Advising as Servant Leadership: Investigating Student Satisfaction

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Student satisfaction with advising is positively linked to first-year student retention and sophomore persistence to their senior year. However, inconsistencies in the advising literature confound conclusions about the most effective advising approach to elicit student satisfaction. Positive links between the servant leadership approach and advising behaviors have been shown, but student satisfaction remains unexamined. We investigate student satisfaction with servant leadership–based advising. Utilizing hierarchical multiple regression analysis, we found positive correlations between servant leadership and student satisfaction with advising. In particular, advisors' altruistic behaviors elicited the greatest impact on student satisfaction. Implications for practice include advancing advising pedagogy and improving advisor selection and professional development.

Students' interactions with their academic advisors play a significant role in their overall college experience (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and measures of student satisfaction with advising are prevalent in the literature. For example, advisors' knowledge of degree requirements as well as their approachability and availability produce strong relationships that have been associated with student satisfaction with advising (Noel-Levitz, 2010; Propp & Rhodes, 2006). In addition, Bloom, Hutson, and He (2008) pointed to advisors' competence and caring behaviors as underlying constructs that build trust between advisors and advisees and ultimately influence students' satisfaction with advising. According to Vasher (2010), trust is facilitated through mutual respect between advisors and advisees, advisors' honesty about students' academic situations, and advisors' knowledge of majors and careers. Furthermore, Punyanunt-Carter, Wrench, and Nance (2014) found significant positive correlations between students' advising satisfaction and advisors' competence, caring behaviors, and trust-

worthiness. Others have linked student satisfaction with advising to first-year student retention (Soria, 2012) and sophomore persistence to senior year (Schreiner, 2009). Despite the indicators that students express satisfaction with advising, the literature offers inconsistent evidence about the advising approach that most effectively elicits student satisfaction.

Over 40 years ago, Crookston (1972/1994/2009) conceptualized academic advising into two dominant approaches: prescriptive and developmental. Prescriptive advising includes class recommendation and one-way communication. In contrast, developmental advising focuses on student growth as well as class recommendation. Practicing two-way communication and enhancing students' decision-making, growth, and critical-thinking skills characterize important facets of developmental advising (Crookston, 1972/1994/2009; Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1984). Winston and Sandor (1984b) argued that developmental advising applies to all students in all college environments. Today, development advising remains a recognized, vital component of academic advising pedagogy and student development (Grites, 2013; King, 2005).

Coll and Draves (2009) tested Winston and Sandor's (1984b) thesis and found a significant link between first-year student advising satisfaction and developmental advising. Furthermore, when comparing advisor type and student preference for developmental advising, Davis and Cooper (2001) as well as Hale, Graham, and Johnson (2009) found positive correlations between developmental advising and student satisfaction. However, Kearney (1994) and Smith (2002) reported greater satisfaction with prescriptive advising among first-year and nursing students. In addition, Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino (2004) as well as Smith and Allen (2006) challenged the assumption that student growth only transpires in a developmental advising setting. Mottarella et al. (2004) and Smith and Allen (2006) found that student satisfaction was associated with advising practiced on a continuum of prescriptive and developmental advising.

In response to the inconsistencies in the literature, Kelly (2003) proposed a new advising

paradigm based on transformational leadership. He argued that advisors should empower students rather than concern themselves with an allegiance to a particular approach. McClellan (2007) agreed with Kelly that a new advising paradigm based on leadership offered a potentially effective alternative to the previously articulated strategies. However, McClellan believes servant leadership offers the more applicable theory to academic advising. The main difference between transformational and servant leadership theories is based on the suppositions of the leader: Transformational leaders look to reach and exceed organizational objectives whereas servant leaders express primary interest on the growth and development of followers (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

Paul, Smith, and Dochney (2012) tested McClellan's (2007) thesis. Specifically, they investigated the empirical relationship between servant leadership and academic advising using Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) *Servant Leadership Questionnaire* (SLQ) and Winston and Sandor's (1984a) *Academic Advising Inventory*. Paul et al. (2012) found significant positive correlations between servant leadership and academic advising behaviors. They also found that servant leadership behaviors were associated with developmental advising behaviors. They concluded that servant leadership provides a useful framework for academic advising.

However, Paul et al. (2012) did not investigate student satisfaction with advisors' servant leadership behaviors. If students are not satisfied with servant leadership–based advising then the adoption of it could negatively affect retention, progression, and graduation efforts. Therefore, we used the SLQ to investigate student satisfaction levels with servant leadership–based advising and to examine whether use of servant leadership in practice can predict students' subsequent satisfaction with advising. The results further the work of McClellan (2007) and Paul et al. (2012) and help establish servant leadership as a viable framework for academic advising.

The *Servant Leadership Questionnaire* and Academic Advising

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) believe use of servant leadership promotes and sustains long-term organizational growth and employee development. As a result, they developed the SLQ to operationalize and measure servant leadership behaviors. They used Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership essay and Spears's (1998) conceptualization of servant leadership as the basis for the SLQ. Their initial analysis of questionnaire items revealed five constructs of servant leadership: altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship.

Altruistic Calling

Altruistic calling refers to servant leaders' desire to place their followers' needs above their own. These leaders want to make a positive difference in their followers' lives by providing an open and caring atmosphere conducive to growth and development (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

Academic advisors also place the needs of their students before their own (McClellan, 2007; Paul et al., 2012; Ryan, 1992). They allocate appropriate time for each student's appointment and give students their undivided attention to foster a caring environment (Holmes, 2004; Smith & Allen, 2006). Advisors also seek to build rapport with students and demonstrate caring behaviors such as empathy, understanding, and respect (Ford & Ford, 2009).

Emotional Healing

Servant leaders show commitment to helping their followers recover from hardship or trauma. This assistance with emotional healing includes a tendency to show empathy and understanding of others' misfortunes (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Spears and Lawrence (2004) conceptualized this healing through a process of making those who have been broken feel whole.

Academic advisors also help students recover from hardship. Specifically, through goal setting and degree planning, they assist students in alleviating dissonance between academic and other collegiate expectations and reality (McClellan, 2007; Paul et al., 2012). In addition, advisors help students cope with nonacademic issues, such as family trauma and troubled interpersonal relationships, and thus exert a positive effect on advisee well-being (Kuhn, Gordon, & Webber, 2006).

Wisdom

Wisdom reflects servant leaders' attentiveness to detail and critical awareness of their surroundings (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). It involves using self-awareness and environmental consciousness to gain and share knowledge to empower followers (Crippen, 2005).

Consistent with servant leadership, effective advisors remain critically aware of their environment and continuously search for sharable knowledge on topics such as degree requirements, campus resources, and institutional policies and procedures, which can educate and enable their students (McClellan, 2007; Paul et al., 2012). In addition, advisors use wisdom to continue professional development that enhances their advising skills (Brown, 2008; Paul et al., 2012).

Persuasive Mapping

A servant leaders' ability to persuade, rather than coerce, their followers to action constitutes persuasive mapping. Leaders envision the future for their organization and followers (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006) and use their foresight to create a strategic plan to turn their vision into reality (Spears, 2004).

Effective advisors also practice persuasive mapping. They share the decision-making process with students and encourage them to action (Crookston, 1972/1994/2009; Ryan, 1992). Advisors use students' academic history and professional interests to co-create their future academic plans (Appleby, 2008; McClellan, 2007).

Organizational Stewardship

Servant leaders provide their followers access to professional development opportunities, which enhance their holistic growth and teach them to value the importance of improving their community (Spears, 2004). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) suggested that organizational stewardship reflects servant leaders' commitment to helping their organization and followers make positive contributions to society through community development programs and outreach.

Academic advisors also practice stewardship. They embrace the responsibility to expose students to both academic and nonacademic resources and encourage them to participate in on- and off-campus activities that improve their overall collegiate experience (Appleby, 2001). When students participate in these extra- and co-curricular opportunities they learn the important, positive impact on community development on campus and in the surrounding locality (Bloom, 2008).

Hypotheses

Students express satisfaction with advisors who demonstrate knowledge about degree requirements and institutional policies and procedures, make themselves approachable and available, and create an open and inviting atmosphere (Ford & Ford, 2009; Holmes, 2004; Mottarella et al., 2004; Noel-Levitz, 2010; Propp & Rhodes, 2006). We contend these qualities comport with Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) constructs of wisdom and altruistic calling. Therefore, based on the theoretical link, we looked for a significant positive relationship between servant leadership and student satisfaction with advising.

We determined the SLQ factor that best predicts student satisfaction with advising. Noel-Levitz (2010) and Propp and Rhodes (2006) found that advisors' knowledge of degree requirements and awareness of policies and procedures have the greatest impact on student satisfaction with advising. Wisdom incorporates behaviors consistent with advisors' knowledge and awareness of their surrounding environment, which means they keep students informed of major requirements and any changes to existing policies and procedures. Therefore, we believe the best predictor of student satisfaction with advising is wisdom. Our hypotheses are summarized as follows:

H1. Students' satisfaction with advising scores will be positively and significantly correlated with SLQ behavior scores.

H2. The most significant predictor of students' satisfaction with advising will be wisdom behavior scores.

Methods

Participants

Utilizing a purposeful sampling technique (as per Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009), we identified 12 classes across campus that showed similar demographic characteristics (race, class, and gender) to the overall undergraduate population of the midsize university in the southeastern United States where we conducted the study. The undergraduate population at the time of the study consisted of 59.0% female, 53.1% White, 35.4% Black, and 30.3% first-year students. The school enrolled 21.7% sophomores, 21.1% juniors, and 24.5% seniors in the year the study was undertaken.

We administered 508 surveys to students in 10 of the 12 targeted classes. The final sample consisted of 428 undergraduates. Participants were classified as 68% female and 32% male.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 47 years, and 72% were between the ages of 18 and 21 years. The majority of participants were White (59.4%) and Black (30.4%). The sample consisted of 26.6% first-year students, 25.7% sophomores, 25.7% juniors, and 22.0% seniors.

Instrument: *Servant Leadership Questionnaire*

Participants were administered a slightly adapted version of Barbuto and Wheeler's (2006) SLQ, which measures advisors' servant leadership behaviors. The SLQ contains 23 items in five subscales: altruistic calling (ac) (e.g., "This person puts my best interests ahead of his/ her own," α = .82), emotional healing (eh) (e.g., "This person is one I would turn to if I had a personal trauma," α = .91), wisdom (wis) (e.g., "This person seems alert to what's happening," α = .92), persuasive mapping (pm) (e.g., "This person offers compelling reasons to get me to do things," α = .87), and organizational stewardship (os) (e.g., "This person believes that the organization needs to play a moral role in society," α = .89). Participants rated their advisors' servant leadership behaviors using a 5-point Likert-type scale with two semantic anchors: 1—strongly disagree and 5—strongly agree. The addition of one question at the end of the SLQ assessed students' satisfaction with advising ("I am satisfied with the academic advising I have received"). Students rated their satisfaction using the same Likert-type scale shown on the SLQ items.

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) used a panel of experts to assess the content validity of the SLQ and found that it positively and significantly correlated to similar servant leadership questionnaires. They also found a positive correlation between the SLQ and transactional leadership. However, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) acknowledged that the effect size was very small, thus warranting their conclusion that the two scales measured two different phenomena. Their comparisons between the SLQ, other servant leadership questionnaires, and transactional leadership instruments supported the convergent and divergent validity of the SLQ.

Procedure

Using the seat analysis tool offered through the Office of Strategic Research and Analysis at the studied institution, we identified 12 different classes across campus enrolling approximately 700 students with similar demographic profiles

(race, class, and gender) as the total undergraduate population. We contacted the professors, via phone and e-mail, requesting access to their students for our study. Ten of the 12 professors allowed us to administer the surveys during class times.

Before distributing the surveys, we asked whether students had been advised for the Fall 2012 semester. Those who self-reported that they had not been advised did not receive a survey. To those who had been advised, we explained the instructions, which appeared in writing at the top of the handout, for completing the surveys to reduce an instrumentation threat to internal validity. We handed out 508 surveys to the 10 participating classes. Of the 508 undergraduates targeted to participate, 471 completed the surveys, yielding a 93% response rate. Of the 471 participants, 43 completed the surveys incorrectly, leaving a final sample of 428 participants (84% usable surveys).

Analyses and Results

We analyzed the results using SPSS-20. The Likert-type scale contained the numbers 1 to 5 so we did not need to code the data. We calculated the average rater response on each item of the SLQ in the five subscales (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006): ac Items 3, 8, 11, 18; eh Items 4, 9, 14, 19; wis Items 1, 6, 12, 16, 22; pm Items 2, 7, 13, 17, 21; os Items 5, 10, 15, 20, 23. High (at or near 5) average rater response scores on each subscale correlated with demonstration of advisors' servant-leadership behaviors. We analyzed students' satisfaction with advising scores using the same format as the SLQ. High (at or near 5) student ratings represented a high level of satisfaction with advising.

Next, we analyzed the relationship between student satisfaction with advising and servant leadership with Pearson product-moment correlations. In conclusion, we conducted a hierarchical multiple-regression analysis to determine the construct of servant leadership that was the most significant predictor of student satisfaction with advising (SSA) scores when participants' race, class, and gender were controlled.

Model 1 contained the three control variables and the dependent variable SSA. The inclusion of the control variables in the first model provided a comparison group to the second model, featuring servant leadership items, so that we could determine the amount of unique variance the second model exerted on SSA. Model 2 contained the three control variables and SSA plus five

Table 1. Intercorrelation values of students' satisfaction with advising scores and servant leadership scores ($N = 428$)

Scale	SSA	AC	EH	WIS	PM	OS
SSA	1.00					
AC	.61**	1.00				
EH	.35**	.50**	1.00			
WIS	.58**	.69**	.57**	1.00		
PM	.54**	.65**	.59**	.71**a	1.00	
OS	.55**	.69**	.57**	.72**a	.75**a	1.00

Note. SSA = student satisfaction with advising; AC = altruistic calling; EH = emotional healing; WIS = wisdom; PM = persuasive mapping; OS = organizational stewardship

[a]Variance inflation factor < 5; tolerance statistic > .2 (Field, 2009).

**p < .01.

independent variables: altruistic calling (AC), emotional healing (EH), wisdom (WIS), persuasive mapping (PM), and organizational stewardship (OS).

The Pearson product-moment correlations revealed positive and significant relationships between SSA and each construct of servant leadership (see Table 1). The first model of the hierarchical multiple-regression analysis was not significant: F (3,424) =1.21, p = .31, R^2 =.01. However, the second model showed statistical significance: F (8,419) = 42.12, $p <$ .01; R^2 = .45. Based on standardized beta weights, the best predictor of SSA was AC (see Table 2).

Discussion and Implications for Practice

McClellan (2007) pointed to many parallels between servant leadership and academic advising and stated that servant leadership could prove valuable as an academic advising framework. Paul et al. (2012) found positive links between academic advising and servant leadership behaviors but had not explored student satisfaction with servant leadership–based advising to validate McClellan's premise. The results of our study suggest that servant leadership is positively correlated with student satisfaction with advising. AC and WIS exhibited the strongest relationships with SSA, a finding that supports our first hypothesis.

We also found that servant leadership is a significant predictor of student satisfaction with advising. The five-factor model accounted for 44% of the unique variance in SSA scores. AC was the best predictor of SSA, not WIS, as we had hypothesized; however, WIS also showed a strong correlation to SSA.

Table 2. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for servant leadership scores predicting student satisfaction with advising ($N = 428$)

Variable	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Model 1				.01[a]
Race	−.120	−.219	−.027	
Class	.030	.088	.017	
Gender	.337	.201	.082	
Model 2				.44[b]
Race	−.223	.167	−.051	
Class	−.118	.067	−.067	
Gender	.317	.152	.077*	
Altruistic Calling (AC)	.621	.104	.331**	
Emotional Healing (EH)	−.157	.086	−.086	
Wisdom (WIS)	.454	.110	.249**	
Persuasive Mapping (PM)	.208	.117	.110	
Organizational Stewardship (OS)	.199	.107	.119	

Note. [a] F (3, 424) = 1.21, p = .31, R^2 = .01; [b] F (8, 419) = 42.12, $p <$ .01, R^2 = .45.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

As the best predictors, AC and WIS are based on conceptualizations similar to those of other factors shown to affect student advising satisfaction positively. For example, previous studies show that students want advisors who are knowledgeable about degree requirements and institutional policies and procedures (Noel-Levitz, 2010; Propp & Rhodes, 2006), and this knowledge comports with WIS. Students also want advisors to extend themselves personally in the best interest of advisees and provide an open and caring atmosphere, and these preferences show consistency with AC. Because students express more concern with the advising environment and caring behaviors than advisor knowledge of degree requirements, as noted in previous research from Ford and Ford (2009), Holmes (2004), and Mottarella et al. (2004), AC proves a better predictor of advising satisfaction than other factors.

Our results provide threefold practical significance. First, they support McClellan's (2007) supposition and further grounds servant leadership in academic advising pedagogy. Servant leadership, in particular behaviors related to altruistic calling, creates an environment where students feel that personnel care about and value them, fulfilling student desires for gestures of appreciation and kindness from people at their institution (Elliott & Healy, 2001). Furthermore, at least one study indicates that colleges and universities may improve students' academic performance and retention rates by creating a caring and welcoming environment (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008).

Second, to find highly qualified candidates, many private sector businesses, professional sports teams, and law enforcement agencies utilize personality and aptitude tests to prescreen potential employees or draft picks (Aamodt, 2004; Stanimirovic & Hanrahan, 2012; Van Steenwyk, 2008). Hiring managers could also adopt prescreening measures rooted in servant leadership behaviors, particularly those related to altruistic calling, to help select advisor candidates who will practice in ways that positively affect student satisfaction with advising.

Last, continual advisor training is linked to improvements in student satisfaction with advising (Paul & Kitchens, 2013), and thus may positively affect student retention and graduation; therefore, advising administrators should incorporate servant leadership into training and development programs. Relevant topics might include ways to help advisors create a caring advising atmosphere and

effectively use their knowledge of institutional policies and procedures, degree requirements, and campus resources (wisdom) to help students negotiate the environment and grow personally and academically.

In addition, advisors should also incorporate servant leadership into their daily professional development. McClellan (2009) suggested that advisors surround themselves with servant leadership–based tools, including books, articles, and web sites. They should also reflect daily or weekly on ways to use servant leadership to advance the interests of students and meet institutional and unit missions.

Limitations and Future Research

We employed a purposeful sampling technique and collected data at a midsized university in the southeastern United States, and multiple replications of our study in different geographical regions at different sized institutions will enhance the generalizability of results. Although the wording made it adaptable for assessing student perceptions of advisor behaviors, the SLQ is typically used in organizational settings; the unique advising environment may not correspond with those revealed in other situations. Furthermore, the SLQ was not designed for advisors to self-report their own servant leadership behaviors; as a result, for use as an employment prescreening tool, as suggested, future researchers should develop a scale to measure servant leadership behaviors specific to potential advisors.

This research could be extended by additional investigation into the altruistic calling factors to elucidate the qualities of altruism that account for the most variance in student advising satisfaction. In addition, future research should further explore the relationships between servant leadership behaviors, student advising satisfaction, and retention to graduation.

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