Over these years, the definition of experiential learning has varied. Kolb and Kolb (2005) present the most current adaptation of the concept, and because of this, their definition of this theory provides the foundation for this research study. The work of John Dewey (1944) was a precursor to Kolb's theory. Dewey, a noted educational philosopher, was a proponent of applied learning. Dewey (1944) asserted that experience alone did not construct desirable learning outcomes; rather he defined education as "…reconstruction or reorganization of experience that adds to the meaning of that experience and which increases ability to direct the course of a subsequent experience" (p. 74). Kolb and Kolb offer additional depth into their learning theory through six propositions detailing critical aspects of the learning experience. These propositions include:

1. Learning is better understood as a process, rather than a set of outcomes.

2. All learning is relearning.
3. Resolving conflicts is crucial to the learning process which invokes a new adaptation to the world.
4. Learning is a holistic process of adapting to surroundings and the world.
5. Synergistic interactions between the learner and the environment foster positive learning experiences.
6. Learning is the process of creating knowledge (Austin & Rust, 2015, p. 143).

These propositions illustrate the manner in which Active Learning occurs. Learning is viewed as a process of making meaning out of experiences. The experiential approach to learning creates space for students to solve problems, engage in discourse about the given context, act, and reflect about their learning experience holistically (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

According to Kolb (1984), knowledge results from the interaction between theory and practice. The direct encounter with a particular experience results in active, rather than passive engagement from the student. Theoretically, Kolb asserted four stages of learning that students must undergo in order to complete the learning cycle and experience. They are:

- **Concrete Experience:** where the learner engages in an applied learning experience such as field work or a laboratory session.
- **Reflective Observation:** where the learner spends time reflecting on the Active Learning experience.
- **Abstract Conceptualization:** learners attempt to conceptualize or make meaning out of their learning experience.

- **Active Experimentation:** the stage where learners create a plan of action or try out theoretical models on their own.

Dewey emphasizes critical reflection as an important component of experiential learning. Other authors have defined experiential learning as "the sense-making process of active engagement" (Beard & Wilson, 2006, p. 19), as a "process whereby the learner interacts with the world and integrates new learning into old constructs" (Eyler, 2009, p.1), and as "making knowledge into know-how" (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999, p. 238).

Critics of experiential learning question whether such experiences actually enhance student learning outcomes. Katula and Threnhauser (1999) argue that such experiences are not effective for learning if offered on their own, and assert that some real-life experiences are not connected to theoretical learning competencies as many experiential learning programs lack specified learning goals. Hence, Active Learning experiences must be well integrated into the learning process in order for knowledge to occur. Austin and Rust (2015) state, "It is also possible that some service-learning arrangements are more quid pro quo arrangements rather than opportunities for students to give back to the community" (p. 144). Austin and Rust (2015) discussed how a campus-wide initiative to enhance experiential learning posed many challenges to organizers. In their study, students were placed in five local businesses with strong elements of social consciousness in their company mission statements. Inconsistencies in the curriculum and program structure were found to be looming issues that posed obstacles within program implementation as each business interpreted those elements differently. The curriculum organizers struggled to define the type of activities the program would cover. Some organizers felt that a service-learning format was necessary,

while others desired a more comprehensive approach that included laboratory sessions, study abroad excursions, and applied learning. Additionally, determining how to measure student learning outcomes was challenging. Grading rubrics were not consistent and required lengthy discussions with faculty before a rubric was implemented; consequently program implementation took over five years to complete. While their program proved overall to be unsuccessful due to the lack of solid structural congruence, the authors caution institutions about implementing programs. However, many researchers (Austin, 2015; Caufield & Woods, 2013) still argue that incorporating experiential learning influences overall learning outcomes by impacting student involvement, engagement, retention, and community-building.

Research (Coker, 2010) shows that experiential learning helps students to apply theoretical concepts and improve their reasoning skills. In an empirical study, Coker studied occupational therapy students who were in a week-long, hands-on learning experience. Coker used pre and post-tests to illustrate growth in critical thinking and reasoning skills during their experience. Researchers also looked at the correlation between the learning experience and improved skills, as perceived by the students. Using the *Self-Assessment of Clinical Reflection and Reasoning Test* (Royeen, Mu, Barrett & Luebben, 2001) and *California Critical Thinking Skills Test* (California Academic Press, 1990) as instruments, results showed that students' understanding of these concepts was statistically significantly (p>0.05) upon completion of the program (Coker, 2010). Therefore, their study supports the use of applied learning to develop clinical thinking and reasoning skills in students involved in a healthcare learning program.

In a qualitative study in which students were interviewed about an experiential learning activity in an outdoor literature course, students reported an increase in collaboration skills, creativity, and self-confidence (Victor, 2013). Additionally, experiential learning aligns with LSWU's 2015 institutional goals for enhancing local impact and social embeddedness by providing students with interactive instruction, learning, and discovery opportunities, and by providing spaces where students can create "real-life" solutions to local problems. Applied learning also encompasses the development of interpersonal and intellectual competence as well as clearly defining one's educational purpose. Chickering and Reisser (1993) discuss these concepts and others in their Vectors of Student Development theory.

Vectors of Student Development

College practitoners will inevitably come into contact with students at various stages of development. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of student development are important to an understanding of the student development process, particularly in postsecondary education. The seven vectors include: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. The seven vectors are described as "major highways for journeying toward individualization—the discovery and refinement of one's unique way of being—and also toward communion with other individuals and groups, including the larger national and global society" (p. 35). Advancement through the vectors does not necessarily occur in a consecutive manner; rather, students can develop in several vectors simulataneously.

For the purpose of this study, only two vectors, *developing competence and developing purpose,* are examined as they are most applicable to the participant group and scope of the study. The selected vectors are essential in understanding peer-advisors' development in competencies and clarity in career aspirations through program participation.

Developing competencies. Chickering and Reisser (1993) outlined three components of compentency development that occur during the college experience: *intellectual competence, physical and manual competence, and interpersonal competence*. Intellectual competence focuses on moving beyond rote skills such as passing a test or memorizing concepts, toward the ability to ask questions, reflect, and create meaning from experiences. The second component, and the least applicable to this study, is physical and manual competence. This comprises physical skill development, that is either athletic or artistic, and that provides a foundation toward lifelong health and wellness. The third component, interpersonal competence, focuses on various interpersonal skills such as listening, asking questions, asking for and giving feedback, and engaging in enlightening dialogue.

Developing purpose. While the other vectors focus on self-discovery and identity development, this vector of developing purpose, focuses on future and career asprirations. Chickering and Reisser (1993) describe the sixth vector as, "an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans, and to persist despite obstables" (p. 209). The goal of participation in a peer-advising program is to connect students with an applied experience to help them develop their purpose and intention as future higher education professionals.

According to Shook and Keup (2012), "most student development theories attribute great significance to the process of maturation in interpersonal relationships and the impact of peers in this process" (p. 5). The central purpose of student leadership programs is to provide services and support to fellow students; however, the result of interaction with peers through the development of social and academic behavior often makes student leaders the primary beneficiary of such programs (Shook & Keup, 2012).

An Overview of Peer-Leadership in Higher Education

Ender and Kay (2001) define peer leaders as "students who have been selected and trained to offer educational services to their peers that are intentionally designed to assist in adjustment of their educational goals" (p. 1). There is evidence of peer leadership dating back to the inception of higher education; peer leadership positions were first recorded in the late 1950's, particulary in recording the use of peer leaders in residence halls and in new student orientation (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). Following World War II, university enrollment greatly increased forcing insitutions to serve rapidly growing student populations in a more efficient manner. Administrators saw that experienced students could effectively guide new students in various ways that helped them to adapt to college life. Today, student enrollment and student diversity continue to increase, showing the need for on-going support to "serve a range of student needs and expectations" (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012, p. 18). Along with soaring student enrollment, universities and academic units are continually encountering budget cuts and deciding how to do more with less. Thus, Ganser and Kennedy assert that utilizing students in support roles is not only cost effective, but "meets the developmental needs of both the students in these leadership roles and the students they serve" (p. 18).

Functionality of peer-advisors. Peer-advisors are often put in place to support the needs of low-performing or at-risk students; however, literature asserts the benefits of peer-advising programs with additional student groups as well (Love & Maxam, 2011). While the main aspect of peer-advising is to allow students to function as paraprofessionals providing basic academic support to fellow students, peer-advisors also assume additional roles that support the overall mission of the institution.

Freshman connection. The transition from high school to college has been well documented and acknowledged in social research (Nutt, 2003). Thus, more universities and academic units have implemented peer-mentoring and advising programs as a means of fostering positive relationships between university and undergraduate students who are often nervous about their new environment (Coyne-Foresi, 2015). The availability of peer-advisors and mentors is particularly important for freshman students who may feel anxious about meeting their professional or faculty advisor and may prefer to meet with a fellow student who can better understand their experience. According to Nutt (2003) involvement and retention efforts are often increased when peer-to-peer interaction is promoted among first-year students.

Social connectedness. Peer-advisors are often the first people new students meet whether through a guided tour of the campus, at orientation, or through an informational program. Peer-advisors are an important resource for faculty and staff in making connections with students. Peer-advisors build relationships with fellow students, provide resources, and provide support from an empathetic perspective integrating students in both the academic and social elements of the college experience (Coyne-Foresi, 2015).

Experienced guide. Freshman and transfer students often feel overwhelmed and lost, particularly when enrolling in a new university. Peer-advisors are students who may have already experienced those feelings, have learned to navigate the university environment and are able share their knowledge with fellow students (Tinto, 1983; Webb, Dantzler & Hardy, 2014).

Peer-advisors are also important in coordinating student-centered events offering new methods of connecting with students in ways that faculty and staff are not able to. Peer-advisors should be visible to fellow students through formal and informal social interaction illustrating that they can be a trusted source of support and leadership for students at various junctures in their college experience (Rieske, 2015).

Peer-to-Peer Learning Model

The college experience is not only about providing discipline-specific curriculum for students, it is also purposed to prepare students for professional positions after graduation. According to O'Brien, Freund, Jantzi, and Sinanan (2014), one key to professional development is socialization. Socialization in an educational setting involves obtaining the knowledge, techniques, values, and skills required to enter and advance within a given profession (Kuh, 2009). Specifically, "it comprises role acquisition and professional development; committing to a profession, developing a professional identity and recognizing the responsibility one has as a member of the profession" (O'Brien et al., 2014, p. 324). Melrose, Miller, Gordon, and Janzen (2012) relate socialization with legitimization as a professional in a given field. Such interaction with others grants students a level of confidence in acquiring new professional skills, thus bolstering their ability to view themselves as valuable professionals in their given context.

O'Brien, et al. (2014) conducted a study in which students were positioned as peer-tutors assisting fellow students with utilizing research tools within the university library. They sought to learn how and to what extent professional socialization occurred in the study's participants. At the conclusion of the study, researchers found that students learned about the limitations of their abilities and skills, learned to negotiate their role as tutors within the greater university community by providing guidance rather than definitive answers to questioning peers, realized that students are often reluctant to ask for help, and found that coaxing is often needed during a tutoring session (O'Brien et al., 2014). The study conducted by O'Brien et al., demonstrates a level of positive interaction between peers that may not occur between professional advisors and students (Coyne-Foresi, 2015), thereby supporting the rationale for this study. Such skills which align with experiential learning and constructivist approaches to learning in non-traditional studies provide the framework for this research study.

College Students and Career Development

Previous research has focused on career exploration of college students, particularly examining reasons why students often find difficulty in selecting a major. For this reason, many institutions currently offer courses to introduce students to career options for their major (Fouad, Ghosh, Chang, Figueiredo & Bachhuber, 2016). Recently, the construct of occupational engagement has gained popularity in career exploration courses as it engages students in behavioral components in career decision-making (Krieshok, Black & McKay, 2009). Helping students begin to adapt to their potential career environment, being engaged in unpredictable situations and using

problem-solving skills spontaneously are significant to the career adaptation process, according to Walsh, Savickas, and Hartung (2013).

In a research study conducted by Fouad et al. (2016), researchers administered a pre and post-experience survey to 57 college students enrolled in a career exploration course. Constructs embedded in the survey instrument included confidence, control, concern, curiosity, self-crystallization, occupational exploration, career decision making, skilling/instrumentation, and transition from school-to-work. Researchers conducted paired *t*-test analyses on the data finding that the career exploration course had a statistically significant impact on occupational exploration, training and instrumentation, and career decision-making; all of these elements were presented as experiential elements of the course. The Fouad et al. study results strongly connect to this action research study through the applied elements of their career exploration course which illustrate the necessity of experiential learning in college student career exploration.

Academic Advising and Approaches in Practice

In an effort to produce quality graduates, colleges and universities draw upon the services of academic advisors as a comprehensive resource to aid students in their collegiate endeavors. Assigned to the student upon their admittance to the institution, an academic advisor is hailed as the ultimate resource for students armed with knowledge on topics related to student success, financial support, academic policies, career planning, and graduate or professional education (Love & Maxam, 2011). According to Nutt (2003), institutions must understand the value of academic advising by stating,

> Academic advising is the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students. For this reason, academic advising…should

> be viewed as the 'hub of the wheel' and not just one of the various isolated services provided for students. Academic advisors provide students with a needed connection to the various campus services. Additionally, academic advisors offer students the personal connection to the institution that is vital to student retention and success (p. 18).

The practice of academic advising can be traced back to the founding of the American postsecondary education at Harvard College in 1636 when all students were advised and enrolled by the college president (Love & Maxam, 2011). Over time, changes in curriculum, funding, faculty and student population influenced the practice of advising in various ways. In 1972, Crookston introduced the concept of *Developmental Advising*, an approach to academic advising that focuses on the holistic needs of the student, emphasizing the various stages in the student's development. Therefore, academic advising has become a complex practice in which a comprehensive approach, analysis, and delivery of service is required to adequately engage, inform, and guide students through their collegiate experience. Another model, *Appreciative Advising* has emerged within the last ten years proving to be beneficial for academic advisors and their students (He & Huston, 2016). Appreciative advising broadens the developmental advising approach by matching student's strengths, interests, and developmental opportunities with school resources. Derived from the concept of appreciative inquiry, developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in 1986, appreciative advising requires advisors to ask open-ended questions to engage students in a thoughtful and purposeful dialogue to maximize students' potential by helping them expand their opportunities and meeting their educational expectations (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008).

In 1979, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was formed to establish, educate, and advance the profession of advising, and unifying members in their craft (Daly & Sidell, 2013). Since NACADA's inception, the advising practice has expanded from a prescriptive approach, which involves prescribing specific courses and tasks to be completed with little input from the student, toward developmental advising in which advisors take a counseling approach to curriculum and success-related issues "with the purpose of aiding students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through accessing the full range of institutional and community resources" (Daly & Sidell, 2013, p. 38). Peer-advising aligns with national and institutional advising goals in that it provides academic and social interaction in a manner that fosters student involvement in both appreciative and developmental ways (Nutt, 2003).

Overview of Advising Models

Advising service is delivered in a variety of ways. Faculty members, professional advisors, counselors, or other student services professionals can provide advising for students in varying contexts.

Faculty advising. Faculty advisors are professors who provide advising for students, particularly in their area of research and specialty. Faculty advise students on course selection, degree requirements, research opportunities, internships, graduate education, and career pathways. Many colleges and universities implement faculty advising to increase student-faculty engagement (Astin, 1999). When students and faculty advisors connect, students are given support from faculty members who are extremely knowledgeable about research, theory and practice in the student's major enabling students to learn more about their interests in ways that are not actualized through

traditional advising (Love & Maxam, 2011). While faculty advising is beneficial, there are drawbacks to this model. Faculty members can be busy with research, teaching, publishing, and other institutional and academic responsibilities leaving very little time for advising, training, or working with students individually.

Professional advising. The most common type of advising is provided by professional advisors who are positioned to support students academically in various academic disciplines (Love & Maxam, 2011). Professional advisors hold bachelor's degrees in a variety of disciplines and are trained to provide advising and support services to undergraduate students. Many other professional advisors hold graduate degrees in higher education, student services, higher education administration, or a degree that corresponds to the discipline for which they advise. Professional advisors are educated in student development and adult learning theories to support students academically with their transition from high school through graduate and professional school (Nutt, 2003). Professional advisors have various job duties that include assisting students with degree requirements, course selection, transfer credit, placement testing, institution policies/procedures, enrollment/registration, and university petitions. They also provide detailed information on housing, dining, career services, tuition, scholarships, financial aid, transportation, counseling, healthcare, study abroad, internships, graduate education and more (Love & Maxam, 2011). With access to higher education increasing, professional advisors experience heavy student loads and are often required to perform additional service functions such as serve on university committees, and collaborate on curriculum initiatives with faculty; thus, students may experience challenges with

advising needs such as decreased appointment availability, or delayed email communication with their advisor.

Peer-advising. Peer-advising has gained popularity within the last two decades and positions have typically been filled by graduate students; however, undergraduate students have also served as peer-advisors. Griffin, DiFulvio, and Gerber (2015) describe peer-advisors as junior or senior level college students who undergo training to provide basic advising functions to fellow undergraduate students, particularly when students are unable to reach their professional advisor. Peer-advising can take place in classroom buildings, in residence halls, in the library or in student recreation centers; They can be placed anywhere so that they are easily accessible to other students. Griffin et al. (2015) assert that peer-advising provides students with positive engagement, mentorship opportunities, and increased communication skills. Through a qualitative study conducted at the University of Massachusetts--Amherst (UMass), Griffen et al. (2015) examined the influence of a newly implemented peer-advising program in the School of Public Health. Nine qualified students were recruited and trained by department advisors in preparation for their first semester as peer-advisors. Students were positioned to assist students with course selection, degree requirements, internship opportunities, university policies, clubs/organizations, and even social issues such as concerns about residence halls or issues with a roommate. Specific methods used to conduct this study were archival records from the peer-advising center that detailed the frequency of student appointments and reflection papers from peer-advisors who completed a year-long internship, and a survey conducted with students who utilized the peer-advising center; specifically, 573 students utilized peer-advising services. Results from this study showed that the most

common reasons for advising were to help with their course schedules, to apply to a specific major, and to answer general questions about career information. In their reflection papers submitted at the end of their experience, peer-advisors identified many themes such as increased time management, improved communication skills, and feeling more confident with themselves indicating personal and professional development as a result of participating in the experience. Satisfaction survey results from students who utilized peer-advising services showed a mean score of 3.8 on a 5.0 scale with scores of four being very good and scores of five being excellent. Such scores showed that students were moderately satisfied with their advising experience; however, the researchers felt that more investigation was needed to truly understand the factors that make peer-advising beneficial to advisees (Griffin, DiFulvio, & Gerber, 2015).

Benefits of Peer-Advising Programs to University, Faculty & Academic Departments

Sufficient research has illustrated the success of peer-interaction, particularly with high school and freshman students making their transition into the university environment (Coyne-Foresi, 2015). However, peer-advising can also be beneficial for overall retention, involvement, and integration efforts within the university.

Student involvement. Student involvement represents the time and effort students put into activities, both inside and outside of the classroom, that enhance institutional learning outcomes (Kuh, 2009). Higher education institutions are highly responsible for providing opportunities to foster student learning in ways that transform traditional learning outcomes into tangible skills that can be applied in work settings. Such pressure on universities is partly in response to public and corporate entities

desiring more accountability within the higher education system to produce qualified graduates who are capable of working in several sectors (Kazmi, 2010). Student involvement has its roots in student development theory which examines how students learn and develop their identity through their college experience (Kazmi, 2010). Alexander Astin, one of the most respected student involvement theorists, posed his theory out of frustration with traditional pedagogical methods of teaching, also known as "black box" approaches (Astin, 2010, p. 2). Black box models assert that the correct combination of inputs (subject matter and support) within the learning environment will assuredly produce desired outputs (student involvement and development). Researchers have criticized this approach for its lack of student action and responsibility in the learning process. Astin (1999) opposes such teaching methods by suggesting that students learn through being involved in their learning experience, particularly through the "physical and psychological energy the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1999, p. 518). Astin's theory is also applied to the inputs and outputs model. Inputs include students' pre-existing characteristics that are brought to college, such as academic achievement and social skills; outputs detail what the student leaves college with, including resources, knowledge, new-found values, beliefs and a new world-view. All these characteristics are developed through involved learning (Kazmi, 2010). Through this experiential learning opportunity peer-advisors are able to associate positive inputs and outputs as a result of participating in the program as outlined by Astin (1999).

Student integration. Students attend college for various reasons. Many earn a degree as a step toward responsible adulthood, while others attend in order to find gainful employment. However, research indicates that students often do not finish their college

degree for similar reasons; one such reason is the lack of integration into the higher education environment. Integration is defined in various ways, but is traditionally defined as a *sense of belonging*, or a *feeling of acceptance* within the university (Webb, Dantzler, & Hardy, 2014).

Notable higher education theorist and strategist, Vincent Tinto (1975; 1982; 1988; 1997) posits that students are more likely to complete their degree program if they are integrated socially and academically within the institution. Students who become integrated into an institution through participation in clubs/organizations, academic activities, mentorship programs, and athletic organizations "are more likely to persist than those who remain on the periphery" (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2011, p. 71). Furthermore, Tinto (1997) asserts that student success initiatives must incorporate a combination of formal and informal interactions in order for students to fully integrate into the university.

Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2011) present a case of peer interaction through a research study conducted on factors of integration on college campuses. Researchers interviewed college students entering their second semester at two urban Northeastern colleges that enroll significant numbers of minority and economically disadvantaged students. The researchers selected students who had completed one semester at the instituion, but were not enrolled for a second semester to identify reasons why students did not re-enroll. Twenty-six out of the 31 students who participated in an interview indicated that they felt properly integrated into the institution primarily due to solid information sharing between peers. Specifically, they reported that "knowing people to say hello to in the hallways did not strongly influence students' sense of belonging;

however, knowing people through whom one could learn about professors, course options, or support services did" (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, p. 78). Their findings strongly support peer interaction and information networks, such as peer-advising, as a critical means toward successful student integration within an institution.

Summary and Implications for the Project

Several areas of literature have been explored in this chapter, specifically the history and purpose of academic advising, the impact of professional and peer-advising, student involvement and integration, peer-to-peer learning models, and experiential learning theory. Each construct pertains to the subsequent research study in different ways.

Higher education curriculum delivery has evolved in the past several decades (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). From the introduction to the "global campus", online degrees, massive online open courses (MOOCs), credits based on prior experience, to capstones, senior theses and applied projects, practitioners have been made aware of the impact of hands-on-learning experiences in the overall college experience. Experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) describes the transformative nature of contextual problem solving in educational settings. Students who learn through applied experiences not only learn valuable professional skills in order to excel at a particular task, but often experience a level of self-efficacy and confidence in ways that traditional classroom learning may not provide (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Additionally, content on academic advising practice provides the context in which this study took place, but also describes the close, and often intimate relationship between students and advisors which provides grounds for why peer-advisors are considered valuable. Finally, content on student

involvement (Astin, 1999), student integration (Tinto, 1975; 1983; 1988; 1997), and peer-to-peer learning models (O'Brien et al., 2014) provide the basis for the use of peer interaction and its impact on student acculturation, transition, success, and satisfaction within higher education settings.

Taken together, the theoretical perspectives and related research formed the basis of this project. In this study, students who desire a career in higher education, whether as an advisor, executive administrator, or professor, are afforded a first-hand experience in working with the very sort of students they will eventually serve in a professional capacity. The opportunity to engage in critical thinking, the use of problem-solving skills, and self-reflection may inform or disconfirm their continued interest in their chosen field. The peer-advising program may provide a solid and inventive method to assist students moving toward practical careers in an academic environment. Finally, this intervention may illustrate a sustainable and economical solution to the expansion of academic advising units. Adding students in this manner as paraprofessionals reduces the need to finance additional professional staff and can be sustained each semester with new students.

It is my expectation that the results of this study will influence the greater university community, not only through its humanistic approach to inquiry, but through the real accounts of students who participated in this experiential learning experience. The ultimate purpose of this action is that actual students who took part in an applied experience within the university setting, are truly able to make a difference in the educational support systems and to validate experiential learning opportunities as a benefit to the overall undergraduate learning experience.

Chapter 3

METHOD

The following section describes the participants, data collection instruments, and the strategies for data analysis used in a research study.

Research Design

Using an action-research approach, the researcher employed a sequential mixed-method research design in which both qualitative and quantitative measures were administered and analyzed. According to Stringer (2013), action research creates an opportunity for the researcher to focus on a problem of practice, develop a strategy for inquiry, and make assertions that lead to solving the problem in order to improve practice. Employing a mixed-method approach to inquiry allows for the integration of the data to present a comprehensive analysis of the problem in order to inform the solution.

Participants

There were three participant groups in this study: peer-advisors, a professional advisor, and student-advisees. Peer-advisors (n = 4) comprised the primary participant group for this study and were senior level (with over 86 credits completed) students majoring in Anthropology, Global Health, or Applied Mathematics for the Life & Social Sciences. The average age of the peer-advisor participants was 23 years old. All applicants for the peer-advising program were White females; thus, the peer-advisors selected for the program were White females. Creswell, Hanson, Plano and Morales (2007) assert that no more than three participants is sufficient for narrative inquiry. The researcher, in this study, selected four peer-advisors to account for attrition of one;

however, all four peer-advisors completed the experience and participated in all data collection purposive samples.

Table 1 displays demographic information about peer-advisors who participated in this study. Appendix A presents personal profiles submitted by each peer-advisor.

Table 1

Description of Peer-Advisors

Pseudo Name	**Age**	**Major**	**Career Goal**
Cindy	23	Anthropology	Research Professor
Dawn	24	Global Health	Education Administrator
Terry	22	Global Health	Higher Education Administrator
Maxine	25	Anthropology	Professor or Museum Curator

There was one professional advisor, referred to as "Michelle", who participated in this study and was instrumental in selecting, training, and managing peer-advisors for the program. Michelle has been working as a professional advisor in SHS for five years, but has been employed by SHS for nearly ten years. She is 34 years old and received both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from LSWU. The researcher is currently her supervisor.

Student-advisees, students who attended advising sessions during the study, comprised the secondary participant group. A total of 67 student advisees met with a peer-advisor during the study; however, only 54 consented to participate in the study. Advisees were students of all class standings and ethnicities with majors or minors in identical or similar disciplines as peer-advisors. The average age of student advisees was 20 years of age. Table 2 contains demographic information on advisees who participated in the study.

Table 2

Demographic Data on Student Advisees

Demographic Profile	**Number of Respondents**	**Percentage of Respondents**
Gender		
Male	21	38%
Female	33	61%
Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	4%
Asian	5	9%
Black/African American	6	11%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	2%
Hispanic/Latino	12	22%
White	25	46%
Declined to answer	2	4%
Academic Year		
Freshman	12	22%
Sophomore	18	33%
Junior	12	22%
Senior	6	11%
Unknown	6	11%
Academic Major		
Applied Math	5	9%
Anthropology	19	35%
Global Health	23	42%
Other	7	13%

Other majors represented: Biology=2; Nutrition, Women's Studies, Art History, Art = 1

Instruments

There were seven data sources used in this study. Qualitative instruments were two eJournal entries, an interview conducted with each peer-advisors, and an interview

conducted with one professional advisor. Quantitative instruments included a pre- and post-experience survey conducted with peer-advisors, and a satisfaction exit survey conducted with student advisees at the conclusion of each advising session.

Pre- and Post-Experience Surveys. The researcher conducted a pre-experience survey at the beginning and the end of the peer-advising program with the peer-advisor participants. The surveys which were identical, contained 40 items and were designed using a combination of multiple choice questions, and four-point Likert-scale with response options of *4 = strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = disagree*, and *1 = strongly disagree.*

Both surveys, developed by the researcher, and conducted online, collected responses from the peer-advisors on the following constructs: a) professional competencies, b) certainty and knowledge acquisition, and c) networking and professional behavior. The survey items were selected through several previous research cycles and reviewed by doctoral colleagues at LSWU. A sample question pertaining to professional competencies was, *"I am able to apply and correlate information I've learned in class with work or extra-curricular activities"*. A sample question included in the certainty and knowledge acquisition construct was, *"I am able to identify my strengths, abilities, values, and character traits knowing how these impact my career choices".* To examine networking and professional behavior, one multiple-choice item instructed respondents to:

> Select the best answer that describes the ways in which you have sought information your potential career choice: a) I have spoken with few professionals about my career choice; b) I have limited access or exposure to professionals in

my career field; c) I am familiar with professionals in my career field, but have not spoken with them about my plans; or d) I am not sure of my career choice at this time.

Prior to administering the surveys, the researcher had two academic colleagues review the survey to ensure that survey items were appropriately aligned with survey constructs. Both colleagues were current professors within fellow social science departments at SHS; each professor had over ten years of research and teaching experience. The survey items and categories were reviewed with a 97% rate of agreement. The complete set of pre- and post-experience survey items can be found in Appendix B.

Reflection eJournals. Peer-advisors submitted two electronic journal entries, one during the middle of the study and another at the conclusion of the study. Journal entries were designed to allow peer-advisors to express their thoughts on competency and clarity development at the middle and the end of their experience. The researcher set up the eJournals online through the use of Blackboard, a virtual classroom platform. Students were asked to identify any new or improved competencies, to discuss barriers that may impact development, and to identify support mechanisms that could reduce potential barriers in development. A sample writing prompt instructed respondents to: *Discuss any encounters, events, or experiences that have been most influential in clarifying your potential career goals. How can you use those experiences to create and apply meaning in your pathway toward higher education?* Writing prompts for each eJournal entry are presented in Appendix C.

Peer-advisor Interviews. The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with each peer-advisor at the conclusion of the experience. In the audio-recorded interview, participants were asked to revisit their initial interest in higher education and to determine if their interest was influenced by their experience as a peer-advisor. A sample question, "*How did this experience enlighten you?"* allowed participants to reflect and comment on their experience while identifying significant experiences. Additionally, peer-advisors were asked to focus on the benefits and challenges of being a peer-advisor as well as the way in which they overcame any challenges. Finally, peer-advisors discussed any impact the program had on their potential career choice: *"How did working with 'real live' students impact you? Do you think you would have felt the same way if you didn't get the chance to personally experience advising?"* The interviews were designed to relate data from pre and post-experience surveys as well as eJournal entries. The list of interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

Professional Advisor Interview. The researcher interviewed a professional advisor at the conclusion of the study. The interview was used to determine the overall perception of the program from the perspective of professional advisors in the department. The semi-structured interview consisted of ten questions to better understand the influence of the program on peer-advisors, advisees, and on a professional advisor. A sample question was, *"Have peer-advisors made a difference in your advising load? If so, how?"* which helped the researcher to understand the program's impact on the department. Another question, *"Do you feel this is an effective way of preparing undergraduate students to work in higher education? In what ways?"* allowed the

professional advisor to discuss the program's influence on peer-advisors and helped to answer the research questions. A complete list of interview items is listed in Appendix E.

Student-advisee Satisfaction Survey. Each student-advisee completed an anonymous electronic survey at the conclusion of his or her session with a peer-advisor. Electronic exit surveys were conducted for the entire duration of the research study. The survey was constructed to determine the level of satisfaction of students who utilized peer-advising services. At the conclusion of each peer-advising session, advisees were asked to complete a brief survey about their session on a tablet computer before leaving the advising center. The survey inquired about advisees' demographics, their major, their year in college, and the primary reason for their visit. The survey questions were in both multiple choice and open-ended formats. Additionally, nine six-point Likert-scale items were listed to determine the advisees' level of agreement with statements about their advising experience. Survey items such as, *"Peer-advising is an effective alternative to meeting with my assigned advisor"*, and "*I feel more comfortable talking with a peer-advisor than with my regular advisor or a professor"*, helped the researcher determine if respondents found peer-advising services to be beneficial to their needs. A complete list of survey items is listed in Appendix F.

Procedure

The researcher submitted an application to the university's Internal Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct the study. The application contained information about the background and objectives of the research study, as well as information on participants, recruitment, procedures and any potential risks to the participants. The IRB approved the

research study in January of 2016. A copy of the IRB approval document is presented in Appendix G.

In February 2016, the researcher sent out an email to approximately 750 undergraduate students with majors in SHS discussing the peer-advising pilot program and providing them with instructions to apply. Appendix H contains the recruitment email that was sent to students. The applications were received and reviewed by professional advisors within SHS. The interviews took place prior to gaining participant consent; therefore, no interviews during the selection process were recorded or transcribed and were not included in data collection phases. The main criteria for selection was based on a grade point average of 3.0 or higher, declaring a major in SHS, and intent to pursue a career in higher education. Each of the participants not only met the criteria for participation, but he or she appeared to understand the value of advising in the college experience, and were able to articulate exactly how peer-advising would advance them toward their goals. Four participants were selected by professional advisors within SHS to be peer-advisors for the following fall semester and were enrolled in an internship course which granted them three academic credits for completing the program. Each peer-advisor submitted a signed consent form to participate in the program.

Peer-advisor training took place in July 2016. The researcher, in collaboration with professional advisors, designed a comprehensive training program which was contained in-person activities, as well as supplemental instruction modules posted online through the Blackboard© virtual classroom platform.

Peer-advisors participated in two four-hour long workshops where professional advisors presented on various advising topics such as understanding degree requirements, reading students' major maps and degree audit reports, internship opportunities, study abroad options, tutoring and counseling services, and areas of faculty specialization. These workshop topics were determined by the professional advisor. Additionally, each peer-advisor clocked ten hours of shadowing experience in which they sat in on approximately 24 actual advising sessions conducted by professional advisors in SHS and in the other social science departments within the university and participated in mock advising sessions with professional advisors within SHS and in two additional Social Science departments at the university.

The online platform contained approximately ten hours of supplemental materials for peer-advisors to complete on their own time such as FERPA training and certification, twelve advising-related case scenarios, materials on career services, clubs and organizations, videos on students in distress and other advising scenarios. A sample advising scenario was, *"You have a student who is a junior in Biology and is interested in finding out what he/she would have to do to get a Global Health degree. Explain the steps you would take to help the student determine if this is a feasible option"*. Another advising scenario was, *"You meet with a student who is doing poorly in one of their courses. What options do you give the student?"* Once peer-advisors completed all online modules, they consented to participate in the research study and selected their weekly peer-advising hours for the semester. Data was not collected during the training period as participant consent occurred after all training modules were completed by peer-advisors.

Appendix I provides a description of each training module used to prepare peer-advisors for participation in this study.

In August 2016, the researcher distributed the research study consent form to each peer-advisor, as well as the professional advisor. The consent document provided information about the nature and rationale of the research study, as well as information on the data collection instruments used in the study. Each peer-advisor consented to participate in the study by signing and submitting the consent document to the researcher. It was explained to students that they could still participate in the peer-advising program even if they chose not to sign the informed consent form and participate in the study or if they chose to discontinue study participation. A copy of the consent document is provided in Appendix J. Next, the researcher conducted the pre-experience survey with peer-advisors to determine their initial level of competency and clarity in their career selection prior to the start of their experience. The electronic survey was distributed through Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Additionally, the researcher provided a laptop computer in the peer-advising center for students who came in for peer-advising sessions to complete a brief exit survey immediately after their advising. The laptop computer was accessible for advisees for the duration of the study. Student advisees were prompted to consent to participation in the study prior to submitting an electronic survey.

In October and December 2016, peer-advisors submitted two separate electronic journal entries through the Blackboard virtual learning system to reflect on and discuss their experience at the middle and end of the semester. After the second journal entry was received, the researcher conducted the post-experience survey with peer-advisors to examine any changes in career competency and clarity in their professional pathway. In

mid-December 2016, the researcher conducted a semi-structured, in-person interview with each peer-advisor to discuss their experience and to gain a deeper understanding of their development through the peer-advising program. Finally, the researcher interviewed the professional advisor in late-December to discuss her perception of the peer-advising experience, and to evaluate the overall benefit of the program to the advising department.

All data obtained from this study was saved on a password protected laptop computer which was accessible from the researcher's home and private campus office. To maintain confidentiality, peer-advisors were asked to create a unique identifier to be associated with all of their responses. This allowed the researcher to keep each peer-advisor's pre and post-survey responses, eJournal entries, and interview transcript organized in order to compare responses during the research study. Each peer-advising participant was then assigned a pseudonym by the researcher to be used in the following chapters. Additionally, the name of the university where the study was conducted was also changed to protect confidentiality of the institution and the participants. Each peer-advisor participant consented to participate by signing a consent form prior to the start of the study. The consent form detailed information about the study, assured that participants could decide not to participate at any time during the study, and provided contact information for both the researcher and principal investigator in the event that any participant had any questions or concerns.

Validity, Reliability and Transferability

To ensure validity of the research study, the researcher conducted member checks with each participant to determine if the interpretations and conclusions made by the researcher were consistent with the participants' responses. Peer-advisors were given a

copy of their interview and eJournal transcriptions to review in order to confirm the researcher's conclusions aligned with their opinions about the peer-advising program. In addition to being given a pseudonym, any information that would identify participants has been omitted from the research findings and discussion.

There were three potential threats to validity in this study. The first threat involves the selection of peer-advisors. Participant selection was based on a high grade point average, frequent participation in extracurricular activities, and career interest in higher education. Participants who met these criteria are typically considered to be high-achievers and may find value in all learning experiences, whether or not objectives were met which may affect the data. The second threat to validity was the Hawthorne Effect. Popularized by researcher Henry Landsberger in 1950, the Hawthorne Effect refers to the tendency of some participants to perform better due to the attention they receive from researchers which may distort the findings. The researcher in this study serves as the Assistant Director of Academic Services and manages advising services within the department. The researcher may have previously advised students who are selected to participate in the peer-advising program; thus, participants may have felt obligated to perceive the innovation favorably due to familiarity with the researcher and advising staff which may have misconstrued the data. To maximize validity in this regard, the researcher used independent professional advisors to interview and select candidates for this study. Additionally, independent advisors were the principal trainers and facilitators of the peer-advising program which allowed the researcher to focus only on data collection methods, therefore minimizing the potential for the effect. The third potential threat was that the professional advisor was supervised by the researcher and may have

viewed the peer-advising program favorably as a way of pleasing the researcher. To mitigate this effect, the researcher explained that the professional advisor's job performance or professional relationship with the researcher would not be impacted by the results of the study. This information was also detailed in the consent document.

The researcher secured a fellow doctoral student in the Ed.D. program to independently code qualitative data comparing those themes to the themes found by the researcher.

Transferability was particularly challenging in this study due to the small number of primary participants. Brooks (2015) asserts that results in qualitative studies are unique to the small number of participants, and it is often difficult to replicate the study with the same results within a different population. However, the researcher, in this study, has provided detailed information on the phenomenon to be studied along with the methodological procedures so that other researchers may be able to compare and contrast their findings with this data analysis plan.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the results used to determine the influence of the peer-advising program on undergraduate students who have declared an interest in pursuing careers in higher education, the impact of the peer-advising program on a professional advisor, and student advisees who met with peer-advisors during the research study. The data are arranged by research question with both quantitative and qualitative data presented.

The researcher employed three quantitative instruments in this research study to better understand the development of participants in relation to three predetermined constructs derived from the literature and to effectively answer the guiding research questions. Quantitative measures included a pre- and post-experience survey conducted with peer-advisors, and a satisfaction exit survey conducted with student advisees. To gain a deeper understanding of survey responses, the researcher also employed two qualitative measures which included a collection of eJournal entries submitted by peer-advisors, a semi-structured interview conducted with each peer-advisor, followed by an interview with a professional advisor.

These measures were used to effectively analyze the ways in which peer-advisors were influenced while participating in the peer-advising program. To analyze each of the qualitative sources, the researcher employed Strauss & Corbin's (2008) open-coding system to categorize emerging themes from the data and to correlate those themes with research questions. The total word count for eJournal entries, and interview transcription

was 17,907. The combined time duration for the interviews was one hour and 11 minutes with a mean time of 17.75 minutes for each session.

Employing an open-coding method, the researcher was able to break down and delineate concepts by assigning codes to each predetermined theme found in the peer-advisor's responses as part of the refining process (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Initially, twenty codes were assigned to concepts found in all of the qualitative data sources which included: technical skills, decision-making, problem-solving, goal-setting, giving/receiving feedback, articulating problems and solutions, creating meaning from experiences, identifying strengths/weaknesses, self-efficacy, visualizing oneself in future career, acknowledging self-image, acknowledging personal values, identifying transferrable skills, networking with professionals/faculty in selected career choice, identifying professional development opportunities, advanced education opportunities, plans to pursue career selection, influential life experiences, benefits and challenges of peer-advising, and enlightenments through experience.

The initial codes were then grouped into the final codes: employable competency development, clarity and knowledge in career selection, and networking and professional behavior. When themes emerged that were not necessarily applicable, they were coded and grouped as additional findings as they still supported the overarching significance of the research study. Appendix K presents a codebook which includes initial codes, larger themes, and assertions as they relate to the data from peer-advisors' qualitative responses. Inter-coder reliability, as outlined by Holsti (1969), was determined through the formula PA = 2A (n1 + n2) in which P is the proportion of agreement observed, A is the number of agreements observed between coders, and n1 and n2 are the total number of items

coded by each coder. Holsti asserts that a reliability of .90 or greater is acceptable. The inter-reliability of qualitative coding this study was .91.

The researcher also conducted a semi-structured interview with Michelle, the professional advisor, to evaluate the overall impact of the peer-advising program on the department. Open-coding was also used to discover qualitative themes in this interview, as well as the assertions Michelle made which were used to support responses given by the peer-advisors and the overall significance of the research study. The initial codes included: knowledge of the profession, knowledge of practical skills, improving confidence, improving interpersonal skills, increased options for students, and improving advising load/workflow. Those initial codes were grouped in the final codes which were employable competency development, clarity and knowledge in career selection, and impact on departmental advising function. A codebook including initial codes, final codes, and assertions is listed in Appendix L. The researcher also used the word enumerator website, Tagul.com, to enter the responses given by the peer-advisors to create visual image of the qualitative data.

Overall, the results from the pre- and post-experience surveys illustrate significant increases in all three constructs, as reported by participants. Table 3 compares pre- and post-experience survey results from the peer advisors. It shows that participants tended to agree or strongly agree, on average, with statements in the post-survey indicating improvement in employable competencies, certainty and knowledge, as well as professional behavior. Although the mean score for every construct increased, the standard deviations remained quite low which indicates a low variance in responses; however, due to the small number of participants, any outlying response can create large

variation in the data. Both pre- and post-tests obtained a 100% response rate (n = 4). Due to small number of participants only descriptive statistics could be employed.

Table 3

Peer-Advisor Pre- and Post-Experience Survey Results by Construct

	Pre-Survey		**Post-Survey**	
Construct	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
Employable Competencies	3.1	.421	3.5	.370
Certainty/Knowledge Acquisition	2.8	.500	3.6	.316
Networking/ Professional Behavior	2.5	.645	3.4	.518

Responses: strongly agree = 4; agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1; (n = 4)

Results in Relation to Research Questions

Data from qualitative and quantitative sources was integrated to effectively answer each guiding research question.

RQ 1: To what extent does the peer-advising program influence a) career competency, and b) clarity of career selection in peer-advisors? Data from post-experience surveys indicates that participants acquired new skills and began to understand the competencies needed for a career in higher education. Post-experience survey results show an average score of 3.5 and a low standard deviation of .37 for the construct pertaining to employable competencies. Such data indicates that peer-advisors perceived an increase in skills and competencies needed for a career in a professional setting. For example, when participants were asked to select their level of agreement with

the following statement, *"I welcome constructive criticism as an opportunity for personal and professional growth"*, 50% of respondents agreed while 50% strongly agreed with the statement. In another statement, "*I can articulate problems and solutions easily to others",* 25% of respondents agreed while 75% strongly agreed with the statement.

In regard to peer-advisors' clarity in career selection, the results show an increase in survey constructs that aligned with this research question. Pertaining to the construct of certainty and knowledge acquisition, a post-survey mean score of 3.6 and a standard deviation of .32 indicates that peer-advisors attributed their participation in the program to confirming their career selection, as well as additional experiences needed to reach their career goals of working in higher education. In a multiple-choice question, participants were asked to select the most appropriate answer to the statement, *"After completing this experience, I have outlined a plan to obtain practical experience for positions in higher education."* The results were split evenly with 50% of respondents selecting, *"Yes, I am very certain about my plan to gain the practical experience I need for positions in higher education",* and 50% selecting, *"Yes, I am pretty certain about my plan to gain the practical experience I need for positions in higher education."* Pertaining to the survey item, "*This experience has helped me visualize myself in my career choice"*, again, 50% of peer-advisors selected, *"Yes, this experience exposed me to a few aspects about my career choice"*, 25% selected, *"I am fairly certain of what my professional life will look like when I advance in my career of choice"*, and 25% selected, *"I am completely certain of what my professional life will look like when I advance in my career of choice."*

RQ 2: How do peer-advisors describe the influence of the peer-advising program on their a) career competency, and b) clarity of career selection? Data

collected from eJournal entries and semi-structured interviews show that peer-advisors directly attributed the acquisition of new skills and competencies to participation in the program. In the interview, participants were asked, *"What are some new skills or competencies that you've acquired through this experience?"* Such responses included, "I've improved my problem-solving skills tremendously. The walk-in appointment format required me to think quickly when I had a student in front of me waiting for information", and, "I can say I've learned a lot about the structure of the university through this experience. There are so many departments and levels of authority here; it is very complex." The eJournal entries also asked students to discuss new competencies learned through the experience. Several responses discussed the improvement of communication skills, problem-solving, and critical-thinking skills. The words "communication and communication skills" were stated 17 times and the term "critical thinking" was stated 12 times. One participant began to understand the reality of working in higher education. She stated,

> Mostly I've come to realize that colleges are like businesses, at least now they are. Parents used to send their kids to college to just to expand their learning, but now it's all about getting a job and getting good results from going to college. Basically, college is a product, students and parents are the consumers, and our experience is supposed to get us something tangible, you know. I understand why innovation and entrepreneurship in education is a big deal because students want to get the best return on their degree and money spent as possible. I never thought of that before.

Participants also indicated that they found clarity in their career pathway through the experience. During the interview, participants were asked, "Why was this program

important to your pathway toward a career in academia?" Responses focused on the need to determine the right career choice, and to resolve curiosity about working with college students. One participant responded, "I always knew I wanted to work in a college setting... both of my parents did, but I just wanted to know how I'd fare with college students myself." Another participant stated, "I'm planning to go to graduate school for this, which is a big commitment. I just want to make sure this is still the best choice for me." In an eJournal entry, one participant discussed the importance of being a peer-advisor in her career aspirations. She wrote:

> I already know that I want to be an advisor, this was like a trial-run for me. I got to actually talk to students and recommend things to them which was really cool. This just confirmed that this is the right fit for me. I'm excited about going to graduate school, because I know I'll learn more about the historical and theoretical side of education which is also important. I don't' know if I would still feel the same about grad school and even just pursuing a career in the university if I hadn't had this opportunity.

Responses given by Michelle, the professional advisor, supported statements made by peer-advisors and demonstrated the influence on peer-advisors' competency. When asked, "In what ways did peer-advisors develop personally, academically, or professionally during this experience?", Michelle responded, "I see them getting more confident as the weeks go on…they are more assertive and are not afraid to be definitive in the information they share with students." She also added, "I'm not sure how they've grown academically, but I definitely see some areas where they can apply their skills to

their next job…problem-solving is half the battle when working with students, and they are doing that well".

RQ 3: To what extent do student-advisees perceive peer-advising as beneficial to their advising needs?" To effectively answer research question 3, a four-point Likert scale exit survey was conducted with student-advisees who utilized peer-advising services during the study. Sign-in sheets collected from peer-advisors show that 67 student-advisees came in for advising, but only 54 consented to participate in the study and to complete the survey with a 100% response rate. The researcher, and professional colleagues assisting in data analyses, considered four items to be indicative of student advisees' level of satisfaction with the peer-advising services. Table 4 presents survey questions along with the mean and standard deviation of responses that were critical in answering RQ3.

Table 4

Student Advisee Exit Survey Results with Mean and Standard Deviation

Survey Item	Item	M	SD
10.1	I am satisfied with the level service I received from my peer-advisor today.	5.0	.614
10.5	Peer-advising is an effective alternative to meeting with my assigned advisor.	4.7	.793
10.6	I feel more comfortable talking with a peer-advisor than with my regular advisor or a professor.	4.2	.805
10.7	I am open to meeting with a peer-advisor in the future.	4.87	.841

Likert-scale response options: strongly agree=6; agree=5; slightly agree=4; slightly disagree=3; disagree=2; strongly disagree=1; (n= 4)

The average response to the statement (M = 5.0), *"I am satisfied with the level of service I received from my peer-advisor today.,"* shows that respondents tended to agree with this statement. The standard deviation (*SD*=.61) shows a moderate variance in responses. Another question, *"Peer-advising is an effective alternative to meeting with my assigned advisor"* showed an average response of 4.7 and a standard deviation of .61 indicating that respondents tended to Agree or Slightly Agree with the statement and again, displayed high deviation in collected responses. Additionally, respondents tended to Agree or Slightly Agree with the statement, *"I feel more comfortable talking with a peer-advisor than with my regular advisor or a professor"* and, *"I am open to meeting with a peer-advisor in the future*" which may indicate that advisees perceived the peer-advising program as beneficial to their advising needs.

Quantitative results were supported by Michelle's statements from her interview. She was asked, "Have you received any feedback from students who have used peer-advising services? If so, what were some other comments?", to which responded,

> The comments have been pretty positive, so far. I think students appreciate having another option to get help…we get really backed up, at times. A few students have mentioned they met with a peer-advisor, but it wasn't really helpful because peer-advisors have little access to student records. So, it's evident that the peer-advisors were mostly helpful, but they didn't meet all of the needs for our students, which was a slight concern.

Additional Findings

Life experiences that impacted career selection. The importance of life influences and experiences was particularly evident within qualitative data. Peer-advisors

often spoke of teachers, parents, coaches, or other persons who made a difference in their educational experience which led them toward a career in academia. Peer-advisors spoke about the importance of life experiences in all aspects of their college education and easily connected those past experiences to their experience as peer-advisors. Specifically, when answering the eJournal prompt, *"What life experiences or influences led you to pursue a career in higher education?"* students emphasized both positive and negative influences or experiences that peaked their interest in this area. An example was Cindy's response which seemed to reflect other peer-advisors' sentiments, "My parents encouraged me to study whatever I wanted, but they've talked to me about being a professor in anthropology because it's hard to find work with just a BA degree in that subject." Dawn spoke about her admiration of previous teachers, "All of my teachers from kindergarten to college have been awesome. I realize how much they've impacted me, and I want to make the same impact on others."

While many positive life influences were shared, both Terry and Maxine talked about experiencing very little support when transitioning to college which attracted them to a higher education career. Deidra spoke about the difficulty in transferring from a different college, "I was really overwhelmed when I came to [this school]. I guess people figured that I knew everything since I had already been in college before. I just want to help other students like me out." Sandra responded openly about challenges with advising,

> I didn't really try to use my advisor at first, I figured I'd just take the courses I wanted to take that would count, but now that I've gotten close to graduating, I realize how much I really need the help of my advisor. Even things like looking

> for a job, or prepping for 'grad school' are conversations I should been having with my advisor. I've been meeting with her more and more, so now I am really fascinated by all that she does. I think that could be a niche for me, too.

Additionally, several responses in the interview were found to connect life experiences with research questions "*In what ways did program participation influence the purpose of peer-advisors pursuing careers in higher education?"* Maxine described participation in the peer-advising program as a way of supporting students in ways she wanted to be supported. She stated,

> Transferring was so hard, and I thought about quitting a few times, but now I realize that I can bring a different perspective to advising through my own experience. I think my personal story will help many students who may be struggling with the same issue. That's why I wanted to try this [peer-advising] out. I think it has really put a lot of things into perspective for me. I'm happy with my career options now.

Terry, an aspiring professor, asserted that she began to see the ways in which professors intimidate students and seemed to draw purpose from her experience. She states,

> Several students I've met with worry about speaking with their professors about grades and assignments…I guess they are too intimidated to speak with them. I always encourage the students I meet with to talk with their professors or at least go to their office hours for help. Professors like to hear from students, and most of the time they are willing to help. This has made me really think about the kind of professor I want to be, or at least the type of demeanor I want to have around my

> students. I want them to feel they can come to me for help…my purpose is to see them be successful with the course material.

Cheryl, planning to pursue a career in university administration, was intrigued by the amount of political intricacies of running a university as result of program participation. She explained,

> This experience has really shown me how much of the decisions in the university are made at a very high level. Corporations, political influences, as well as taxpayers decide how the university will run. I'd really like to put my energy and brain into that sector if I can.

The selected examples indicate that students were able to connect their program experience with their career purpose. Although peer-advisors had previously selected their desired careers prior to becoming a peer-advisor, it was clear that the peer-advising experience allowed them to see additional aspects of the university system and confirm their interest in pursuing an academic career.

Enlightenments through hand hands-on experience. The crux of the research project was to examine the influence of the peer-advising program on participants who are pursuing careers in higher education; thus, collecting information on any enlightenments experienced by the peer-advisors through experiential learning was essential. Merriam-Webster.com (2016) defines enlightenment as, "The action of enlightening or a state of understanding, wisdom, and learning", which connects to responses that related to the overarching questions of the research study. All of the peer-advisors expressed that they learned new competencies, and understood more about higher education in general. The one-on-one interview conducted with each peer-advisor

yielded data on enlightenment gained through the experience particularly when they were asked, *"How did this experience enlighten you?"*. Dawn spoke about her new-found knowledge of advising students of diverse backgrounds,

> I've met so many types of students through this experience. I had two advising sessions with international students and those were really rough, but interesting. One student came from China and there was a really strong language barrier. I couldn't imagine going to college, especially like this one, in a foreign country. There were so many things that he didn't understand. I talked to him about going to the registrar's office for something and it was totally lost him. I never understood what international students must go through when they come here. That made me more sympathetic to those students.

Terry shared that she was enlightened by learning about the intricacies of curriculum and scheduling each semester. She stated,

> Being a peer-advisor, I learned a lot about classes and scheduling that I never knew. I sat with one of the advisors as she was scheduling a last minute class to put in the schedule. I never realized that classes have to be 'built' in the system, a class number has to be assigned, a professor has to be assigned, then of course there's books and also the class has to be scheduled in a class[room] that meets the needs of the instructor…it's a lot. I can see that several people have to collaborate in order to get one class taught.

Cindy explained that she had learned more about herself than anything else during her peer-advising experience, "I don't really like to talk to people as much as I thought.

I'm okay doing a presentation, but talking with students one-on-one was tough for me. I have a hard time breaking out of my shell."

Peer-advisors were indeed asked during the interview, *"*What have you learned about yourself through this experience?" All advisors seemed to interpret the question in similar ways by discussing their new-found strengths and weakness, and identifying areas of improvement in their professional lives.

Cindy continued, "I've learned that I am really an introvert. I don't get nervous or weird around people, but I realize that I do need space and time for myself each day; I feel burned out otherwise."

Dawn stated, "I'm not the best communicator and I know that. That's one of the reasons I wanted to do this because I wanted to do better with that. I am doing better, but I can still use some work in that area."

Terry continued to speak about enlightenments by talking about the realities of working in higher education in a society that views college education in a different way. She stated,

> I realize that traditional book learning, and class lectures are great for just exposing you to different concepts and theories. But, being able to apply that material in regular life, like we did here, is really impactful. Basically, learning about the practice of higher education is one thing; actually working in a college setting is a different thing.

Additionally, peer-advisors agreed on the importance of hands-on-learning in the pathway toward their career goal(s) in higher education. During the interview, peer-advisors were asked, *"How did working with 'real live' students impact you? Do you*

think you would have felt the same way if you didn't get the chance to personally experience advising?" Their responses indicated that the opportunity to work with students in a real-life setting positively influenced them. For example, Dawn stated,

> Well, since I already know that I want to be an advisor, this was like a trial-run for me. I got to actually talk to a student and recommend things to them which was really cool. This just confirmed that this is the right fit for me. I'm excited about going to graduate school, because I know I'll learn more about the historical and theoretical side of education which is also important. I don't know if I would still feel the same about grad school and even just pursuing a career in the university I hadn't had this opportunity.

Cindy shared, "Getting to do this [peer-advising] helped me see things from a different perspective. Advising is like teaching in a way; I was able [to] make some connections to that. I probably wouldn't have seen it that way if I didn't do this." Terry shared the same sentiment stating, "I am such a kinesthetic learner--- there is no way I would have learned a lot of this stuff by just reading or working my way up to this somehow."

The sampled responses indicate that peer-advisors perceived the experiential learning opportunity as an important aspect of their learning and future career pathway. Statements about learning style, changing perspectives and confirming their career pathway illustrate their collective agreement in the necessity of experiential opportunities that connect students with their career path while in college.

Benefits/challenges of peer-advising. Peer-advisors discussed several benefits and challenges of peer-advising in all qualitative measures. However, participants

identified specific benefits acquired directly through participation, while identifying challenges that were apparent in both their advising sessions and within the academic unit. Collecting data on the benefits and challenges of this experience was not only critical in understanding participants' perceptions, but also in examining the overall effectiveness of the peer-advising program to make an argument for its continuance in the future. When participants were asked, *"What are the benefits of peer-advising?"* during the interview, they shared a variety of responses. One peer-advisor responded, "Communication. I find that I articulate things better since I've had to explain things to students." Another stated, "I guess I can say that my problem-solving skills have improved. At first, I counted on getting help with answers I didn't know, but now I can figure things out on my own."

Two peer-advisors used the word "rewarding" while discussing the benefits of peer-advising during the focus group and the interview. Terry stated,

> Just the single fact of knowing that I helped someone is really rewarding for [me]. Having a student come in and be completely overwhelmed or upset and then me calming them down and helping them out, is a great feeling. It always takes me back to when I first started school; things were difficult for me. I really think other students should give this program a try, especially if they think they want to work in higher ed. I even think it can be beneficial for students who want to pursue counseling, psychology, social work and maybe even elementary education.

Additionally, students shared challenges they faced as peer-advisors in the program. While many of the statements were related to their actual advising

appointments, some statements were directed toward the academic unit and helping students better understand what areas peer-advisors could be of assistance. During the interview, peer-advisors were asked, *"What are the challenges of peer-advising?"* Some of the responses were, "It was really hard getting the students to talk at times. They seemed like they wanted help, but they didn't really know what to say or what to ask." Another response was, "I had trouble remembering all of the degree requirements at times, especially for programs outside of this department. I ran into that a few times and it was difficult for me and the student." During the group discussion, Cindy discussed issues she had with how peer-advisors were advertised and the need for available support during peer-advising hours from professional advisors in the unit; other peer-advisors verbally agreed with her statement as well. Cindy shared,

> I know that the [professional] advisors did a good job advertising about us; I saw all of the mailers that went out to students about the program, but I think some students were really be disappointed that we as peer-advisors couldn't make changes to their student information or anything like that. I had a few students who wanted to change their major or add a minor, and I had to let them know I couldn't help them. For those students, it was a waste of time for them to come. Maybe the department should send something that tells students what exactly a peer-advisor is, and how they can help them.

Terry shared additional challenges in advising students with little supervision at times, "There were times when I needed help with a student, but none of the [professional] advisors were around or, they were with other students. That was hard because I couldn't help some students, in that case."

There were strong commonalities in response to questions on the benefits and challenges of participating in the program from peer-advisors. Statements about improved communication and problem-solving skills indicate the positive influence of the program. Challenges that were found included the need for more training on different techniques to help students articulate their needs and the need for more departmental support during advising hours and in clarifying the usefulness of peer-advisors.

Statements by Michelle, the professional advisor, demonstrated the benefits and challenges of peer-advising in relation to the academic department. She stated, "The biggest benefit is that we were able to expand our team creating a tiered approach to advising. Most importantly, we did it with virtually no cost to us, so our budget stayed intact." She added, "I think we need to do some additional work to ensure that students understand the functionality of peer-advisors so that they can direct their concerns to the right people in the future."

Summary of Results

Results from the qualitative and quantitative data demonstrate the overall influence of the peer-advising program on participants. Recall, the goal of the study was to examine the influence of a peer-advising program on future higher education practitioners through the lens of experiential learning theory.

The qualitative data collected from the eJournals, and semi-structured interviews with both the peer-advisors, and the professional advisor, indicate that the peer-advising program was positively influential on the career purpose, preparation, and guided pathway of peer-advisors. Responses clearly show that participants gained new perspectives on higher education practice, improved communication, and problem-

solving skills, and the participants stated that after the completion of the program they had a clearer understanding of the pathways and opportunities toward their goal in higher education. Additionally, the results also demonstrate the continued need and value of hands-on learning experience for college students prior to graduation.

Figure 1 presents a visual analysis of qualitative data through the use of word enumeration. Qualitative statements were entered into the online enumerating platform, Tagul.com, to illustrate the most common words found in the eJournals and interviews. The larger words in the figure represent words and phrases with high levels of frequency in the data.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Frequently Used Words and Phrases in Qualitative Data

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings, lessons learned through the action research process, implications for practice and research, and closing thoughts on the research study.

Complementarity of the Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Results from the qualitative and quantitative data demonstrate integration and complementarity providing a comprehensive interpretation of the results found in this study (Herr, 2015). The qualitative and quantitative data are complementary in several areas. First, pre- and post-survey scores pertaining to the construct of competency development reflect influences on the peer-advising program found in the qualitative data. Peer-advisors consistently identified improved communication and problem-solving skills as a result of program participation. Additional findings, particularly those centered on learning more about the university structure, and the complex relationship between advisors and students support positive quantitative results.

Next, peer-advisors' scores on the pre- and post-surveys demonstrated the impact of the program on participants' certainty and knowledge about their selected career pathway. Quantitative data showed that students were leaning toward a career in higher education prior to the start of the program, while qualitative data from the interviews and eJournal entries showed a direct relationship between the experience and confirmed career selection. Additionally, peer-advisors detailed future plans to pursue additional internships and graduate school programs for advancement toward their career goal as a result of participation.

According to the pre- and post-surveys scores, peer-advisors began to engage in networking and professional behaviors at the conclusion of the experience. Participants agreed that the experience influenced them to contact professors and other staff professional to learn more about their selected careers, as well as the steps required to reach their goals. This is complementary to qualitative responses that pertain to peer-advisors engaging with professors and staff in a manner they would not have considered prior to participating in the program. For example, two participants discussed conversations with professors about research and teaching pedagogy while participating in the program. Another participant was offered a teaching assistant position for a future class after briefly speaking with a professor who inquired about peer-advising services.

Finally, scores on the satisfaction exit survey conducted with student advisees show that the program was indeed beneficial to their advising needs. Quantitative data showed that advisees were satisfied with peer-advising services overall. Additionally, survey scores showed that advisees felt slightly more comfortable speaking with a peer-advisor than with their professional advisor and all respondents were open to meeting with a peer-advisor in the future. This supports qualitative responses in which peer-advisors described meeting with professional advisors and professors as intimidating asserting the importance of peer support during the college experience.

Taken together, the qualitative and quantitative data are quite complementary. The qualitative data provided depth to the quantitative results which allowed the researcher to better understand the impact of the peer-advising program.

Results in Relation to Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984) and two Vectors of Student Development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) shaped this research study. As previously discussed, Experiential Learning requires the learner to apply abstract concepts to active situations; therefore, knowledge is created by experience (Kolb, 2004). As noted in the literature review, there are four components of the cycle of Experiential Learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Although learners can enter the cycle at various stages, according to Kolb, effective learning occurs once all four stages have been completed. In this research study, peer-advising participants were guided through the cycle of experiential learning in order to evaluate the influence of a hands-on learning program on their potential career choice.

First, participants were engaged in observation through shadowing professional advisors and student services professionals, and reflected on the concepts they learned through journal entries and reflections. Next they began experimenting through case studies and mock advising sessions. Finally, participants obtained concrete experience through several weeks of conducting active advising sessions with fellow-students. Thus, it was imperative that data collection instruments were designed to address and influence participants through the experimental learning cycle. Responses given in the eJournal entries and the interview indicated that peer-advisors directly attributed influence on both competency and clarity development to the experimental aspect of the program. Such outcomes are consistent with the Coker (2010) study in which occupational therapy students reported increased critical thinking and reasoning skills through a similar peer-

advising program. The significant correlation between the learning experience and improved skills supports the importance of hands-on learning experiences in higher education. Additionally, the results of this study supports Victor's (2013) research by demonstrating the ways in which students consistently related their experience as peer-advisors to increased competency and career clarity, as well as gaining a better understanding of course objectives through an applied learning experience.

Chickering's (1969) Vectors of Student Development provided an additional theoretical foundation for the research study. The vectors refer to the phases of development undergraduate students experience during their collegiate experience. As previously mentioned, only two vectors—developing competence and developing purpose—were most applicable to the scope and participant group used in this study. According to Chickering (1969), competency development occurs when students begin to socialize personally and professionally with individuals who are connected to their long-term goals or interests. Peer-advisors exhibited competence development through reported increased ability to meet new people and to engage in intellectual conversation with higher education practitioners. Additionally, purpose development is believed to occur when students clarify their career and life goals and begin to make progress toward those goals. Peer-advisors demonstrated purpose development through eJournal and interview responses in which all participants indicated an increase in career clarity and purpose through the experience. Two participants felt the peer-advising experience helped to confirm their career plans, while the remaining two discussed a slight shift in job position, but felt the experience reaffirmed their desire to work in higher education, in general.

Constructs focused on the value of peer-leadership, as well as student involvement and integration related to supporting scholarship used in this research study. Participants consistently attributed their experience as peer-advisors to identifying their leadership strengths and capabilities and cited the experience of supporting fellow students with various issues as rewarding. Not only did peer-advisors attribute positive interaction with fellow-students in their growth, student-advisees reported the opportunity to regularly speak with an experienced peer as the aspect of the program they appreciated most. Additionally, the rationale for the use of peer-advising in college settings was validated through the responses from student advisees who found the program to be beneficial to their needs. Such responses align with the O'Brien et. al (2014) study in which students discussed the positive interactions between peers that do not always occur between professional advisors and students.

Lessons Learned Through the Action Research Process

There were two major lessons learned through the action research process. First, the project may have benefited from a phenomenological approach to the research in order to closely examine changes in competency and career clarity development as such changes occurred, rather than examining the influence of the intervention at sporadic moments during the research. To accomplish this, the researcher could have considered a research design that included a daily or weekly journal to be completed by peer-advisors detailing phenomena as they occur. Perhaps, the use of a video diary would have proven to be beneficial to allow participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences without the confinement of writing prompts and specific word counts.

The second lesson learned involves the complexity of conducting an action research project, particularly qualitative-focused projects. The amount of time, skill, and effort required to analyze and interpret qualitative data and integrate such data with quantitative measures can be quite challenging. The use of qualitative software is critical to organizing large amounts of textual data, but challenges lie in determining how to apply data to research questions and theoretical frameworks. If given the opportunity to redo the research, the researcher would have used a quantitative approach using qualitative measures to support findings rather than using them equally, as in this case.

Along with peer-advisor and student-advisee participants, the researcher was also influenced through the action research process. As a result of the research process, the researcher is now able to identify problems in education practice, propose a practical solution to the problem, employ existing theoretical foundations to support the solution, engage in scholarly inquiry, and analyze results and findings in order to initiate change in an educational context.

Limitations

Five significant limitations may be found in this research study: a) the small sample size, b) the brevity of the research study, c) the physical location of the peer-advising center, d) the exclusion of online students, and e) the lack of diversity of the peer-advisors. The project consisted of a purposive sample of four peer-advisors as participants in the research study. Although the small sample size is ideal and effective for this particular action research study, it is not generalizable to other settings and populations. The entire research study was limited to 16 weeks to align with the standard academic semester. The outcomes of the research study may be different if participants

are able to participate over a longer period of time or if they are able to work with a larger number of advisees during the experience. Peer-advisors only worked with student advisees for 14 weeks. An increased study duration may allow the participants more time to recognize concerns or issues with their advising style giving them ample time to correct or improve their student interaction, if necessary. The physical location of the peer-advising center proved to be a problem for students seeking peer-advising services. The peer-advising center was located in an empty lab space at the rear of the building which was difficult to find. Ensuring visibility of the advising center, as well as demonstrating a student-centric environment is essential to the program's success. Additionally, more clarification about the peer-advisors' capabilities and limitations was necessary. Peer-advisors often met with advisees for matters that could only be resolved through a professional advisor.

Finally, due to the lack of online video conferencing tools, online students were not able to meet with peer-advisors during this study. Recent research focused on online students often highlights the unique needs and challenges of online students (Rieske, 2015) and the complex techniques advisors must use to assist these students academically. The opportunity to include online students in this project may have provided additional depth to the development of the peer-advisors who participated in this study, as well as informed the research about the effectiveness of the intervention with online college students.

Implications for Practice

The intervention posed in this action research study influenced the participants and the academic unit in significant ways. First, undergraduate students were granted the

opportunity to try out their potential career choice while pursuing their studies. Unlike traditional internship or practicum programs that generally limit students to peripheral positions within the company or institution, the peer-advising program trained students to do an entry-level job that served a specific purpose within the department. Additionally, the academic unit, which was struggling to manage an ever-increasing advising load, was provided an economical method of expanding advising services within the unit. The professional advisor indicated that the program helped to relieve their advising loads and provided students with an additional advising resource. Based on the comments of both the peer-advisors, the professional advisor, as well as exit survey responses from student advisees, the intervention is a sustainable method of serving both students and academic services and should continue in the future.

Implications for Future Research

While this research study has contributed to the wealth of knowledge regarding the influence of undergraduate peer-advisors pursuing careers in higher education, there are additional areas of research that could provide greater understanding of student development in this regard. One possible area for future research could be focused on different types of advising programs, such as career counseling, or student athletics advising. It is possible that similar outcomes may occur; examining student interactions that are not based on academics may lead participants to pursue careers in those areas as well. Another possible area for future research could be to design a study to examine the influence of a virtual peer-advising program on both peer-advisors and undergraduate students enrolled in an online degree program may present another area for research. Collecting data on the unique challenges and needs of online students and how peer-

advisors adapt their skills for online advising may present variances in outcome regarding career choice and competency.

Closing Words

Reflecting on the influence of the peer-advising program on undergraduate students pursuing careers in higher education, I am reminded of a quote by one participant on the purpose of higher education, "…college is not just about getting a job, but it is to prepare the minds of students to see, learn, and do things in various ways." Dawn's quote eloquently captures the purpose, mission, and goal of this research study. Although participants may ultimately select other careers as they move forward in life, this experience was one that focused on providing a practical learning opportunity and obtaining clarity toward the next steps in their educational and professional experience.

Incorporating practical learning experiences to prepare students for productive roles in society is not a new concept; however, encouraging students to evaluate themselves, as well as their competencies and career clarity development, is an area of research that requires more attention, particularly for students who want to explore career options in higher education. This iteration of the peer-advising program produced favorable results for both participant groups, and it is through this positive outcome, the program will continue within the SHS academic unit in the future.

Overall, the findings of the SHS peer-advising program indicate that peer-advisors experienced increased competency and clarity as they pursue careers in higher education. Through hands-on experiential learning, peer-advisors became knowledgeable and confident about their career options while obtaining concrete experience to ground future endeavors.

As I reflect on this research study as a higher education practitioner, this experience reminds me that my road to leadership has not been clear or free from challenges. However, I realize that any success I have obtained has been the result of small, impactful experiences along the way that prepared me to make an impact in my profession and in the community I serve. I am confident that an applied experience, such as the peer-advising program, would have helped me to develop necessary practical skills earlier in my career exploration. Therefore, I will continue to promote learning opportunities where students can engage in self-actualization, create significant relationships, and obtain practical and theoretical knowledge that will aid in their personal and professional goals.

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APPENDIX A

PEER-ADVISOR PROFILE INFORMATION PUBLISHED ON SCHOOL WEBSITE

Name: Cindy

Year: Senior

Age:22

Major: Anthropology

Why did you choose to major in Anthropology?

I'm really interested in why people are the way they are, evolutionarily and culturally. Anthropology seemed like the perfect fit to pursue that interest.

What are your career plans?

That's a good question! I love paleoanthropology and archaeology and want to keep studying both for a long time. I also love public outreach and science education, so I'm hoping to do a lot of all of these things in the years to come. As far as my next step goes, I'm headed to grad school, and will be a professor in the future.

What is your favorite thing about SHS?

My favorite thing about SHS is our tight-knit community. Between professors who have invested in both my academic success and personal wellbeing, fellow undergrads who flintknap, study, and eat pizza with me, and graduate students who go out of their way to help me, SHS has given me a network of people who seem to move mountains in order to help me be both happy and successful.

What is something you wish you knew when you were new to LSWU?

I wish I had known right off the bat to talk to upperclassmen. I learned in my freshman year how much help they could be in navigating this completely new world. They might seem kind of remote from where you are now, but they remember what it's like to be in your shoes and they have all the insider information you could ever want about classes, professors, and good places to eat near campus

What is one thing that all students should do while at LSWU?

Every student as LSWU should get involved with an internship or research apprenticeship! It's a great way to get experience that can boost your resume when you apply to jobs or graduate school and it will help you decide what you do (or do not!) want to do in the future.

What are some words of advice for fellow students?

Get to know people. The people in your classes, your professors, your advisors. All of these people can help you navigate school by making sure you have access to resources that will improve your college experience. Talk to them about their interests and yours. Ask them for help. Just starting conversations is the best way to create opportunities.

Name: Dawn

Year: Senior

Age: 24

Major: Global Health and Psychology

Why did you choose to major in [Global Health]?

I chose to major in Global Health because I have always been interested in other cultures. Global Health allowed me to explore all different aspects of culture from medical anthropology to understanding the evolutionary advantages and disadvantages of conflict and cooperation. In addition, majoring in Global Health provides opportunities to apply the knowledge you gain in your classes to a first-hand internship or study abroad experience.

What are your career plans?

After graduating with my B.A. in Global Health and B.S. in Psychology, I plan on either attending law school or pursue graduate school to continue my education. My ultimate goal is to teach law within the university.

What is your favorite thing about SHS?

My favorite thing about SHS is that there are so many opportunities to get involved, whether you join a lab or study abroad, there are a multitude of resources available to you and the professors and advisors will help you along the way.

What is something you wish you knew when you were new to LSWU?

I wish I knew when I was new to LSWU that it is okay to go up and speak to your professors, especially if there is something you do not understand. All of my professors have been kind and understanding when I have gone to them with questions. Also, if there's something you do not understand during the lecture, chances are someone else is confused as well. Knowing this helped me become more comfortable raising my hand during class and asking for clarification.

What is one thing that all students should do while at LSWU?

Get involved! I have been involved in a number of things during my time here at LSWU. I've worked on campus, participated in research studies, been involved in student housing, and joined a service sorority. All of these activities afforded me so many opportunities and helped me develop a real sense of pride as a Sun Devil.

What are some words of advice for fellow students?

Whatever you decide to major in, just be passionate about it. Don't worry so much about how much money you will make after graduation. If you love what you do, then that truly is all that matters.

Name: Terry

Year: Senior

Age: 22

Major: Global Health

Why did you choose to major in Global Health?

I chose to major in Global Health because I knew I wanted to eventually apply for medical school. I first found out about Global Health right before my freshman year of college and it sounded like the perfect mixture of science with culture. I have always been really interested in learning about other cultures, languages, and traditions, so finding this major was perfect for me. I also thought that it would allow me the freedom to take the prerequisite science courses for medical school while also allowing me to explore my passion for traveling.

What is your favorite thing about SHS?

There are so many aspects of SHS that I love, but I would have to say that my favorite thing about SHS are the unique courses and opportunities offered.

What is something you wish you knew when you were new to LSWU?

I wish I had known that there were so many amazing opportunities that I could have gotten involved with as a freshman. Although I did not wait too long to start joining clubs and participating in other activities, starting sooner would have allowed me to develop even more and would have given me more time to find my passions.

What is one thing that all students should do while at LSWU?

One thing that all students should do while at LSWU is join a research lab and at least one club or organization.

What are some words of advice for fellow students?

One piece of advice that I have for my fellow students would be to not be afraid to join any club, organization, or lab that you think you are interested in or that could help you to discover what you are passionate about.

Name: Maxine

Year: Senior

Age: 25

Major: Anthropology, B.A.

Why did you choose to major in Anthropology?

As a child, watching Anthropology related films, or what I thought was Anthropology at the time, occupied most of my time and left me in awe. Classics such as the *Indiana Jones* series, *Medicine Man*, and *Jurassic Park* were among my favorites, and admittedly still are. Starting my journey into college, I started looking at what Anthropology *actually* entailed, and fell in love again.

What are your career plans?

After graduating from LSWU, I plan to go to graduate school and emphasize in Archaeology. After, I would love to have a position in a museum or work in the government under Cultural Resources Management, or work in a college environment, advising students about academics in Anthropology.

What is your favorite thing about SHS?

Student wise, SHS is a relatively small school, and that is what is great about it. You are treated like a VIP. On top of there being small class sizes and amazing research opportunities, SHS offers the opportunity to truly connect with your peers and professors, building relationships that will last and continue to grow as your education does.

What is something you wish you knew when you were new to LSWU?

Starting out at a new school is difficult. I found myself lost and in need of some answers. It *is* okay to ask questions. Ask your advisor, ask your peers, and ask your professors. When you ask, not only will you have your questions answered, but often you will learn about things you never even considered to ask about! When I started out, after about a semester of being at LSWU, I finally started asking. Asking can lead to many wonderful things such as ideas, research projects and internships.

What is one thing that all students should do while at LSWU?

Befriend everyone and anyone that you can. It helps to have a support/friend group to grow with as you go through college. Don't just make friends with peers but also your advisors, TAs and professors! Not only can they offer great advice but they are interesting and driven people. Surrounding yourself with people like that will help you stay motivated and involved with the community.

What are some words of advice for fellow students?

Stay organized and stay informed! Buy a planner and use it. Check LSWU's academic calendar and copy down due dates from all of your syllabi. This will help keep you on top! Read emails that come in from ASU, especially from SHESC. Another easy way to stay involved is to join one of our clubs!

APPENDIX B

PEER-ADVISOR PRE- AND POST-EXPERIENCE SURVEY ITEMS

Q1 You are receiving this survey because you have been selected to participate as a peer-advisor in Fall 2016. This survey is designed to allows us to learn more about your employable competencies and career clarity development while in this program. Your participation is voluntary and your answers will be kept confidential. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

❍ Yes, I will complete the survey

❍ No, I will not complete the survey

Q2 This survey is part of several data collection measures used in this research study. In order for us to keep all of your responses organized, you will need to create a unique identifier to be placed on all of your materials/responses. The unique identifier will be the first three letters of your mother's name, and the last four digits of your telephone number. For example, my mother's name is Tracy and the last four digits of my phone number is 6887; my identifier is TRA6887. Please enter your identifier below.

Q4 The following statements will help us understand your employable competencies before you participate in the peer-advising program. Please select your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. I am comfortable meeting new people.	❍	❍	❍	❍
2. I am comfortable responding to other people by giving advice or assistance	❍	❍	❍	❍
3. I am comfortable using technology.	❍	❍	❍	❍
4. I am comfortable using social	❍	❍	❍	❍

media to communicate with others.				
5. I trust in the decisions I make.	❍	❍	❍	❍
6. I believe I will reach my goals.	❍	❍	❍	❍
7. I welcome constructive criticism as an opportunity for personal and professional growth.	❍	❍	❍	❍
8. I struggle with analyzing problems and finding solutions.	❍	❍	❍	❍
9. I am comfortable having a serious conversation with my peers.	❍	❍	❍	❍
10. I am comfortable speaking with professors, advisors, and other administrators about my needs, goals, and concerns.	❍	❍	❍	❍
11. I am able to learn from	❍	❍	❍	❍

hands-on experiences.				
12. I am able to ask questions to help find the answers I need with certain problems.	❍	❍	❍	❍
13. I can articulate problems and solutions easily to others.	❍	❍	❍	❍
14. I can accept new ideas and perspectives.	❍	❍	❍	❍
15. I can accept the differences of others.	❍	❍	❍	❍
16. I am able to conduct research on a specific area of interest.	❍	❍	❍	❍
17. I am comfortable asking a professor or other university administrator for help.	❍	❍	❍	❍
18. I create meaning from things I learn or experience.	❍	❍	❍	❍
19. I am comfortable in the university environment.	❍	❍	❍	❍

20. I am able to apply content I learn in the classroom to work or extra-curricular activities.	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q5 The following statements will help us learn about your confidence and knowledge of your professional characteristics and values before you participate in the peer-advising program. Please select your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. I am able to identify my strengths, abilities, values, and character traits and understand how these factors can impact my career goals.	❍	❍	❍	❍
2. I am able to acknowledge my achievements, learning style, leisure activities and understand how they impact the way I view myself.	❍	❍	❍	❍
3. I am able to access career information resources online, at career fairs, and speaking with	❍	❍	❍	❍

professionals in the field.				
4. I understand the standard of behavior and attitude expected me in a work environment.	❍	❍	❍	❍
5. I understand that organizational needs may impact the knowledge and experience required for my potential career (e.g., technological changes, increased demand, etc.)	❍	❍	❍	❍
6. I am able to identify skills that can transfer to different employment positions.	❍	❍	❍	❍
7. I am secure in my personal values and know how to apply them to my career aspirations.	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q6 The following questions will help us learn about your networking and professional behavior with higher education professionals before you participate in the peer-advising program. When thinking about the career field that I plan to pursue,

- A) I have not decided on a career choice, yet,
- B) I am uncertain what my career plans are after graduation,
- C) I am somewhat clear on my career plans after graduation
- D) I am pretty certain what my career plans are after graduation.

Q7 In preparation for my potential career choice,

- A) I am not certain of my career choice, at this point.
- B) I do not have access to professionals in the field, at this point,
- C) I am familiar with professionals in the field, but I have not spoken to anyone about my goals.
- D) I have spoken with a several professionals in the field and discussed my goals.

Q8 Reflecting on entry-level positions in higher education that I will be eligible to apply for upon graduation, I

- A) Cannot name any,
- B) Can name 1,
- C) Can name 2 -4,
- D) Can name several.

Q9 When considering the potential career area I wish to explore,

- A) I have not determined a career area I which to explore, at this time,
- B) I am uncertain on areas where I will be successful,
- C) I have a few ideas of areas where I will be successful,

Q10 I have outlined plan to obtain practical experience for positions in higher education.

- A) No, I am not certain of my career pathway at this time,
- B) Yes, I have considered something options, but have not settled on a pathway at this time,
- C) Yes, I am pretty certain about my plan to gain the practical experience I need for positions in higher education,
- D) Yes, I am very certain about my plan to gain the practical experience I need for positions in higher education.

Q11 This experience has helped me visualize myself in my career choice.

- A) No, I am not certain of my career choice at this time,
- B) Yes, this experience has exposed me to a few aspects about my career choice,
- C) I am fairly certain of what my professional life will look like when I advance in my career of choice,
- D) I am completely certain of what my professional life will look like when I advance in my career of choice.

APPENDIX C

PEER-ADVISOR EJOURNAL ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS

Please submit a written entry about the progress you've made toward identifying employable competencies and increasing clarity on your career options in higher education.

Identify and discuss the ways in which peer-advising has impacted your development in the last seven weeks. Discuss specifically any new competencies and skills that you may have learned or improved. How have you gained clarity on your potential career in higher education?

Identify and discuss any perceived barriers to your development that you've encountered in the last seven weeks while peer-advising. How have those barriers impacted the acquisition of new competencies, or reduced clarity on your potential career in higher education?

Have you identified additional competencies you'd like to develop professionally through your experience as peer-advisor in the last seven weeks? If so, what?

Discuss any encounters, events, or experiences that have been most influential in clarifying your potential career goals. How can you use those experiences to create and apply meaning in your pathway toward higher education?

APPENDIX D

PEER-ADVISOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ITEMS

1. Describe your experience as a peer-advisor.
2. What made you decide to participate as a peer-advisor?
3. Tell me about a few highlights of your experience.
4. What were some of the most challenging parts of this experience for you?
5. How did you overcome those challenges?
6. Tell me how you've benefited from participating in this program?
7. How did this experience enlighten you?
8. What have you learned about yourself through this experience?
9. What characteristics were required of you in order to successfully advise your peers?
10. What are some new skills or competencies that you've acquired through this experience?
11. Are there new areas of higher education that you have been introduced to through this experience? If so what?
12. Were you clear about your career pathway before you participated in this program?
13. Now that you've completed a semester as a peer-advisor, do you have more clarity about your professional goals?
14. Why was this program important to your pathway toward a career in academia?
15. How did working with 'real live' students impact you? Do you think you would have felt the same way if you didn't get the chance to personally experience advising?
16. Discuss any specific experience, training, or education you plan to engage in to advance yourself toward your career goal(s). Why are these particular steps important in your progress?
17. What other comments or insights can you provide for us based on your experience?

APPENDIX E

PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How has having peer-advisors in this department been for you at this point?
2. Have peer-advisors made a difference in your advising load? If so, how?
3. What are some of the benefits of having peer-advisors available to students?
4. Have you received any feedback from students who have used peer-advising services? If so, what were some other comments?
5. Has there been any negative issues that have occurred due to having peer-advising available? If so, what issues have you noticed.
6. How has peer-advising made a difference in the overall advising needs of this department?
7. In what ways did peer-advisors develop personally, academically, or professionally during this experience?
8. Do you feel this is an effective way of preparing undergraduates to work in higher education? In what ways?
9. Should the department continue to offer peer-advising in the future?
10. What additional comments would you like to share?

APPENDIX F

PEER-ADVISEE SATISFACTION EXIT SURVEY

Q1 You are receiving this survey because you just met with a peer-advisor at ASU's School of Human Science. This short survey is designed to provide us with information on the peer-advising program and to determine how we may improve the program in the future. Your participation is voluntary, your answers will be kept confidential and will only be viewed by advising administrators.

Do you agree to participate in this survey?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q2 What is your academic major?
- ❍ Anthropology
- ❍ Applied Math for Life & Social Sciences
- ❍ Global Health
- ❍ Other _____

Q3 What is your gender?
- ❍ Male
- ❍ Female
- ❍ Other
- ❍ I prefer not to answer

Q4 What is your age?
- ❍ 40 and above
- ❍ 35-39
- ❍ 30-34
- ❍ 25-29
- ❍ 20-24
- ❍ 16-19
- ❍ I prefer not to answer

Q5 What is your ethnicity?
- ❍ Black or African American
- ❍ Hispanic or Latino
- ❍ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ❍ Asian
- ❍ Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander
- ❍ White
- ❍ I prefer not to answer

Q6 What is your class standing?
- ❍ Senior
- ❍ Junior
- ❍ Sophomore

❍ Freshman
❍ Graduate
❍ I am not sure

Q7 Are you a transfer student (attended another college/university before ASU)?
❍ Yes
❍ No
❍ I am not sure

Q8 What was the main reason for your advising session today?
❍ Help with class my class schedule
❍ Help with Major Map/Degree Audit (DARs)
❍ Changing my major/adding a major
❍ Adding a minor
❍ Transfer credit
❍ Studying abroad
❍ Hold or alert on MyASU page
❍ Getting involved (i.e., clubs, sports, research, internships)
❍ Other _____

Q9 Is this your first time meeting with one of our peer-advisors?
❍ Yes
❍ No
❍ I am not sure

Q10 Please state your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with the level service I received from my peer-advisor today.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
My peer-advisor was knowledgeable about the topic(s) I wanted to cover today.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I am confident that the information I	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

received from my peer-advisor was accurate.						
I am confident that the information I shared with my peer-advisor will be kept confidential.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Peer-advising is an effective alternative to meeting with my assigned advisor.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I feel more comfortable talking with a peer-advisor than with my regular advisor or a professor.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I am open to meeting with a peer-advisor in the future.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I will recommend peer-advising to a fellow student.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I am interested in being a peer-advisor in the future.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q11 What aspect do you most appreciate about peer-advising?

- ❍ Getting help without an appointment
- ❍ Talking to one of my peers
- ❍ Getting advice from an experienced student
- ❍ Other reason _____

Q12 Please share any comments or concerns you have about peer-advising services.

APPENDIX G

INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Linda Caterino Kulhavy
Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe
480/965-7524
Linda.Caterino@asu.edu

Dear Linda Caterino Kulhavy:

On 1/11/2016 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Experiential Learning in Higher Education: Perspectives from Undergraduate Students as Peer-Advisors at a Large Southwestern University
Investigator:	Linda Caterino Kulhavy
IRB ID:	STUDY00003611
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Supplementary2_ProfessionalAdvisor_Consent.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Supplementary6_PreExpereince_Survey.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Supplementary5_Peer-Advising RecruitmentEmail.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Supplementary11_ProfessionalAdvisor_Interview_Questions.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Suplementary4_StduentAdvisee_SessionConsent.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Supplementary1_PeerAdvisor_Consent.pdf,

	Category: Consent Form; • Supplementary7_PostExperience_Survey.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Supplementary3_Peer-Advisee_Consent.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Supplementary8_FocusGroup_Prompts.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Supplementary12_Peer-Advsee_Satisfaction_Survey.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Supplementary10_WrittenReflection_Prompts.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Peer-Advising Protocol, Category: IRB Protocol; • Supplementary9_SemiStructured_Interview_Questions.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 1/11/2016.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Anika Hutchinson
Anika Hutchinson

APPENDIX H

EMAIL RECRUITMENT PROTOCOL FOR PEER-ADVISORS

Dear SHS Students:

The School of Human Studies is looking for outstanding Anthropology, Global Health, and Applied Math majors to fill several SHS Ambassador positions within our department. SHS Ambassadors are junior/senior level students who serve as peer-advisors providing top-notch basic advising information to our students on a walk-up basis. SHS Ambassadors will be trained and supervised by professional advisors in our department and the College of Liberal Arts.

Requirements:

- Must be an Anthropology, Global Health, or Applied Math for the Life and Social Sciences major in good academic standing.
    - 56 hours completed by end of Fall 2015
        - At least 12 hours completed at LSWU.
- Must be committed to helping SHS students make successful academic, personal and social connections to LSWU
- Must be enthusiastic about LSWU and The School of Human Science
- Must be comfortable interacting with professors, staff members, and students
- Must be knowledgeable about LSWU traditions and policies
- Must be passionate about their SHS major
- Must have outstanding organizational, time management and communication skills

Responsibilities:

- Advise students approximately 7 hours per week in the SHS building
- Provide information on course options
- Discuss student DARS reports
- Discuss student major maps
- Provide general information on LSWU policies and procedures
- Provide information about student clubs/organizations
- Provide information about Study Abroad trips
- Determine when students may need advanced help from their assigned professional advisor

Benefits:

- Three hours of upper-division elective credit for ASB 484
- Excellent work/mentoring experience
- Looks fantastic on any resume or graduate school application!

Application process:

Submit resume (include your name, student ID #, and LSWU email address), a one page or less statement of interest*****, unofficial transcript, and 3 references (names, email

addresses and phone numbers) via email to Anika.Hutchinson@asu.edu by **February 12, 2016.**

*****Your statement of interest should address the following points:

- Why are you interested in becoming a SHS Peer-advisor?
- Do you have prior teaching, tutoring or mentoring experience?
- What makes you passionate about your major and LSWU? What are you involved in at LSWU?
- What academic success strategies do you use as a student at LSWU?
- How does peer-advising fit in with your goals?

Training: Mandatory training sessions will be held in April – June, 2016

APPENDIX I

DESCRIPTION OF TRAINING MODULES

Module	Mode	Details
Introductory Workshop	In-person	Peer-advisors attended a two-hour workshop introducing them to academic advising. Discussed the mission, standards, and expectations of advising in the department. Professional advisors provided information on degree programs, resources, and tools to help with advising sessions, and hosted a question and answer period, as well.
FERPA	Online	Peer-advisors reviewed material on the FERPA by the university's registrar's office and completed a 30 question quiz to obtain university authorization to view student records.
Purpose & Methods of Advising	Online	Peer-advisors viewed videos and read articles on the history of academic advising, its purpose, and various methods of advising (i.e., prescriptive, developmental, appreciative, etc.).
Ethics & Crisis Management	Online	Information on appropriate behavior, dress, and conversations were presented through readings on university policy. Peer-advisors were provided with information on counseling services and campus police for uncertain and emergency situations. A short ten question quiz was provided for students to gauge their learning.
Advising Tools & Systems	Online	Peer-advisors viewed videos on how to read degree audits, complete degree check sheets, and interpret major maps for each degree program offered within the School. Additionally, peer-advisors were given a list of bookmarks to easily locate advising-related information on the web (i.e., course schedules, policies, calendars, petitions, contact information, etc.) to access during appointments.
Shadow an Advisor	In-Person	Peer-advisors were paired with professional advisors at the university to sit in on actual advising appointments and participated in

		mock advising sessions with each other and professional advisors for a total of five hours.
Advising Scenarios	Online	Fourteen advising scenarios were presented for peer-advisors to review and explain how they would handle each situation.

APPENDIX J

PEER-ADVISOR CONSENT FORM AND STUDY INFORMATION

Title of research study:

Perspectives from Undergraduate Peer-Advisors Pursuing Careers in Higher Education through the Lens of Experiential Learning

Investigator: Dr. Linda Caterino, Ph.D. ***Co-Investigator:*** Anika Hutchinson, M.Ed.

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?

We invite you to take part in a research study because you are currently serving as a peer-advisor, and we are conducting a study on peer-advisors at a large southwestern university.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to examine the experiences of peer-advisors serving fellow-students at Arizona State University in an effort to support the use of "real-life" learning opportunities in higher education to foster leadership growth, and pre-professional development in undergraduate students.

How long will the research last?

We expect that individuals will spend approximately four hours on research-related tasks over the entire Fall 2016 academic semester. You will be asked to participate in and submit the following:
August, 2016: Participate in a pre-experience online survey
October 4, 2016: Submit a written journal entry on your experience as a peer-advisor.
November 4, 2016: Submit a written journal entry on your experience as a peer-advisor.
December 5-9, 2016: Participate in an interview with investigator about your experiences.
December 15, 2016: Participate in a post-experience online survey

How many people will participate in the study?

We expect that no more than 10 people will participate in this research study**.**

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

You will participate in your experience as a peer-advisor, but in addition, you will participate in an online pre- and post-experience survey, and you will be scheduled to participate in a focus-group session with other peer-advisors, an interview, and submit a written reflection sharing your insights on your experience as a peer-advisor during the semester. The interview and focus group will be audio recorded. These recordings will be deleted after being transcribed, and any identifiers will be removed. Only the research team will have access to the recordings, recording transcriptions, and your survey

responses. Your identity will be protected; however, because the focus group will be conducted in-person with other study participants, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. You will use a unique identifier, the first three letters of your mother's name and the last three digits of your phone number. This identifier will allow the investigators to keep your audio recorded, written responses, and survey responses organized and linked to the research study. *Therefore, it is very important that you avoid using your actual name or personal identifying information during interviews, written materials, and survey responses whenever possible as you may be quoted directly in research study results.*

Please let me know if, at any time, you decide you do not want to be recorded and we will stop recording you. If you decide that you do not want to submit your survey answers, please let us know and we will delete your submission from our data base. You are free to decide whether you wish to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate, you will still be able to participate in the peer-advising experience. Your grade for the peer-advising internship course is not affected by opting out of participation in any way.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time it will not be held against you.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Although, efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study records to people who have a need to review this information, your responses may be directly quoted in published materials. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations or publications but your name will not be used.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, talk to the research team at 480-965-7524, or by emailing the principle investigator, Dr. Linda Caterino, at Linda.Caterino@asu.edu. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Behavioral IRB. You may talk to them at (480) 965-6788 or by email at research.integrity@ASU.edu if:

- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

By signing below, you agree to be a part of this study.

_____ _____

Printed Name Signature

Date_____

APPENDIX K

QUALITATIVE CODEBOOK FOR PEER-ADVISORS' RESPONSES

Initial Codes	Final Codes	Assertions	Sample Statements	Applicable RQ
01 Technical skills 02 Decision-making 03 Problem-solving 04 Goal-setting 05 Giving/Receiving Feedback 06 Articulating problems and solutions 07 Creating meaning from experiences	Employable Competency Development	The peer-advising program helped students to develop or improve upon employable competencies during the experience.	"I feel like I can articulate things better since I've had to explain things carefully to students."	1; 2
08 Identifying Strengths/ Weaknesses 09 Self-efficacy 10 Visualizing oneself in future career 11 Acknowledging self-image 12 Acknowledging personal values 13 Identifying transferrable skills	Clarity and Knowledge in Career Selection	Peer-advisors were able to acknowledge areas of efficacy to determine and solidify a career pathway.	"Helping others is really important to me. Pretty much any career I choose will be involved with helping others."	1; 2
14 Networking with professionals/faculty in selected career choice 15 Identifying professional development opportunities 16 Advanced education opportunities 17 Plans to pursue career selection	Networking and Professional Behavior	The peer-advising experience influenced peer-advisors to make connections with faculty and professional development opportunities to advance their career goals.	"I've gone to a few career fairs lately." "I'm exploring my options with graduate programs"	1; 2

18 Influential life experiences 19 Benefits and Challenges of Peer- advising 20 Enlightenments through experience	Additional Findings	Additional factors were also influential in helping peer-advisors to gain competency and clarity in career selection.	"I come from a family of educators, so this just fits." "I've learned so much about myself, I am not really a people person."	-

APPENDIX L

QUALITATIVE CODEBOOK FOR PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR'S RESPONSES

Initial Codes	Final Codes	Assertions	Sample Statements	Applicable RQ
01 Knowledge of the profession 02 Knowledge of practical skills 03 Improved interpersonal skills	Employable Competency Development	The peer-advising program helped students to develop or improve upon employable competencies during the experience	"From what I've seen they are becoming more self-sufficient as the weeks go on." "They know where to find the info they need, or at least point students in the right direction".	1; 2
04 Improving confidence 05 Vocalizing career-related discoveries	Clarity and Knowledge in Career Selection	Peer-advisors were able to acknowledge areas of efficacy to determine and solidify a career pathway.	"A few of the peer-advisors have asked about differences in what the dean's office does versus the provost's office. I can tell they are starting to put some concepts and ideas together."	1; 2
06 Additional advising resource 07 Balanced workflow/load	Impact on Departmental Advising	The peer-advising program relieved heavy advising loads and provided students additional academic support.	"I can really tell the difference in my advising load; more students are stopping in to talk with the peers before they schedule with me".	-