

# Academic Advising and the Community College Baccalaureate: Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

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*An increasing number of community colleges have expanded their programmatic offerings to include baccalaureate degrees. In this national, mixed methods study, we examined how and to what extent the implementation of baccalaureate degree programs has impacted academic advising policies and practices across U.S. community colleges. Survey and interview data highlighted the reorganization of advising and adoption of various advising models as well as the need for collaborations, communication, and professional development. In addition to underscoring the overall complexities involved in establishing four-year degree programs at the community college, results from this study helped us illuminate implications for policy and planning as well as suggested areas for future research related to advising.*

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Community college, oftentimes referred to as the people's college, democracy's college, or the open-door college, serves as a primary point of access to U.S. higher education for first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color (Levin, 2007; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). For example, 56% and 52% of all Native American and Latino U.S. undergraduate students attend community college, respectively (AACC, 2019). Community colleges offer students a variety of educational programs, such as academic transfer, occupational education, developmental education, and continuing education (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Historically, the highest degree awarded by U.S. community colleges has been an associate in arts or associate in science degree (Cohen et al., 2013). However, over the past two decades, an increasing number of states have authorized community colleges to

confer baccalaureate degrees in critical workforce areas such as nursing, education, and business (Gandara & Cuellar, 2016). According to *Inside Higher Ed's* 2019 Survey of Community College Presidents, 25 states have authorized community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees, and more states are considering moving forward with such plans.

Although the exact number of community colleges conferring baccalaureate degrees is hard to track given flawed classification systems (Floyd, 2006), this trend continues to grow (Pierce, 2017). Most recently, California's baccalaureate degree pilot program, which allows 15 community colleges to each offer a single bachelor's degree program, was extended to July 2026 (Gozon, 2018). This type of change impacts various areas of the college, including academic advising (Martinez, 2018; McKinney, Scicchitano, & Johns, 2014).

Academic advising is one of the most effective retention strategies utilized by U.S. colleges and universities (McArthur, 2005; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). This practice is especially important within community colleges (Wiseman & Messitt, 2010), which are prone to exhibit less-than-favorable transfer outcomes and completion rates (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). Although there are examples of robust, dependable, and effective advising at community colleges, these efforts usually exist on a small scale and are limited to certain programs and students (Acevedo-Gil & Zerquera, 2016). Given structural, cultural, and financial barriers, community college students tend to receive limited support in the area of academic advising (Bailey, Jenkins, & Jaggars, 2015; Scott-Clayton, 2011). These barriers include: high student-to-advisor/counselor<sup>1</sup> ratios (Scott-Clayton, 2011), lack of organizational structure (Bailey et al., 2015), and limited implementation of promising policies like mandatory advising (CCSSE, 2008), among other organizational

<sup>1</sup> The terms counselor and advisor are oftentimes used interchangeably in the literature. Historically, counselors at the community college carried out both counseling and advising (King, 2002). Yet, this model has started to shift.

factors (Bailey et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 2013; Jenkins, 2011; Karp, O’Gara, & Hughes, 2008; Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Community colleges have adopted various reforms to address some of the aforementioned challenges and improve student outcomes. Currently, there is a strong national movement toward the implementation of guided pathways (Lahr, 2018). Guided pathways is one of the many ways colleges have responded to the completion agenda, which is not without controversy in its origins (Mangan, 2013; Smith, 2017). Fundamental to the guided pathways model are clear intentional pathways or course-taking patterns that are supported by built-in student services such as advising (Bailey et al., 2015; Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017). In addition to the national Pathways Project launched by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), several states have moved forward with their own initiatives. For example, California started a multi-year state program created to provide all California Community Colleges with the opportunity to implement Guided Pathways (CCCC, n.d.). Broadly speaking, careful planning, uniform implementation, and continued evaluation create guided pathways (AACC, n.d.).

Taken together, advising in a community college requires a “flexibility of knowledge and skill” (Kirkner & Levinson, 2013, para. 2). King (2008) indicates that “curricula, especially at community colleges, are constantly changing to keep up with community needs. Advisors are expected to stay on top of these changes to help students achieve their goals” (p. 243). Advising is further complicated when community colleges begin to offer their own baccalaureate degrees (Martinez, 2018; Helfgot, 2005). According to Helfgot (2005), “advisers need new conceptual and structural models for students who will stay at the institution through the baccalaureate” (p. 12). Similarly, Martinez (2018) found that the community college baccalaureate (CCB) presented an ongoing learning process for academic advisors, which included new ways of thinking and doing.

Still, academic advising within baccalaureate degree-granting community colleges remains understudied. As such, the purpose of this study was to understand how the expansion of the community college mission to include conferring baccalaureate degrees has impacted academic advising. The following research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** How has the community college baccalaureate impacted academic advising policies and practices?

**RQ2.** What organizational changes related to academic advising have occurred due to the implementation of the community college baccalaureate?

### **Conceptual Framework**

We relied on existing literature on academic advising (McArthur, 2005; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Scrivener & Weiss, 2009), the community college baccalaureate (McKinney & Morris, 2010; Martinez, 2014, 2018), and theories of change (Kezar, 2014) to frame this study. Theories of change can be categorized into the following schools of thought: scientific management, evolutionary, social cognition, cultural, political, and institutional (Kezar, 2014). Each school of thought shares a set of ideas about how and why organizations function and change (Bess & Dee, 2008; Kezar, 2014). These understandings help us to understand the impact of the CCB on academic advising and related organizational changes. For the purposes of this study, we drew primarily from the scientific management and cultural schools of thought.

The scientific management school of thought suggests that change is intentional, rational, planned, and linear (Kezar, 2014). Efficiency and effectiveness are central to scientific management. Leaders recognize and adhere to the organization’s mission, which is achieved via structures and processes (Gonzales, Kanhai, & Hall, 2018). Conversely, rather than viewing organizations as rational actors and minimizing the role of people and human relations, the cultural school of thought suggests that we must consider mission, values, language, symbols, norms, and shared meanings to understand and enact change (Gonzales et al., 2018; Kezar, 2014). As Tierney (1988) explained, “an organization’s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level” (p. 3).

Accordingly, we approached this study with the understanding that an organization’s mission serves as the basis for organizational policies, practices, and processes (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Therefore, when their mission changes, organizations must revisit these elements to ensure they are consistent with new organizational goals and objectives. This includes academic advising. Campbell (2008)

stated that “the vision, mission, goals, and program objectives of an academic advising program are inextricably intertwined with a college or university’s central purpose and mission statement” (p. 232). As such, the institutionalization of four-year degree programs at the community college can be expected to impact academic advising policies and practices. From the scientific management perspective, the development of new structures and implementation of various technologies is expected. Based on the cultural school of thought, these formalized structures would impact various dimensions of organizational culture, such as the ways individuals communicate with each other, convey meaning, take action, and carry out their work. As discussed in the literature review, advisors within baccalaureate degree-granting communities will need new conceptual and theoretical models (Helfgot, 2005) or new ways of thinking and doing that align with organizational culture (Martinez, 2018).

### Research Design

We designed this study as a concurrent mixed methods study. The concurrent approach allowed us to converge quantitative and qualitative data to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the topic of study (Creswell, 2014). We relied on two main data sources: 1) a survey; and 2) semi-structured interviews. We developed an original survey based on a thorough review of the literature as well as findings from a previous qualitative study on the community college baccalaureate that drew attention to academic advising (Martinez, 2018). The literature helped us identify four main constructs: (a) institutional context, (b) advisor roles and responsibilities, (c) organization and delivery of academic advising, and (d) academic advising policies and practices. In addition, a content expert in this area helped develop the survey. Once created, we piloted the survey with academic advising professionals in the field, including but not limited to academic advisors and directors of academic advising. Pilot testing allowed us to examine flow, relevance, wording, and redundancy of questions and responses as well as the administration of the survey (Collins, 2003; Moser & Kalton, 2017).

Questions included four-point and five-point Likert scales, drop down options, multiple choice questions, and open-ended questions. In addition to describing our sample, these questions helped us understand existing policies and practices at

degree-granting community colleges and assess the extent to which they were impacted by the development of CCB programs. Two of the questions we asked were:

- To what extent have advising practices at your institution changed since the implementation of the baccalaureate degree?
- To what extent has the establishment of baccalaureate degree programs increased collaborations between academic advising and other departments within your institution?

Open-ended questions were included to elicit additional information and insights on how the CCB has influenced academic advising policies and practices. These questions also provided participants the opportunity to draw attention to themes or topics they considered important or relevant to the study, which were then expounded upon during the interviews.

Semi-structured interview questions focused on participants’ experiences advising baccalaureate degree-seeking students, their personal advising approaches, and changes in advising policies and practices. We also asked about challenges of implementing four-year degree programs and what recommendations, if any, they would offer to colleges interested in offering four-year degrees. Sample interview questions included:

- What are some of the experiences you have had when advising CCB students?
- How would you describe your advising practices?
- What recommendations related to advising would you provide to another college wishing to implement the CCB?

These questions were used to further our understanding of current academic advising practices at these institutions.

### Sample and Participants

Our target population was baccalaureate degree-granting community colleges. During the time of this study, 63 public U.S. community colleges conferred baccalaureate degrees, according to the Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA). Based on the colleges identified by the CCBA, we created a list of potential survey participants. We visited each college’s advising/counseling website and selected individuals based on their title, role, and

**Table 1.** Survey participant breakdown by academic appointment

Primary Role	Percent
Faculty members	14.5%
Professional advisor	62.9%
Academic advising administrators (e.g., director of advising, dean of advising)	16.1%
Administrator with responsibilities over various areas including advising (e.g., vice president for academic affairs)	6.5%

association with academic advising. We identified and invited a minimum of two participants per college. Ultimately, 762 individuals across all 63 community colleges were invited to participate in the survey. Each potential participant received an email invitation to participate in the Qualtrics survey and the informed consent.

Ninety-three individuals from across the 63 CCB-granting community colleges participated in the survey. Participants included faculty members, professional advisors, academic advising administrators, and administrators with responsibilities over various areas including advising.

Out of 93 respondents, 62 completed the survey. Table 1 presents an overview of survey participants. Table 2 presents a breakdown of how long participants had been in their roles at the time of the survey.

In accordance with Institutional Review Board approval, we did not ask survey respondents to disclose their specific college—a limitation of this study. Table 3 offers a general overview of our survey respondents’ institutional affiliations.

**Table 2.** Survey participants’ years in current academic advising role

Range	Percentage
Less than 6 months	1.1%
6 months or more but less than 3 years	5.4%
1 year or more but less than 3 years	32.6%
3 years or more but less than 5 years	18.5%
5 years or more but less than 10 years	19.6%
10 years or more	22.8%

**Table 3.** Institutional classification

Setting	Percent
Rural-serving	33.9%
Urban-serving	30.6%
Suburban-serving	25.8%
Other (e.g., combination of rural and suburban-serving)	9.7%

The first baccalaureate degree offered by a community college dates back to 1970. The most recent program to establish, based on our survey responses, was founded in 2016. Additionally, the number of baccalaureate degrees offered from our sample institutions ranged from one to seventeen.

Of those who completed the survey, 26 agreed to participate in a follow-up, semi-structured interview. Twenty-one completed the follow-up interview. Interviews were conducted via telephone and in-person. One interview was conducted via cloud-based communication software. Table 4 presents an overview of interview participants. All names used in this study are pseudonyms. Furthermore, all percentages reported in this study are valid percentages. The valid percent excludes missing data from the calculations.

**Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Open-ended questions and interviews were manually coded and analyzed. The specific coding methods we employed were process, structural, and versus coding (Saldaña, 2016). We individually coded the transcripts and then met as a team to compare codes and categories. From the various categories, we developed themes. We obtained trustworthiness through various strategies including: member checking, triangulation (Creswell, 2014), and a critical friend who critiqued and provided feedback throughout this study (Gordon, 2006). In addition, we maintained an audit trail (Glesne, 2016).

**Findings and Discussion**

Our survey indicates that academic advising policies and practices have been impacted in various ways and to varying degrees through the addition of baccalaureate programs. Roughly one third of survey participants (32.3%) indicated no changes at all to their practices. However, 11.3%, 14.5%, and 41.9% reported changes to a great extent, moderate extent, and slight extent,

**Table 4.** Interview participants

Primary Role	Participants	Total
Faculty members	Becky, Catherine, Joanna, Josiah, Marissa, Sheldon, Travis	7
Professional advisors	Annalise, Angela, Deanna, Hillary, Jacob, James, Jacqueline, Justin, Mark, Nohemi, Stan	11
Academic advising administrators	Nicole	1
Administrators with responsibilities over various areas including advising	Rip, Lauren	2

respectively. Furthermore, when asked whether or not their institutions had created new advising policies specifically related to baccalaureate degree-seeking students, 58.1% of respondents indicated “no,” whereas 41.9% indicated “yes.” In addition to whether or not changes occurred, participants revealed that some of the undergoing changes yielded significant challenges for academic advising. These challenges were illuminated through open-ended survey responses and interviews.

Overall, both survey data and interview data converged on the following interrelated themes: (a) (Re)organization of Academic Advising, (b) Collaboration and Communication, (c) Promoting Efficiency and Effectiveness, (d) Generating Buy-in and Support for Baccalaureate Degree Programming, and (e) Ongoing Professional Development and Cross-Training.

### **(Re)organization of Academic Advising**

The colleges represented in our sample utilize various advising models. Based on Pardee’s (2000) general classification, the majority of survey participants reported a shared model (67.5%), a model wherein “advising services are shared between a central administrative unit and faculty or staff in academic departments” (King, 2008, p. 244). Meanwhile, 22.1% reported a centralized model, where “all advising takes place in an administrative unit such as an advising or counseling center with a director and staff generally housed in one location” (King, 2008, p. 244). Ten percent reported a decentralized model, where “advising services are provided by faculty and staff in their academic departments” (King, 2008, p. 244). Additional data collection and analysis provided a more nuanced exploration of the various models used specifically to support baccalaureate degree-seeking students.

In order to effectively advise baccalaureate degree-seeking students, survey and interview data showed colleges either: (a) added CCB advising responsibilities onto existing advisors, (b) hired or (re)assigned academic advisors to advise CCB students only, (c) hired program coordinators to market, recruit, *and* advise students among other responsibilities, (d) charged both professional advisors and faculty members with advising students, or (e) granted faculty members the sole responsibility for advising CCB students. The models adopted by colleges were dependent on both organizational capacity and infrastructure. Capacity was discussed in relation to personnel (i.e., faculty and staff members) while infrastructure referred to both physical and organizational structures (e.g., facilities, information management systems). Hillary, a professional advisor, explained that baccalaureate degree programming at her college came with no additional funding for academic advising: “The message that we got from [said college leader] at the time, we all were gathered in this theater, was we’re doing this and we’re not hiring anybody, so we’re gonna do this and we’re not adding staff.” Similar narratives shed light on the lack of consideration of personnel needs and additional resources when adding new baccalaureate degree programs.

Indeed, each model presented challenges and carried limitations. In cases where advising responsibilities were added onto existing advisors, CCB programs exacerbated high student-to-counselor ratios. Participants consistently identified heavy student-advising loads. During interviews, participants noted advising 1,200 and 2,000 students, which aligns with existing literature from Scott-Clayton (2011). One advisor reported an advising load of 3,000 to 4,000 per advisor. It is possible that heavy loads are the reason that advising is not mandatory at the

majority of the colleges in our sample. In fact, only 23.7% of colleges represented in our sample have mandatory advising policies.

Although some colleges hired or (re)assigned advisors to focus on baccalaureate degree-seeking students, this solution did not always work out as planned, especially during peak advising times. Joanna spoke to this scenario: “The reality was that actually we did have a dedicated advisor in our Student Services that was supposedly handling just bachelor students. But at busy times it doesn’t work quite that way downstairs.” Although the idea of assigning or hiring someone to advise CCB students seemed promising, it is apparent that assigning one person inadequately addresses the burgeoning need in community colleges due to limited availability. Having a centralized advising location where multiple advisors are available emerged as essential to providing proper support to students. As such, professional advisor, James, advocated for additional advisors dedicated to baccalaureate degree-seeking students at his college. He explained this situation as follows:

I think the biggest thing I would need to effectively advise the bachelor’s students is basically a central location. Because like I said, when you have the students coming in and, depending on one person to advise them, it’s kind of a disservice to the students. So having a central location where a bachelor’s student can come in, get everything they need in that one day, and not need to be turned away because he’s not here or he’s not there. So really having a support staff of advisors who advise just for the bachelor’s program.

Although James worked at a college with a greater number of four-year degree programs than some of the other colleges represented in our sample, this is an important point to consider. The issue of availability was less common in colleges that had hired program coordinators to market, recruit, *and* advise students. The creation of coordinator positions provided some relief for advisors. As noted by professional advisor Jacqueline:

If we didn’t have those program coordinators we’d be doing all of that. And then that would be even more work that we wouldn’t

be able to see students individually in person anymore that are just trying to get through their learning support classes. They’re not even worried about their bachelor’s degree just yet.

Jacqueline’s quote highlights the importance of having additional support positions created to assist advisors with meeting the demands of their increased advising loads.

The shared model was common at community colleges in our sample who offered 2 + 2 degree programs. Professional advisors were charged with helping students complete their associate degree requirements. Once students completed all associate degree requirements, they would work with faculty members regarding their upper-level/ bachelor’s degree coursework. In other cases, faculty members took care of all advising needs for baccalaureate degree-seeking students. Although some advisors felt faculty members should have a more prominent role in advising, issues related to faculty union contracts, overload, and a willingness to advise emerged. Regardless of who was charged with advising, collaboration and communication were key according to the survey and interviews.

### **Collaboration and Communication**

We found that internal and external collaboration and communication were critical to meeting the needs of CCB students. However, only 9.8% of survey participants reported that collaboration between academic advising and other departments increased to a great extent within their institution since the establishment of baccalaureate degrees programs. Additionally, 24.6% noted that collaboration had increased to a moderate extent. Others stated their collaborations had increased slightly (41%) and not at all (24.6%).

Our qualitative data illuminated that the degree of collaboration and communication varied and changed over time. As noted by Rip, an administrator, “in some cases, the collaboration has been really effective and the communication has been really transparent and in other cases it has not been.” Nonetheless, most interview participants pointed to a complete lack of internal collaboration and communication structures and strategies, which they believed resulted in tension, frustration, and reduced efficiency and effectiveness within their respective colleges. Some organizational cultures allowed or encouraged silos. Mark, a professional advisor, spoke to

this issue at length: “A lot of the information tends to be siloed . . . from administration to staff. From staff to faculty. From faculty to students, and department to department.” He was particularly concerned about the lack of communication regarding curricular changes, stating:

When there’s program changes or curriculum changes, and we don’t find out about it until two semesters later . . . Well, what about the students we talked with two semesters ago? You know? Kind of not so beneficial for them. So that’s one of the big things for me, is getting timely access to the information of when there’s changes, and just keeping the open lines of communication.

Mark, along with other participants, emphasized that students were the ones most negatively impacted by the lack of communication and collaboration. The lag time in communication impacted students mostly in terms of finances and time to degree.

In some cases, the lack of collaboration and communication stemmed from the program development phase. The knowledge and expertise of academic advisors was often considered only after issues related to advising came to light. For example, issues related to prerequisites and program flow could have been prevented if advisors had been brought into the conversation during the early stages of degree program development. Nicole, an academic advising administrator, referred to this as “short-sightedness” among faculty members. While the advisors we interviewed were mostly left out of the decision-making process, one of our survey respondents discussed the role of advisors in the curriculum review committee. By serving on such a committee, not only were they involved in the decision-making process, but they were up-to-date and could prepare for changes coming down the pipeline.

Similar to internal communication and collaboration, partnerships with the external community or outside of the college were instrumental to the success of the programs and advising. Establishing and fostering strategic partnerships with community stakeholders was an integral step in ensuring the programs were relevant and that advisors were adequately prepared to advise students regarding employment, career, and graduate education options. Program coordinators and faculty members, in particular, spoke about the importance of establishing partnerships or

memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with local universities to support students who were interested in pursuing graduate education. In fact, 30.5% of survey participants reported their colleges implemented “graduate school advising and planning” in their advising practices. Promoting graduate education entailed a cultural shift as the highest degree awarded by community colleges had been the associate in arts or the associate in science. Therefore, advising had focused mostly on transfer students. In summary, strategic partnerships with both internal and external stakeholders are critical to the success of baccalaureate degree programming and related academic advising responsibilities.

### **Promoting Efficiency and Effectiveness**

As noted previously, various structural, cultural, and financial barriers affect academic advising in the community college (Bailey et al., 2015; Scott-Clayton, 2011). When asked what supports they personally needed to effectively advise baccalaureate degree-seeking students at their institution, the top three responses were: additional academic advisors (21%), information regarding job and career opportunities for students (17.7%), and training regarding degree expectations (19.4%). Interview data provided greater insights into how participants dealt with these and other challenges. Insufficient advisors, limited class offerings, enrollment numbers, and cohort-based delivery models required advisors to be meticulous in their advising practices. Faculty member Sheldon referred to his work as “high pressure advising.” He explained:

We have to be really efficient . . . So many of the programs have two-year rotations, which is an advising challenge. [Students] can enter the two-year rotation at any time for the bachelor program and they have to complete it in that order, but if they want to finish in two years, they can’t miss anything. So it’s high-pressure advising.

Travis, who was also a faculty member, spoke about the importance of making sure students were properly advised, especially given limited course offerings: “upper division classes in [said] fields are only offered one semester a year. If they’re trying to get their [upper degree courses done in] two years, there’s some guidance that they have to get, right? If they’re not, it’s a little

bit more open and they can wait.” In spite of the complexities involved in advising CCB students, 66.1% of participants indicated that they did not have mandatory advising practices each semester/quarter for their baccalaureate degree-seeking students, whereas 11.9% indicated they did have mandatory advising and 22% were unsure.

Given some of these limitations, guided pathways were identified as essential to helping students complete their program of study. Rip stated, “it’s so important that there be a clear path for the students to get the degree. They’ve got to have clarity on where they can get the courses and when they can get the course and where that might lead afterwards right in terms of career and prospects.” In addition to implementing pathways, which integrate both academic and student services, participants spoke about the use of advising technologies to enhance communication, efficiency, and effectiveness.

While some participants praised the use of technology, others recognized some of the limitations associated with technology-mediated advising. Professional advisor Nohemi, for example, believed technology made her job “easier.” Meanwhile, Sheldon referred to the oracle database used at his institution as a “retrieval nightmare,” which might be associated with what Travis called a “bottom of the barrel version” of student management systems. Participants also pointed to the need for training as well as time needed to implement technology. Faculty member Marissa explained this challenge:

So there are some things that our system is just not ready for. I don’t know if [my advising colleague] mentioned it, but our degree audit system just, within the last month, has the bachelor’s degree in it. And we’ve got students ready to graduate in June, so it took a year and a half from the time it was actually approved for it to get loaded up in the system, which has made her job incredibly difficult.

In summation, additional work remains despite the various strategies being employed to address structural, cultural, and financial barriers.

### **Generating Buy-in and Support for Baccalaureate Degree Programming**

The varying perspectives related to whether or not community colleges could or should be

offering bachelor degrees in the existing literature (Toma, 2012; Walker, 2005) were apparent in our open-ended survey responses and further emphasized in interviews. Different views regarding the legitimacy of a four-year degree from a community college also emerged. Justin, a program coordinator, spoke of his colleagues’ perceptions regarding these degrees and how they impacted his program:

I think one of the other challenges is really the perception of these degrees. I think we still battle it, even at [said campus], whether it is overt or whether it is kind of hidden, about what people really think about a bachelor degree coming from a community college and whether they think it is serving the student . . . and it is not that I am asking them to promote this above the other ones, we just want to make sure the students know what is out there.

In many ways, the implementation of baccalaureate degrees challenged underlying values, assumptions, structures, and processes that connect back to an institution’s organizational culture. Additionally, advisors and some faculty members shared whether or not they encouraged students to pursue bachelor’s degrees at their college. Evidently, the views held by advisors shaped their individual advising practices. If they felt a student could be better served elsewhere, they made it a point to have an honest, often difficult conversation. Stan, a professional advisor, shed light on this issue:

I encourage [them. Well,] yes and no. I think the most important thing is the student . . . choosing the right path and the right school to go to earn their degree . . . One of the first conversations that I’ll have with a student is, “What are your plans after? What are your dreams?” If it looks as if that student should be someone who should be considering a state university or a private university and could be ending up with a degree in [said field] or in [said field] or an [said graduate degree], I’ll steer them away from our program because it’s not good for them.

Although Stan understood that his institution was concerned with full-time equivalent (FTE) students, he wanted to ensure students were on



the path that best supported their future personal and career goals—even if it meant their attending a different college. While an advisor’s main concern is the student, academic advisors as well as others charged with advising benefit from ongoing professional development and cross-training.

### **Ongoing Professional Development and Cross-Training**

When survey participants were asked how prepared they felt to effectively advise baccalaureate degree-seeking students at their college, 47.4% indicated “very prepared,” 39.5%, 10.5%, and 2.6% reported feeling moderately prepared, slightly unprepared, and unprepared, respectively. The number of training or professional development activities participants engaged in varied as well. For example, the majority of participants (36.8%) reported 1 to 3 professional development/training activities. However, 28.9% reported zero activities. The majority of participants (63.2%) reported that none of the activities they participated in were related to the CCB.

During the interviews, participants indicated the need for training and professional development in response to the implementation of baccalaureate degree programs. While some professional development or trainings were rather basic, some were in-depth. Joanna, a faculty member, discussed the kind of training she provides to advisors:

I give them the program guide to go through the program, what the supplemental application requires, how we generally transfer credits, what’s acceptable to certain of the specialties within [said area], how that works. And then also if they have any questions at all when they’re meeting with the student they’ll call up or if I’m available send the student up if they’re not available or they’re not able to answer what the student needs. But they have the basic information about it.

Trainings were also used to receive clarification from the departments who oversaw four-year degree programs in addition to sharing new information and enhancing technology use. Some trainings, as discussed by Sheldon, included shadowing. Interacting and working with community stakeholders also contributed to academic

advisors being prepared to advise baccalaureate degree-seeking students interested in pursuing graduate school. Although most community college baccalaureate (CCB) degree programs are geared toward employment and workforce preparation (Walker, 2005), given the current labor market (McCallum, Posselt, & López, 2017), baccalaureate degree-granting community colleges must foster a culture that promotes the full range of post-baccalaureate options including graduate education (Martinez, 2018).

### **Implications**

This study provides valuable insights into academic advising at community colleges and is relevant to community college leaders, advisors, and faculty members at institutions that are considering or have already implemented four-year degree programs. As underscored by our participants, the implementation of the community college baccalaureate is a complex process that requires careful attention to all areas of the college. Perhaps most importantly, community colleges should consider academic advisors. The implementation of baccalaureate degrees requires an extensive degree of communication, collaboration, and ongoing professional development. Additionally, it demands constant explanation of the nature of the change. Ultimately, organizational culture needs to be addressed in order to meet the advising needs of CCB students.

There are significant implications from this work for practice. Both collaboration and communication are paramount in light of limited resources at the community college. Administrators and faculty members should assume responsibility and ensure that academic advisors are kept abreast of curriculum changes. We recommend including academic advisors on curriculum review committees. Although curriculum committees are often-times limited to faculty participation, these committees could leverage the knowledge and experience of academic advisors to avoid some of the pitfalls experienced by the colleges in our study.

Also, collaborations should be sought both inside and outside of the college. For example, while community colleges may be unable to hire additional advisors and faculty members may be bound by collective bargaining agreements, there is an opportunity to build partnerships with university student affairs or college student personnel graduate programs by providing internship opportunities. Through such collaborations, graduate

students will gain invaluable practical experiences and community colleges will fill a critical need.

Professional development is also key. Despite wanting and needing professional development, our participants identified limited opportunities. Professional development is especially important as advisors engage with students who may be interested in pursuing graduate studies. While some of the advisors in our study, as well as faculty members, were able to draw on their own graduate school experiences to guide students, the highest degree attained by some advisors may be a bachelor's degree. To this point, they may have limited knowledge about the GMAT, GRE, or other graduate school related requirements. Professional development and training related to guided pathways, degree requirements, and course offerings/sequences are necessary as well. Furthermore, if colleges are seeking to redesign their advising practices using new technologies, then they must offer professional development opportunities. Participants in our study wanted and needed professional development, aligning with previous work on the implementation of advising technologies (Kalamkarian, Boynton, & Lopez, 2018).

The guided pathways concept was a prominent topic in our open-ended survey and interview data. Our participants indicated that their colleges were committed to guided pathways, which have proven effective in helping students graduate (Bailey et al., 2015). Yet, the programs our participants were associated with continued to experience both minor and major curricular changes, making it difficult for both faculty members and professional advisors. The effectiveness of guided pathways was further diminished by the lack of communication at multiple levels. These findings indicate that advisors should be brought into policy conversations during the development and implementation stage for new programs.

As indicated by some participants, had they been brought on earlier in the development and implementation stages of the CCB, several of the challenges and issues they encountered could have been prevented. Programs will experience curricular changes in order to remain relevant, but lack of critical review and consultation resulted in ineffective practices according to our participants. Also, including advisors early on in the process might help generate the buy-in needed for these programs to be successful.

Finally, our study shows that it is unreasonable to develop baccalaureate degree programs without allocating resources or funds to academic advising.

As noted in our findings, some colleges have added the responsibility of advising baccalaureate degree-seeking students onto existing advisors and others have (re)assigned advisors for baccalaureate programs and/or students specifically. Doing so places strain on existing advisors and limits their effectiveness. Taken together, our study's findings counter the oversimplified explanations that undergird discussions regarding the institutionalization of baccalaureate degrees and what they mean for community colleges and stakeholders. In many ways, our findings revealed as many questions as insights. Future research might explore which of the identified advising delivery models are most effective for four-year community college programs. In addition, we recommend research on the role of CCB advisors promoting graduate school and faculty roles in advising.

### Conclusion

In closing, the focus of this study was to better understand how and to what extent academic advising practices have been impacted by the implementation of four-year degree programs at U.S. community colleges. As revealed in our findings, there are several considerations institutional leaders, academic advisors, and other critical stakeholders must take into account during the development and implementation stages of these new degree programs. If these new degree programs are to be successful, community colleges must provide the proper support for both students and advisors along with promoting internal and external collaborations. Advising policies and practices must be a central consideration in program planning and development, which would entail giving academic advisors a seat at the table and valuing their expertise.

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