Advising graduate adult learners at Historically Black College and Universities: An exploratory study of faculty advisors' experiences

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative research study was to explore faculty advisors' lived experiences in advising graduate adult learners at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The extant body of literature does not adequately examine the experiences of faculty who serve as graduate academic advisors and does little to address the unique issues, challenges, and barriers faced by graduate adult learners. Furthermore, there is nothing in the literature that addresses academic advising of graduate adult learners within the HBCUs context. This exploratory study addressed this gap in the academic advising literature. Using purposive sampling, 10 faculty members were recruited from four public HBCUs to explore their experiences as academic advisors to graduate adult learners. Using a multi-step coding process, the following themes emerged: (a) individual and group interaction; (b) virtual advising, and (c) time constraints. The findings of this study can increase understanding of faculty's experiences in the advisor/advisee relationship with graduate adult learners, provide some contextual understanding of academic advising of graduate adult learners at HBCU, and provide an impetus for further research in this area.

Keywords: Graduate Adult Learners, Graduate Faculty Advisors, HBCUs, Virtual Advising

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Introduction

With increasing numbers of adult learners pursuing undergraduate and graduate education, universities are challenged to ensure students' retention and successful matriculation. Academic advising has been identified as a significant contributor to students' retention and academic success (Bigger, 2005; Cuseo, n.d; Drake, 2011; Metzner, 1989). Therefore, undergraduate institutions have developed a myriad of tools and systems to assist traditional students in fostering their academic success. Parallel mechanisms have not been fully articulated for the adult learners or graduate adult learners outside of the realm of dissertation/thesis advisors. Few scholars have explored the experiences of graduate adult learners with regard to academic advising in higher education (Bland, 2003; Polson, 1994, 2003; Schroeder & Terras, 2015) and how adults successfully complete their graduate studies (Shepard & Nelson, 2012). The literature about faculty roles as advisors for graduate students is also sparse. Additionally, very few studies (Punyanunt-Carter & Wrench, 2008; Schroeder & Terras, 2015) have expounded on faculty perceptions of advising graduate adult learners. Notwithstanding, the corpus of existing literature highlights the importance of academic advising for graduate adult learners in light of the multiple roles that these students juggle and the barriers inherent in adult learners' pursuit of higher education (Cross1991). Further, even as the importance of faculty's role as academic advisors has been acknowledged, the challenges of faculty advising in academic environments that does little

to prepare faculty for advising or reward effective advising are discussed.

While the above literature shed some light on the importance of academic advising and the context of advising graduate adult learners, the aforementioned literature placed emphasis on the role of faculty in academic advising within the context of Predominantly White Institution (PWIs) and rarely within the context of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Shaw, Cole, Harris, and Laird (2011) found that HBCUs, when compared to PWIs have a variety of approaches to support students who are experiencing difficulty within their academic performance. HBCUs faculty place emphasis on student support and provide ample opportunities for quality faculty student interactions that has had support in the literature in fostering academic success for minority students (US Department of Education, 2017). Therefore, this qualitative research study explored faculty advisors' lived experiences in advising graduate adult learners at HBCUs. Studies like Schroeder and Terras' (2015), highlighted the need for specific skill development for dedicated advisors for graduate adult learners. However, Cunningham (2015) suggested that "advisors themselves will need to provide meaningful definition, and the definition will not be a job description or a description of the advising process, but instead will detail *what advising is*" (para 4, emphasis in original).

Literature Review

Academic advising has a long history in literature that sought to define, operationalize, and professionalize the advising process (e.g. Crookston, 1972; He & Hutson, 2016). The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) concept of advising stated

> Academic advising, based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students' educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes. (NACADA, 2006, Summary section)

Recent literature highlighted major academic approaches that were differentiated based on "information, intervention, student holistic development, student learning outcomes, and strength and asset building" (He & Hutson, 2016, p. 215). The major academic advising approaches include prescriptive, developmental, advising as teaching and learning, strengths based, intrusive, and appreciative advising (He & Hutson, 2016). Prescriptive academic advising places the advisor in the expert role whereby he/she has all the requisite information and answers that the advisee would need to facilitate successful academic matriculation (He & Hutson, 2016). The advisee assumes a passive role as an information seeker accepting the expertise of the advisor. Conversely, critics of the prescriptive model advanced the developmental academic advising perspective whereby both the advisor and advisee have a shared responsibility for successful advising. Developmental advising is grounded in the establishment of a mutually respectful advisor/advisee relationship in which the advisee actively participates in the development of his/her advising plan (Crookstoon, 1994; Grites & Gordon, 2000; Harris, 2018). While these two approaches may be placed on the opposite ends of an academic advising continuum, more recent approaches offer alternate descriptions of advising.

Advising as teaching and learning, strengths based advising, and appreciative advising models focus not only on the context of advising, but also on the overall outcome and processes. Advising as teaching and learning relies largely on ensuring that student learning outcomes are realized while strengths based and appreciative advising emphasize advisee's strengths and asset

building (He & Hutson, 2016). Intrusive advising is a more direct intervention-based model in which the advisors actively inserts themselves into advisees academic lives by identifying at risk areas and providing remediation and other interventions.

In the conceptualization of advising, due consideration must be given to not only the advising models, but also to the advising process, content, and impact. The advising process encompasses the level and type of relationship that is established within the confines of advising (He & Hutson, 2017). Faculty, as advisors, are expected to have the requisite knowledge of program curriculum, policies, and processes in order to provide accurate and timely academic content. Studies such as Drake (2011) support quality advising as an integral component for academic success.

While there is a comprehensive body of literature on academic advising, the existing body of literature on advising does not adequately examine the experiences of faculty who serve as graduate academic advisors while considering the unique issues, challenges, and barriers faced by graduate adult learners. Furthermore, there is nothing in the literature that addresses academic advising of graduate adult learners within the HBCU context. Nonetheless, it is imperative for the terms *faculty advisor* and *graduate adult learner* to be situated purposefully in the context for the understanding of this research study. First, a faculty advisor is someone who is "assigned by the department or program to act in an official capacity in such ways as discussion and approving course work or signing registration forms" (Nettles & Millett, 2006, p. 265). In particular, the *advising* involves "engaging students to think critically about their academic choices and make effective plans for their educations" (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008, p. 43). For example, faculty advisors assist students in registering for classes, help with students planning their course of study, conduct formative assessments of students' progress, and guide students as they matriculate through their graduate studies. Kuhn (2008) provided a similar context for advising by using the terms academic advising and academic advisors. *Academic advising* is defined as the engagement of students to advance their educational experiences, and the individuals involved in this interaction with students are referred to as *academic advisors* (Kuhn, 2008). Specifically, he argued that "academic advising should refer to situations in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 3). More recently, following an analytic induction research method with academic advisors, Larson (2018) coined the definition of academic advising as an application of knowledge of the field "to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic interactions related to higher education" (p. 86).

Within the context of higher education, adult learners are typically defined as being aged twenty-five and older, who are participating in formal education within a postsecondary educational setting (Sandmann, 2010). For this study, adult learners were defined as being aged 25 and older, who were participating in graduate studies. Few scholars have explored the experiences of graduate adult learners with regard to academic advising in higher education (Bland, 2003; Polson, 1994, 2003; Schroeder & Terras, 2015), the nature and function of support systems for the graduate adult learner (Roberts & Plakhotnik, 2009), and how adults successfully complete their graduate studies (Shepard & Nelson, 2012). Polson (2003) emphasized the importance of support because often graduate adult learners have to negotiate their multiple roles while pursuing their advanced degrees. Cross (1991) offered an explanation for barriers to participation in adult education and identified three types of barriers: situational, institutional and dispositional. Situational barriers, such as role conflicts, time management issues, responsibility to family and work, financial wellness, and logistics, are "those arising from one's situation in life

at a given time" (Cross, 1991, p. 98). Like adult learners in various educational settings, graduate adult learners arrive at the university with a "palette of life experiences" which are "colored with older age, full-time employment, and the roles of spouse and parent" (Fairchild, 2003, p. 11). Furthermore, situational barriers cannot be removed by the institution as they are specific to the individual graduate adult learner. Institutional barriers include those policies and procedures that impact recruitment and retention; whilst dispositional barriers refer to adult learners' self-perception (Cross, 1991). Although Cross' explanations may be considered dated, they remain relevant to today's adult learners. Therefore, graduate adult learners facing such barriers need support services to assist them while they pursue their degrees and may rely heavily on the assistance and guidance from their faculty advisor.

Consistent and quality advising is clearly documented in the literature as integral to students' success (Bigger, 2005; Drake, 2011); however, the experiences of the faculty advisors' have not been afforded the same level of scrutiny. Dillon and Fisher's (2000) examination of faculty advisors' perspectives on faculty advising suggested that while faculty is in agreement of the importance of quality advising, advising was often seen as an extra, time consuming, and undervalued responsibility. The time and effort that faculty expended on advising had little or no bearing on faculty member's success in academia, using the traditional tenure and promotion system. Barnes and Austin (2009) also echoed this as they discussed that faculty reward systems, especially in high research universities, did not recognize teaching and advising as highly as research. Therefore, systems that do not reward faculty's advising can negatively impact the amount of time and effort faculty allocates to advising. More recent discussions, like the work presented by Schroeder and Terras (2015), supported the inclusion of advising in the tenure process. Further, faculty's interest in advising, the requisite curricula and academic policy knowledge, and the absence of training for faculty advisors also affect the advising process (Dillon & Fisher, 2000). Additionally, Barnes and Austin (2009) stated, "The level of attention given to advising in the array of faculty work responsibilities is probably one reason why advising in graduate education has been labeled problematic" (p. 300).

Notwithstanding those challenges, effective advising by competent faculty advisors remains critically important to graduate adult learners. Schroeder and Terras (2015) concluded that "all adult graduate students require quality, holistic advising to meet educational goals" (p. 48). Edwards (2007) asserted that quality advising does not occur in the absence of a connection to the advisor's personality, skill, passion, interest, and knowledge. In agreement with the authors aforementioned in this paragraph, it is essential for the faculty advisors to support graduate adult learners as this is a significant component for retention, graduation rates, and post-graduation placement.

Barnes and Austin (2009) identified key faculty advisors' perceived responsibilities, advisors' functions, and characteristics of the advisor/advisee relationship in graduate doctoral students advising. Key responsibilities and functions of successful advisors included helping advisees: to be successful, to develop as researchers, and to develop as professionals while the advisors engaged in collaborating, mentoring, advocating, and chastising. Further, the advisor/advisee relationship was defined by the following characteristics: friendly/professional, collegial, supportive/caring, accessible, and honest (Barnes & Austin, 2009). More recently, while affirming the importance of the advisor/advisee's relationship to the graduate student's success Offstein, Larson, McNeil, and Hasten (2014) identified "accessibility/availability, personal interest, trustworthiness, a mentoring attitude, communication of program expectation, and guidance in focusing, developing, and goal setting" as ideal characteristics of graduate

advisors (p. 403).

HBCU Context

To appropriately situate the context for this paper, it is imperative that we provide some background information about Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Specifically, HBCUs were established with the commitment to support the educational needs of Black Americans. It is important to note that although HBCUs were originally founded to support the educational needs of Black Americans, they have historically enrolled racially diverse students (Hill, 1985). Before the establishment of HBCUs, Black Americans were commonly denied admission to college and an outgrowth of this discriminatory practice was HBCUs becoming the major vehicle for providing higher education to Black Americans (Means & Jaeger, 2013). Founded in 1837 in Cheyney, Pennsylvania, The Institute for Colored Youth was the first higher education institution for Black Americans. Today we know this institution to as Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, which has an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students and offers 18 academic programs at the undergraduate level and three academic programs at the graduate level (Cheyney University, 2017). According to the US Department of Education (2017), there were 105 HBCUs located in 19 states, Washington, DC, and the US Virgin Islands. Approximately 40 HBCUs offer graduate programs at the master's and doctoral levels. For example, Table 1 below provides a list of the HBCUs that offer doctoral degrees.

Table 1
Historically Black Colleges and Universities that Offer Doctoral Degrees

Alabama A&M University	Howard University	South Carolina State University
Albany State University	Jackson State University	Southern University and A&M College
Bowie State University	Langston University	Tennessee State University
Clark Atlanta University	Meharry Medical College	Texas Southern University
Fayetteville State University	Morehouse School of Medicine	Tuskegee University
Florida A&M University	Morgan State University	University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Grambling State University	North Carolina A&T State University	Xavier University of Louisiana
Hampton University	Prairie View A&M University	

With consideration to academic advising, the context of a HBCU allows for opportunities wherein Black students can engage with faculty and staff who are racially diverse, but largely Black. A study by Shaw, Cole, Harris, and Laird (2011) shed light on faculty-student relationships at HBCUs. Among the findings, Shaw et al. (2011) found that HBCUs, when compared to PWIs, have a variety of approaches to support students who are experiencing difficulty with in their academic performance. Historically, HBCUs faculty place emphasis on student support and provide ample opportunities for quality faculty student interactions that continues to have support in the literature in fostering academic success for minority students (US Department of Education, 2017). This example illuminates the nurturing culture that exist among student-faculty relationships within HBCUs and why the developmental academic advising approach is most complementary to HBCUs. Harris (2018) conducted a study within the context of a HBCU and

not only found that developmental advising was the most prevalent advising method used for advising undergraduates, but also that students were satisfied with the developmental approach.

Conceptual Framework

Developmental academic advising is widely accepted in the literature and made its entrance on the advising scene over three decades ago with a shift from the more prescriptive approach to advising. Prescriptive advising places advisors in the expert role and students in a more passive/receiver role, whereas developmental advising places students in a more active role. With the seminal publication by Crookston in the 1970's, the term developmental academic advising was coined (King, 2005). Crookston described developmental academic advising as one in which the advising relationship rests on values and beliefs whereby both the advisor and student learn from the process (Crookston, 1994). With roots in student development, developmental academic advising recognizes the importance of students' developmental level and embraces a holistic approach to advising. This translates into advising being more than a function of class selection, but one in which students' have an opportunity to look at career and life choices, while due consideration is given to advisee's current developmental state and other contextual factors. Over two decades ago, Miller and Albert (1994) asserted that, "If students are to succeed in college and in life, the principles of developmental advising must be considered essential to all phases of the institution" (p. 45). This sentiment continues to resound in current literature where the tenets of developmental academic advising are widely accepted. Since the latter part of the 1970's National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) has been a strong proponent of developmental academic advising. Developmental academic advising factors such as advisors' establishing rapport and demonstrating care for and support of the student were deemed as important for the advising process (Mottarella, Fritzsche, & Cerabino, 2004). Students viewed the developmental academic advising approach more favorably than other advising approaches (Mottarella et al., 2004).

Likewise developmental academic advising has been espoused in the literature for graduate learners, as this comprehensive advising approach moves beyond the mere selection of courses and adherence to academic regulations (Bland, 2003; Punyanunt-Carter & Wrench, 2008). Developmental advising focuses on the whole person (Grites & Gordon, 2000) and is grounded in forging an advisee/advisor relationship that recognizes and is responsive to the unique needs of graduate adult learners (Bland, 2003). The graduate advisor is essential to the success of graduate students. Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench (2008) concluded that, "All in all, the graduate advisor can influence the advisee's perception of graduate school, learning, progress, and possibly future success" (p. 581). With this in mind, Schroeder and Terras (2015) identified five characteristics of good graduate student advising: students need good advising to guide them through their program; students trust the process of advising through their experiences with advisors; good advisors see students as individuals and provide individualized advising; good advisors believe good advising is imperative for student success; good advisors are readily available and immediate in response such that advising is timely.

Methodology

This phenomenological qualitative study is guided by the following research question: *What are the lived experiences of faculty advisors of graduate adult learners at HBCUs?* A phenomenological approach was most appropriate for this study as we assumed "*there is an essence or essences to shared experience*" and "these essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced" by HBCU graduate-level faculty

(Patton, 2015, pp. 116-117, emphasis in the original)

Participants

      Using purposive sampling, faculty was recruited from private and public HBCU based on (a) faculty rank, (b) employment status, (c) field of study (restricted to educational social sciences—education, counseling, psychology), and (d) institutional affiliation. Recruitment efforts involved searching various institutional university websites to obtain the email addresses of graduate-level faculty teaching in educational social sciences. From there, an email invitation was sent to the faculty as we solicited their participation for this study. Ten faculty members from four public HBCUs participated in the study. Participants received a $20 gift card at the completion of the data collection process. For the purposes of this article, the demographics for eight of the participants are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Research Study Participants' Demographics

Pseudonym	Professional Field	Number of Advisees	Race	Gender	Age
Kenya	Counselor Education	15	B	F	38
Bethany	Special Education	25	W	F	57
Gail	Adult Education	8	B	F	66
Jerry	Urban Education	20	W	M	56
Catherine	Counselor Education	10	B	F	35
Thomas	Counselor Education	20	B	M	42
Regina	Urban Education	24	B	F	49
Megan	Community College Leadership	15	W	F	69

Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

      Each participant completed a preliminary survey, an individual interview, and a critical incident questionnaire. The individual interviews were guided by open-ended questions and each interview lasted between 20-40 minutes. Focus group interviews were also guided by open-ended questions and conducted with participants with the same institutional affiliations in the efforts to elicit additional data that otherwise may not be contributed within the individual data collection sessions.

      To assist in the management of the data collected, each recorded interview and focus group interviews was transcribed, and each participant was labeled with a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. A systematic inductive approach to analyzing the data was used. Memos, transcripts, and responses from the critical incident questionnaires were coded using a multi-step coding process (Alston, 2014, 2016) that included (a) Initial coding, (b) Process coding, and (c) Values coding (Saldaña, 2016).

      Lastly, in efforts to achieve trustworthiness by minimizing threats to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability the strategies of reflexivity, maximum variation, and triangulation were incorporated to ensure that the research was carried out with integrity and represent our ethical stance as researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Limitations

Limitations are potential issues that may influence the results of a study (Patton, 2015). One limitation of this study was that we intentionally sought graduate faculty who also served as academic advisors, and who were exclusively affiliated with an HBCU. While this intentional commonality was present in this study, a second limitation was that the participants were not all affiliated with the same HBCU or the same field of study. Therefore, the data captured from the participants may be unique to the participants' institution and or field of study.

Findings

In this section, we present the findings associated with the ways that participants described their experiences advising graduate adult learners. The following themes emerged: (a) individual and group interaction with advisees, (b) virtual advising, and (c) time constraints. Additionally, professional development emerged as a noteworthy category.

Individual and Group Interactions

The participants were very open about describing the typical interactions while advising adult learners. For example, when asked about her approach, Kenya explained how she ascribed to an individualistic approach when advising graduate adult learners:

You definitely have to scaffold and differentiate based on needs, but I also take a person centered approach to each student and like I said earlier I listen to what their needs are and try to accommodate their needs as best as possible. So, it's a little bit of differentiate orientation as well as person centered or individualistic approach to advising.

Similarly, Thomas offered a rationale for him ascribing to an individualistic approach when advising his doctoral advisees. For instance, he shared:

For the doctoral students, their advising comes in developmental stages. So initially they have to deal with the transition from whatever they thought school to be to whatever it is now. The doctoral program tends to shock them in that first year and realizing the level of sacrifices that is necessary to complete a doctoral program is the gist of my advising.

From a different perspective the participants also described how group interactions can supplement the individualistic approach to advising graduate adult learners. Regina describes interactions with dissertators as follows:

Right after graduation, I went right into doctoral education, most of my advising is around the dissertation, the interactions are typically one on one, here I formed a dissertation group, we have so many students, so I do have some group interactions as well, but most interactions are one on one… since I have so many doctoral students, I have a Blackboard shell for my doctoral group, I can collect their information in one place.

Virtual Advising

Incorporating virtual technologies for engaging learners in higher education is currently a hot topic. Therefore, we were interested in the participants' perspectives on virtual academic advising. The majority of the participants were in support of virtual academic advising. Megan was a faculty member in a 100% online graduate program. Therefore, virtual advising was her primary method for engagement. She shared the following perspective relative to accommodating the complexities of commuter and distance adult learners:

I think it works just as well, if they have to come in physically, they have to park, they have

to get through the traffic. I have students who travel from Washington, DC and there are parts of the day where it's impossible to get anywhere on time. So, the virtual is really great. It's the wave of the future, we need to be doing this! I think anybody who is not doing this is not going to have many students in the future. The thing that's really important is you can offer students both. We have students that are right down the street but they're online because it's convenient for them. When it comes to certain things, a tough assignment, something going wrong, they can come here. If you're in Arkansas, North Carolina of Florida you can't come on campus I can talk to you anytime. On Sundays, anytime I'm available. The virtual thing is a great idea and since I've been doing it technology has gotten much better. Think about what you can do on your cell phone!

In the case of Bethany, she did not think it should be the initial mode of engagement, and she explained:

Well, I've done it. I think its best when I've already met the student face to face in my office at some point, because, then we already have a little bit of a relationship. It's not (inaudible), the students really prefer it in a lot of instances, if they live at a distance, and I mentioned to you the other advisees I will be taking on, that's a statewide program and it also included some students from Georgia. I'm going to be doing virtual advising. I'm just, that's just how it's going to be, but their whole program is virtual except for a couple of classes, they're used to it. I'll be used to it, you know, we're good so, and it really is, it's much more convenient for everybody.

In a similar manner, Thomas mentioned:

I am okay with virtual advising as long as it's not the primary method of advising. I tend to use virtual advising methods when I am out of town or my students are out of town. I don't want my students to ever feel like they are bothering me or that there isn't a time when we can't talk. Typically, students won't over step the boundaries most students tend to stay within that. So, I am okay with that and know how to even keep that level of contact at bay.

By the same token Catherine first year assistant professor, was excited about the idea of virtual advising. She exclaimed,

I wouldn't mind being on a camera and advising someone via some sort of video thing! I suppose that just an audio would work, the idea of being able to see that person myself, I think that that would work, the interaction through video or virtual I think is going to be what you make of it, that might be a little more difficult if your technology fails or something like that. As long as you are prepared I think that you can do the same things that you can do face to face that you could do in virtual.

Conversely, two participants were not interested in virtual advising. For example, Jerry preferred face-to-face meetings with his advisees and he stated:

Face to face is my preferred way of advising. For me to have enough time to look at what they sent me and have comments and not provide them with the comments, but to narrate and talk through and engage with them and let them try to find the problems themselves instead of me giving it to them, the other is virtual, like the student I haven't heard from in a year, he lives in southern Mississippi, he does not come up typically, and I haven't really worked out long distance advising in a satisfactory way. I don't even have a camera on this machine, it's possible that skype would do it, I haven't tried it, maybe it's partly

laziness… skyping might be a way to substitute for the face to face.

Time Constraints

All the participants repeatedly mentioned that time (or the lack thereof) was a significant challenge for them while advising graduate adult learners. With regard to time and the delicate balancing act of teaching and advising and being a researcher, Regina commented:

It's a doctoral research university, aspiring to be research high, the focus is on research and so doctoral advising takes a lot of time, so tome that's the biggest challenge… I have really great colleagues and if they're not taking time with the students then it's probably because of the time, I reality you need to (inaudible) if its taking up 60% of my time, I need to account for that 60%, I want here to be some sort of even handedness with the way its treated, if you're in a place where there's a big undergraduate focus, people should figure out how to understand how graduate advising differs and the time it takes.

Like Regina, Kenya spoke about the institutional limitations and barriers that present time constraints as relative to advising graduate adult learners. She expressed:

I think there might be some internal, university internal limitations for example umm… as far as course registration, prerequisites, not being able to register, time constraints things like that, that are internal structures of the university that make academic advising difficult students not being able to register for classes because the system is down, or the prerequisite's in the system are incorrect. You already kind of have been given the guidelines on how to do that you then you know have to double your work, or double your effort those things can be challenging and time consuming I can say.

Lastly, Catherine reported that time was the biggest challenge for as an academic advisor. She specifically explained:

Timing is sometimes a challenge, to be able to squeeze in the academic advising. I say squeeze it in because there's always something that happens that changes. For example, the schedule might not be the most current schedule when they register for the classes so that can make it challenging to provide accurate information.

Professional Development

Although professional development did not emerge as a theme, we believe it was a significant category and necessary to mention in this section. The participants all stated that they have never been trained or participated in any professional development workshops on how to be a faculty advisor for graduate adult learners. Two quotes were quite interesting as they illuminate the lack of professional development opportunities for faculty to enhance their advising practices. Kenya pointed out that even though her background as a school counselor helped her as an academic advisor, she believed "it would not have been as seamless" if she was not a school counselor. She continued:

I think the one thing I would like to add is that I do agree that the professional development [for academic advising graduate students] from a university wide effort would be a very important part of becoming a faculty member. Potentially, it could occur at the orientation phase so that they [faculty] come in with some entry level knowledge that will help them get started.

With regard to virtual advising and professional development, Gail bragged on the

technological support and infrastructure within her institution: "We have a number one technology campus, they do an excellent job with professional development, I take advantage of all the technology, that's my accountability piece."

Discussion

The findings show how these HBCU faculty advisors are committed to the development of their graduate adult learners. The qualitative focus on the experiences in this study show that these faculty advisors accommodate their graduate adult learners by being available whether via individual, group, or virtual interactions and this is consistent with the prescribed five characteristics of good graduate student advising according to Schroeder and Terras (2015). In addition, while the findings concur with Bland (2003) and Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench (2008), we argue the developmental advising approach is innately included in the *nurturing culture* that has traditionally existed within HBCUs. For instance, Heider (2016) stated that "the historical mission of HBCUs to nurture and educate marginalized and disenfranchised populations remains essential and especially relevant today" (p. 85). The findings of this study are congruent with Harris's (2018) study in that similar to the undergraduate level, developmental advising approach is also appropriate for graduate adult learners at HBCUs. With this in mind, we believe this study highlights the nurturing or development approaches of the faculty advisors of graduate adult learners at HBCUs.

In addition, the faculty members acknowledged that as academic advisors, they function in a highly technologically advanced space and agree that virtual advising is advantageous. Even the two faculty advisors who were reluctant to incorporate virtual technologies within their practices of advising recognize the significant assistance provided by technology. For many tenure-track faculty members, time is a constant challenge while attempting to balance the multiple roles and responsibilities of being an academic advisor, instructor, researcher, service committee member, administrator, and not to mention life outside of the institution (e.g. parent, spouse, partner, caregiver).

Implications for Practice and Research

While findings from this small, non-random, context–specific sample cannot be applied to all advising practices, they may provide insight in continuing to explore and understand the nature of academically advising graduate adult learners. Furthermore, although the emergent themes that originated from this study of advising graduate adult learners are within the context of HBCUs, they may certainly have transferability to other institutions of higher education. There is undeniable support in the literature for quality advising for graduate adult learners therefore universities need to pay particular attention to not only graduate adult learners advising needs, but also the concomitant experiences and needs of the graduate faculty advisors. Implications for practice include the articulation of a recommended graduate faculty advisor to graduate advisee ratio; development of university policy for graduate advising to include its inclusion and weight in tenure and promotion policies; development of training modules for faculty; and the exploration of virtual advising as a viable primary or at least supplemental advising modality.

While there is an absence of information in the reviewed literature that prescribes a specific advisee load for faculty advisors, the advising load for each participant in this study were high for graduate faculty and the findings suggest that the high numbers of advisees posed several challenges to the advising process. Though, Dillon and Fisher (2000) discussed faculty's perception that advising load should be considered for tenure and promotion, a recommended faculty advisor to graduate advisee ratio was not articulated. Parallel mechanisms for graduate

level advising need to be brought to the forefront to address the graduate adult learner's unique challenges and opportunities. The mechanisms should include, but are certainly not limited to, structures for advising and training modules for faculty.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of technology in higher education which should extend more fully into best practices in advising. Virtual advising can serve to augment existing structures and create additional opportunities for adult graduate learners who may not be able to or choose to access traditional advising modality. As noted in the findings, faculty's use of virtual advising may be largely dependent on their perceived competence in this modality. This of course extends the discussion about relevant training and materials to ensure that this process is not only viable but also effective.

The findings from this study suggest that there is a need for more detailed and comprehensive exploration in a number of areas to include: advising graduate learners, advising at HBCUs; and graduate faculty advisors experiences in advising. Specifically, we recommend the following scholarly efforts to further address the gap in the literature on advising graduate adult learners: (1) a comparative analysis of graduate advisees and faculty's perspective of effective advising: (2) exploring graduate faculty advisors' experiences at other minority serving institutions: and (3) quantitative exploration of faculty's and student's perception of advising experiences.

Conclusion

Academic advising in higher education has been shown to be a significant factor for the successful retention and persistence of undergraduate and graduate students. Generally, academic advising involves a process that involves continuous and intentional interactions guided by curriculum, pedagogical and andragogical approaches to engagement, and student learning outcomes. Research has shown that developmental advising is an effective approach because it focuses on the whole person. With specific regard to advising graduate adult learners, this approach extends beyond helping graduate adult learners understand curriculum and institutional regulations and is more responsive to their unique needs as graduate adult learners. While much literature exist on developmental advising and undergraduate students, not much has been explored as relative to faculty advising graduate adult learners at historically Black colleges and universities. It is hoped that the findings from this study will extend the conversation and expand the understanding of faculty's experiences in the advisor/advisee relationship with graduate adult learners. In addition, we hope this article offers additional contextual understanding of academic advising of graduate adult learners at HBCU and encourage future scholarly exploration in this area.

Authors' Note

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