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“Seeing Everything About a Student”: Proactive Advising & Coaching as Intersectional
Student Support Systems and Services

By

Corrin Helget

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Gender and Women’s Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

May 2022

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“Seeing Everything About a Student”: Proactive Advising & Coaching as Intersectional Student Support Systems and Services

Corrin Helget

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student’s committee.

Advisor

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Abstract

Colleges and universities are struggling to retain their underrepresented students; some are searching for solutions and others are reluctant to update support services to better serve the students who require them the most. Underrepresented students are more likely to experience challenges and barriers that impact their ability to academically succeed and achieve their degrees. Many of these barriers are linked to their intersecting identities and are a result of systemic oppression. Underrepresented students deserve intersectional support systems and services that recognize their intersecting identities, work against interlocking oppressive systems and policies, and create a level playing field for underrepresented students. Student support services such as coaching and proactive advising have the potential to be intersectional support systems. In this thesis, I conduct qualitative interviews with staff members at a midwestern university to gain insight into their experience of coaching and providing proactive advising to underrepresented students and analyze these services for principles of intersectionality. I had three objectives (1) understand proactive advising and coaching, (2) discover if and how the identities of the students and coaches affect how the students are coached or advised, and (3) learn about the challenges and barriers underrepresented students experience and how their coach helps them overcome them. The following objectives served to answer my research question is intersectionality, explicitly or implicitly, involved in the coaching and advising of underrepresented students? The interviews included discussions of a variety of topics, including student identities, barriers and challenges of underrepresented students, and the services and programs provided to the students by the coaches. The analysis of the interviews revealed that intersectionality was not explicitly involved but manifested implicitly in the coaching and proactive advising process for the majority of the coaches. Recommendations for future research are also discussed. Additionally, this research could be an example of an intersectional support system that could be applied at other universities and diversity offices.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The Pell Institute 2007 report, *Moving Beyond Access*, revealed the startling statistic that 89 percent of students who are considered low-income and first-generation leave college without getting a degree.¹ As a low-income and first-generation student, myself, I could not believe *my* odds. I not only achieved my bachelor's degree but went on to attempt my master's, as well. Then I examined my brothers' college journeys, who were also low-income and first-generation students. One attended a four-year university for a couple of years, and then transferred to a community college and earned a certificate, the other dropped out after his first year. We all had different experiences and reasons for choosing the paths we did. But there is one big difference between the three of us--I had a support system on campus. Through this support system, I was able to build a connection to the university I attended, gain confidence in myself, and grow not only as a student but as a person. I was lucky to have the experience I did. However, as a white female student, I also had advantages and privileges that students of color who are also low-income and first-generation may not have.

The diverse population of higher education institutions is increasing every day, and yet the retention rates of underrepresented students of color are still lagging behind their white student counterparts.² In this current study, "underrepresented students" are those who have been historically and disproportionately marginalized and underserved by higher education, based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, education status, and immigration status. It can be difficult to provide a simple definition of underrepresented

students because they often have multiple intersecting identities that create overlapping disadvantages and challenges. These barriers can affect the ability of underrepresented students of color to navigate the culture of college, especially at Predominately White Institutions (PWI). Students who are not a part of the dominant population often have their experiences ignored and their identities marginalized.³ Due to the interlocking barriers they experience, students need support systems and services that recognize their individual, unique needs and acknowledge how students experience college differently because of their intersecting identities.

Colleges and universities are struggling to retain underrepresented students. Some are even reluctant to modify their support services and programs to accommodate the students that need them the most.⁴ However, higher education institutions were “built mostly for exclusion, not inclusion.”⁵ Rachelle Brunn-Bevel and authors write about the problematic history of higher education and argue that the foundation of higher education institutions is rooted in systems of oppression including but not limited to racism, sexism, and classism.⁶ To improve students’ experiences, scholar David Mitchell suggested that institutions of higher education recognize the significance of intersectionality and incorporate it in research, policies, and services. Mitchell argues that if these institutions do not change and evolve, they are failing their students and that they need to “recognize students’ continuous need to navigate spaces in an attempt to belong and begin to deconstruct oppressive forces on college campuses.”⁷ These colleges and universities must provide services that work against these interlocking systems and create a level

playing field for underrepresented students. Services like proactive advising and coaching have the potential to supply this intersectional support.

Researchers have used an intersectionality framework to examine higher education, including the experiences of underrepresented students and faculty, pedagogy and learning, and student affairs.⁸ This framework includes exploring how race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, physical ability, and other identities intersect and how these intersections impact an individual's experience in higher education. However, there is a lack of research on proactive advising and coaching using an intersectional framework. Proactive advising involves an academic advisor reaching out to a student who is struggling or is predicted to struggle in college, and then working with the student to ensure success in academics.⁹ Coaching is similar to advising, but instead of just focusing on helping a student succeed academically, a coach works with a student to help them achieve both their personal and academic goals.¹⁰ Research on proactive advising and coaching has proven that these services can increase the retention of underrepresented students.¹¹ I theorize that if proactive advisors and coaches incorporate an intersectional framework into their process, it will create a meaningful experience for the students, especially for students of color. Before testing the impact of intersectionality on these services for students, it is important to first determine if principles of intersectionality are even involved in them.

Current Study

This project was originally inspired by the work of an office I will call the Office for Diverse Student Access and Success (ODSAS), located at a regional comprehensive

midwestern university. The staff members of this office are dedicated to the recruitment and retention of diverse students at the university where this study takes place. They provide a multitude of services with relevance to student support and student achievement, including coaching and proactive advising. The current study examines the ODSAS services of coaching and proactive advising and analyzes them for principles of intersectionality. To understand the role of coaching and proactive advising, four qualitative interviews were conducted with staff members of ODSAS. All interviews were face-to-face. Participants and the office were given pseudonyms to keep their anonymity. While all four staff members identify themselves as “coaches,” their practice of coaching does involve proactive advising of students, as well. In these four interviews, I had three objectives (1) to understand proactive advising and coaching, (2) to discover if and how the identities of the students and coaches affect how the students are coached or advised, and (3) to learn about the challenges and barriers underrepresented students experience and how their coach helps them overcome them. The following objectives served to answer my research question, is intersectionality, explicitly or implicitly, involved in the coaching and advising of underrepresented students?

As Kofi Annan said, “Education is a human right with immense power to transform.”¹² However, here in the United States, there are barriers and oppressions in higher education that are enforcing the exclusion of underrepresented students from being admitted and from obtaining a degree. Services that recognize underrepresented students’ struggles as an intersectional issue may have a better chance of truly helping students with intersecting identities. There needs to be services that advocate for underrepresented

students, address the barriers at a systemic level, and enact social change. There need to be services that help students facing multiple intersecting barriers succeed in their academic, personal, and professional goals. Services such as proactive advising and coaching are currently helping underrepresented students succeed, and if they take on an intersectional approach, they could work to dismantle barriers of oppression and address systems of power that enforce these barriers. Education is a human right and there should not be barriers preventing individuals from attending college and attempting their degrees.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter two, the literature review, situates my research in the existing scholarship. It includes a discussion of three bodies of knowledge. The first body of knowledge focuses on proactive advising and coaching, including the definitions and histories, strategies and techniques used, and the benefits of each. The second body of knowledge examines the definition and history of intersectionality in feminism, and how it is used as a framework in higher education. The final section reviews the main challenges that affect underrepresented students' retention, including academic preparedness, financial aid, and access to student support services. An overview of these three bodies of knowledge is necessary to understand the importance and value of proactive advising and coaching and how an intersectional support system could benefit underrepresented students.

In the methodology portion, chapter three, I explain my rationale for analyzing proactive advising and coaching for feminist principles and intersectionality. I also

explain the intersectional and critical race theoretical frameworks influencing my research. I examine my methods of qualitative interviews. Finally, I include a section on my reflexivity and the limitations of my research.

In chapter four, the results chapter, I explain my findings on three themes in the interviews. These three themes include position description, identity, and the students' barriers and challenges. Each theme also includes multiple subsections that examine the themes closer. I also include a section on unexpected findings, an explanation of the significance of my research, and recommendations for future research.

The goal of this thesis is to analyze proactive advising and coaching through an intersectional lens and possibly use these support services as an example of an intersectional support system that could be used in other diversity offices, or at other universities. The goal of this thesis is to encourage the implementation of more support systems, especially intersectional support systems. I succeeded in gaining my undergraduate degree because I had a support system that genuinely cared about my progress and success, so I personally know the importance of a good support system. The institution of higher education could benefit greatly from the addition of more student support services and support systems that could enhance the college experience of underrepresented students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This thesis aims to analyze a proactive advising model through an intersectional lens and examine how the proactive advising model and coaching techniques are used to better the experience of underrepresented students on a college campus and increase their retention. To achieve this, the following literature review will provide a discussion of the proactive advising and coaching of students, intersectionality in higher education, and retention and persistence of underrepresented college students. All these topics connect and relate to how proactive advising and coaching can be an intersectional approach to underrepresented students' success at college. I will first discuss the history of proactive advising and how it has evolved over the years. The first section will also include an explanation of coaching and how it connects to proactive advising. The second section will include a definition and history of the term "intersectionality," and will examine how higher education institutions use an intersectional approach in their practices. Finally, the last section will discuss key issues and challenges that affect the retention and persistence of underrepresented college students.

I. Proactive Advising and Coaching

Academic advising has been a part of higher education since the founding of the first university, Harvard University, in 1636, but "academic advising" has changed throughout history. Between 1636 and 1870, the universities were still relatively small with no provision of official student services. However, the universities' president and faculty were designated as "in *loco parentis* and assumed responsibility not only for students' intellectual and academic lives but also for their moral training and

extracurricular activities.”¹ It wasn’t until the 1870s when electives began to be included in the curriculum did academic advising become a necessary profession to help students navigate a “successful pursuit of their chosen paths.”² At that time, students were granted the ability to choose their advisor among the available faculty or staff. As time progressed and universities multiplied and grew larger in numbers, advising has taken on many new forms and models to specialize in what students needed. According to scholar Terry Kuhn, contemporary academic advising can refer to “situations in which institutional representatives give insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social and personal matter,” and can take the form of mentoring, counseling, teaching, or coaching.³ Models also include developmental, prescriptive, and intrusive or also known as proactive advising, which will be the focus of my research.

Proactive Advising Background

Proactive advising was first introduced as intrusive advising by Robert Glennen in 1976. Glennen combined aspects of counseling and advising together to form a new model of advising - intrusive advising. His model introduced the idea that advisors should be the ones to reach out to students first, instead of the student actively seeking out help when they need it. Glennen advocated for colleges and universities to not be “passive” or wait for students to seek out help or advising.⁴ His model was influenced by a school in Las Vegas, Nevada, where faculty went through every student file (including academic records, test scores, mental and physical health, and family information) to identify anything that might affect the student’s academics. The intrusive advising began when the semester started. The students were called in to meet with an advisor to discuss

“academic regulations, grading systems, probation, attendance regulations, and the curricular options available.”⁵

In 1987, National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Charter member, Walter Earl expanded on Glennen’s intrusive advising model in his article, “Intrusive Advising for Freshmen.” He describes intrusive advising as “action-oriented,” where advisors identify a student’s academic crisis and reach out to the student to offer help.⁶ Earl considers intrusive advising as a combination of prescriptive and developmental advising models. Earl explains that intrusive advising uses “the good qualities of prescriptive advising (expertise, awareness of student needs, structured programs) and developmental advising (relationship to a student's total needs).”⁷ He goes on to discuss the advantages of intrusive advising, which include improvement of students’ academic skills and retention.⁸ Earl also recognizes that intrusive advising is beneficial for first-year students who are “high risk,” such as students on academic probation or warning.⁹

Intrusive advising has evolved over the years since Glennen and Earl introduced the concept in the 1980s. More recently, NACADA has encouraged the phrase “intrusive” to be replaced with “proactive.” This was because of the negative connotations associated with the word “intrusive,” and the word “proactive” provided a more positive and welcoming description of the advising model.¹⁰ Hence, “intrusive advising” is now “proactive advising.” Another way the model has developed is it now goes beyond a student’s academic problems and recognizes how a student’s personal life can affect their academics, as well.

In his article, “Intrusive Advising: At-Risk Students on a Commuter University Campus,” Forest Wortham addresses how a student’s personal life can affect their academic performance, and that proactive advising should acknowledge that. According to Wortham, factors that can affect a student’s academic performance include time management skills, financial challenges, major/career decisions, and family and/or personal issues.¹¹ With proactive advising, the advisor and student discuss what the student’s life is like inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, Wortham encourages advisors to address that students’ learned behavior and habits from school, work, and their home life can be the origins of their challenges.¹² This also allows students to learn how their own actions can impact their success. It additionally empowers students to take responsibility and learn to change their behaviors that are threatening their academic performance.¹³ Wortham agrees with Earl, that “at-risk” students can benefit from proactive advising. Wortham specifically advocates for an advising model that addresses personal issues that can affect academics because students often don’t understand what they need to do to improve academic performance. Wortham adds that when at-risk students were “questioned as to what they could do to improve, they say study harder and longer.”¹⁴ However, Wortham emphasizes that “studying harder and longer,” is not enough, especially when there could be a larger, personal issue causing the academic challenges.

A variety of student populations have received proactive advising since its inception. While Glenn argued that proactive advising should be provided to all first-year and transfer students, Earl and Wortham believed that “at-risk” students, especially first-

year students with low academic status or who are on probation would benefit from it the most.¹⁵ The first research studies on proactive advising did not include demographic information on the students being provided the services. Thus, it is unknown if these “at-risk” students were also marginalized in some capacity, such as being identified as students of color, first-generation, or low-income. More recent articles include recognition of the benefits of proactive advising for underrepresented students and will be discussed below. However, my research will go into more detail about how intersectionality can improve advising for underrepresented students who occupy multiple marginalized identities, including students who may identify as “at-risk,” students of color, first-generation, *and* from a low-income family. These multiple identities create multiple interlocking barriers that can affect students’ ability to succeed. My research asks how these intersecting identities are addressed by contemporary models of academic advising or coaching, such as proactive advising.

Proactive Advising Strategies

By the early 2000s, proactive advisors worked with students and provided strategies that improved students’ academic performance, as well as got them more connected and involved in their academic and social life on campus. There are several strategies that advisors can use to be more proactive with their students. Some examples are given by Jennifer Varney, former Chair of the Advising Adult Learners Commission at NACADA, include providing support and advising from registration to graduation; helping students form skills to overcome all challenges they have that may affect their academics (academic, social, and family); and encouraging students to be proactive in

their own learning experience.¹⁶ Varney also includes specific strategies for advisors such as providing several forms of communication either through phone, e-mail, and in-person appointments and being actively involved in class registration. Varney explains that the first meeting between the advisor and advisee will include the advisor providing “in-depth information on educational program planning and scheduling, outlining the expectations for the student-advisor relationship, and ensuring students register for appropriate courses.”¹⁷ According to Varney, the institution should be involved in the proactive advising process as well. Institutional assistance could include an “early-alert system” that monitors a student’s academic progress and informs the student and advisor of low academic performance.¹⁸

In their article, “Advising At-risk Students in College and University Settings,” Dana Heisserer and Phil Parette, like Wortham and Earl, acknowledge that different “at-risk groups” have certain characteristics that require strategies from proactive advisors. However, Heisserer and Parette address specific student populations that are considered to be “at-risk” by the college and university. “At-risk” groups include students who are “academically disadvantaged,” students with disabilities, low socioeconomic status students, and probationary students. All have different characteristics and different proactive strategies for advisors to use and address.¹⁹ For example, the academic performance of students of color is linked to satisfaction with their college experience; they also may experience low self-concept, and there may be a lack of role models for them on campus. In these scenarios, Heisserer and Parette recommend that the advisor encourage students’ involvement on campus, suggest campus resources, encourage

positive self-concept, and acknowledge the importance of role models.²⁰ I agree with Heisserer and Parette that advisors should encourage students to build connections on campus, and would also argue that these strategies are valuable to intersectional advising, as well.

Throughout its history, proactive advising has been acknowledged as a successful advising model that increases student success and retention rates. In Glennen's study of a university in Las Vegas, Nevada, 74 percent of students who were in danger of failing, and were also seen by advisors, passed their courses.²¹ Glennen wrote that proactive advising resulted in a reduction of first-year students going to the "psychological clinic," because many problems were being handled by the advisors before becoming a "crisis."²² In addition, Earl argued that proactive advising improves "the effectiveness of advising, enhances student academic skills, and increases retention."²³ According to Heisserer and Parette, proactive advising approaches result in an increase in retention of at-risk students and "enhanced feelings of 'belongingness' within the institution."²⁴ Finally, Varney states that because proactive advisors encourage and help students "build solid academic and social foundations" they are able to achieve and reach their academic goals.²⁵ Further, I argue that a proactive advising model that is intersectional will improve a student's sense of belonging and retention, by working with the student to find out what they need to feel more connected to the university based on their intersecting identities, and the advisors doing whatever they can to meet those needs.

Coaching

Student support services have evolved in recent years as advisors have combined coaching techniques with their academic advising services. According to their article, “Coaching Students to Academic Success and Engagement on Campus,” authors Claire Robinson and Jimmie Gahagan define coaching as a “one-on-one interaction with a student focusing on strengths, goals, study skills, engagement, academic planning, and performance.”²⁶ Academic coaching wasn’t introduced into higher education until 2000.²⁷ Before that, the coaching model was popular in the career of business as a strategy to improve “under-performing” managers and executives. Then it was used to prepare lower-level employees for promotion to higher positions.²⁸ Since it has entered higher education, coaching programs at institutions can vary and can be offered by an “outside agency contracted by the institution” like the company InsideTrack, or it is provided by staff on-campus.²⁹

In 2001, InsideTrack, a company that provided coaching services nationwide, was established. It began by first offering “free academic strategy sessions” at Stanford University and the University of California. Following the success of these initial programs, InsideTrack began to partner with other universities and colleges to provide a program that assigns coaches to students. Since then, it has become one of the largest providers of student coaching in the United States.³⁰ Universities pay for InsideTrack to provide their students with coaches. The partnership between the company and the institution is an investment to increase student retention. The InsideTrack Coaches regularly connect with students throughout their first year of college and provide support

by helping students “prioritize their studies, plan how to be successful, and identify and overcome barriers to students' academic success.”³¹ Similar to the proactive advising described previously by Wortham, the InsideTrack coaches also acknowledge how a student’s personal life can be the “leading influencer” regarding whether or not they persist and complete their degree. Meetings between students and coaches commonly include topics like “personal time commitments (work scheduling), primary caregiving responsibilities, and financial obligations.”³²

Eric Bettinger and Rachel Backer’s research study of InsideTrack shows that the company’s remote coaching does increase retention of the students who opted to use the coaching program. Jessica Alzen and colleagues further analyzed Bettinger’s and Backer’s study and InsideTrack’s remote coaching in their article, “Academic Coaching and its Relationship to Student Performance.”³³ Alzer et al. were skeptical of the study, mainly because over half of the students who received coaching were male students with an average age of 31, and they felt this was not an accurate representation of the “traditional college campus.”³⁴ Alzen and the authors also felt that remote coaching practices, such as those provide by companies like InsideTrack, differ from on-campus programs because the companies may not have staff who are familiar with the institution the students attend.³⁵ Thus if a student has many questions about how to navigate the campus itself, it could be difficult for InsideTrack coaches to provide answers. On-campus staff would be most beneficial to students because they are familiar with campus resources, programs, initiatives, and values. Students of color especially struggle with finding a sense of belonging to the institutions they attend; therefore, it would be

important for students to have a coach on campus, and that relationship could lead to the student feeling more connected to the college itself. In contrast to InsideTrack's approach, institutions have developed on-campus programs and coaching services and they have been proven successful at increasing retention and student success.³⁶

An example of on-campus coaching services includes Robinson and Gahagan's research based on academic coaching at the University of South Carolina. Their article also provides a coaching framework that includes three steps, self-assessment, reflection, and goal setting. Through all three steps, the coaches learn to understand their student's goals (both academic and personal), interests, and academics. The self-assessment step is the starting point of the interaction with the student and involves forming a "base-line of information." The coach assesses the student's study habits, strengths, and levels of involvement on campus.³⁷ The reflection step includes the coach asking a range of open-ended questions about the students' personal and academic interests, their motivations, and their goals. Robinson and Gahagan argue that the students often "engage in conversations with their coaches that they may not have with anyone else on campus."³⁸ The last step includes goal setting, and the students should leave the meeting with "strategic steps they can take to synthesize the previous steps to reach success."³⁹

Another example of a coaching program in higher education is the Student Success Coach program that was established in 2009 at the University of Minnesota, Rochester. The Student Success Coaches are similar to the InsideTrack coaches; they provide support and help students with both academic and personal-related problems. Students who are facing more difficulties in their academics may have to meet with their

coach more often, and coaches are expected to help them “craft study plans” and provide “additional oversight and support” to students on academic probation.⁴⁰ However, unlike the research on proactive advising and InsideTrack, the Student Success Coach program also encourages students to meet with their coach even when things are “going well” and students should also update them on “additional learning experiences (internships, study abroad, etc.) or changes in career plans and goals.”⁴¹

In their article, “Coaching Toward Completion: Academic Coaching Factors Influencing Community College Students Success,” Pechac and Slantcheva-Durst recognize that coaching “complements” advising because coaches are often “links between the academic and student affairs sides of campus.”⁴² As this “link,” coaches help students learn and understand the campus culture and the campus and community resources available to students. Pechac and Slantcheva-Durst explain that coaches support students by encouraging them to “examine their own learning environment, identify factors that impact their academic progress, become engaged in academic activities, and increase self-awareness, personal responsibility, reflection, and goal setting.”⁴³ McClellan also acknowledges the connection and similarities between coaching and advising. He argues that both are focused on “promoting the growth, learning, and development” of students.⁴⁴ McClellan explains the goal of coaching should be to understand the student’s “personality, learning style, study habits, self-efficacy, interests” to build rapport with the student.⁴⁵

In their study of a coaching program at Silverbell University, Alzen and the authors concluded that “coaching intervention had positive impacts on GPA, credits

earned, and retention.”⁴⁶ Students involved in the coaching program had an increase in their GPA and they were more likely to enroll in classes in the following semester.⁴⁷ McClellan agrees with Alzen that coaching can increase retention, but he also addresses how coaching “promotes student responsibility and ownership of any plans and their outcomes.”⁴⁸ In their article, Pechac and Slantcheva-Durst acknowledge how coaching encourages students to focus on their personal, academic, and career goals and also help students navigate their campus. They argue that coaching can provide a “meaningful connection” to the campus and community for their students, especially underrepresented students.⁴⁹ As previously stated in the proactive advising section by Heisserer and Parette, when students can interact with the campus in a positive and “meaningful” way, they are more likely to succeed. Pechac and Slantcheva’s study also emphasized that coaching programs should be targeted to “part-time, underrepresented, and low-socioeconomic-status students” who would also benefit from “tailored” programs that acknowledge their specific needs.⁵⁰ They do not, however, mention that students with these multiple intersecting identities would benefit from coaching programs with an intersectional approach, which is where my research will fill in the gap.

In sum, coaching and advising serve different purposes. Academic advising has a set focus—to help a student succeed academically. To do this, the advisors learn about the students’ academic history, grades, study habits, course schedule, and if necessary, their personal life. As stated above, a student’s academic problems can be a symptom of challenges in their personal life. So, to fix the academic problems, an advisor will help the student address the personal challenges, whether it be financial, family, or social

challenges, all while also helping a student register for classes and stay on track for graduation. My research will examine how coaching does involve some academic advising, specifically proactive advising, but it also goes beyond that. The coaches see the students as more than students but as individuals with goals and challenges beyond the world of academics. Specifically, coaches examine how students' intersecting identities bring about certain challenges and barriers.

II. Intersectionality & Higher Education

Intersectionality as a framework and analytical tool is beneficial because it is not meant to just be theoretical but should be applied to real-world challenges and issues. Intersectionality's history is proof of this because it has been applied to the social justice and activism work of feminists of color. Recently, it has been used by policymakers, educators, social workers, media analysts, activists, organizers, and more. In this review of literature, I'll focus on how it has been used (or not) in higher education.

The term "intersectionality" has been debated, defined, and redefined many times in its history. Some scholars even believe that "intersectionality" is too complex and ambiguous that it should not even be defined. Or some scholars debate if the term "intersectionality" is even the right word to use.⁵¹ For the purpose of this literature review and research, I use Patricia Hills Collins' and Sirma Bilge's "working definition" of intersectionality:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity of the world, people, and human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They

are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender, or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and themselves.⁵²

Recognizing that this is a “working definition” is important, because intersectionality is an intricate and complex concept that no one definition can encompass its entirety and expansivity. Collins and Bilge also specifically use this definition because it is “broad and elastic” and it “provides some guidance on some important boundaries.”⁵³ A broad definition allows intersectionality to be interdisciplinary. In “Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful,” Kathy Davis discusses how intersectionality has been used by feminist scholars across many different disciplines, theoretical perspectives, and political persuasion. As a concept, intersectionality has reached the “mainstream” and has come a long way from its origins.

The history of intersectionality is also more complicated than it is commonly made out to be. Kimberlé Crenshaw has been continuously acknowledged as the scholar to “coin” the term intersectionality. However, Collins and Bilge argue that this provides a misconception that intersectionality as a theory and concept wasn’t used until it was given a name in Crenshaw’s 1991 article, “Mapping the Margins.”⁵⁴ Intersectionality was

(and still is) a fundamental part of feminist scholarship and activism of countless women of color long before Crenshaw “coined” it. Collins and Bilge include examples such as the Combahee River Collective, Frances Beal, Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Esther Ngan-Ling Chow. All were writing about the intersectionality of race, class, gender, nationality, and sexuality before Crenshaw.⁵⁵ Collins and Bilge stress, and I agree, that Crenshaw’s work has been crucial to intersectionality. However, they argue that Crenshaw’s groundbreaking work goes beyond just defining and coining the term, but “identifies an important marker that shows not only intersectionality’s growing acceptance in the academy but also how this acceptance subsequently reconfigured intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis.”⁵⁶ Intersectionality is more than its definition; it is important to know the history to use the concept correctly and better understand its importance. Including the history in my research also acknowledges the women of color who laid the foundation for my research to take place.

Praxis of Intersectionality in Higher Education

In *Intersectionality & Higher Education: Theory, Research, & Praxis*, Donald Mitchell argues that intersectionality can be used to examine, explore, and provide social justice solutions to concerns on U.S. higher education institutions. Mitchell contends that “research, policies, and practices that recognize the relevance of intersectionality may be important in improving educational outcomes for current and future college students.”⁵⁷ Mitchell also states that there will be a need for more intersectional support systems in the future for students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Mitchell mentions that intersectional support systems and groups have existed on college campuses, like Black,

Latina, and Asian sororities, but have not received recognition as intersectional support.⁵⁸ Intersectional support systems can and should be implemented on college campuses and should be acknowledged as such. My research intends to examine advising and coaching as a potential intersectional support system, that can be used across departments and other universities.

Collins and Bilge discuss how recruitment at institutions would benefit from an intersectional approach and how to create a campus climate that is inclusive and achieves equity. Collins and Bilge explain that “initially, colleges recruited and served groups one at a time, offering, for example, special programs for African Americans, Latinos, women, gays and lesbians, veterans, returning students, and persons with disabilities.”⁵⁹ This was not an effective process, because not only was it slow and tedious, but it also didn’t acknowledge that students can and do identify with more than one identity or category. Universities and colleges had good intentions in creating these programs, but they do not address that every student brings different experiences and each one requires different support services. Universities have more and more students enroll who identify with multiple intersecting identities. Collins and Bilge give examples such as “students who formerly had no way to pay for college (class), or students historically faced discriminatory barriers to enrollment (race, gender, ethnicity or citizenship status, religion), or students who experience distinctive barriers and discrimination (sexuality and ability) on college campuses.”⁶⁰ It is the university’s responsibility to come up with the best strategies and support services that will benefit the students and create a more

inclusive environment on campus because the university was the one to put the barriers in place.

In their piece on intersectionality in higher education, Rachele J. Brunn-Bevel and her colleagues examine the history of higher education in the United States. They argued that it was important to acknowledge the beginning of higher education and how it has “acted as an apparatus of and/or colluded with the state in the construction of universal citizen predicted on white capitalist cis-heteropatriarchy.”⁶¹ Thus due to the creation of this “universal citizen,” and focus on furthering racist, sexist and classist ideas, the individuals with multiple intersecting “marginalized” identities defied the “essentialized ideal student, staff, and faculty.”⁶² Additionally, Brunn-Bevel presents examples of “spaces of whiteness,” and the indifference and disregard of marginalized individuals. Recently, there have been demands to remove the progressive policies that were put in place during the Civil Rights Era, including affirmative action.⁶³ Despite its dark history, feminist theorist, bell hooks, acknowledged that education can be “a practice of freedom,” especially for marginalized individuals.⁶⁴ However, there is work that needs to be done by the institution to make higher education more intersectional and inclusive.

Therefore, the university, as an institution with its immense power and privilege must acknowledge its role in the systems of oppression affecting students and the ability to create an inclusive environment. In her writings on intersectionality, Vivian May explains that there are nine critical practices of intersectionality. One of which is analyzing systems of oppressions as interlocking, and another is that intersectionality

provides tools for understanding how multiple forms of oppression are upheld despite efforts to dismantle them.⁶⁵ Universities have the power to become more intersectional and inclusive by examining their equity and inclusion policies, recruitment plans, and retention efforts. They can also be more inclusive by providing programs and services that remove barriers and break down the interlocking oppressions. I argue that proactive advising and coaching are services that the university can provide to underrepresented students and break down those barriers.

In her research on intersectionality on college campuses, Deborah Carver also recognizes that higher education institutions do acknowledge ways to be more inclusive, but do not always have the best follow through in providing valuable programs to their students.⁶⁶ Carver focuses on the strategies colleges and universities use to recruit diverse students, and she argues that universities and colleges put more effort into recruiting diverse students than in retaining them.⁶⁷ Other scholars disagree with Carver. For example, Sheri Hardee argues that institutions do not even try to form a recruitment plan for diverse students, and rather “viewed one ‘token’ student as a sufficient representation of diversity.” Hardee’s argument is based on interviews with students of color at PWI in the south.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, recruiting students is important, and to retain them, universities need to look at the campus environment. Carver further explains that “students should be in an environment where they can feel confident, valued and desired.” It is the universities’ job to provide an environment that “nurtures the mind, body, and spirit of its students.”⁶⁹ Carver also argues that the building of this environment and the recruitment

of students with marginalized intersecting identities should be a more complex process that acknowledges the student as a “whole person.”⁷⁰

In her case study of one Student Support Services (SSS) office, Hardee examines how students of color need “physical and theoretical spaces to explore their multiple, fluid, and intersecting identities, and how these identities change and are changed by the world around them.”⁷¹ Hardee took inspiration from Chicana feminist, Gloria Anzaldúa and described these spaces as “borderlands.” The students of this study greatly benefited from their own borderland in SSS and were able to explore their identities and found a place those identities were valued instead of ignored or forced toward assimilation.⁷² However, outside SSS, the students all faced stereotypes, microaggressions, and overall, an “unsupportive environment” at their university, which made their borderland even more crucial.⁷³ Hardee’s case study is an example of a successful intersectional space and program in higher education that not only acknowledges the student’s intersecting identities and barriers but also encourages the students to reflect and examine their own identities. The students were then able to provide conversations centered on intersectionality in the more dominant spaces on campus, as well. This connects to my own research because I am also examining a student support service, coaching, and proactive advising, and analyzing it for intersectionality. However, while Hardee interviewed the students that belonged to the program, I will be interviewing the staff members who provide the service.

III. Retention and Persistence of Underrepresented Students

The institutional success of a college or university can be measured in the retention and graduation rates of its students. If a student is successful, the college or university is successful. Unfortunately, underrepresented students face many disadvantages and challenges that can hinder their academic performance; thus, the retention and graduation rates of underrepresented students are low.⁷⁴ To improve the retention and persistence of underrepresented students with proactive advising, issues that could be affecting their ability to achieve their academic goals need to be examined and discussed.

Key Areas for Persistence and Retention: Financial Issues

There are many issues that have a negative effect on retention rates for underrepresented students, but there are a few that are more prevalent. In her article, “Key Issues in the Persistence of Underrepresented Minority Students,” Deborah Carter examines the key areas that can affect minority underrepresented students’ persistence and retention in college. The key areas Carter lists include level of academic preparedness, access to adequate financial aid, and strong student support services, networks, and programs.⁷⁵ In his research study of underrepresented students’ persistence, Olcay Yarvus expands on Carter’s list of key issues, and Yarvus’ study shows that financial issues are the top challenge of underrepresented students. In “Exploring the Impacts of School Reforms on Underrepresented Urban Students’ College Persistence,” Yarvus states that 76 percent of students reported financial issues being a challenge to succeeding academically, 44 percent reported that having a job was a

challenge, and 37 percent reported that they dropped out due to financial issues.⁷⁶ Yarus also argues that students from low-income families have difficulties paying the high cost of tuition, making it difficult for the students to stay in school.⁷⁷ Carter also acknowledges financial difficulties, but she includes the example of high poverty rates of African Americans, and how financial challenges can affect the student's persistence along with discrimination.⁷⁸

Academic Preparedness

Another key area Carter lists is academic preparedness. In her article, Carter associates academic preparedness with whether or not students took college preparatory or honors courses in high school. Completing college prep or honors classes had a positive effect on persistence in college for white, African American, and Hispanic students.⁷⁹ In "Retaining First-Generation Underrepresented Minority Students: A Struggle for Higher Education," Satasha Green and Constance Wright define college readiness as having "the academic abilities and competencies, critical thinking skills to assess, analyze and manage complex problems."⁸⁰ Green and Wright argue that underrepresented first-generation students frequently have to face "college readiness gaps," because they are the first in their families to go to college. Students of color also often come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, which means that they also attended high schools that may not have the funds to provide college readiness courses. Green and Wright argue that due to the lack of these college readiness courses and pathways, students are underprepared. The lack of funds and resources in these low-income high schools can impact students' ACT and SAT scores, as well. All these factors can "hinder"

the student's application and acceptance to colleges and universities.⁸¹ Some colleges and universities, like the one at which my research takes place, have recognized this systematic barrier and grants students an appeal if they are rejected due to low test scores.

Student Support and Belonging

The third key area Carter lists is student support. Student support can come in a variety of forms and programs, but one thing is clear—when students are supported by the faculty or staff of an institution, they are more likely to persist in college. Yavuz, also, states that 49 percent of students report a lack of support as a challenge that affects their level of persistence in college.⁸² Carter also mentions that underrepresented minority students don't "feel comfortable in college environments that lack diversity."⁸³ Green agrees with Carter and argues that lower academic engagement rates can also impact a student's sense of belonging, which in turn can affect students' persistence and retention.⁸⁴ Green also discusses how underrepresented minority students experience feelings of isolation, especially at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs).⁸⁵ Green also states that "it is important that underrepresented minority students do not feel that they have to disassociate with their home cultures and assimilate to the institutional values and norms in order to socially integrate to college and university environments," which is also crucial for the student's sense of belonging at college.⁸⁶

Feminist researchers have examined this concept of belonging further by looking specifically at the experience of women of color and the way their intersecting identities affect their experience at college, especially in STEM departments.⁸⁷ For example, intersectional researchers, Hyun Kyoung Ro and Karla Loya found that the learning

outcomes of students of either gender can be affected by their race and/or ethnicity. Ro and Loya explained that women and men of color in engineering fields tend to experience lower self-confidence in their learning compared to their white counterparts.⁸⁸ In their article, “Linking Intersectional Invisibility and Hypervisibility,” Kerrie Wilkins-Yel and colleagues examined how women of color experience both intersectional invisibility and hypervisibility in STEM spaces, which affects their feeling of belonging in the field. Women with multiple intersecting “subordinate” identities experience misrepresentation, marginalization, and disempowerment.⁸⁹ Women of color in STEM are made to feel unwelcome and excluded by other classmates, faculty, and advisors. They are also sent the message that they don’t belong due to the lack of representation of individuals who have similar racial and gender identities in the STEM field.⁹⁰ Due to this lack of belonging, women of color are more likely to not choose a STEM major or career. Women in STEM are only one example of how a student’s intersecting identities bring about challenges in higher education that result in low retention and inability to achieve their goals. My research will examine how advisors address these challenges and help their students overcome them.

Conclusion

This literature review presented a discussion on three bodies of knowledge: the proactive advising and coaching of students, intersectionality in higher education, and retention and persistence of underrepresented college students. These three bodies of knowledge provide the necessary context for this aim and showcase where this thesis topic fits into the conversation of existing research. These texts also allow me to see what

has been done in the past to provide intersectional support and services to underrepresented students in higher education. While existing research focused on the important and meaningful study of students' experiences, my research will fill in the gap and provide insight into the individual's experience of providing services to students. This thesis aims to present the combination of the proactive advising model and coaching techniques as an intersectional method for student success, but also to present the value and importance of these services. The next chapter will examine the methodology of how I will achieve this aim.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research involves in-depth semi-structured interviews with advisors who use the proactive advising method with their students to gain insight on the advising of underrepresented students. Interviews allow advisors to explain their advising process and their experience with working with underrepresented students. The study sample consists of four advisors who are responsible for providing proactive advising and increasing the rate of retention for underrepresented students. These four all work in an office that I call, Office for Diverse Student Access & Success (ODSAS) at a regional midwestern university. All four advisors and the office are focused on the support and retention of all diverse and underrepresented students at the university. The purpose of this study is to answer the question: Is intersectionality, implicitly or explicitly, involved in the proactive model of advising? Other concepts are also addressed in this research, including what proactive advising of underrepresented students at a regional midwestern university looks like and how the identity of the advisor and advisee affects the process. It is significant to understand how underrepresented students are being advised and how feminist techniques and theories are present in the advising process. I theorize that advisors may implicitly incorporate intersectional feminist ideas in their advising without explicit reference to intersectional feminist theories or research.

In the existing literature on university advising, there is a lack of perspective from the advisors themselves. Advisors' perspectives should be considered because they provide a unique and important voice to the topic of advising underrepresented students due to their experience of working with diverse students to ensure retention and

persistence. While I considered surveying the students who have been a part of a proactive advising program, interviewing the advisors themselves allows me to gain a more expansive and in-depth understanding of the advising model and how it has helped a multitude of students over several years. The advisors also acknowledge how their model has evolved over the years to increase the support necessary for students to succeed in college.

Additionally, the proactive advising model encourages advisors to recognize that a student's academic performance and retention can be affected by their personal life and experience.¹ Some research on underrepresented students' retention and persistence does acknowledge how a student's intersecting identities can affect their college experience but doesn't explicitly reference feminism or intersectionality theory.² This thesis fills the gaps in the existing literature by providing a new approach to analyzing both proactive advising and retention of underrepresented students through an intersectional feminist framework and a critical race theory lens.

Theoretical Framework

My study is multifaceted in that it is influenced by feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and critical race theory. I use an intersectional feminist theoretical framework and argue that an individual identity goes beyond gender and intersects with many other positionalities that affect how the individual experiences the world. My analysis recognizes that individuals have interlocking identities based on different positionalities such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, ability, citizenship status, and educational status. I follow authors like Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth who argue that Black

feminist theorists also use intersectionality as a way to “analyze the dynamics of marginalization and to call attention to the inequities of power and privilege.”³ My research also draws from critical race theory. This approach is important because critical race theory focuses on drawing attention to how discrimination and inequality can affect the achievements and accomplishments of individuals of racial and ethnic groups.⁴ All three of these frameworks are essential in analyzing both the underrepresented students’ challenges influenced by their identities and how their advisors/coaches support and help them succeed.

Qualitative Interviewing Methodology

I recruited advisors at ODSAS by sending out emails asking if they would be interested in participating in a one-on-one interview about proactive advising (recruitment email, Appendix #1). After they agreed, consent forms were sent out and signed before proceeding with the interviews (consent forms, Appendix #2). For this research, in-person interviews were conducted with all participants. I chose qualitative research because it relies on analyzing the content in detail and focuses on the human experience. In this case, I sought to understand these advisors’ jobs and how they interact with and support underrepresented students.⁵ While I am interested in the students’ success, I am not interested in measuring the students’ success or retention rates. It is difficult to measure student success because success looks different in every student, which will be acknowledged in my research and analysis.

Qualitative interviews are an effective research method for answering my research question, “Is intersectionality implicitly or explicitly involved in the advising/coaching

model?” I was able to ask the advisors to describe their job and their experiences with their students and go into more detail on their students’ identities. They were also able to describe what they do and provide specific examples of how they help students in their own words. It is also important with in-depth qualitative interviewing to have participants with experience and knowledge of the topic.⁶ The advisors have been in their position for multiple years and have helped thousands of students, therefore they are qualified to speak on their position of serving underrepresented students.

In their book, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, Herbert and Irene Rubin argues that “intensive listening” and “a respect for and curiosity about people’s experiences and perspectives” are essential to the method of qualitative interviewing.⁷ This is also why interviewing has been recognized as “valuable” to feminist researchers, because feminist researchers also believe that interviewing is an important method to gaining insight into the experience of their participants.⁸ According to Hesse-Biber in her book, *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*, what makes in-depth interviewing “feminist” is the types of questions asked. Hesse-Biber lists three requirements that make research feminist. The first is that the research and interview questions are seeking to understand “women’s lives and those of other oppressed groups.”⁹ In my research, the “oppressed group” is underrepresented students and their advisors. The second requirement Hesse-Biber lists is that the research should “promote social justice and social change.”¹⁰ Through my research, I am seeking to reveal how an intersectionality approach could improve underrepresented students’ lives and college experiences. And finally, the third requirement is that the research is mindful of the

relationship between the research and the participants.¹¹ Thus the researcher should practice reflexivity, which I will include below.

The interviews for my research are also semi-structured, which allowed me to go into the interviews with a set plan of questions, but also, I was able to ask questions, “on the fly,” throughout the interview.¹² The plan included questions based on the topics, proactive advising, and intersectionality (interview script, Appendix #3). The interviews began with questions based on the advisor’s demographic information. After that, I presented a question that encompassed what I thought intersectional coaching is, instead of explicitly asking them if they use an intersectional approach. The question is, “Some people advise using an approach that focuses on a student’s multiple interconnecting identities and how those identities bring about a set of disadvantages and challenges to the student’s ability to succeed in college, and the advisors may provide strategies and programs to address those challenges. Would you say this reflects your advising practices, yes, or no?” Providing a definition in a form of a question guaranteed no participation bias.

The topic of intersectionality was also included in three different sections, the identities of students, the challenges the students face due to those interlocking identities, and how the identities affect the advising. The interviews were about an hour long and took place in the advisor’s own office, thus ensuring comfort and privacy. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, I coded the data for themes and patterns. To find an answer to my research question, I used the following codes to analyze the data: identity, intersectionality, and

the barriers faced by students. Additionally, I examined for similar themes that appeared across the interviews that provided insight into proactive advising and coaching.

Reflexivity

According to Hesse-Biber, “The feminist, reflexive researcher’s perspective begins with an understanding of the importance of one’s values and attitudes about the research process”¹³ This research is important and personal to me. As someone who has worked in the ODSAS as an undergrad student worker, the office has special meaning to me and is the reason I plan to go into the career of academic advising after I have achieved my master’s degree. Because of my past work in the office, I have friendly relationships with all the advisors and participants already. Thinking critically about the work of people I consider friends and mentors may prove difficult for me, but the importance of analyzing this intrusive model of advising outweighs that uncomfortable feeling. I also personally identify as an underrepresented student, because I am a first-generation, and low-income student, I believe I can provide a better understanding of what underrepresented students need to succeed in college. However, I also must address my privileged identities as a white, cisgender female. Therefore, there are challenges that I may never experience, and barriers that I may not consider.

It is also important to mention that the coaching style of the participants at the university this takes place, may be different than coaching at other institutions. Coaching is difficult to define and varies depending on the needs of the students. This research may not reflect all academic coaching. As a feminist researcher, it is important to state that how I analyzed the data, may have been different than how someone else would. This is

due to my standpoint and my identities. The next chapter will examine my findings and include the analysis of the data.

Chapter 4: Results

The following chapter includes a discussion of my findings from interviews with four advisors at a mid-sized midwestern university. All four advisors work for what I will call the Office for Diverse Student Access and Success (ODSAS). The research had initially centered on proactive advising. This focus was influenced by the Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan that was created in 2019 at the university at which this study took place. The plan stated that underrepresented students would be provided with a proactive advising service. However, the interviews revealed that although proactive advising is still a part of what ODSAS does, they have since taken a more coaching-style model with their students. Each participant clarified that they are not “technically” academic advisors but referred to themselves as “Student Success Coaches.” As stated previously in the Literature Review chapter, coaching does involve academic advising and goes beyond what coaches provide for their students. For this chapter, I will refer to the participants as coaches and discuss both the proactive advising and coaching that occurs in ODSAS.

This study aims to explore how intersectionality is incorporated into the advising and coaching of underrepresented students. There are three objectives, including (1) understanding the proactive advising and coaching that is provided to underrepresented students, (2) examining if and how intersectionality is involved, including how the identity of the students affects the coaching and advising, (3) exploring the challenges and barriers underrepresented students face and the strategies coaches use to increase retention and help students achieve their goals. I will first introduce the participants and

definitions that are important to know. Then I will examine the coaches' roles, methods, and philosophies. Finally, I will analyze the themes that emerged in the interviews. The themes connect to intersectionality and include identity and the barriers and challenges students encounter. Each theme also includes subthemes. The theme of identity will include an examination of the students' and coaches' identities. The other theme focuses on the students' financial and family challenges and how the advisors help the students manage and overcome those barriers. I will also discuss the concepts I found to be unexpected and surprising.

Participants and Definitions

A series of demographic questions were asked of each participant at the beginning of the interview regarding their race, gender, how long they have held their position, and how many students they serve. Also, as stated in chapter three, all participants were given a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. Yusuf Ali identified himself as a Black male. Jon Lee identifies as an Asian American male. Blanche Olson is a white female and Ashley Walker is a Black female. There is a significant range regarding the years they have held their position, with the shortest length of time being eleven months, whereas the longest was five years. Each participant was also asked to estimate how many students they serve. Participants estimated providing services to as few as 10 students, and the highest estimate was 35 students weekly. Ashley is also in charge of contacting an estimate of 2,300 domestic students of color via email and other communications. Although she does not *meet with* all of them, she is reaching out to them and seeing if they need any help, or if they would like to make an appointment with her. Through emails, she is also sharing

important information students might need to know, such as registration and financial aid deadlines. These students are also relevant to the study because even though Ashley has not met all these students, there are still students who are contacting and setting appointments with Ashley, even if it is a couple of years later. Furthermore, each coach oversees different populations of students. A table has been provided below of each participant and who they specifically serve. The table specifically includes the students that have been assigned to the coaches in any way. The table does not include students who may be “walk-ins,” as in students who may come to the office randomly or be referred to the office.

Participant	Who They Serve
Participant #1 – Yusuf Ali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic Students of Color - Students on Academic Probation - First-Year Success Program
Participant #2 – Jon Lee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First-Year Success Program
Participant #3 – Blanche Olson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First-Year Success Program - Male Athletes of Color - Pell Eligible
Participant #4 – Ashley Walker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic Students of Color - Transfer Students - First-Year Success Program - Multicultural Learning Community

Based on the table above, here are definitions of the students that the coaches serve. These definitions are based on information provided in the interviews.

First-Year Success Program:ⁱ The students a part of this program, are students who were admitted the “non-traditional” way. To be admitted to the university, a student must meet three requirements based on test scores, GPA, and class ranking. If they do not meet any of them, they can appeal, and then a committee decides to admit them or not. If they are admitted by the committee, they must follow certain rules. One is that they are required to meet with an advisor/coach throughout their first year and thus become a part of the First-Year Success program where they will be provided with resources to help them succeed.

Male Athletes of Color: According to the ODSAS coaches, male athletes of color are more likely to not complete their degrees. There are many reasons for this, but one may be that the athletes do not meet the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) standards for academics. The standards of the university are different than those of the NCAA. According to the ODSAS coaches, the students could have good academic standing according to the university but not NCAA, and then are ineligible to participate in the sport.

Pell Eligible: If a student completes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and a student’s expected family contribution for financial aid is below a certain amount, they are eligible for the Pell Grant. According to

ⁱ This is a pseudonym that I came up, due to the original name of the program revealed information about the university this study takes place.

the coaches, students who are Pell Eligible do not require coaching based on this status alone. However, most students receiving coaching in ODSAS are also Pell Eligible. These students are considered to have a low socioeconomic status.¹ However, it is also important to note that not all low socioeconomic students are Pell Eligible.

Transfer Students: Transfer students are those who attended another university or college before coming to the current one. According to the coaches, most times these students are transferring from two-year community colleges. Transfer students are not required to receive coaching. However, ODSAS is contacting the students through email and providing information on transferring credits and important deadlines.

Multicultural Learning Community: According to the coaches, a multicultural learning community is made up of a group of students of color, who live on the same floor in the dorms. The students may share classes and form study groups amongst themselves. This community was designed because when students of color come to an institution, especially a predominately white institution, they can experience culture shock. This learning community allows them to create solidarity amongst each other and comradery knowing that they share similar experiences and a safe space to be themselves. This builds a strong foundation in the first year and makes the transition from high school to college easier. As the advisor of this community, Ashley works to get the students connected to other cultural communities on campus and encourages them to

attend events, especially diversity events. She also invites them to learn more about racial justice and equity work.

Advising, Coaching, and Services

To evaluate if the coaches use intersectional methods and principles in their coaching, it was necessary to first understand what these coaches did and their process. Through the interviews, I discovered that each coach's role in helping their students is exhaustive and multifarious. In this section, I will first examine the coaches' philosophies including their "one-stop-shop" philosophy and holistic philosophy of coaching. Then I will explore the methods the coaches use to enact these philosophies.

"One-Stop-Shop" Philosophy

One theme that appeared throughout the participant's responses is the idea that they have a "one-stop-shop" philosophy. The coaches in ODSAS can provide information and services on a wide range of topics. The coaches can assist their students with any concerns they may have, whether it is financial, academic, personal, or career planning. Ashley explained it further:

I kind of work in a kind of "one-stop-shop" philosophy, but that is a lot of what we do in general. Whatever the issue is, let's see what the issue is, and how we can help you and either get you connected to the right people or solve it at that moment.

Yusuf said something similar, but also addressed that the office is here for whatever the student needs, whether it is to get a question answered, or just to "vent."

I like to tell them that this office is a one-stop-shop, it doesn't matter what your question is about or if you're just here to vent, or if you have a concern, or you're thinking about something that might possibly be a question that I won't have the answer to, and I probably won't sometimes, I will point you into the direction to someone who does. And just save you the headache of walking around campus all the time figuring out where to go.

What is important about each of Ashley's and Yusuf's quotes is that they both recognize that they may not always have the answers, but that they still work with the student to figure it out. The students can acknowledge their coach and the office as a place to get their questions answered, whatever the question may be. This potentially decreases the likelihood of frustration on the student's part of having to walk around campus looking for the answer. Based on a study done by Elizabeth Auguste, Becky Wai-Lang Packard, and Alexander Keep, non-traditional women students are often met with indifference by their advisors. While my study focuses on underrepresented students more broadly, it is important to note that when the nontraditional women students were met with indifference, they left the exchanges "feeling frustrated" and often discontinued the relationship with their advisors.² The same can occur with other underrepresented students. The coaches' dedication to give students answers and work to find the answers if they do not know them is extremely important in ensuring the student's success on campus. This is also the benefit of the coaching model because the coaches can go beyond just helping students with their academics, but that advisors help students, as another coach, Blanche put it, "to navigate this world of college." There is an

acknowledgment by these coaches that the life of a college student is more than just navigating their classes, registration, and homework.

Holistic Philosophy

When Yusuf was asked to describe his coaching in one word, he chose “holistic.” He mentioned that it is important to see “everything about the student.” He said:

“So, I would say I see holistic advising as you are kind of touching on everything because a student is a person, not just a statistic or a GPA or a completion rate.”

Yusuf also mentioned how his coaching method is influenced by “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.” Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a motivation theory in psychology that is often depicted as a five-level pyramid model of human needs. From the bottom of the pyramid upwards, the needs include physiological (food, water, clothing), safety (job security, safety at home), love and belonging needs (friendship, family), esteem, and self-actualization.³ In theory, an individual must first fulfill the lower-level needs before attending to the needs higher up. Maslow’s theory has since been discredited based on two main critiques: needs do not necessarily follow a hierarchy and the theory lacks empirical evidence.⁴ However, its foundation in the recognition of human needs and the link to motivation is important. Based on research, meeting important needs is beneficial to an individual’s ability to progress and meet other needs, however, it is not necessary for those needs to be met in a hierarchical order as suggested by Maslow.⁵ Through his coaching style, Yusuf recognizes the importance of seeing a student and their needs beyond their identity as a “student.” A student is a person, with a world outside of their academics. According to Yusuf,

For a student to be successful academically, their social, personal, and emotional needs have to be met. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which the theory is based on, if the students aren't meeting their basic needs to survive, they can't be successful in the classroom. So, I feel like any good advising has to come with that check-in to how things are going outside of school. A lot of the time school-related problems can be a side effect of something else.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been commonly used in the field of education, especially with teaching. Maslow believed in a holistic approach to education that acknowledged that the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual qualities of a student can impact their ability to learn.⁶ Therefore, it is also important that the social, personal, and emotional needs of a student are addressed, especially since most of the students the coaches serve are underrepresented students and domestic students of color. Statistically, underrepresented students are going to experience more difficulties meeting those "basic needs."⁷

Underrepresented students may identify as low socioeconomic status and may experience financial challenges and food insecurity. In his study on food insecurity of college students, Don Willis specifically focuses on whether students with "nontraditional" age, gender, race, and sexual orientation are more likely to experience food insecurity.⁸ Willis' study reveals that students of color, LGBT students, and Pell Eligible students have a higher prevalence of food insecurity.⁹ Another study by sociologist Carol Glasser and her students supports Willis's findings. Glasser's study reveals that undergraduate students who identify as Asian American and Black/African

American have the highest rates of food insecurity. Glasser's study also shows a high correlation between housing instability and food insecurity.¹⁰

As part of an intersectional approach to advising and coaching, it is necessary to recognize the financial difficulties and students' challenges in meeting basic needs because these barriers commonly result from systemic oppression and affect the student's ability to handle all their daily responsibilities. In the article, "Employing a Black Feminist Approach to Doctoral Advising," authors Tamara Bertrand Jones, JeffriAnne Wilder, and La'Tara Osborne-Lampkin established an advising approach that is influenced by Black feminist theory. One of the characteristics they call for advisors to have is an "ethic of caring."¹¹ They described it as a "holistic advising relationship that considers the academic, personal, and community responsibilities of the advisee; provides advisee with a sense of caring and empathy for the "entire" self."¹² This is like the holistic coaching model Yusuf employs with his students. Not only does his coaching model exemplify his care for his students, but it also encourages the students to care for themselves. It also reflects intersectionality in that it addresses the way systemic barriers and inequalities affect a student's ability to care for themselves and meet their basic needs such as food and security.

Coaches' Method I: Proactive Advising

All four participants agreed that proactive advising is involved in their coaching model. One coach even described it as "the bedrock" of his coaching process when working with students. For example, Yusuf explained that even if a student is not thinking about where they will live next year, Yusuf will initiate the conversation early in

the year and discuss apartment options based on the student's budget. Yusuf explained that he is "always thinking ahead of what might come up." Jon also agreed and said:

I still feel like the coaching goes back to proactive advising. We want to be proactive, and we want to serve the students as early as possible. We want to see them before they end up in that bad situation.

This idea is also the influence behind the programs the coaches provide for their students such as the First-Year Success Program and the Summer Bridge Program. In the First-Year Success Program, first-year students who may have underperformed in high school and were admitted "on contract" are assigned one of the coaches in the ODSAS. These students are required to meet with a coach because the university makes the connection that because they underperformed in high school, they may also struggle to succeed academically in college. They are provided a coach and required to meet with them throughout the semester; this program holds a student accountable, and they can inform their coach of a problem before it becomes too big.

As mentioned in the literature review, proactive advising has been proven to increase the retention of "at-risk" students, similar to the underrepresented students being served by the coaches in the First-Year Success Program.¹³ Another study based on promoting the success of underrepresented students argued that "new students tend to benefit from early interventions and sustained attention during the first year in terms of their academic approaches," especially when these students come from "underrepresented backgrounds and those with low ACT scores."¹⁴ Through the program, the coaches provide services and resources for the first-year students to succeed. They offer

workshops about important information on financial aid and registration for classes. They also provide diversity and “de-stressing” events, where the students can meet other students in the First-Year Success Program, who share similar experiences.

In her research on proactive advising, Jennifer Varney recommends several proactive strategies for helping students. Varney suggests that advisors provide students with information on the institution and other resources. Varney mentions that even though all this information may likely be available on the school’s website, students may become overwhelmed by the amount of information available. Advisors can be proactive and provide information that they know students will find relevant.¹⁵ Based on this strategy, another proactive program that is provided by ODSAS for incoming first-year students in the Summer Bridge Program. It is a website that students can access where they can learn more about the university that they will be attending and include information on areas in which first-year students tend to struggle. These areas included financial aid, scholarships, registration, accessing academic transcripts and records, and even email etiquette. Yusuf established and led this program. This was a way that he can be proactive and provide information for first-year students before they arrive on campus. The website also includes important connections to other offices and centers on campus, such as the library and Career Development Center. Yusuf felt it was important to let the students know that there were many people on campus ready to help. He says,

Another thing or another reason why we had the Summer Bridge Program that I felt was important was also to have them know that there were already people on campus that are waiting for you. Not just me, but others involved as well as my

office in general. Or the office that I work in. That we are here waiting for you to provide support the second that you show up. But I am here talking to you in July so that when it is September and you have a question, come get answers.

This sets a crucial foundation for students and creates a sense of familiarity and comfort with the campus and its staff and faculty before the students even have their first day. It also shows how proactive the coaches are being, and that they are reaching out to students as soon as possible.

Coaches' Method II - Getting to Know the Student

When prompted with the question, “what do you consider to be the most important part of your advising or coaching?” one coach, Jon, said that it would be getting to know the student. He stressed that he found “great pleasure” in learning more about the student and their career plans. He went on to say:

Just getting to know a person and you can learn a lot about them. I have had some students where I have learned a lot about their family history, or family dynamics and found out that what they are studying is not what they truly wanted to study. It was more family pressure saying, “you have to go do this.” But having conversations with them and actually truly understanding who they are, and understanding what they want to go major in, having those conversations with them to have those conversations with their parents. And then having a big sigh of relief and seeing their grades improve, because they are actually studying something, finally, that they enjoy.

The other coaches also explained the importance of getting to know their students. Their reasons include (1) to learn what the student needs because different students need different things, and the coaches want to tailor their services to the students (2) it builds a relationship and rapport with the student, without it they will not feel comfortable coming back to the advisors when they do need help (3) it extends the coach's knowledge of who the student is beyond their academic files and records. For example, Blanche mentioned that she knows how the student did in high school, but that is only one part of the narrative. Talking with the students provides a "broader picture" and the most important information is the things that have not been talked about or acknowledged. She went on to say:

It is kind of like, sometimes the things that you learn most are the things that are left unsaid. So, you are looking, and you're talking, and they are just saying, "Math is really hard." Then the more you talk about it you are learning that maybe there is a reason math is hard. Somebody just went through all of high school and got into college before they even realized that they needed a hearing aid. How does that happen? I don't even know. But when you start talking to students, and you start hearing what they are saying, but you are also questioning things they might not be saying. That leads you down these different little paths, and sometimes those paths are dead ends. And sometimes those paths are those "A-Ha" moments and you are like "Why wasn't this ever figured out before?"

This connects to the coaching framework established by Robinson and Gahagan that was previously mentioned in the literature review. The first two steps in this framework are

self-assessment and reflection; each step involves getting to know the student.¹⁶ In the self-assessment, the coach assesses the student's involvement on campus and level of academic skills.¹⁷ The reflection step includes discussions between the coach and the student about the student's personal and academic interests, motivations, and goals.¹⁸

While Robinson and Gahagan focus on understanding the student's strengths and interests, the coaches at ODSAS are looking further into understanding why students may have difficulties achieving their goals or improving their academics. Through this coaching service, students may be able to learn more about themselves, and their identities, find the "roadblocks" that are preventing them from succeeding and move them out of the way.¹⁹

Coaches' Method III - Building Connections and Sense of Community

The participants also reflected on how they increased student engagement on campus in the interviews. Coaches in ODSAS encourage their students to get involved on campus or in the community by attending events, joining student organizations or intramural sports, and going to weekly events in their dorms if they live on campus. One coach, Jon, described this process as "helping them find a sense of community here on campus." This can be a crucial step to ensuring students, especially underrepresented students, persist and retain. Doing this in their first year also builds a solid foundation for students to stand on for the rest of their college careers. Another coach, Blanche, argued, "when a student doesn't find their community here on campus, they will choose to leave." This coincides with previous studies that report students who have a community or a sense of belonging are more likely to succeed in their academics and personal life.²⁰

Ashley also mentioned that the office will have events about diversity, social justice, racial justice, and equity work that she encourages all of her students to attend. She argued that these events and conversations are important because they motivate students to build knowledge on these topics and issues, especially racial justice issues. Students must understand the “kinds of things that are happening,” build their confidence and find their voice. These events and creating spaces to discuss social and racial justice issues encourage conversations about race and social change. In her piece on critical race theory and academic advising, Jasmine Lee mentions the importance of advisors creating “counter-spaces,” for their students.²¹ Daniel Solórzano originally defined two types of counter-spaces that are beneficial to African American students, academic counter-spaces, and social counter-spaces. Academic counter-spaces are areas in that students can “foster their own learning and nurture a supportive environment wherein their experiences are validated and viewed as important knowledge.”²² Social counter-spaces usually take place outside of the classroom where students of color can “vent” and meet others who share similar experiences of microaggressions and discrimination.²³ Although Solórzano focuses on African American students in his research, counter-spaces can be beneficial to all students of color. Students of color who have counter-spaces are less isolated and alienated.²⁴ In the current study, the events the ODSAS coaches host are both academic and social counter-spaces because the students are fostering their learning but are also able to meet other students who share similar experiences. The students can find a sense of community in these counter-spaces where they can have their experiences validated, but also learn more about their own identity.

The participants also discussed how they connect students to offices and individuals outside of ODSAS. This is their way of increasing the student's social capital and building a network of people that the student can turn to when they need help or to form relationships with potential role models. Yusuf explained that he will often walk students to people in other offices that he feels that the student should meet, and he wants to help build these contacts, and introduce "another familiar face" for the students.

Another way that the coaches in ODSAS help students build connections on campus is by organizing workshops or events that allow students to meet the staff of other departments on campus. For example, Ashley mentioned an event where the office brought in financial aid advisors to stay in the office for a day, and students were able to participate in "walk-in" appointments with financial aid advisors to get specific questions they may have answered. Ashley said that she would meet with the students prior to their appointment to discuss which questions they should ask the financial aid advisors, but the coaches brought the advisors to the students instead of the students going to them. Ashley explained that it was to provide the students to build those connections and get their answers in a space that they were "familiar with" and would then feel comfortable going to the financial aid advisors in the future. Research has shown that it is important for student support services such as advisors and coaches to help underrepresented students become engaged with the other faculty and staff on campus.²⁵ Additionally, it may be difficult for students to make these connections themselves because they do not know how to build a support network or they may not "feel entitled to being engaged," especially if it means they have to ask for help or advocate for themselves.²⁶ Students

may avoid reaching out to other offices and departments to ask for help to avoid rejection, but the coaches help the students move past this barrier and also help students to gain the skills to continue building a support network in the future.

Coaches' Method IV - Support System

“But in general, yeah providing a support system so that they know that they have a person who is in their corner, who is on campus. Who they can turn to if they have a question, regardless what it is.” – Yusuf

Discussions of providing a support system for students appeared throughout all the interviews with coaches. Jon explained that he had students that said that they would have transferred because they did not have a good support system before they met him. It proves that students who do not have a personal connection or a support system on campus are more likely to drop out or transfer to another school. More importantly, it suggests that there is someone who cares whether you succeed or not and will dedicate their time to finding a solution to the problems. Sometimes a student's success can come down to one person providing support. Blanche especially believes in the importance of students having “their person” or “human” on campus. A person to be there for you in your joyous moments and for the hard times. Ashley also discussed how she felt her colleagues and she was able to see successes and retain students because of the support system they have set up. She says:

So, we do see those successes. I do feel like the work we are doing is helping retain students because, for some students, if they didn't have us, it would have been really hard for them to find their place and the people that they can get help

from. Not saying that we are the best place in the world. I just think that we provide a service and experience for students that sometimes it would have taken longer had they not met with us. To get the help they need and to go off into other parts of campus and be successful.

Ashley mentioned that not all her students take advantage of the support system the coaches provide because they may not be looking for that type of relationship and may just need someone to answer their questions in a timely matter. However, Ashley feels that most of the time her students do need that “extra personal touch or friendliness to feel like they are uniquely heard and that someone is looking out for them.” This can relate to how underrepresented students and students with multiple intersecting identities need that connection and compassion to feel like they belong on campus. Especially since students with multiple identities are often met with indifference and apathy from other advisors, faculty, and staff.²⁷

Theme One: Identities of Students and Coaches

A key objective of the interviews was to examine if and how intersectionality is involved, including how the identity of the students affects the coaching and advising. All the interviews with coaches involved discussions of identity, including both the students’ identities and the coaches’ identities.

Instead of asking every coach if they used an intersectional approach with their advising, I presented a question that encompassed what I thought intersectional coaching is. The coaches were presented with the question: “Some people advise using an approach that focuses on a student’s multiple interconnecting identities and how those

identities bring about a set of disadvantages and challenges to the student's ability to succeed in college, and the advisors may provide strategies and programs to address those challenges. Would you say this reflects your advising practices, yes, or no?" Each participant agreed that their coaching at least partially encompasses this concept. When prompted with this question, Jon said:

I would say yeah. More so as getting to know a student on a personal level; seeing what things they may be struggling with and understanding maybe cultural, historic backgrounds for them, and being able to serve different resources for them, so that they are successful.

Jon recognized the students' intersecting identities, but he was not able to determine their needs without talking to them more about their background and culture. Jon wants to get to know the student on a personal level and figure out the resources the student needs based on what he learns. Interestingly, Yusuf said something similar when prompted by this question.

In his interview, Yusuf answered the question by stating that the coaches may acknowledge the student's identity, but that the coaching model is meant to go deeper on a personal and individualized level. His answer was:

Because we are very cognizant of how students' identities can disadvantage them or advantage them, usually its disadvantage in our society, but we avoid a one size fits all policies because even within identities it changes from person to person. Part of that is based on your perception of yourself and what your identity is or whether it is the socio-economic environment you grew up in.

Yusuf's advising was intersectional, even though he did not explicitly mention it. By saying that as a coach Yusuf does not take a "one-size-fits-all" approach is another way of saying he takes an intersectional approach. Each student will be different and have different intersecting identities that will affect their experience. In her piece on intersectionality, Vivian May lists critical practices of intersectionality, one is to challenge "false universals." May explains that intersectionality "exposes how the experiences of some are often universalized to represent the experiences, needs, and claims of all group members."²⁸ The coaches refusing to use a "one-size-fits-all" approach is how they are challenging "false universals." This also connects to critical race theory, anti-essentialism, and over-generalization. In her article on academic advising and critical race theory, Lee argues that advisors must not essentialize or overgeneralize the experiences of their students.²⁹ Lee relates this to critical race theory, which is committed to anti-essentialism in that it states that "all individuals experience the world in unique ways such that no experience of one person is the same as that of another person."³⁰ No one student is the same, even if they share the same identity, their experience, disadvantages, and advantages will be different.

Ashley on the other hand answered the question by saying that she does not want to acknowledge the student as "disadvantaged." She understands that there are challenges and "areas of improvement" in the student's life but wants to stay focused on what the student needs and what their goals are. It is not that Ashley refuses to recognize a student's intersecting identities, but that she does not want the students to identify themselves as "disadvantaged." More importantly, Ashley does not want to tell them that

“they can’t do something, or they aren’t able to” achieve their goals or succeed academically because of their identities. Ashley refuses to put her students in a certain box before they even get a chance to try.

Yusuf described the same thing with his students and insisted that you do not want to start “categorizing them.” He gave an example of helping a student choose a Recognized Student Organization (RSO) to join. He said,

Starting with “What are the kind of RSOs you would be interested in?” Because on the other hand, these students have come up in majority-white environments, and if you start categorizing them based on, “Oh you’re Asian, so why don’t you join this Asian American group.” They won’t like that. At least from my experience. Because that is stuff they experience before, and you don’t want to just be put in a box.

“Because this is your identity, go do this.”

It is important to recognize underrepresented students’ identities and acknowledge that for a student to succeed and retain in college they must find a sense of belonging.

However, it is up to the students to decide where they fit in, and coaches should let students choose what organizations they want to join without making assumptions about what is best for them. Especially, since they may have experienced that in high school and grade school. There is variance among individuals, and their goals for themselves are complex and unique. They will not be the same across racial identities or any other positionalities for that matter.

Importance of Students Self-Identifying

My expectation going into these interviews was that coaches would apply an intersectional approach to coaching in their first encounters with students. What I failed to recognize is the importance of a student self-identifying their intersectional identities to their coach. It is difficult for a coach to provide an intersectional approach if they do not have all the information. It is up to the student to provide that information. Ashley explained,

I am working with students, like I said, that have been historically excluded in some capacity. It's just that I more so that I work with ones of color. And then all the other things are definitely a part of their identity, I just don't have access to all that. Like Accessibility Resources, I don't have access to those records, unless a student self-discloses to me. I don't get access to all students who identify as women. And I don't have access to students who identify as the LGBT+ community, but I have students who self-identify to me.

The coaches have access to students' academic records from high school and past institutions. The coaches have information based on what those records state about the student's race, gender, and ethnicity. However, it is possible for those to have the wrong identities recorded, especially if those individuals identify as non-binary and/or multiracial. Forms are not always inclusive of an individuals' identity choices. Therefore, it is crucial that students self-identify to their coaches so that they can best tailor their services to them. However, a student must first feel comfortable to self-identify to their coaches and have trust in the coaches. This relates to the importance of building rapport

and a relationship between the coach and their students. Thus, the student will feel comfortable coming to the coaches with their problems and questions, but also so the student can feel comfortable being themselves around them. This is interesting because research that focused on the student's experience with advisors and coaches did not mention the importance of self-identifying, and neither did the research on intersectionality. Students need to be able to self-identify, in order for the coaches and advisors to provide intersectional advising. The coaches can gain more valuable information from their conversations with their students than if they relied solely on the student's records, history, and appearance. These interactions are focused on discussing the student's identities and addressing the challenges they are specifically encountering.

Ashley mentioned that she has students with a lot of different intersecting identities, and she adjusts herself to their needs. Below is an example of a student Ashley had that self-identified as a gay, Latinx, cisgender male who is also autistic. Because he did so, Ashley was able to adapt her coaching style to best fit the needs of this student. In this example, a student did not want to focus on addressing their immigration status with Ashley, instead, the focus was on the challenges he faced as a student with autism.

At first, the way I would help them is I would kind of start off with my standard thing that I introduced you to... but then realized that I didn't think that was what they needed. And maybe they needed a listening ear, they didn't need action, because they were doing the action. And so, I learned to adapt there. And then when they self-identified to me that they were autistic, then I started doing my own research. And started figuring out what are other better ways that I can help advise a student

because sometimes I felt like I was missing the mark. And I learned that sometimes things can be a little bit more concise, and I don't need to provide every single option for them. Sometimes people like to see the options laid out; they didn't need that.

It is in this example that an intersectional coaching style is explicitly used because the advisor has access to many of the student's intersecting identities. It also shows the willingness of Ashley, as a coach, to recognize when she is falling short and feels that she can do better in providing services to her students. She dedicated time to learning more about different identities and adapted her approach to better advise her student. Ashley mentioned that this student also inspired her to examine her coaching relationship with her other students and find the areas where she may be failing to provide the best resources for her students based on their intersecting identities. For example, Ashley mentioned that many of her students experience difficulties with citizenship status, particularly with being undocumented. Ashley realized that the student's academic problems should not be the main focus but should instead "flow" with what the student needs depending on their identities, and in this case, the student needed to call their immigration lawyer. However, coaches will not know what the issues are until the student self-identifies.

The Identity of the Coach

The interviews also included discussions of how the coaches' identity affected the coaching of the student. In some cases, there can be tension between the coach's identity and the student's identity, but it appears to only affect the first meetings between the

coach and students. Jon, for example, described his experience with his students as an Asian man. He said,

I have noticed that a lot of the more Asian students are more relaxed and talking to me a lot easier than let's say my Caucasian students or my African American students. But that is kind of just on that first part basis. After that building that connection with them, building that rapport, and finding those connections and themes between us. And knowing that I am on their side, that is what really helps me.

Jon later mentioned that female students can also be more hesitant to open up to him and discuss their problems. However, Jon said that finding commonalities and building rapport with the students can improve their relationship and the student's ability to talk to him. Blanche had similar experiences with her students, however, the tension came from her being a white woman working with students of color. She mentioned that building rapport with her students can be "a lot more challenging sometimes," so she needs to find something she has in common with her students to better their relationship. She is also reflexive of what she perceives as her limitations as a white female and recognizes that she may not be the best person for her students. However, it is still important for that student to succeed, so she will do whatever it takes for that student. She said,

I will say that there are times, especially as a white female, when I feel like it is not working. I am going to try and find them someone who will work better with them. And this is not a personal thing. We all know that there are people you work well with, and people you don't. I want to make sure that whoever the student is

working with is in the best interest of the student and the best interest of the advisor.

It has been demonstrated in research that students of color are more likely to succeed academically and retain if they have a mentor, advisor, or coach who shares their racial identity.³¹ However, there is also power in building rapport and making connections between the student and coach or advisor, especially when they do not share a commonality in their identities. Students of color can be appreciative of a coach or advisor who care enough to make that connection.³² In her article, Lee argues that it is important for academic advisors to practice cultural competency, which includes “self-reflection and introspection on one’s own identity and positionality as well as biases and perceived stereotypes.”³³ Culturally competent advisors also consider their racialized positionality, their privilege, and how these can positively or negatively impact the relationship with their students. It also requires advisors to be committed to exploring the experiences of students.³⁴ Based on these definitions provided by Lee and the previous examples, the coaches in the current study are practicing cultural competency with their students. It is also a way intersectionality and critical race theory are involved in their coaching since cultural competency is rooted in both.³⁵ Coaching requires the coach to acknowledge their own identity as well as the students' intersecting identities and how they work together.

Theme Two: Barriers and Challenges

The final objective of the interviews was to learn more about the challenges and barriers underrepresented students face and the strategies coaches use to increase

retention and help students achieve their goals. Two challenges were prominent throughout all the interviews with the coaches. Underrepresented students experience challenges in both finances and family influence. Both affect the students' ability to navigate college life, succeed academically, and achieve their goals, however, the coaches provide strategies for their students to overcome these barriers. With an intersectional approach to advising and coaching, it is necessary to recognize these challenges and barriers because they are most likely linked to systemic oppression.

Financial

Discussions of financial challenges were prominent and appear to be one of the leading causes of lack of retention and academic struggles of underrepresented students. This is no surprise considering recent statistics revealing that low-income students of color are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and food and housing insecurity.³⁶ The coaches try to help where they can. Yusuf mentioned that it is “pretty common to have students that come and do not have a textbook for class because it is too expensive.” In these situations, coaches share resources where they can access textbooks for free, including the textbook reserve at the campus library. Coaches also inform their students of grants and scholarships available to them. The ODSAS also has a resource called “Retention Grants” of \$1,000 that are available to seniors first and then juniors, sophomores, and first-years. Seniors have priority because they are closer to graduation.

Jon mentioned a student who was facing financial difficulties and had an obligation to their family and needed to send money back home. This resulted in the student having to work 30-40 hours, sometimes even past 40 hours, to make extra income

that they could send home. Due to the excessive number of hours working, the student had difficulty maintaining their academics. Jon described that it can be “really hard” helping the student through financial difficulties like this because the student needs that extra support at home. Jon went on to say how he helps them.

So, trying to help the student find a nice balance between work life and academic life, but also a social life. Helping them maybe create a schedule with times that they are going to be studying and hours where they will be tutoring. So, making sure they have that balanced schedule as well.

In her article, Sara Goldrick-Rab uncovers findings from a six-year study on Pell Eligible students throughout their college careers. Goldrick-Rab and her research team discovered that although colleges and FAFSA expect families to financially support or at least contribute to their children’s tuition and fees, the opposite is happening.³⁷ Low-income students are actually having to support their families, which is the case for Jon’s students. Goldrick-Rab’s research also revealed that the federal government does not measure students’ financial needs properly and often overstates a family’s ability to contribute and understates the costs of attending college.³⁸ These inadequacies result in students not qualifying for financial aid, such as the Pell Grant. Blanche said that the students she worries about the most are the ones who are not Pell Eligible, and their families will not or cannot contribute money. The students then struggle trying to pay for their tuition, because they may not be able to apply for loans either. Blanche said, “Those are the students, that no matter what you try to do, you can’t help.”

Ashley also said that the financial aid process can also be a “big barrier” for her students. It can be frustrating and daunting going through the process, but it is necessary to pay for tuition. Ashley goes on to say,

Maybe it's like you got to do the verification or you have to do extra stuff with your security, or you have to get your taxes and get all this stuff right. For some people, they can push through and get it done. But some give up real soon and all of a sudden, the student is not here. They have an unpaid balance, and I don't know if they are ever going to come back. Now they are affected if they go off to other schools.

Financial challenges can quickly lead to the student dropping out. College is also often the first-time students have to be financially responsible for themselves and even their families. They may not know how to properly handle financial situations and challenges or may struggle to balance their work, academics, and their social life. In their article, Julia White and Amelie Dache discuss the inequalities students of color experience through financial aid. White and Dache discuss how Latina/o students are the most disadvantaged and receive the lowest average amount of financial aid.³⁹ There is also the case of Latina/o students who are undocumented and are not eligible for state or federal financial aid in the majority of states, and if they are eligible they might be fearful of providing personal information that could result in being deported.⁴⁰ The coaches often have students experiencing financial challenges for a variety of reasons, however many can be tied back to a student's class, ethnicity, or racial identity. Providing an

intersectional coaching framework means the coaches must be prepared to address how those identities may intersect.

Family Pressures

Another theme that appeared throughout the interviews is the challenge of family pressures that affects the students' ability to be successful in their academics. When examining the identities of students who face more family obligations, researchers Susan Sy and Aerika Brittian found that family obligations fall more onto women than on men.⁴¹ Sy and Brittian's study also revealed that Latinx women reported fulfilling family obligations more than white and Asian American students.⁴² Overall, underrepresented students face family pressure due to cultural expectations, or because they may be first-generation students, and their parents have high expectations for their children because they were not able to go to college themselves.⁴³ Either way, the coach tries to handle the challenge delicately. Yusuf said,

Other times it is family pressure. Maybe these students want to change their major, maybe they want to do something else. They aren't graduating on time, and it might be wise for them to take things slower, they still want to cram it, because they think that they have to finish by this time. And realistically, that's not the best choice for them, it might set them back even further. And they won't be successful in those courses. Navigating that can also be a little bit tricky. Because you can't talk down on somebody's family.

Jon described a similar experience with his students, as well. The student wanted to major in Family Consumer Science but felt that their family would not approve. Jon helped

build the student's confidence to have that conversation with their family. He also helped them to come up with ways to explain the benefits of the major, why they wanted to major in it, and the types of jobs that they could get. Once that conversation was had with their parents, the parents would reply with, *"Oh I never knew you could do that with an FCS degree or things like that."* Jon thought it was important to allow the student to "picture themselves where they want to be" and assure their parents that switching majors will be beneficial, but also asserting themselves by telling them, "This is what I want."

Unexpected Findings

One thing I found to be interesting and unexpected was the discussion I had with Ashley about barriers the students may face that are out of their control. In her position as Director of Student Access, Ashley coaches students, but she also implements programs that solve students' issues and problems. Through the coaching, she is learning about a student's problem on a personal level, and then acknowledging how to solve it on a systemic level, that way no other student has to experience that issue again.

Intersectionality is not just about the individual; it is about the intersecting systemic oppressions the individual experiences. Ashley said,

I know some people in here help write policies or make recommendations for helping students on suspension who lose their financial aid. So, a couple people come together because they found a barrier and they write something up, had it sent off to the department, and it got implemented and now some students coming back on suspension can get their financial aid. Because they were able to meet more criteria. So, we were looking at all these random things that were

roadblocks and how can we move a breakout of the way so that eventually the road is clear.

This was surprising to me because I assumed that the coaching done in ODSAS just focused on helping students at a personal level, talking with students, and solving their individual problems. However, it is much more extensive than that. Coaches do not just want to move the “roadblocks” on individuals’ roads, they want to find a way to move those roadblocks for everyone.

This connects to feminist principles like feminist action, social change, and intersectionality. In his book, *Intersectionality and Higher Education*, David Mitchell explains the importance of using an intersectional framework in higher education, from the classroom to student affairs. He argues that intersectional theory and practices can “serve as gateways for exploring, interpreting, documenting, and most importantly, providing solutions to the social concerns facing U.S. higher education institutions.”⁴⁴ Addressing barriers students face due to their identities on a personal individualized level is only the beginning. Intersectionality is about more than just a student’s identity, but about the context – their experience, the structural oppressions, and systemic barriers, in this case, systemic barriers can play a role in how students experience college and their ability to achieve their goals and/or affect their retention. Student affairs staff, advisors, coaches, and faculty can take what they learn from talking with students about the barriers and challenges they are experiencing and work together to provide change on a systemic level. This can be through changing policy, advocating for students, or even providing services and resources.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights how proactive advising and coaching support underrepresented students and help enact their success. The interviews conducted with the participants revealed the multitude of services that coaches provide underrepresented students. This thesis examined coaching and proactive advising, and I argue that the coaching and proactive advising provided by the coaches in ODSAS involve intersectionality. In some cases, intersectionality was explicitly referenced, but overall, it was implicit. Most of the coaches did not specifically reference or mention intersectionality theory. However, principles of intersectionality were present in the interviews. It is clear based on the information from the interviews and supporting research that coaching is an important and intersectional support system for underrepresented students that could be beneficial to other universities and departments.

The ODSAS coaches' one-stop-shop and holistic philosophies provide students with a welcoming environment to get their questions answered and problems resolved. As part of an intersectional approach, it is crucial for coaches to address the challenges and barriers students face due to their intersecting identities. These philosophies allow for the coaches to be prepared for any of the students' challenges. The coaches' methods including proactive advising, getting to know the student, helping the students build connections and community, and being a support system are all influenced by these philosophies. Whether explicit or not, the holistic and one-stop-shop philosophies are intersectional because the coaches see the students in their entirety, as a student and as an individual who experiences many barriers and have academic goals, as well as personal

and professional. ODSAS is where coaches are prepared to provide any information related to navigating the world of college and beyond. Additionally, the methods allow the coaches to understand a student's specific needs based on their identities and the barriers they face, create counter-spaces for students to explore their identities further, and most importantly help ensure that students create a connection to the campus. Students who feel a sense of belonging at the university are more likely to succeed and stay to complete their degrees.

The interviews also revealed two themes connected to intersectionality: identity, and barriers and challenges. The theme of identity included an examination of both the coach's and the student's identities, and how they interact. This theme revealed that not only did the coaches implicitly practice intersectionality, but they also practice cultural competency with their students. The interviews also revealed the importance of students self-identifying to their coaches. Without the student self-identifying, it is difficult for the coach to truly know and address all the students' intersecting identities. The importance of self-identification was an unexpected finding because the research on proactive advising and coaching often focuses on how a student experiences these services, therefore it leaves out that an advisor or coach needs a student to self-identify their identities to better serve the student. This adds to the existing literature on intersectionality and higher education by acknowledging that through the discussions and interactions between coaches and students, coaches are able to gain more valuable information from their conversations with their students than if they relied solely on the student's records, history, and appearance.

The second theme of barriers and challenges included an examination of the different obstacles underrepresented students encountered throughout their college experience and the strategies the coaches use to help the students overcome them. The obstacles that were discussed in the interviews include academic difficulties, financial challenges, and family pressures and obligations. All obstacles are commonly experienced by underrepresented students and the analysis included how students with intersecting identities experience multiple barriers at once. For example, financial challenges affect a student's ability to succeed academically and can quickly lead to a student dropping out. Financial challenges can also overlap with family obligations. In the interviews, the coaches mentioned that some students had to send money to their families. One student had to work more than 40 hours a week in order to support their family. This resulted in that student falling behind in their academics. The coaches provided an intersectional approach by addressing how the student's identities and the obstacles they face overlapped. This connects back to the coaches' "one-stop-shop" and holistic philosophies. Each philosophy ensures that coaches see the students in their entirety, as a person who faces challenges and has goals beyond their academics.

Intersectionality is about more than addressing an individual's intersecting identities and the challenges they experience; it is about how the larger systems enforce oppressions and discriminations of individuals with intersecting marginalized identities. The coaches at ODSAS take what they learn from their students and their individual problems and address the barriers at a systemic level as well. The coaches consult on policies and work with other departments to address barriers that underrepresented

students experience. For example, the coaches noticed that students on suspension often lose their financial aid. They worked together to write up a recommendation that was sent to the financial aid department, and now when a student comes back from a suspension, they can get their financial aid back.

Conducting interviews with coaches of underrepresented students was very insightful. I learned how intersectionality can be involved in higher education and the retention of students. However, further research could be done on the coaches themselves and the things they do to improve their coaching such as researching, partaking in diversity trainings or workshops, or working with other departments. Future research could include examining how coaches conduct cultural competency, and how they recognize their own bias or explore their own privileges and oppressions. This could also include understanding how the coaches' self-examination impacts their coaching style, and how it is connected to intersectionality and critical race theory. Additionally, this research could be an example of an intersectional support system that could be applied at other universities and diversity offices.

Future research could examine how coaching could be a part of diversity offices such as Women's Centers and LGBT Centers. This study centered on coaches that focused mainly on the intersection of class and race identities, but future research at Women's Centers and LGBT Centers would involve different intersections of identities which may result in different barriers and challenges students face and how to address them. For example, based on the article, "Nontraditional Women Students' Experiences of Identity Recognition and Marginalization During Advising," nontraditional women

students might benefit from coaching and proactive advising that is influenced by intersectionality. Nontraditional women students commonly have intersecting identities such as low income, parents, and women of color.⁴⁵ Many nontraditional students commonly face pressure as the primary caretaker for children or extended family and require a strong support network in order to succeed in their academic and professional goals.⁴⁶ Intersectional coaching provided through a Women's Center could have the capability to be that support system.

LGBT Centers also have the potential to provide coaching services to queer and trans students. According to a study on queer and trans students' retention, Erich Pitcher and S. L. Simmons explain that there is a lack of research on queer and trans students' retention because institutional records rarely collect such data or reflect on how queer and trans students' identities intersect with their gender, race, class, etc.⁴⁷ Thus, there needs to be more research on the obstacles and oppressions queer and trans students face due to their intersecting identities, and how it impacts their retention. Pitcher and Simmons argue that queer and trans students benefit from connecting with other queer and trans students and building a community amongst themselves. However, these connections and communities are usually built between the students without the help of faculty or staff, and the authors argue that the institution needs to try and help these students retain; it cannot just be up to the students.⁴⁸ I argue that LGBT centers that provide intersectional coaching, could gain more information on queer and trans students' retention rates while also providing an intersectional support system for the students.

There is still much more research to be done in order to better the experience of underrepresented students on colleges campuses. This study proves that an intersectional support system through coaching and proactive advising is possible and important. Universities could greatly benefit from implementing more coaching and proactive advising programs for their students because the coaches like the ones that participated in this study provide a great deal of services and support that ensure that underrepresented students succeed and thrive at college. Colleges and universities must provide services that acknowledge a student's intersecting identities, work against interlocking oppressive systems, and create a level playing field for underrepresented students. Services such as coaching and proactive advising are able to do this, but they are not the only solution.

Appendix #1 - Recruitment Email

Hello!

My name is Corrin Helget, and I am a graduate student in Gender and Women's Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am conducting a research study on proactive advising for underrepresented students. I am emailing to ask you if you would be willing to participate in a 60-minute interview for this research project. I feel like you are well suited to provide insight on this topic because of your experience as a retention advisor. Participation is completely voluntary, and you will be able to choose whether to remain anonymous or to be identified in this research. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your relationship with MSU Mankato. This research will be analyzed for a master's thesis. If you decide to participate in this study, interviews will take place in person, and **I would like to conduct the interview in the next three weeks**. I would also like to audio record the interview.

If you are willing to participate, or have questions, please contact me at corrin.helget@mnsu.edu or Laura Harrison, Principal Investigator at laura.harrison@mnsu.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Corrin Helget

Graduate Student

Gender and Women's Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Appendix #2 – Consent Form

Proactive Advising as an Intersectional Feminist Method for Student Success

Principle Investigator Laura Harrison
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Researcher: Corrin Helget
Graduate Student, Gender and Women's Studies
Department
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You are invited to participate in a research study at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of this study is to assess the proactive advising model as an intersectional feminist method that is valuable for student success. This research is being conducted by Dr. Laura Harrison in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato (Principal Investigator) and Corrin Helget (Graduate Student).

You are being asked to be a part of this study because you have unique insight into the proactive advising model and underrepresented student success.

What would participation in this research include?

This interview will be in person and last 60 minutes. The researcher will ask you questions pertaining to the proactive advising model and advising underrepresented students. After the interview is complete, the researcher will make a transcript of the interview. You will decide what kind of identifying information about you is included in the research. You may choose a pseudonym if desired. If you choose to remain anonymous, all identifying information will be removed from the transcript. The researcher will ensure the protection of your confidentiality and privacy.

Can I stop being in the study?

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You can decide to stop at any time. To withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher at any time prior to the interview, during the interview, or any time after the interview.

What risks can I expect from being in the study?

The risks of participating in this study are no greater than those experienced in everyday life.

Are there benefits to me or others by taking part in the study?

There is no direct benefit from participating in this study. However, the information that you will provide will contribute to research that offers recommendations and best advising practices that benefit underrepresented college students.

Will I be compensated for taking part in this study?

You will not be compensated for taking part in this study.

Will information about me be kept private?

We will do our best to make sure that the personal information gathered for this study is kept private. Audio recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed after 2 years, and the research will be stored in the Principal Investigators locked office.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

Taking part in this study is your choice. You may choose either to take part or not to take part in the study. If you decide to take part in this study, you may leave the study at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will not involve a penalty.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the study?

If you have any questions later, you are encouraged to contact Corrin Helget at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Her contact information is on the first page of this form.

Consent to Participate in the Research Study

Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you wish to have a copy of this form, ask the researcher for one now. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. You have the right to a copy of this consent form, and it can be obtained by emailing the researcher at corrin.helget@mnsu.edu. If you have any questions about this research study, contact Laura Harrison, Principal Investigator at laura.harrison@mnsu.edu or +1 (507)-389-1490. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at +1 (507) 389-1242.

Sign below to indicate your willingness to participate in this research study and to indicate that you are at least 18 years of age.

Signature

Your Name (Printed)

Date

Appendix #3 - Interview Script

Introduction: Thank the interviewee for their participation. Remind the interviewee that they have signed an informed consent form and ask them if they still consent to participate. Record their answer. Ask them if they would like to use a pseudonym during the interview, or their real name and job title. Then begin recording the interview.

Opening Questions:

I'm going to begin with some demographic information. Could you please tell me your:

- Name and pseudonym
- How you identify your gender
- How you identify your race
- Your job title (if you choose to disclose this)
- How long have you worked in this office as an advisor?
- How many students do you serve?

Some people advise using an approach that focuses on a student's multiple identities and how those identities bring about a set of disadvantages and challenges to the student's ability to succeed in college, and the advisors may provide strategies and programs to address those challenges. Would you say this reflects your advising practices, yes or no?

Objective 1: To learn about who the advisors service, and why.

- Who are the students you are advising?
- How would you define "underrepresented" students?
- What "qualifications" do students need to get advising?
- What year of students are you focused on?
- When do you stop advising a student?

Objective 2: To learn more about the proactive advising model and advising model that advisors of underrepresented students use.

- If you could describe your advising in one word, what would it be?
- What is your advising process? What do you do in your first meeting? How do the meetings change as the semester progresses?
- How often do you see your students in a semester?
- Would you have available data on return visits?
- What do you think advising should consist of?
- When do you know/feel like your advising has been "successful" or helpful?
 - o What would a successful student look like to you?
- What do you consider the most important part of your advising?

Objective 3: To learn if and how intersectionality plays a role in proactive advising of underrepresented students.

- Who are your students? Their identities?
 - o Do their identities affect how you advise them?
 - o How? Why?

Objective 3.5: To learn more about the challenges, stress, and discrimination against underrepresented students that can affect their college experience, their retention, and their goals. And to discuss the strategies advisors use to increase retention and/or help students achieve their goals

- What are challenges that can affect your students' retention and achievement of goals?
- How do you help them overcome those challenges?
- What resources and programs do you provide or share with your students?
- How do you feel that your advising improves your students' retention?
- Would you have data on students' retention and completion rates?

Endnotes

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Chapter 4

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