Characteristics of Academic Advising That Contribute to Racial and Ethnic Minority Student Success at Predominantly White Institutions

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Racial and ethnic minority student departure continues to be a major concern for higher education researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. We explore the role that academic advisors play in facilitating success among students of color at predominantly White institutions that have demonstrated effectiveness at generating ethnic minority success. Three themes emerged from the findings and underscore the characteristics of academic advising that contribute to that success. First, participants noted the importance of advisors who humanized the practice of academic advising. Second, they highlighted the impact of those who adopted a multifaceted approach to advising. Finally, participants emphasized the importance of proactive academic advising. Implications for academic advising practices are discussed.

Retention and graduation rates of racial and ethnic minority students continue to be a major concern for higher education researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. Indeed, several recent discussions among federal and state policy makers have focused on retention and graduation issues (Supiano, 2009). Over one half of the Black and Latina/o students who enter a 4-year college will fail to complete a bachelor's degree within 6 years of matriculation, a rate much lower than that exhibited by their White counterparts (Berkner et al., 2002). While many Asian American ethnic subgroups have high rates of persistence and degree completion, some subgroups within this population hold 4-year degrees at rates far below the national average (Museus, 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Teranishi, 2007). The failure of so many students of color to attain a college degree is associated with many negative ramifications for the individual students who leave college, such as money spent on tuition and fees, forgone wages during enrollment, accrued debt that results from the costs of education, time invested in educational endeavors, and the inability to enjoy the social and economic benefits that result from a college degree (Baum & Payea, 2005; Choy & Li, 2005; Swail, 2004). Moreover, the failure of those students to finish college results in cumulative negative effects on American society, including increased incarceration rates, higher rates of unemployment, lower levels of academic preparation among subsequent generations, decreased civic participation, and lower tax revenues. For example, the average high school graduate pays $6,500 in local, state, and federal taxes, which equals 55% of the $11,800 in taxes paid by baccalaureate degree recipients (Baum & Payea, 2005).

Because of the low rates of completion and the negative consequences that accompany them, educators must make efforts to increase persistence and degree completion among students of color. To increase persistence and attainment among racial and ethnic minority undergraduates, educators must better understand the ways various factors can hinder or promote success among this population. While a growing body of research addresses the factors that influence racial and ethnic minority student persistence and completion, the role of academic advisors in fostering such success is not well understood. As some institutions utilize academic advisors to improve retention rates (Killough, 2009), the role of advising in promoting success among students must be better understood. The current inquiry was designed to shed light on how academic advisors contribute to the success of students of color at institutions with high and equitable racial and ethnic minority student retention and graduation rates.

Before proceeding, we highlight a few noteworthy considerations. First, in the following

sections, we use the terms "racial and ethnic minority student" and "student of color" interchangeably to refer to undergraduates who self-identify with the socially constructed Asian American, Black, Latina/o, and Native American racial categories. Second, we recognize that college students of color enter institutions of higher education as complex individuals with multiple identities that shape their experiences. Thus, while our inquiry is focused on understanding commonalities across the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students, we acknowledge the importance of recognizing the diversity within this population with regard to gender, sexual orientation, disability, generational status, ethnic orientation, and so forth.

Academic Advising and Minority Student Success

Empirical research on the effects of academic advising is clear and consistent: Advising can have an impact on persistence and graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Seidman (1991), for example, conducted a randomized experiment of 278 matriculating community college students. He randomly assigned them to a treatment group that received pre- and post-admissions advising or a control group. The pre- and post-admissions advising received by the treatment group included meetings with advisors to discuss course schedules, involvement opportunities, and progress during the first semester of college. Participants in the treatment group were significantly more likely to persist into the second year than those in the control group. The results of several other studies confirm these findings and indicate that participation in advising programs is positively associated with persistence and graduation (Austin et al., 1997; Elliott & Healy, 2001; Metzner, 1989; Peterson et al., 2001; Smith, 1993; Steele et al., 1993; Yorke, 1998).

While the aforementioned literature provides evidence that advising can affect persistence and degree completion, research on how the nature of academic advising influences students' success is less clear. Although the quality of academic advising has been linked to persistence, the paucity of literature on the influence of the qualitative aspects of academic advising on students is problematic. Only a few empirical studies have focused on understanding how academic advisors shape undergraduates' experiences (Harrison, 2009; Shultz et al., 2001). Harrison, for example, analyzed a survey of pre-nursing and nursing students and

concluded that academic advisors who are approachable, available, communicative, organized, fostering, and nurturing were perceived as effective advisors. However, empirical studies that describe the elements of academic advisors or advising relationships that negatively or positively influence undergraduates' experiences are difficult to find. Moreover, in our extensive review of extant literature on this topic, we found no rigorous empirical studies focused on the characteristics of academic advisors or advising that positively or negatively impact the success of students of color. The dearth of research in this area could be one reason that many institutions fail to maximize the potential positive impact of their advising programs (Habley, 2004). For institutions of higher education to maximize the effectiveness of academic advising on their campuses, their administrators must have a better understanding of the characteristics of advisors and advising that foster or hinder success among racial and ethnic minority college students.

Research on faculty-student interactions can be used to begin understanding how academic advisors might be able to interact with undergraduates of color in meaningful ways that increase success among those students. For example, scholars have found that both the quality and quantity of faculty-student interactions are associated with positive academic outcomes (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Berger, 1997; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). While providing valuable insights into the salience of faculty-student interaction in fostering success, these researchers primarily measured academically focused interactions (e.g., work on research projects and receiving prompt feedback from faculty members). They assessed nonacademic interactions by asking Likert-type survey questions; for example, they would query how often students "worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework" (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2010). Recognizing that such measures might oversimplify or mask the full range of faculty-student encounters, researchers have qualitatively uncovered several types that can positively impact students' experiences, including academically driven, personal, structured, incidental, and mentoring interactions (Cox & Orehovec, 2007).

A small and growing body of literature focuses on positive faculty influence on students of color. These studies indicate that faculty members who are warm to, provide holistic support for, and go above and beyond their normal duties to serve racial and ethnic minority students can have a

positive impact on their college experience (Guiffrida, 2005; Hernandez, 2000; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Nettles et al., 1986). For example, Guiffrida qualitatively examined the impact of faculty on the experiences of 19 Black undergraduates and found that faculty members who extended themselves and took a holistic approach in supporting and advocating for their students had a positive influence on participants' experiences. How the qualitative aspects of advisor-student of color interactions influence those students' success, however, has remained unexplored.

Purpose of the Study

The current inquiry was aimed at exploring the role that academic advisors play in facilitating success among students of color at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) that have demonstrated effectiveness as generating ethnic minority success (GEMS)—the GEMS institutions. This investigation contributes to existing literature in two primary ways. First, it underscores the role, often not addressed in higher education literature, that academic advisors can and do play in facilitating success among students of color. Second, it advances previous research by empirically delineating some of the ways that academic advisors contribute to the success of students of color. Specifically, we aimed to answer the following question: What role do academic advisors play in generating racial and ethnic minority student success at the GEMS colleges? We found three characteristics of academic advising that participants perceived as contributing to racial and ethnic minority students' success on their campuses.

Methods

We employed qualitative techniques in the current investigation for two primary reasons. First, qualitative methods allow for the exploration of a topic or concept through the use of rich and detailed information (Creswell, 1998). Second, they are most appropriate for answering *how* and *what* research questions. Thus, qualitative techniques are ideal tools for generating a rich description and better understanding of the characteristics of academic advising that participants associated with racial and ethnic minority students' success on their respective campuses.

Institution Selection

Institutions were selected with the intention of achieving both intensity and variation. *Intensity* refers to the selection of information-rich cases, while *variation* involves identifying and describing themes that cut across variation in samples (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, we selected institutions that represent a wide range of characteristics and are most likely to offer insights into how academic advising can and does contribute to racial and ethnic minority student persistence and degree completion. As for the 4-year institutions, we sought to select campuses that exhibited a) graduation rates among underrepresented racial and ethnic minority (Black, Latina/o, and Native American) students that were appreciably higher than the national average, and b) graduation rates among underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities that were close to or greater than those of their White peers. Finally, because we focused this inquiry on how advising influences the persistence and graduation of minority students at PWIs, we limited sites to colleges at which approximately 50% or more enrollees were White.

We utilized the College Results Online (CRO) database to select 4-year institutions for inclusion in the study (www.collegeresults.org). The CRO database permits the comparison of the 6-year graduation rates of 4-year colleges. Once a focal institution is selected, CRO applies an algorithm to compare that institution to approximately 1,400 other 4-year colleges and universities throughout the country. CRO compares the selected school to all other institutions in the database according to the following characteristics: a) estimated median SAT/ACT of entering class, b) admission selectivity, c) Carnegie classification, d) percentage of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants, e) public or private control, f) number of full-time equivalent undergraduates, g) student-related expenditures per student, h) percentage of undergraduates 25 years of age or over, i) status as an historically Black college or university, j) percentage of undergraduates who are enrolled part-time, and k) status as a commuter campus. CRO then calculates similarity scores between the focal institution and all other institutions in the database and identifies the most similar peer institutions for comparison. The CRO database permits the comparison of focal and peer institutions by the graduation rates of various racial and ethnic student subpopulations (e.g., Asian, Black, Latina/o, and White). Moreover, CRO allows users to compare institutions by racial disparities in 6-year degree completion rates within each institution.

One relatively large, private, doctoral institution, which we refer to as *Research University* in the remainder of this article, and one small, public, comprehensive, state institution, which we refer to as *State University* herein, were selected using the CRO database. Between 2002 and 2004, both Research University (78%) and State University (63%) exhibited 6-year graduation rates for underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities that were higher than the national average (46–47%) (Berkner et al., 2002). Research University reported 82% and 78% graduation rates among White and underrepresented racial and ethnic minority students, respectively. This 4% gap was the smallest among its PWI peer group, which included nine other institutions with gaps ranging from 5 to 18%. State University reported a White graduation rate of 51% and a graduation rate for underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities of 63%, indicating that underrepresented minorities graduated at a rate 12% higher than their White peers at the same institution. In contrast, the 14 PWIs identified as its peer institutions exhibited underrepresented racial and ethnic minority graduation rates that were 4 to 22% lower than those of their White peers on the same campuses.

Because the CRO database only contains data on 4-year colleges and bachelor-degree attainment rates do not provide an adequate benchmark for success at 2-year colleges, an alternative method was used to identify the 2-year institutions to include in this study. First, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System was used to find 2-year colleges with relatively high persistence and graduation rates (www.nces.ed.gov/IPEDS/). Because all of the identified 2-year colleges were in California, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Data Mart was then employed to compare those institutions' within-semester retention rates (i.e., the rate at which students completed courses in a given semester) with those of other community colleges in California (www.cccco.edu).

One community college, which we will refer to as *Community College*, was selected for inclusion in this study because it exhibited a) high retention rates among all racial groups in comparison to other California community colleges, and b) nearly equal retention rates among all major racial groups (Asian, Black, Latina/o, Native American, and White). According to the Data Mart retention rates for 2005–2006, Community College had overall within-semester retention rates (91% for fall and 92% for spring semesters) higher than the California community-college system average (83% for both semesters). Regarding retention rates across racial groups at Community College, the rates for Asian (92% for fall and 94% for spring semesters), Black (90% for fall and 91% for spring semesters), and Latina/o (92% for both semesters) students were all comparable to those of their White counterparts within the institution (92% for both semesters).

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used to achieve intensity (Patton, 2002) in the participant sample as well. This method permitted the acquisition of a sample that provides a wealth of insight into the phenomenon under investigation. Accordingly, the academic advisors as well as the racial and ethnic minority students were selected for their knowledge of the role of academic advising in the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students on the three campuses. First, academic advisors on each of the three campuses were contacted via email and asked to participate in individual face-to-face interviews. Then, advisors who agreed to participate and other staff on the campuses were asked to help identify racial and ethnic minority students for participation in the study. Those students were contacted via email and asked to participate in individual interviews.

The final sample consisted of 45 individuals, including 14 academic advisors and 31 racial and ethnic minority (9 Asian American, 9 Black, and 13 Latina/o) students across the three institutions. White students were excluded from the sample because research suggests that they provide inaccurate assessments of the experiences of their minority counterparts (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Native Americans were also excluded from the sample because of the difficulty in acquiring participants from this population as they comprise only 0, 1, and 3% of students at the three campuses. While Asian American graduation rates were not considered in selecting the three participating sites, they were included in the participant sample because evidence suggests that they share common struggles with their Black and Latina/o peers (Lewis et al., 2000) and that some Asian American subgroups also suffer from racial and ethnic disparities in degree attainment (Museus, 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Teranishi, 2007).

Regarding other characteristics, the students in the sample consisted of 21 female and 10 male undergraduates. They ranged from 18 to 32 years of age with 90% of the sample (28 of 31) falling between the ages of 18 and 24 years. Student majors spanned a wide range that included biology, business, education, political science, psychology, and sociology. As for socioeconomic status, 22 self-identified as coming from a low socioeconomic or working-class circumstance, 7 identified as originating from a middle-class situation, and 2 identified as having a wealthy background. The students were involved in a wide range of activities and organizations on campus: 4 were in fraternities and sororities, 8 were connected to cultural centers, 12 were in targeted support programs, and 13 were involved in predominantly racial and ethnic minority student organizations.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data collection consisted of individual face-to-face interviews. We conducted 1.0- to 1.5-hour individual face-to-face interviews with academic advisors and racial and ethnic minority students. We used a semi-structured approach, which ensured that the interview data provided information necessary to understand the phenomenon under study while providing flexibility for us to address emergent themes (see Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This approach included the specification of a set of issues to be explored throughout the course of the interview (Patton, 2002). The semi-structured approach also allows the interviewer to build conversation by establishing a conversation style and engaging in spontaneous questioning for clarification and deeper understanding of participants' responses. Therefore, using an interview guide systematized the individual interviews and ensured that all relevant topics were covered; it also allowed for considerable flexibility in probing. Interview participants were all asked about the role of advisors in facilitating success among students of color on their campuses. The interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed.

Data analysis consisted of elucidating the ways that academic advisors and students of color perceived academic advising to contribute to racial and ethnic minority student success on their respective campuses. Interview data were organized and coded in the NVivo Qualitative Software Research Software Package (QSR International, 2007). Each interview transcript was coded using open-coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this process, nine invariant constituents were identified. Those constituents were then used to inductively generate three themes that describe the characteristics of academic advising that participants associated with racial and ethnic minority student success. Then, axial coding was used to identify the various properties of each theme.

Researcher Subjectivity and Reflexivity

While some qualitative researchers have attempted to minimize the impact of researcher subjectivity on qualitative inquiry (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), others have adopted a constructivist approach and advocated for recognition of the importance of researcher reflexivity, which is the identification and understanding of biases and assumptions that can affect researchers' decisions and interpretations (Charmaz, 2005). The latter approach, which we utilized, allows one to embrace their subjectivity and incorporate it into the discourse of research. The lead researcher, Museus, identifies as a multiracial, racial, and ethnic minority and was once an undergraduate at a PWI. He has produced over 40 publications and national conference presentations on campus environments as well as racial and ethnic minority college-student experiences and success. Thus, his experiences as a racial and ethnic minority student and a racial and ethnic minority scholar studying the experiences of students of color shape his biases. The second coresearcher, Ravello, also identifies as a racial and ethnic minority of color, was once a college student, and has several years of experience working in academic support and serving racial and ethnic minority undergraduates and other disadvantaged groups in college. Her experiences have shaped her perceptions and biases.

Therefore, our own racial and ethnic backgrounds and perceptions as persons of color most likely informed our approach to this study and interpretation of the data. Indeed, at the outset of this examination, we both espoused the assumption that racial disparity in persistence and degree completion is a significant problem. We also share the belief that educators and advisors at PWIs have the ability and responsibility to address this problem through the ways in which they shape environments and deliver services to students of color. Our selection of participating sites, interview protocols, and approaches to data analysis were based on these assumptions and

beliefs. These biases also likely influenced our interpretation of the data. For example, Museus was greatly influenced by faculty mentors who cared about and were committed to his success. As a result, he may have been more likely to identify such caring and commitment as an emergent theme than would a majority student who was not influenced by caring and committed educators.

Credibility and Transferability

While internal and external validity are critical considerations in the measurement and generalizability of results in quantitative research, quality assurance in qualitative research is determined by the degree of credibility and transferability of the research findings. *Credibility* refers to the congruence of the research findings with reality, while *transferability* refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to situations outside of the cases being studied (Merriam, 1998).

For the purposes of this inquiry, credibility and transferability were maximized using two primary methods prescribed by Lincoln and Guba (1986). First, discrepant data were sought and examined throughout the analysis to ensure the consideration of alternative hypotheses and to question underlying theoretical presuppositions and emergent themes. Second, member checks were conducted with three individuals on each of the three campuses to ensure that our interpretations were congruent with participants' perceptions and realities.

Limitations of the Study

We acknowledge several limitations of the current study. First, this examination is context bound. While the institutional sample includes public and private, 2- and 4-year, as well as urban and rural institutions, it only includes three campuses, all of which exist within their own unique political, cultural, economic, and geographic contexts. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to any broader population of colleges and universities.

Second, we did not have a comparison group, which prohibits the juxtaposition of high performing and low performing institutions. Therefore, any one finding of this inquiry must be interpreted with caution because the characteristics of academic advisors perceived to contribute to racial and ethnic minority student success at the GEMS colleges may also be found among advisors at institutions that do not exhibit high or equitable retention and graduation rates among racial and ethnic minority students.

Selection bias constitutes a third limitation of the study. Academic advisors volunteered for participation and may have very different professional philosophies than their counterparts who did not volunteer to participate. Also, advisors and other staff were asked to invite students who could provide valuable insights, and the students who were invited to participate were likely involved in campus activities or connected to on-campus staff in some other way. Students who were not connected could have provided very different perspectives than the ones we obtained.

Finally, we focused our analysis on themes about participants' perceptions of the elements of academic advising that fostered success on their campuses, but we did not conduct an analysis of, and therefore cannot speak to, differences across subgroups within the racial and ethnic minority student population.

Findings

Before proceeding to our presentation of the findings, we want to highlight a few important points. First, we do not argue that all academic advisors at the GEMS institutions intentionally incorporate the practices discussed into their work, nor do we claim to validate a causal relationship between the factors discussed herein and racial and ethnic minority student persistence and degree completion. Rather, we only aim to outline the characteristics of academic advising that participants perceived to contribute to the success of students of color on their campuses. Second, one half of the academic advisors who participated in this study worked in targeted support initiatives, such as equal opportunity programs. These advisors may serve fewer students, on average, than typical academic advisors, which readers should consider when interpreting the data. Finally, these findings are based on common themes emerging from participant interviews. No clear and discernable differences across subgroups were apparent.

We recognize that some readers might deem these findings intuitive. We are also aware that many academic advisors might already intentionally incorporate these elements into their practice to some extent. We admit that if readers react to these findings by saying, "I already knew that" or "I already do that," then the findings of this study might not have much utility. For the findings presented herein to be useful, readers must a)

recognize that these themes highlight the aspect of advising that participants believed to be the *most salient* in facilitating racial and ethnic minority student success at high performing institutions, and b) reflect upon how they can invest more thought, time, and energy into improving their work by enhancing the extent to which these elements are manifested in their advising practices and interactions with students of color.

As illustrated in this section, the findings indicate that participants did, to some extent, perceive that academic advisors play a role in the success of racial and ethnic minorities on the three GEMS campuses. Three themes emerged from the findings and underscore the characteristics of academic advising that contribute to that success. First, participants noted the importance of academic advisors who humanized the practice of academic advising. Second, they highlighted the impact of academic advisors who had adopted a multifaceted approach to advising. Finally, interview participants underscored the importance of proactive academic advisors.

Humanized Academic Advising

The first theme emerging from the interview data highlights the importance of advisors humanizing the academic advising experience. The humanization of academic advising consists of two components: a) academic advisors being seen as human beings and b) those advisors caring about and being committed to their racial/ethnic minority students' success. Regarding the former, academic advisors who were interviewed at the GEMS campuses discussed how they made intentional efforts to ensure that their students saw them as human beings, rather than just staff at their college or university. This theme is illustrated by the following comment:

> My role is, first of all, to get to know the students on a personal level and for them to kind of get to know me. I think, before we get to the whole business side of it, of just sitting with a student like a straight academic counselor would do and just map it out, that I need to know a little bit about them, their interests, and get to know them, the human aspects of them. And, then, after that, it's about trying to figure out what is it that they want. (White female academic advisor at Research University)

Racial and ethnic minority students in the sample also discussed the importance of their academic advisors being perceived as human beings, rather than just college staff. In fact, when asked about the role that academic advising plays in fostering success among college students of color on their campuses, several student participants referred to the positive impact of key academic advisors who were friends or mentors. This important point is illustrated by the following student's comment about her advisor:

> On campus, there have been two people that have really helped me out and one of them is my advisor. Go see her like every . . . at least once a week, I go see her and then we just sit down and we can talk for hours. She'll say "Okay, how's everything going?" So, she's like a friend too. Like, "Is everything okay? How are you feeling? Are you not homesick anymore? How are your classes going?" (Latina student at State University)

This quotation illuminates how such informal interactions were associated with strong relationships, or friendships, between advisors and their racial and ethnic minority students.

In addition, advisor and student participants underscored the importance of academic advisors caring about and being committed to their students' success. The following student highlighted the importance of advisors (or mentors) caring as he described one advisor who has had a major impact on his experience; he sees that person as a mentor who cares:

> Advisors are good and well, but a mentor situation is more desirable to me, partially because the mentor cares, as opposed to you being a student ID number who comes in, and there's a file. (Black male student at Community College)

The following academic advisor from State University also underscores the importance of this caring and commitment in the following statement:

> I just feel like our students need to relate, especially because most of our students are first generation students. They have, they don't have that support at home and, even if they do, their parents or their guardians may

not know what it means to be in college, so how can they truly support them because they don't know what it entails? So, I think our students are looking for someone to just say "I understand what you're going through. I've been there." They just need to feel like they still have that here and that student and that people generally care about their success. (Black female academic advisor at State University)

As the following student participant illustrates, racial and ethnic minority students discussed how they are able to talk to caring and committed advisors about their experience, and they associated those opportunities with perceptions of the advisor being accessible and helpful:

Whenever I'm talking with my advisor, I'm never talking about school, like my classes. I'm only talking about those like one-third of the time. The other two-thirds it's about myself, my personal experience, what's going on in my life . . . it's easy because they care and everything just goes into a rhythm, where they understand everything that I'm saying. They're always helpful. They're always there when you need them. (Asian American female student at Community College)

In addition to their emphasis on advisors' humanization of academic advising, participants noted the importance of academic advisors providing multifaceted support.

Holistic Academic Advising

Participants underscored the importance of academic advisors who made concerted efforts to provide holistic advising and serve the whole student. This theme consisted of two components. First, advisors using a multifaceted approach are aware that minority students' problems are rarely isolated to one aspect (e.g., academic, financial, etc.) of their college experience. Second, those advisors ensure that racial and ethnic minority students access the support they need, regardless of the nature of their problems. The following comment exemplifies how academic advisors in the participant sample perceived the importance of providing holistic academic advising to address multiple issues faced by students of color:

We deal with, you know, like I said, anywhere from academic issues to personal issues to financial aid—so, the entire package of what a student needs to be successful in this office and to be retained and actually graduate. But, I think it should be like that across the board. (Black female academic advisor at State University)

Several racial and ethnic minority student participants highlighted the importance of academic advisors understanding that students' academic, psychological, and social problems are not isolated issues. The following student, for example, noted the significance of her academic advisor being able to give her advice, regardless of whether those issues are academic in nature:

Pretty much anything that I go to her for, she gives me advice. So, one way or another, she might criticize me and say "No, you can't do this. Wait another semester." I've gone to her twice and said, "Maybe I'll study abroad next semester." And, she'll say "No. You have to wait." Like, okay. Damn. (Latina at State University)

Academic advisors also discussed the importance of being closely connected to support networks that exist across their respective campuses, whether they are academic departments, targeted support programs, counseling services, or financial aid offices. These connections allow those advisors, when they are unable to help racial and ethnic minority students solve their problems, effectively serve as bridges to support networks on campus and link their students to the appropriate faculty members, administrators, or staff with resources to help address their needs. This point is illustrated by the following quotation:

I'm over at the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society. I'm thrilled when there are minority students there. Not only do I do that, but I'm involved with different committees on campus, and I'm a part of different organizations. Besides that, I do go to the different minority support offices for their meetings too. I attend their meetings. I'm very active in the community. That is important too because I have a lot of students that belong to those organizations that I'm also involved in.

(Latina academic advisor at Research University)

The next quotation highlights how these close connections allow academic advisors to address problems or issues that are multifaceted and might need the expertise of academic advisors, as well as other professionals, at their institutions:

> If I had a student in here who was discussing certain problems and I spoke to them about the possibility of them seeking some type of counseling, I would ask the student, and if they agreed, then what I would do is, with the student in the office, I would call up the counseling center because we have a specific protocol So, we, you know, are in constant contact with counselors over the phone and sometimes, for instance last semester, I met with one of my student's counselors as well as my student. The three of us met to discuss certain issues that were going on. So, very close, because everything is related. When a student is going through something personal you better believe that it's going to affect their academics so those are things that on both sides that we need to know. So that's the counseling aspect. (Black male academic advisor at State University)

This participant also demonstrates how academic advisors consciously and proactively maintain those connections. This finding is consistent with previous research on the relationships between faculty members and students of color, which indicates that professors who take a holistic approach to supporting students of color make extra efforts to help those students with both academic and nonacademic problems (e.g., Guiffrida, 2005).

Proactive Academic Advising

The last theme that emerged from the data involved the importance of academic advisors espousing proactive philosophies. Specifically, when asked how advisors contribute to racial and ethnic minority success on the GEMS campuses, participants discussed the importance of academic advisors who proactively assume a responsibility for connecting minority students with the resources (e.g., information, opportunities, and support) they need to succeed. This theme consisted of two components: informal and formal manifestations of proactive advising.

Academic advisors who were noted for their impact on racial and ethnic minority student success make intentional efforts to proactively connect students with resources. This informal manifestation of proactive advising is illustrated by the following statement from an academic advisor who is intentional about his incorporation of proactive advising into his work; he underscores his proactive philosophy to academic advising as he explains the importance of physically walking students over to other offices when making a referral:

> By walking the student over, what happens at the point is, now, there is a significant relationship. When I walk in the other office, I am going to get results. When I bring somebody in, they are going to say, "Hey, Steven. How are you doing? You got a new student for us?" I say, "Yes, I do. Take care of that individual." There is that relationship there, because it is only a short walk for me, it only takes me three or four minutes, maybe five minutes, to go over there and talk for a few minutes and make that connection. (Black male academic advisor at Community College)

Racial and ethnic minority students also discussed the impact that proactive advising makes on their experiences and outcomes. A student made the following statement about his advisor in response to a question regarding individuals on campus who have had a major impact on his success:

> Even now He saw me on campus. I hadn't seen [him] for a while, and he grabbed me and said, "Hey. There are some scholarships I want you to apply for." And, he's always promoting success in the minority population. . .in everybody, really. But, he wants to push it because Afro-Americans makeup about two percent of people in college or something. (Black male student at Community College)

In addition to such informal proactive practices, several participants mentioned the importance of systematized proactive-advising practices on their campuses; many of these efforts fall under the

category of intrusive academic advising, such as regular required meetings, long-term monitoring of grades, and early alert and intervention systems. The following participant underscored the importance of institutionalized monitoring practices:

> The professors have to tell her how we're doing. So, she kind of keeps track of how we're doing. So, if you have somebody who is also keeping track of how you are doing, it makes me want to do better, because I know she's going to have to see my grades at the end of the semester. (Black female student from State University)

The finding that proactive academic advising practices are perceived to be associated with student success is not new. Other research (see Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001; Vander Schee, 2007) indicates that intrusive advising practices are associated with student persistence and completion. What these findings add to existing literature is evidence that advisors and students of color perceive this to be a factor in the effectiveness of institutions with high and equitable racial and ethnic minority student retention and graduation rates.

Conclusions and Implications

Our findings point to the ways in which academic advisors appear to contribute to racial and ethnic minority students' success at PWIs, and they have several implications that may enable all advisors to become more effective in promoting the success of students of color. These findings are congruent with earlier research on faculty-student interactions, which indicate that faculty can positively influence student outcomes (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Berger, 1997; Kuh & Hu, 2001) and that faculty members who are warm to, provide holistic support for, and go the extra mile in serving students of color can have a positive impact on those students' experiences (Guiffrida, 2005; Hernandez, 2000; Jackson et al., 2003; Nettles et al., 1986). The findings add to this literature by highlighting how advisors can also facilitate racial and ethnic minority student success by employing humanized, holistic, and proactive advising practices.

First and foremost, several of the advisors noted for their impact on the success of students of color at the GEMS institutions worked in targeted

support programs. This is a crucial point because many academic advisors might read these findings and conclude that it is just not feasible to implement the noted practices to the extent necessary to have a major impact on racial and ethnic minority student success on their campuses because they simply do not have the time to walk students to financial aid offices or have group meetings with their students and counselors. In such cases the key issue is resource allocation. Thus, institutional leaders must consider the investment of additional resources in academic advising services so that advisors can take the time to provide humanized, holistic, and proactive academic advising for students of color.

Second, academic advisors working with students of color should make every effort to incorporate a human element into advising and demonstrate that they care about and are committed to their students' success. For advisors to be viewed as authentic, they should avoid being overly empathetic or completely disengaged. An overly empathetic advisor may seem disingenuous and patronizing to a student of color, and a completely disengaged advisor may give an impression that he or she is disinterested in the student. To be perceived as authentic human beings, advisors can share their own personal stories and struggles with their advisees. Advisors can also humanize academic advising by using the advisee's name during meetings, talking about pop culture or social activities with students, learning to pronounce an advisee's name correctly, sending an advisee useful individualized resources between meetings, inquiring about their advisees' home life, and being honest about the student's academic standing.

Third, advisors should provide holistic academic advising. This means that advisors should both try to understand nonacademic challenges faced by students of color that might be influencing their academic experiences. For example, Asian American students encounter immense pressure to succeed, which results from both high family expectations and racial stereotypes that perpetuate assumptions that all Asian Americans are overachievers (Museus, 2008; Museus & Kiang, 2009). This pressure has been associated with negative psychological consequences, and Asian American students who are more likely than other groups to underutilize counseling services (Kim & Omizo, 2003; Suzuki, 2002). This can be detrimental for many Asian American students who come from communities that are already economically under-

resourced and who are at risk. Understanding such nonacademic factors can enable advisors to more effectively understand the issues that their students face and when they should refer their racial and ethnic minority students to other offices on campus to address such issues.

Fourth, those working in academic advising offices should frequently ask themselves how they can make their delivery of services more proactive and less passive. Beyond typical academic-advising duties (e.g., helping students plan their course-taking activity or fulfillment of graduation requirements), for example, advisors should consider proactively introducing or accompanying students of color to activities, events, and networks that will expose them to faculty members and peers with similar interests. Advisors should also consider how they can more fully incorporate intrusive advising practices into their work, including systems of monitoring and early intervention systems. In sum, incorporating a human element into advising, providing holistic academic advising, and practicing proactive advising can both communicate that they are interested and invested in the success of their racial and ethnic minority students and equip them to more effectively serve those undergraduate advisees of color.

Last, we underscore the implications of one of the major limitations of our investigation. Our study did not illuminate how intersections of racial and ethnic minority students' identities shape student experiences. Therefore, we encourage future research to unpack the way race intersects with gender, sexual orientation, religion, and generational status to inform students' academic advising experience. In addition, advisors should consider these factors when learning about their advisees' backgrounds and determining how to provide holistic and proactive advising.

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