

**MAY I HAVE THIS DANCE: ACADEMIC ADVISORS' PERCEPTIONS OF
SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

by

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(Under the Direction of Lindy K. Parker)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored academic advisors' perceptions of and experiences with academic advising students with disabilities (SWD), specifically how academic advisors perceive their SWD, their self-perceived roles in supporting SWD on their campuses, and their training around academic advising SWD. This study employed a structured thematic analysis approach, and found that academic advisor participants reported diverse definitions of disability and SWD; viewed SWD as resourceful and capable of academic success; were able to establish comfortable advising connections with SWD; served as advocates and liaisons for their SWD; faced and navigated institutional barriers themselves while working on behalf of their SWD; experienced professional rewards while advising SWD; lacked both knowledge and training around advising SWD, and received reactive and sufficient support to advise SWD from their supervisors and institutions; and engaged in self-directed learning and networking to better their professional practice with SWD. Recommendations for practice, training, and future research informed by the findings are made.

INDEX WORDS: Students with a Disability, Academic Advising, Marginalized and Systemically Excluded Student Groups

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DEDICATION

I would want to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to the God I serve. Your presence has supported me in all my endeavors, giving me strength and peace when I felt I had none left. My deepest gratitude goes out to You.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance”

(AppNexus, 2015, 5:24). This vivid quote from Vernā Myers at AppNexus’s inaugural Women’s Leadership Forum captures the essence of inclusion, incorporating more than just being there. While working as an academic advisor for a student with a disability, I became aware of this essential interconnection between diversity and inclusion.

I began my job as an academic advisor, just like any other day. I fetched my first appointment after resetting my computer and reviewing my schedule. It was getting close to lunchtime when I walked to the lobby to meet with another student. I could hear an employee from the corridor requesting that someone contact the campus police. Looking around the halls, I noticed students and staff members looking perplexed as a male student furiously walked and screamed. The student was about to be apprehended by campus police when an assistant director of academic advising stepped in and requested that the student be released from custody to receive academic advising services.

Glancing nervously toward the academic advising department's meeting room, the young man cautiously entered after being released by the campus police. A few of us advisors were then alerted to the student's presence and his need for academic advising. They were requested to come into the conference room to serve the student in hopes of collectively calming him down and meeting his academic needs. After gathering my advising tools, I entered the conference room minutes later to see the young man

illustrating red and green figures from a well-known animated video game plumbing dynamic duo. I welcomed the student to the advising department. Now looking relaxed and content, he smiled and continued with his sketching. After ten peaceful, mutually silent minutes, he headed to class. This was our first opportunity to build rapport and trust.

I initially crossed paths with the student narrated here roughly six years ago. The young man, whom I subsequently met with during his college enrollment and successfully delivered academic advising services to in future meetings, turned out to have high-functioning autism, which manifested itself mainly in social difficulties such as an inability to communicate with others in high-pressure situations, an inability to focus on specified topics, and the need to expend a sudden surge of physical energy by pacing around the room. Unfortunately, his first encounter with me was a recurring scenario between him and new-to-him advisors that grew quite difficult to handle for the academic advisors within my department who were unfamiliar with him and had not yet established trust and rapport.

This is one example of a challenging scenario that may have been avoided if the advising team had shared education and understanding of serving students with disabilities (SWD). Owing to my perceptions of this student and my colleagues in academic advising, I could not help but wonder if other academic advisors had a narrative resembling mine and if they felt sufficiently prepared and equipped to engage with SWD. Developing academic advising standards and best practices tailored to the training needs of academic advisors serving SWD lingered in my thoughts. I began contemplating improving our training and, in turn, roles and protocols as academic advisors serving

SWD. Beyond providing refuge, what else can academic advisors do to support SWD once admitted into higher education institutions or “to the party,” in what ways have academic advisors encouraged SWD to thrive or “dance”? (AppNexus, 2015, 5:24). This student inspired me to rethink how I could influence higher education. I later discovered that what I experienced in that scenario would define my purpose as a student affairs (SA) practitioner.

For SA practitioners, achieving adequate and equitable results for all student groups must be their top priority. A set of skills created in 2015 by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) highlights the significance of promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in SA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & American College Personnel Association, 2015). The *advising and support* competency emphasizes the vital roles that SA practitioners play in promoting students' holistic wellness through the development of advising and supporting strategies that take self-knowledge and the needs of others into consideration. This skill goes beyond the *social justice and inclusion* competency, which emphasizes the significance of practitioners creating environments where students can thrive. Considering the combined skills, SA practitioners must go beyond accepting collegiate SWD and including them equitably. Lack of inclusion in higher education can significantly impact the experiences of SWD, general life quality, and educational settings inside and outside the classroom (Myers et al., 2013). SA practitioners must use determination and intentionality in their methods and processes to guarantee equitable opportunities for success for all students, including those with disabilities. Myers et al. found that this intentionality resembles

social norming, so SA practitioners see SWD more favorably than unfavorably. Additionally, this implies that all SA practitioners, including academic advisors, must ensure SWD feel included and meet their academic needs.

This study explored academic advisors' perceptions of supporting SWD in higher education institutions. This study examined academic advisors' firsthand narratives to develop effective support strategies, documenting their perceived roles, viewpoints, and encounters, if any, with SWD. This study sought to improve academic support systems and create a more inclusive environment for all students in higher education by understanding the approach of today's academic advisors to their work with SWD. Like encouraging someone to dance instead of merely inviting them to a party (AppNexus, 2015, 5:24), this study aimed to understand any barriers to academic advisors' ability to create an atmosphere where all students are fully engaged and supported by their academic advising.

Background

A disability is any condition of the body or mind (disability) that makes it harder for the person with the disability to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world (participation restrictions), whereas “people with disabilities” refers to a diverse group of people with a wide range of needs, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2024). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires colleges and universities to offer reasonable accommodations for SWD (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 34 C.F.R § Part 104, 2000; Rothwell & Shields, 2021).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023b), undergraduates with disabilities comprised 21% of all undergraduates in the 2019–2020 academic year.

Despite the existence of federal laws like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act—which aimed to guarantee fair treatment and equal opportunities for SWD in areas such as recruitment, academic support, housing, finances, and employment—SWD still encounter obstacles and difficulties that result in unsatisfactory grades and early college withdrawal (Hong, 2015). First, Lombardi et al. (2020) noted that SWD face the same postsecondary education challenges as their peers without disabilities, such as high tuition and housing costs, low grades, or the need to transfer to another institution due to outside factors such as health demands or family demands. However, Lombardi et al. found that some of these challenges may be linked to or worsened by disability-related complications, such as not utilizing accommodations or having additional healthcare needs. As such, SWD pursuing higher education may face multiple barriers that are like their peers without disabilities; however, they also have unique disability-related needs that may further compound these *standard* barriers to completing their college degree programs (Lombardi et al., 2020).

Many SWD require holistic student support and specialized support services to succeed in college, indicating a need for more targeted and effective service delivery by SA professionals (Squires et al., 2018). Because of variations in their high school settings and the supports available, SWD may have issues in their new college environments with grades, course-taking, educational expectations, and cognitive ability that make it difficult for them to succeed (Carroll et al., 2020). Insufficient transition to college planning may also be problematic, as these students may no longer have supportive, individualized educational plans (IEPs) after entering college (Swartz et al., 2018). Because college environments did not initially aim to promote marginalized and

systemically excluded groups like SWD, they may have historical and institutionalized practices that make it difficult for SWD to succeed academically, such as unnecessary timed tests and absence regulations (Museus, 2021). Institutions of higher education designed to serve historically overrepresented students could academically harm these newly enrolled student populations.

SWD encounter barriers related to not only academic integration but also social integration. According to Carroll et al. (2020), social and academic integration encompasses students' experiences with social and academic activities outside the classroom, such as study groups and advisor meetings. Citing Hovland (1997), Soria (2012), and Strayhorn (2015), Soria (2023) states that academic advisors “help students [including SWD] navigate the higher education culture, direct students to important resources and services, and foster students’ sense of belonging” (p. 18). Because of the additional challenges SWD face rooted in their disability, SWD are more likely to need this support from their academic advisors (Rothwell & Shields, 2021). This additional need makes it more crucial for academic advisors to fully support SWD, rather than solely focusing on course planning, to ensure their students’ academic success.

Problem Statement

SWD are more likely to complete college if they utilize extracurricular support (Los Santos et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2019). Rothwell and Shields (2021) cited academic advising as a common form of this beneficial extracurricular support. Most academic advising frameworks being utilized by academic advisors on college campuses have elements that can be used to support at-risk populations, including SWD (D'Alessio & Banerjee, 2016). Prior scholarship, however, has identified accessing academic

advising as a barrier SWD encounter on college campuses, specifically the social stigma SWD perceive from their academic advisor and their hesitance to disclose their disability to their academic advisor; as a result, SWD lose out on valuable connections to disability support services or other resources to which the academic advisor could connect or refer them (Zilvinskis et al., 2020).

Despite the potential benefits of academic advising for SWD (Los Santos et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2019; Rothwell & Shields, 2021), there is a significant gap in understanding the experiences of academic advisors working with SWD, how they perceive SWD, and their role in fully supporting SWD on their campuses rather than solely focusing on course planning. This includes self-assessment of their training and support to work with their SWD.

By recognizing disability as a prevalent aspect of the human condition, SA practitioners can enhance understanding and comfort among all those involved, reduce social stigma, and facilitate the access of individuals with disabilities to necessary resources and support systems, including academic advising (Francis et al., 2018). Recognizing the contributions of SWD in higher education becomes more feasible when SA practitioners identify the supports that can eliminate these obstacles. Improving the knowledge of SA professionals, such as academic advisors, in supporting SWD can enhance the academic and collegiate skills of SWD while fostering a more inclusive campus culture. A better understanding of SWD, particularly in terms of academic support, can enhance the professional skill set of academic advisors in general.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study aimed to explore academic advisors' perceptions around advising SWD, how they perceive their SWD, their self-perceived roles in supporting SWD on their campuses, and their training around advising SWD. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What are the academic advisors' perceptions of advising SWD?

RQ2. How do advisors make meaning of their roles supporting SWD based on their perceptions of SWD?

RQ3. How do academic advisors describe the training and support, if any, they received to effectively advise SWD and their satisfaction with that training and support?

Understanding the perceptions of academic advisors is integral in developing effective SA professionals equipped to serve their SWD. College campuses have ensured their physical environment staff are knowledgeable and equipped to improve physical access to classrooms and housing to accommodate their institutions' SWD. Accordingly, it could be equally essential to ensure staff in other areas, like academic advising, are knowledgeable and equipped to serve student groups who need non-physical accommodations to access colleges and universities so that support for all SWD on campus keeps growing until colleges and universities are fully inclusive. Informed by these results, higher education institutions can evaluate their academic advising services—specifically academic advisors and their perceptions of SWD, their perceived role in supporting SWD, and the training and support they feel they received to advise SWD effectively. The insights and perspectives from academic advisors could prove

invaluable in how the SA field is preparing them to create a fair environment for all students on campus. The importance of this emphasis stems from the knowledge that SWD are more likely than their non-disabled peers to drop out or experience delays in their degree completion, and academic advisors can serve as one line of defense against those outcomes (Becker & Palladino, 2016; Hinz et al., 2017).

Academic advisors are essential to the institution's ability to retain, advance, and graduate marginalized and systemically excluded students, including SWD (Museus, 2021; Soria, 2023). As such, students should receive academic support services based on the field's most up-to-date standards and best practices. Moreover, to guarantee that universally appropriate accommodations and access are created for every student population that academic advisors support, academic advisors should review their understanding of SWD, their department's best practices and policies/procedures, and each SWD's specific needs when exploring how to serve them better.

Philosophical Worldview

Constructivism is the philosophical worldview that informs my work. Constructivism points to the unique experience of each of us claims Crotty (1998). From my perspective, experiential learning methods yield the highest learning outcomes for students; after all, life is best experienced firsthand. Even with formal education structures like college, learning is a social activity, and value is gained both within and outside the classroom (Nielsen et al., 2008). Since many students are experiencing life independently for the first time, I believe they need to learn how to be learners and make daily decisions about their experiences that will improve their learning. Institutions should focus on removing barriers to create more seamless learning pathways (Gulley,

2022). To better assist students through their unique agency for a seamless learning path, academic advisors for this research discuss how their perceptions might help SWD develop as professionals, scholars, and people (Gulley, 2022; McGill, 2024).

Though academic advisors have not historically functioned as coaches, clinicians, therapists, counselors, or advocates for those with disabilities, D'Alessio & Banerjee (2016) positioned academic advisors as coaches who assist SWD in becoming better life-long learners. Through a qualitative study on the self-perceived college preparedness of SWD, Francis et al. (2018) summarized the participants' feelings that "university staff were not equipped to fully support their individualized needs or that services were 'dependent on negotiation with professor[s]'" rather than working through academic advisors or other support staff (p. 3579). While the perceptions of the SWD have been captured in the literature, the academic advisors' perspectives must be considered. This study captured the perceptions of academic advisors in hopes of serving this student population better and understanding any gaps in training or education that must be filled so that these SA professionals can better empower SWD and use effective strategies to steer their learning and campus environments, leveraging resources to meet their specific needs.

Theoretical Approach

Numerous theoretical frameworks address the concept of disability, including moral, student development, and social justice perspectives. This study was guided by two of those theories. The first was the social model of disability (SMD), which views disability through the lens of societal and cultural influences rather than solely through medical or biological deficits (Oliver, 1990). While Victor Finkelstein pioneered the

SMD movement and co-founded the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), a disability advocacy group that helped spread the word about the SMD model (UPIAS, 1976), scholar Mike Oliver developed the "social model of disability" term after the theory gained popularity and momentum in the 1970s (Oliver, 1990; Oliver, 2013). SMD indicates that disability barriers are formed mainly by societal norms and physical hurdles rather than innate characteristics of the individual (Oliver, 1990). This approach suggests that for people with disabilities to engage in all facets of life fully, society must adjust and remove these barriers (Oliver, 2013). It moves thinking from a deficit based approach, which highlights SWD' inadequacies or focuses on only what is missing or problem, and moves it to an asset based approach that focuses on the unique talents of SWD and their contributions to society (University of Memphis, 2018). This theory aligns with the study as it seeks to understand the social and cultural influence of the advisors and their academic advising norms and how they either create barriers or remove hurdles for their SWD through their advising work. It also adds to the literature a new perspective as the medical and social construction models, rather than this SMD, are particularly prominent within academic and university research contexts (Kimball et al., 2016).

In addition to the SMD theory, Nevitt Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support (CS) framed this study. According to Sanford, three conditions are necessary for student development: readiness, challenge, and support. When the advisor provides too much challenge for the student and insufficient support, the student will not grow. Alternatively, student growth will not occur if the academic advisor provides too much support and not enough challenge. This study used Sanford's CS theory to explore how

academic advisors' perceptions influence SWD to experience appropriate levels of challenges necessary for student growth while offering the necessary support to their SWD in an academic advising context. CS theory is essential to this study as it examines how academic advising might be optimized by advisors correctly balancing both challenge and support to serve SWD and how these two may differ from how they are balanced when working with their peers without disabilities. CS theory effectively proposes an equitable approach, acknowledging that marginalized and systemically excluded groups of students may face unique, additional challenges that may require SA professionals to explore how to give them the necessary support they need from academic advisors as they face increased challenges in their college and university environments (Sanford, 1966).

By integrating the SMD with CS theory, this study aimed to enhance the understanding of the academic advisor's perceptions supporting SWD. It sought to identify how societal structures and advising practices can be adjusted, if necessary, to better support these students' educational journeys. This approach not only emphasizes removing social and environmental barriers but also underscores the crucial role of academic advisors in creating an inclusive educational environment that promotes equality, making the advisors feel valued and integral to the process.

Significance of Study

This study aimed to understand how academic advisors navigate the complexities of advising their SWD. Effective academic advising makes SWD enrolled in college more likely to graduate (Rothwell & Shields, 2021). Exploration and discoveries in the field of academic advising—particularly effective academic advising for SWD—have the

potential to profoundly influence multiple aspects of higher education, such as the enhancement of the professional development of academic advisors. Improving the professional development received by academic advisors will help these practitioners provide more effective assistance for SWD (Zilvinskis et al., 2020). Academic advisors serve as a source of referrals for students, directing them to campus partners and assisting them in developing social inclusion. Strong academic advising support helps students succeed by assisting them in navigating their schools, relating coursework to long-term goals, and creating a feeling of community (Hawthorne et al., 2022).

Significant differences in educational performance between those with and without disabilities persist, making it increasingly essential to explore extracurricular supports for SWD, including academic advising (Carroll et al., 2020). This study sought to uncover training-related, structural, and resource-related barriers and opportunities for improving SWD support in higher education settings by learning about the perceptions of academic advisors who work with SWD in advisee-student interactions. The perceptions of academic advisors working with SWD are particularly beneficial to consider, as Kimball et al. (2016) state that all SA professionals, including academic advisors, must offer environments, activities, and services that are beneficial and inclusive of all students.

By delving into the perceptions of academic advisors, research can identify the specific requirements needed to effectively support SWD and facilitate the development of tailored support systems. This exploration can improve student outcomes by guiding academic advisors in adapting current best practices to address the challenges better and capitalize on the strengths of SWD. Moreover, academic advisors stand to benefit from

increased awareness of best practices in supporting SWD, contributing to their professional growth and making them feel motivated and inspired. The findings of such research can inform policy changes and advocacy initiatives aimed at ensuring equal access to higher education for SWD. Ultimately, this research can foster a more inclusive and diverse educational environment by highlighting the importance of supporting SWD in pursuing college degrees and transforming how institutions support this student population.

Definition of Terms

Below are defined terms and concepts used in this study that have multiple meanings in society or may be unfamiliar to some.

Students with a disability (SWD): This refers to people enrolled in a course or institution of higher education who reported having deafness or serious difficulty hearing; blindness or severe difficulty seeing; serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition; or severe difficulty walking or climbing stairs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a). Since these factors might be involved in disabilities to differing degrees and in different combinations, the nature of disabilities and their implications for teaching and learning are very variable (Kauffman et al., 2023). This is the person-first (student with a disability) use of the phrase rather than the identity-first (disabled student) use of the phrase, but they could be used interchangeably in this study since many disability activists now reclaim the word “disabled” (Strimel et al., 2023). Also, it should be acknowledged that this paper uses a broad definition of disability, realizing that the needs of students with one impairment might differ from the needs of another student with

another disability. Moreover, the broad definition is used here as this study focused on the academic advisors' perceptions of supporting SWD rather than the SWD.

Academic advising: Academic advising, as outlined by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), occurs when "an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter. The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach" (Kuhn, 2008, p.3).

Marginalized and systemically excluded student groups: This includes students of color, first-generation students, low-income and working-class students, students with minoritized sexual orientations, and students with disabilities or SWD in this paper (Soria, 2023).

Chapter Summary

The goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of academic advisors who support SWD. Using the SMD and CS theory to frame the study, the research tried to determine how academic advisors may have better experiences serving SWD on their college campuses. This chapter presented background information and context for the study. Overall, this chapter outlined why it is necessary to consider how academic advisors could contribute to improving SWD educational outcomes through their professional training and growth.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The transition into adulthood for many, including those with disabilities, increasingly involves earning a college education (Antony & Shore, 2015). The employment outcomes for individuals with higher education levels, including those with disabilities, are significantly better (U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Notably, people with disabilities are among the postsecondary demographics with the fastest rates of enrollment growth as more and more SWD enter colleges and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). This is a testament to the resilience and determination of these students, as disabilities are reported by approximately 19% of undergraduates overall (Snyder et al., 2019).

This historically marginalized and systemically excluded student body also experiences “discrimination, unwelcoming campus climates, and obstacles in accessing critical campus resources” at their institutions of higher education (Soria, 2023, p. 18). Additionally, SWD may require extra guidance and support to navigate the added hurdles associated with their disability (Rothwell & Shields, 2021). Academic barriers, negative faculty and staff perspectives, and stigma have all contributed to SWD less-than-ideal higher education experiences, which academics have recently begun to identify and address (Abes & Wallace, 2018). Discussing literature related to SWD, Soria (2023) states:

Academic advisors play an important role in supporting marginalized and systemically excluded students and facilitating their success in higher education (Museus, 2021). Additionally, advisors help students navigate the higher education culture, direct students to important resources and services, and foster students' sense of belonging (Hovland, 1997; Soria, 2012; Strayhorn, 2015). Moreover, academic advisors promote a wide variety of students' outcomes, including academic achievement, retention, learning outcomes, responsibility, academic and career planning, self-efficacy, and overall success in higher education (Chiteng Kot, 2014; Drake, 2011; Erlich & Russ-Eft, 2013; Mu & Fosnacht, 2019; Museus, 2021; Smith & Allen, 2006; Soria, 2012; Swecker et al., 2013; Young-Jones et al., 2013). (p. 18)

The following literature review provides an overview of SWD experiences in higher education, academic advisors, and their role in supporting SWD. Additionally, it addresses academic advisors' awareness of SWD, their training to advise them effectively, and the most recent academic advising support strategies for SWD. The literature begins to uncover the challenges and support mechanisms provided to SWD when working with this division of student affairs (SA) practitioners. However, it is crucial to note that while some research points to the potential effects of academic advising, there is a significant gap in our understanding of the perceptions of the academic advisors as they advise these SWD, how they perceive SWD, and their roles supporting them, as well as their self-assessment of their training to work with this growing student population (Rothwell & Shields, 2021). More research in this area is desirable and urgently needed to improve the experiences of SWD in higher education.

Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

Approximately one out of five undergraduate students report having a disability (Snyder et al., 2019). Several definitions of disability exist in the literature. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024) defined disability as "any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions)" (para.1). According to the U. S. Department of Education (2011), people with a physical or mental disability that significantly restricts one or more main activities of daily living are classified as disabled. The World Health Organization (2001) recognized disability through the interplay of three elements: disability, activity limitation, and participation restriction. The Americans with Disability Act of 1990, on the other hand, defined a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such a disability, or a person who is perceived by others as having such a disability" (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 *et seq.*, 1990).

While the various definitions of disability above are each tailored to the specific requirements of their respective laws, policies, or programs, they also illustrate that arriving at a singular, all-encompassing definition of disability is a complex task. To further distinguish between the various experiences of disabilities in higher education, researchers have classified disabilities as "physical" and "mental," "apparent" and "nonapparent," "visible" and "invisible," and "non-cognitive" and "cognitive" (e.g., Adams & Proctor, 2010; Fuller et al., 2009; Olney & Brockelman, 2003).

Legal Framework Impacting Students with Disabilities

Two primary laws protect people with disabilities in college and university courses from discrimination: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973)

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects civil rights and forbids discrimination against people with disabilities (Squires et al., 2018). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 34 C. F. R. § 504 (1980) declares that no otherwise qualified person with a disability...shall, solely on the basis of disability, be denied access to, or the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity provided by an entity/institution that receives federal financial assistance. This law includes higher education institutions and modifies academic requirements and recruiting and admissions processes without significantly changing program standards (Squires et al., 2018). It ensures SWD are permitted the same access to postsecondary education as their peers without disabilities.

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)

The federal civil rights of people with disabilities began taking shape with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA restricts disability-based discrimination regarding employment, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications. All services, programs, and activities of state and local governments are covered explicitly by Title II of the ADA, which mandates that anyone identifying as disabled be given equal access to public education, including state colleges and universities and other state and local government programs as specified by law. This civil rights law was intended to provide equal opportunities for all people and

to shield disabled individuals from discrimination (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Higher education institutions abiding by this law must provide reasonable accommodations to SWD (Strimel et al., 2023).

These two laws—Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—are the primary laws protecting people with disabilities from discrimination while enrolled in college and university courses. Various other legislations have been enacted to safeguard the educational rights of SWD, such as the following laws that may also have implications for SWD and the higher education institutions that serve them.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004)

The federal legislation supporting special education and associated assistance programming for children and youth with disabilities is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Before the enactment of this law, school-aged children (Kindergarten-grade 12) with disabilities were often sent to separate schools, typically with little funding and low academic standards (Lee, n.d.). IDEA leveled the educational landscape, and public elementary, middle, and high schools were tasked with offering Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that would assist students in settings alongside their classmates without disabilities. IDEA outlines disabilities into 13 categories: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing disability, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic disability, other health disabilities, specific learning disability, speech or language disability, traumatic brain injury, visual disability including blindness, and finally, developmental delay that is recognized for ages 3-9 only (Dragoo & Lomax, 2020). To qualify for an IEP, students must identify in one of these categories.

In the 2022–2023 academic year, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education and/or related services under the IDEA was 7.5 million, or the equivalent of 15% of all public school students enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a). Currently, IDEA is only valid from kindergarten through high school, and students who wish to continue their education beyond their high school graduation must self-report any disabilities to their institutions of higher education to receive any academic and other accommodations at their chosen college or university.

Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008)

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments (ADAAA) of 2008, changes were made to the definition of disability, which clarified the scope of the definition initially created under the ADA in 1990. The ADAAA of 2008 amended the ADA of 1990 to redefine the term disability to include "major life activities" and "being regarded as having such a disability" (Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, 2008). This broadened the definition of disability to physical or mental disabilities, psychological disorders or conditions, cosmetic disfigurements, and anatomical losses, as, prior to this amendment, many people were discouraged from getting accommodation in the educational system. Rather than explicitly stating that specific disabilities exist, the primary goal of ADAAA is addressing how learning is impacted (Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, 2008). In 2012, the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), a professional association that advocates full participation in postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities, published documentation for supporting accommodations that explains that the primary source of information on a student's disabilities is the student, and the second source of information is what the

institution gains from SWD sharing (Association of Higher Education and Disability [AHEAD], 2012). External documentation can be provided for viewing; however, the institution's proactively retrieving external documentation is not legal, and through the ADAA, this documentation can only be used as a supplement to assist the institution with determining accommodation needs for the student (AHEAD, 2012). Professional staff are obligated to ensure SWD receive the necessary academic support before and in advance of their college education (Keenan et al., 2019). As the Congressional Research Service (2023) mentioned, legislative regulations direct higher education institutions to carefully consider past documentation of past accommodations, such as test preparation, IEPs, or Section 504 plans.

Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008)

The original Higher Education Opportunity Act was issued in 1965 and then further clarified by the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEA) of 2008. The HEA law aims to strengthen educational resources at U.S. colleges and universities and provide financial aid to postsecondary school students. Within the reauthorized act, improvements to financial aid access were made for postsecondary students with intellectual disabilities (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008). Under Title IV, to be eligible for these benefits, there are requirements that the student with intellectual disabilities is enrolled or accepted for enrollment in a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program at a specific institution of higher education and maintain satisfactory progress in the program by standards established by the institution (Smith Lee, 2009). A degree, certificate, or non-degree program incorporating an advising and curriculum structure is one definition of a "comprehensive transition and postsecondary program for students with intellectual

disabilities" contained in Title VII, Part D, Section 760 of the Act (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008).

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 limits communication between an adult student's former guardians and college professionals unless the student signs a waiver granting permission to exchange information. Before entering postsecondary education, extra support may have been given by involved guardians of the SWD. However, that involvement is limited in adult-aged college students due to FERPA (Francis et al., 2018).

Current research on SWD in higher education emphasizes how inclusive practices have advanced due to these laws, which aim to provide equal access to all institutional programs, services, and places through fair and reasonable modifications. Higher education institutions have made significant strides in ensuring academic accessibility for SWD, primarily due to the proactive role of disability resource professionals (DRP) on nearly every campus (Strimel et al., 2023). These professionals, often working in a disability resource center (DRC), are responsible for determining reasonable academic accommodations (Aquino & Scott, 2022). The DRP and its centers have become the primary source for all access, accommodation recommendations, and guidance (Strimel et al., 2023). Their role extends to developing accommodation plans, advocating for student needs with institutional stakeholders, and fostering an inclusive postsecondary setting (Lombardi et al., 2020). However, most are concentrated on helping higher education institutions comply with legal criteria for access and offering accommodations to students (Fleming et al., 2017).

Access and Accommodations

At most institutions of higher education, the DRPs working within the institutions' DRC are responsible for effectively and efficiently providing SWD with the required accommodations and access (Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017; Strimel et al., 2023). For example, a student with a learning disability may need more time to process and learn new information in classes than their peers or a student with a chronic health condition may need to spend more time addressing their health before attending academics (Rothwell & Shields, 2021).

Out of all students enrolled in four-year institutions, approximately 20% have learning disabilities; 32% have ADHD; 26% have a mental illness; 12% have health disabilities; 18.5% have hearing, mobility, sight, or speech disabilities; and the remaining 3% had other unclassified disabilities (Stolzenberg et al., 2019). A brief description of the most prevalent disability categories reported by 54,000 undergraduate students at 129 undergraduate institutions in a 2022 study by the American College Health Association (ACHA) is provided below, along with an indication of the most frequently used accommodation.

Physical Disabilities

"Moving and maintaining body positions, handling and moving objects, moving around in the environment, and moving around using transportation" are the definitions of mobility given by the ICF (World Health Organization, 2001, para. 3). In this capacity, activity restriction would entail difficulties carrying out tasks and interacting with others because of mobility limitations. As directed by Gin et al. (2020), institutions accommodate students who identify with having physical disabilities through universal

design for learning approaches in the classroom, extended time on assessments and other tasks, and living accommodations.

Sensory Disabilities

Sensory disabilities are neurological disorders that affect the human brain to process sensory information (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell) or how the brain processes or interprets information from the senses (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2021). Vision disability is defined by the World Health Organization (2023) as an eye condition impacting the visual system's functions. To access academic assistance materials, people with disabilities may need assistive devices like screen readers or braille texts. Hearing loss, as defined by the World Health Organization (2024b), refers to a condition where an individual's hearing ability is not as good as someone with normal hearing, characterized by hearing thresholds of 20 dB or better in both ears. Deaf individuals typically experience substantial hearing disability, meaning they have very little or no ability to hear and thus commonly rely on sign language as their primary mode of communication (Marschark et al., 2017). The following accommodations are listed as beneficial for this population of people with disabilities, as required by ADA legislation in public schools: captioned films, hearing aids, or sign language interpreters may be required for SWD to fully participate in academic support initiatives (National Association of the Deaf, 2024). Other accommodations that serve this level of disability include assistive technology devices (World Health Organization, 2024a).

Learning Disabilities

Disabilities that impair one's capacity to comprehend and utilize spoken or written language, do mathematical calculations, coordinate motions, and focus are known as learning disabilities (World Health Organization, 2023; National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2024). This is the most prevalent type of disability documented in higher education (Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, 2022). According to (Couzens et al., 2015; Mental Health America, 2025), this disability is particularly significant in postsecondary education and educational settings, as it affects the ability of students to perform in classroom settings and requires specific accommodations such as assistive technology and extended time on assessments and other tasks.

Psychiatric Disabilities

According to the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation (2021), a psychiatric or mental health condition significantly interferes with the performance of major life activities, such as learning, working, and communicating. The most common forms of psychiatric and mental health conditions are ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, bipolar disorders, and schizophrenia-spectrum disorders. Accommodations for this kind of disability could include, but are not limited to, extended time on assessments and other tasks, rooms with fewer distractions, and single dorm room arrangements (D'Alessio & Banerjee, 2016). In a particular study, D'Alessio & Banerjee suggest that college students with ADHD should consider an innovative academic advising strategy as a remedy.

Chronic Health Conditions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024) defines chronic health conditions as disorders that persist for a year or more, impair everyday activities, and

require ongoing medical treatment. These conditions, which include diabetes, epilepsy, chronic fatigue syndrome, and Crohn's disease, significantly impact the lives of students in higher education (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024). Because chronic diseases fall under the non-visible category of disabilities, some peers and staff may not acknowledge them as legitimate disability, which can create a view that they are less significant than apparent disabilities. An individual with this disability may also benefit from recording equipment (Hamilton et al., 2023).

Autism Spectrum Disorders

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2024), repetitive behavior, narrow interests, and persistent trouble with social communication are all signs of autism, which is also known as autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Despite the belief that autism is a lifelong disorder, the degree of functioning disability varies among individuals with autism. Support for these SWD may include social skills training, organized environments, and sensory accommodations since ASD impacts behavior, communication, and social interactions.

Speech and Language Disorders

Individuals with oral/written language disorders and specific reading comprehension deficiencies struggle with understanding and/or expressing language, often in both oral and written form (Learning Disabilities Association of America, n.d.). Some disabilities in this category are stuttering and aphasia. One might imagine that support for processing spoken language (e.g., the ability to tape-record the lecture and access to crucial vocabulary to learn prior to a lecture) may benefit such individuals more

than the general accommodation of having additional time on exams (Del Tufo & Earle, 2020).

According to Kimball et al. (2016), disability categorization can be problematic since it may lead to essentialism, stereotyping, and dehumanizing implications. Research on disability as a monolithic identity has shifted because the application of categories may have the unintended consequence of summarizing an individual's whole life based on just one aspect of their identity (Kimball et al., 2016). Still, a basic understanding of some common disabilities could help institutions to better tailor their practices to the unique needs of each SWD (D'Alessio & Banerjee, 2016). Understanding disabilities holistically may help institutions develop universally applicable policies and practices that remove common barriers to SWD (Abes & Wallace, 2018).

Barriers in Higher Education for SWD

While there is an encouraging rise in the percentage of SWD attending college, many obstacles prevent SWD from advancing and completing a college degree (Francis et al., 2018). These obstacles are created mainly by structural injustices, including grading systems, attendance regulations, faculty reporting requirements, and the general college environment (Carroll et al., 2020). To improve their academic experience, SWD recommend that improvements should be made to three areas: campus resources (DRCs, growth areas, and visibility connectedness), academics (instructors and advisors, accommodations, instructions), and campus environment (disability awareness, inclusive attitudes, and universal access and accessibility). Nearly half (42%) of the SWD suggested improvement in academics, with some indicating a lack of support and

accommodations in the subcategory of instructors and advisors (Fleming et al., 2017). A closer look at the lack of support documented in the literature is outlined below.

Campus Resources and Burden of Self-Advocacy

One of the most common ways SWD successfully navigated disabling environments and related academic barriers was by openly discussing their disability and articulating disability-related needs, as well as utilizing available resources, practicing good self-care, working harder to succeed and challenge stereotypes, and viewing disability as a positive aspect of self (Vacarro et al., 2019). According to the U. S. Department of Education (2022), students who disclosed having a disability were more likely to access academic services, such as tutoring, writing centers, as well as study groups or office hours, compared to their peers who did not disclose their disability. Many assume that SWD will actively and willingly seek support from institutions (Squires et al., 2018). However, Los Santos et al. (2019) found shame and a reluctance to disclose disabilities among most SWD, which can contribute to lower graduation rates.

Academic Support and Accessibility Issues

Since the late 20th century, policies have been implemented to give SWD access to higher education and the same opportunities for success as their peers. Colleges must now consider appropriate accommodations and modifications to ensure fair access to higher education for SWD (Keenan et al., 2019). Unfortunately, SWD receiving services and accommodations through their university reported that services were too generic and alluded to a need for more training for higher education professionals on serving their student population. More specifically, most SWD expressed dissatisfaction with insufficient services and claimed that university staff lacked the necessary resources to

handle their needs appropriately (Francis et al., 2018). Campanile et al. (2022) assessed 50 top-funded undergraduate programs on an A-F letter scale for accessibility, accommodation, and inclusivity; only 6% scored an A, and 60% received a D. Additionally, SWD reported poor working relationships with academic advisors due to their lack of knowledge around accessibility and called for more intentional support from their academic advisors, given that they, along with instructors, significantly promote or hinder educational outcomes for SWD (Hong, 2015).

To assist the campus community in bettering support and access, user-friendly resources are available to assist postsecondary SA professionals, faculty, administrators, and staff from the following organizations: Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), Disabilities Opportunities Internet Working and Technology (DO-IT), Disability Rights, Education Activism and Mentoring (DREAM), National Center for College Students with Disabilities (NCCSD), and National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) (Myers et al., 2013). However, greater adoption of these resources and more research on their effectiveness are needed.

For example, despite the increase in the numbers of SWD attending college and some proactive use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)—defined as an educational approach that aims to increase inclusivity and accessibility through fostering flexibility (Myers et al., 2013)—in coursework and academic resources and the work of disability resource professionals in DRC, the retention and graduation rates of SWD continue to consistently lag their peers without disabilities (Fernandes et al., 2016; Francis et al., 2018; Kreider et al., 2020; Stark et al., 2023).

In response to legislation, institutions have become more proactive in providing academic accessibility and support to this student population. The shift from SWD being excluded or discriminated against to receiving proactive access and inclusion to their coursework and academic resources at institutions has ushered in a new era of a more leveled playing field for SWD, and some of this may also be attributed to universal design (UD) theory, another name for UDL (Tarconish et al., 2023). Ronald Mace (1985) was an architect who used a wheelchair, and he described his UD theory as “Simply a way of designing a building or facility at little or no extra cost so it is both attractive and functional for all people, disabled or not” (p. 147). The use of UD in colleges and universities and its application to academics at institutions of higher education—sometimes referred to as UDL, Universal Design for Higher Education (UDHE), Universal Design for Instruction (UDI), Universal Instructional Design (UID), and other UD implementations—has improved the practice of serving the academic needs SWDs (Bracken & Novak, 2019; Burgstahler, 2021; Faggella-Luby et al., 2017; Tarconish et al., 2023). Many DRCs are now implementing UD and UDL, providing proactive support instead of relying on reactive support when crises arise (Rothwell & Shields, 2021).

Campus Environments and Social Stigma

Historically, negative faculty and staff perspectives and stigma have all contributed to SWD less-than-ideal experiences, which academics have recently begun to identify and address (Abes & Wallace, 2018). According to Carroll et al. (2020), structural disparities in higher education institutions—such as unaccommodating course requirements, access to school clubs, and attendance standards—influence SWD experiences. Disabilities were first viewed as medical issues, leading to criticism and the

belief that people identifying with having disabilities needed to have their disabilities *fixed*, per se, before they could fully participate in society (Kimball et al., 2016). SWD reported that the societal obstacles in their surroundings were more significant barriers than their disabilities (Vaccaro et al., 2019). The social model of disability (SMD) redirects attention from the public perception of those with disabilities to the biases encountered by such individuals (Goering, 2015). Kimball et al. (2016) emphasized that wheelchair users' difficulties entering buildings lacking accessible elements are one visible example of disability as a social construct in their study of disability conceptualization. However, the marginalization caused by physical disabilities can be reduced but not fully resolved by UD methods, such as the architectural design of ramps and other practical design elements (Carroll et al., 2020). The impact of college social norms, such as semester length, class duration, and an over-reliance on objective evaluation, on SWD, are occasionally overlooked by higher education (Kimball et al., 2016).

Academic Performance and Outcomes of SWD

The six-year graduation rate of SWD at four-year colleges is 49.5%, compared to roughly 68% for students without disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). SWD are more likely to drop out or experience delays in degree completion than their non-disabled peers (Becker & Palladino, 2016; Hinz et al., 2017). Students who utilize accommodations through disability services have higher achievement on average than those who do not (Kimball et al., 2016). Comprehensive support systems that extend beyond DRCs and work in collaboration are crucial for ensuring the academic success of SWD (Strimel et al., 2023).

Tailored outreach by academic advisors has proven to be a successful method of increasing the use of academic support services, improving academic performance, and producing higher cumulative grade-point averages and higher retention rates, especially for SWD. This strategy has also increased the use and satisfaction of academic advising centers on campus (Abelman & Molina, 2002; Levesque et al., 2017). Support must be equitably given to all student populations, including SWD, and universities are increasingly responsible for discovering methods to assist students and promote their academic achievement; Hawthorne et al. (2022) suggest that academic advising can uniquely address this inequity.

Academic Advising in Higher Education

Since the 1970s, academic advising has been a unique part of university life, providing a guide for students who may be struggling to select a major, who are unsure about how best to proceed toward their end goals, or who do not know how the college process works (Thomas, 2017). "Academic advising engages students beyond their own world views while acknowledging their characteristics, values, and motivations as they enter, move through, and exit the institution," according to the National Academic Advising Association (2006) (para. 5). There are several responsibilities academic advisors have, including advising students on navigating college culture, helping them find the resources they need, and informing them about course and program requirements (Hawthorne, 2021). Academic advisors help students succeed by meeting them where they are developmentally and fostering academic and personal progress (Sprately, 2020). Academic advisors possess the knowledge and skills to facilitate better student outcomes (White, 2015; Sprately, 2020; Duslak et al., 2023). To achieve these outcomes, academic

advisors focus on the core competencies of academic advising that provide a foundational framework for effective advisor training programs and advising practices (National Academic Advising Association [NACADA], 2017).

White (2015) underscored the significance of academic advisors assisting various student populations, including SWD, detailing how academic advising leads to higher retention rates and better student outcomes. Academic advisors may help students who struggle to maintain their GPA and experience test anxiety by offering counsel and support (Hawthorne et al., 2022). By guiding students through the campus, establishing relationships between coursework and career aspirations, and fostering a sense of belonging, high-quality academic advising is a key factor in students' academic achievement, including those with disabilities (Hawthorne, 2021).

Academic Advisors Supporting Students with Disabilities

Academic advisors are essential in facilitating the connection between SWD and campus resources, including career services, tutoring, and disability services (Zilvinskis et al., 2020). SWD are more likely to need such guidance because they encounter additional obstacles rooted in their disability (Rothwell & Shields, 2021). Academic advising helps SWD by directly engaging individuals and providing them with resources for further support. Academic advising can affect students' academic performance and engagement, including SWD and their unique experiences on campus (Zilvinskis et al., 2020).

Researchers have aimed to understand and improve the academic experiences of SWD in higher education using various approaches (Fleming et al., 2017; Stark et al., 2023). Although some research points to the potential benefits of academic advising, little

research has been conducted to determine the outcomes for SWD (Rothwell & Shields, 2021). D'Alessio and Banerjee (2016) suggest a hybrid model of proactive advising that includes elements such as the advisor-advisee relationship, postsecondary readiness, goal setting, action steps/implementation, and accountability, as it has been successfully used with SWD with learning disabilities, ADHD and autism spectrum disorder. Rothwell and Shields (2021) describe a 2-4-8 model, which is a proactive advising approach created to provide SWD with academic skills instruction, and the 2-4-8 naming coincides with the cadence of the weeks in which the SWD meets with their academically skilled instructor or advisor. To ensure that each student's unique needs are met, D'Alessio and Banerjee (2016) say academic advisors and other staff must understand disability and tailor support to each student. Zilvinskis et al. (2020) recommend a model where students can receive resources relevant to their requirements by having a personalized academic plan that accounts for their disability and unique accommodations.

However, academic advisors might not be aware of the full range of disabilities among students, whether nonvisible, cognitive, physical, learning, etc., or have the training on appropriate accommodations or skill development. While they do share some responsibility to ensure these students receive appropriate resources and support, other entities and professionals within higher education—such as the DRPs in DRC—have typically been responsible for determining disability accommodations and providing SWD with access assistance (Strimel et al., 2023). For example, support and accommodations for SWD have encompassed note-taking assistance, extended assignment deadlines, testing in a tranquil environment, and utilizing assistive technologies (Singh, 2019), all things typically done apart from academic advisors.

Although it can be inferred that SWD have the right to equal access to academic and extracurricular programs and facilities as their peers without disabilities, including academic advising, little mention of the accommodations to be employed when obtaining services like academic advising has been taken into consideration.

However, ensuring SWD are successful in their collegiate journey is a collective responsibility that cannot be shouldered by DRP and DRC alone. Research has shown that collaboration with other university professionals on campus, including academic advisors, significantly benefits the work of DRPs and the success of SWD (Strimel et al., 2023). Partnerships from DRCs with campus professionals could assist SWD in progression, retention, and graduation to connect those SWD and exhibit indicators of academic risk with additional campus resources (Knight et al., 2018). In their discussion about supporting SWD, Kimball et al. (2016) argued that higher education needed to move beyond compliance and toward a place where colleges and universities provide support for every student. By including resources for SWD in every aspect of university life, SWD may use the knowledge of all campus professionals and avoid being dependent just on the disability services office (Knight et al., 2018). As such, administrators and university stakeholders must clearly define what constitutes accommodation in their SA division and a comprehensive list of accommodations utilized in all areas of higher education (Los Santos et al., 2019).

SA practitioners play a crucial role in supporting SWD despite facing barriers such as being unknowledgeable of the specific needs of certain types of SWD and the ambiguity of the legalities at large (Kimball et al., 2016). Creating more adaptable and integrated support systems to cater to the requirements of SWD and encourage their self-

advocacy may raise this marginalized student population's persistence and graduation rates (Fleming et al., 2017). Student affairs practitioners can be more integrated in supporting this student group by being proactive and collaborating with DRC to create inclusive environments for SWD on campus and meet the individual needs of these students. However, recent research around collaborations between DRC and other professionals on campus appears limited to the DRP collaboration with faculty and university general counsel. It does not explicitly mention collaboration with the academic advisors of the SWD (Strimel et al., 2023). This highlights the untapped potential of academic advisors in supporting SWD and the need for their active involvement in this area. Creating interventions for better support of SWD that span the institution will be more helpful in the long term, as they help to avoid reactive practices (Kimball et al., 2016).

Training Required

Only 44% of advisors claimed to have taken a disability-related college course, 47% admitted to having no ADA training, and advisors' comfort levels varied when it came to working with students with various types of disabilities, with the highest advisors' comfort levels being related to physical disabilities and the lowest to emotional disabilities (Preece et al., 2007). Student affairs practitioners reported having little disability training and feeling unprepared to support SWD (Vaccaro & Kimball, 2017). However, more targeted and recent research on perceptions of academic advisors working with SWD is lacking in the literature.

Understanding the purpose, process, and evolution of the advising relationship is essential to increasing the efficacy of academic advising. It could be further explored

comprehensively through the narrative inquiry of academic advisors (Hawthorne et al., 2021). Research has shown that SWD believe there needs to be more training for higher education professionals on how to handle disabilities, that university staff lack the necessary resources to handle their needs appropriately (Francis et al., 2018), and that they have poor working relationships with academic advisors due to their lack of knowledge around accessibility and want more intentional support from their academic advisors (Hong, 2015). Exploring the academic advisors' perceptions around advising SWD in higher education institutions—examining the academic advisors' firsthand narratives and documenting their perceived roles, viewpoints, and encounters with SWD—is the next step.

Theoretical Frameworks

While numerous theoretical frameworks address the concept of disability, including moral, student development, and social justice perspectives, this study of the academic advisors' perceptions around advising SWD in higher education institutions is guided by two of those frameworks: Michael Oliver's (1990) theory social model of disability (SMD) and Nevitt Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support (CS).

Social Model of Disability

Humankind are the ones who are the issue, not those who have a disability (Oliver, 1990). The SMD model is essential to this study because it provides the framework for understanding how academic advisors approach supporting this student body and to what extent they recognize that disability is a social construction, wherein society has constructed the barriers and boundaries faced by individuals with disabilities (Patton et al., 2016). This understanding can be used to illuminate advisors' attitudes

toward this student body and better identify how these SA professionals can be better developed, if necessary, to provide adequate academic advising support to SWD.

The SMD model reduces social barriers, allowing SWD to receive the accommodations they require from academic advisors to be directed down the best academic paths rather than concentrating on the obstacles that can hinder academic achievement. Academic advisors are responsible for modifying biases and prejudices and removing social obstacles (Oliver, 2013). Various examples of social obstacles include stereotyping, prejudices, biases, physical barriers like inaccessible structures or services, and institutional and organizational policies and overly rigid processes (Oliver, 1990).

Challenge and Support Theory (1966)

Sanford's (1966) challenge and support (CS) theory implores academic advisors to ensure their SWD do not face too many challenges or obstacles—like the difficulties SWD report facing when seeking academic advice (Francis et al., 2018)—or receive too much support and assistance which may restrict their ability to advocate for themselves and their autonomy (Sanford, 1966). Students learn in a variety of ways, and the utilization of this CS theory seeks to help academic advisors make sure that marginalized groups, like SWD, receive an education where there is an appropriate balance of challenge and support, the same that is offered to their peers.

Although there is minimal and outdated literature on academic advisors supporting SWD at institutions of higher education and the advisors' attitudes toward the inclusion of SWD, the existing research on SWD has paved the way to begin the conversation. Research on strategies to help student success is expanding due to the demand for higher education institutions to boost retention and on-time graduation rates

(Los Santos et al., 2019). This qualitative research study displayed the perceptions of various academic advisors' perspectives on supporting SWD through a narrative inquiry approach. Without tokenizing them, campuses must acknowledge SWD as essential leaders and role models and support their leadership and involvement on campus (Vaccaro & Kimball, 2017). Understanding academic advisors' thoughts on supporting this distinct student group and their revealed awareness will help define the next steps for SWD to continue moving forward in institutions.

Conclusion

The first component of this literature review examined the legislation governing SWD and how it has evolved over the years. Academic advisors might be positioned to contribute to SWD navigation of accommodations and better explore legislation like the ADAAA and the effectiveness of accommodations in guaranteeing equitable access to postsecondary education programs (Keenan et al., 2019). Further, the literature highlights the specifics of access and accommodations in higher education within the multifaceted range of disabilities. This emphasizes the need to educate professionals such as academic advisors on disability and responsibilities (Squires et al., 2018). The literature review closes with how academic advisors and student affairs practitioners have historically assisted this student population. It is now more critical than ever for academic advisors to improve their methods of providing advice and access to resources and make them more inclusive of SWD due to the obstacles presented by institutions, such as insufficient academic support (Fleming et al., 2017). As it stands, more research on the perspectives of academic advisors may improve the academic experience for SWD students. An atmosphere that is more accessible and unbiased for SWD could be achieved by working

to sustain support for SWD.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Nearly one out of every five undergraduate students report having a disability (Snyder et al., 2019). Unfortunately, students with disabilities (SWD) are more likely to drop out or experience delays in degree completion than their peers without disabilities (Becker & Palladino, 2016; Hinz et al., 2017). Outreach by academic advisors has proven to be a successful method of increasing the use of all academic support services, improving academic performance, producing higher cumulative grade-point averages and higher retention rates, and increasing the use and satisfaction of academic advising centers on campus among SWD (Abelman & Molina, 2002; Levesque et al., 2017; Hawthorne et al., 2022; Zilvinskis et al., 2020). However, only 44% of advisors claimed to have taken a disability-related college course, 47% admitted to having no ADA training, and advisors' comfort levels varied when working with students with various types of disabilities (Preece et al., 2007).

Research shows that SWD believe higher education professionals need more training and resources on appropriately handling their disabilities and needs (Francis et al., 2018). SWD also report wanting more intentional support from their academic advisors but having poor advising relationships with them due to their advisors' lack of knowledge about effectively supporting them (Hong, 2015).

This qualitative study aimed to explore the other side of the advising relationship, specifically the academic advisors' perceptions as they navigate their roles in supporting

SWD, providing valuable insights into the complexity of this task. The study's focus on academic advisors' narratives and viewpoints hoped to uncover any structural, social, training, and resource-related barriers, with the goal of illuminating avenues for enhancing academic achievement and SWD inclusion in higher education. This study was one more step towards establishing a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, with hopes to inspire significant improvements in academic support systems for SWD by enhancing inclusive educational practices, improving student outcomes, fostering professional development, informing policy and advocacy efforts, and promoting social inclusivity. The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1. What are the academic advisors' perceptions of advising SWD?

RQ2. How do advisors make meaning of their roles supporting SWD based on their perceptions of SWD?

RQ3. How do academic advisors describe the training and support, if any, they received to effectively advise SWD and their satisfaction with that training and support?

Research Design

Qualitative research allows for gathering a comprehensive and in-depth perspective when examining human behavior and decisions in their natural environments (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Qualitative research can help identify processes that support or inhibit student and professional success (Biddix, 2018). Narrative research is a way to study the life of one or more people using qualitative research methods (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Narrative inquiry involves delving into participants' perceptions and perspectives by closely analyzing their vivid stories. This method allows researchers to

gather candid insights beyond what a standard survey may capture. Using narrative inquiry allowed academic advisors to describe how they perceive their work and roles with SWD on their campuses and their level of competence and training in advising SWD.

Narrative inquiry encourages researchers to share and publicize the stories and research to assist others in comprehending that experiences are dynamic (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Studying human lives through the lens of narrative inquiry acknowledges lived experience as a valuable source of knowledge and cognition (Clandinin, 2013), making the study more insightful.

For this study, I employed a biographical narrative research approach. In a biographical study, the researcher documents and writes the narrative of another person's life experience (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Narratives allow researchers to analyze educators and their instruction—or, in this case, academic advisors and their advising—as they are in motion, growing, and embedded in their institutional, social, and cultural settings (Moen, 2006).

To obtain an authentic representation of how academic advisors interact with SWD, this study captured the personal perspectives of the academic advisors through oral, biographical interviews or narratives. Biographical narrative inquiry allowed the academic advisor participants to express themselves, which is essential since it affirms, acknowledges, and archives their understanding of supporting SWD while leaving them with appropriate challenges to facilitate their growth. Narrative inquiry allowed for understanding the *why* behind the actions of the academic advisors during the perceptions advising SWD. Additionally, the interviews provided academic advisors' insights on the

institutional and social obstacles associated with advising SWD and helped determine the best approach to assisting this student group. This research gained insight into academic advisors' strategies and approaches to supporting SWD by delving into their narratives, not only uncovering barriers that arise from current advising policies but also reimagining solutions that could more effectively cater to the needs of SWD. This understanding might lead to insights into new practices that can be implemented in academic advising and student affairs offices beyond this division to serve SWD more meaningfully.

Research Paradigm and Theoretical Frameworks

A paradigm, sometimes called a worldview, is a set of interconnected assumptions or beliefs (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Patton, 2015). I chose constructivism as the paradigm for this study. Constructivism recognizes the diversity of reality and viewpoints. Crotty (1998) asserts that constructivism emphasizes each person's individual experiences and the crucial role of context in forming knowledge.

Student affairs professionals, specifically academic advisors, are tasked with monitoring student performance, considering the distinct perspectives of SWD, and tailoring their support to meet their needs (Zilvinskis et al., 2020). Using a constructivist perspective, this study explored academic advisors' perceptions of supporting SWD to reveal their unique and distinct stories and viewpoints in their context and how these narratives contribute to effective (or ineffective) support techniques.

In the context of this study, the perceptions of academic advisors and their encounters, if any, with SWD will likely differ from other SA professionals due to their unique context and perspectives working in the academic advising function of SA. Each academic advisor in this study offered a distinct perspective, as each one may utilize

various approaches from the others. Institutional regulations, support services, and the larger academic environment are all aspects that impact these perceptions, and this study uncovered some of the impacts of that larger context on each advisor. The recognition, comprehension, and analysis of these realities improved this qualitative study. Student affairs professionals, specifically academic advisors, are tasked with monitoring student performance, considering the distinct perspectives of SWD, and tailoring their support to meet their needs. This study captured the perspectives of academic advisors working with SWD to assist academic advisors in better serving this student population. It also empowered academic advisors with knowledge of their viewpoints on serving SWD to steer their learning environments and leverage resources to meet their specific needs. This study assumed a constructivist philosophy to provide a comprehensive view of academic advisors' roles in advising SWD by using narrative inquiry to uncover the nuanced aspects of their perspectives. Academic advisors' perceptions and interactions with SWD varied in this study's setting. Each academic advisor provided a unique insight into gaining more knowledge about working with this student population. Acknowledgment and understanding of these various realities enhanced the qualitative discoveries made in this research.

Ontology

Ontology studies how reality or existence is structured and how to explain or ask questions about reality produced among individuals (Jones et al., 2021). Through this viewpoint, this study helped SA leaders understand how academic advisors socially construct the status of being a SWD, the systems that shape their perceptions, and the

significance they attach to their perceptions of providing effective academic advisement to SWD.

Axiology

Axiology, or value theory in philosophy, is the study of what is good and how excellent things are (Schwandt, 2015). Through this lens, this study considered some of the principles of ethics that shape the academic advising relationship while considering the fundamental values of both the academic advisors and those of SWD, such as equity, inclusion, and respect. Through the constructivist lens, the ethical implications of academic advising relationships and how these ideals relate to the lives of people with disabilities were investigated from the perspectives of multiple participants in this study, giving a symmetrical depiction of an inclusive participant pool of academic advisors (Mertens, 2021).

Epistemology

Epistemology, as defined by Jones et al. (2021), is the systematic examination of the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired. It delves into the origins of knowledge, the criteria for defining what qualifies as knowledge, and the processes by which researchers interpret and understand knowledge (Jones et al., 2021). Constructivist epistemology is when the researcher and participant interact with one another to construct and gather the participant's narrative, or data, through a reciprocal process (Mertens, 2021). Specifically, epistemology explores the process of the academic advisor participants generating their narratives around their academic advisors' perceptions of SWD within higher education and the researcher verifying the accurate capture of those data and narratives. My experience as an academic advisor working with SWD helped me

to connect with the academic advisor participants as they constructed their narratives in response to open-ended questions.

Methodology

Study methodology instructs researchers on planning, executing, gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data (Jones et al., 2021). This qualitative study employed open-ended, semi-structured interview questionnaires to delve into the nuanced connections between academic advisors and SWD, shedding light on academic advisors' perceptions of supporting this student group.

Theoretical Framework

This study's methodology and data analysis processes utilized the qualitative research style of narrative inquiry and incorporated Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support (CS) and Oliver's (1990) social model of disability (SMD).

Challenge and Support Theory

According to CS theory, learning is best accomplished when students are given appropriately balanced levels of challenge and support (Sanford, 1966). CS theory holds that students learn best when both pushed in the right direction and given the assistance and support, they need to overcome learning challenges (Sanford, 1966). Using this framework, this study examined how academic advisors provide just the right amount of support to their SWD, adequately addressing their excessive challenges, or if what they provide inadvertently hinders their development by being overly supportive (or not supportive enough).

CS theory suggests optimal student development occurs when students are neither overly challenged nor overly supported, creating a dynamic equilibrium that fosters

growth and learning (Sanford, 1962). The degree to which a particular student is challenged and supported by their surroundings and traits determines their range of optimum dissonance (Patton et al., 2016).

Within the framework of CS theory, this study analyzed the data so that recommendations for improving the academic advising process for SWD could be made around how to provide better the appropriate levels of both challenge and support required for this student group to succeed and grow. The way the interview questions were constructed for this study enabled an in-depth look at the ways academic advisors balance both challenging and supporting SWD and demonstrated the effectiveness of the selected research methodology and approach.

Social Model of Disability

SMD was inspired by the 1970s publication *The Fundamental Principles of Disability* and was popularized by disability advocate (and the world's first professor of Disability Studies) Mike Oliver (UPIAS, 1976). According to Oliver (2013), individuals are not hindered by their disabilities but rather by the societal barriers around their disabilities that they encounter. The SMD suggests that disability is not caused by individual limits (Buder & Perry, 2024); instead, disability is a condition placed on persons with disabilities due to unnecessary isolation and exclusion from society, which prevents them from fully participating (Oliver, 1990). This theory holds that the structure of society that does not allow for variety in physical and cognitive capacities is the real cause of handicap, not the individual (Oliver, 1990). This viewpoint forces a reassessment of standards and procedures inside organizations, including educational settings, calling for a more significant environmental change to guarantee accessibility

and inclusion rather than just accommodating individual requirements (Kim & Aquino, 2017). One of the conclusions that may be drawn from the SMD is that a condition is only regarded as incapacitating when it prevents an individual from accomplishing their objectives or meeting their essential needs (Buder & Perry, 2024).

This study incorporated SMD to examine academic advisors' attitudes toward SWD in higher education and their perspectives on assisting SWD, all hoping to illuminate the barriers that already exist because of the academic advising structures and policies these professionals must adhere to. Unlike the medical model of disability, SMD maintains that the way professionals, such as academic advisors, approach people with disabilities is the problem, not the disability itself (Oliver, 2013). Additionally, more needs to be done to improve the lives of those who have disabilities, including academic advisors being more intentional in their support of this student population (Oliver, 2013). Intentionally equalizing opportunities for SWD and improving established methods of operations, like academic advising, benefits everyone and emphasizes the worth that SWD contribute through their diverse experiences and capacity to enrich campus life intellectually and socially (Rothwell & Shields, 2022; D'Alessio & Banerjee, 2016). Distinguishing the limitations of SWD and enhancing their abilities can lead to improved academic outcomes (Los Santos et al., 2019).

Research Participants

A purposeful sampling method was employed to select and integrate academic advisors with one or more years of expertise (Palinkas et al., 2015). As noted by Morse (2007), this selection strategy allows the opportunity to identify interview participants who are educated about this study topic, currently experiencing, or have experienced the

event—advising a SWD—relevant to this study. The qualifying criteria for this study were: 1) being established as an academic advisor intentionally engaged with a curriculum, pedagogy, and learning outcomes for students, as defined by NACADA (2006) within a centralized advisement division, and 2) having the experience of academic advising at least one SWD to their knowledge.

Research Site

Participants were academic advisors who presently work on the campus of a large public university system within the southeast of the United States. By focusing on multiple sites of a single network, participant interviews, and narratives were further informed by the policies, guidelines, training materials, and other materials about SWD and academic advising that the researcher could gather from that specific network (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To reflect diverse backgrounds and perceptions, the researcher sought a sample size of 8 to 12 academic advisors until saturation was reached and consistent trends in the data emerged (Jones et al., 2013).

Recruitment Method

This study employed a purposeful sampling approach to recruit participants. Specifically, those who already fit the sampling criteria were asked to recommend others who might be suitable and information-rich participants (Jones et al., 2022).

First, I emailed the director of each advising center (see Appendix A) and requested the director to share the participant recruitment flyer electronically (see Appendix B) with the academic advisors in their office. I also sent an electronic copy of the flyer to the advisors directly through email using the publicly available directory listing their email addresses on their university's website (see Appendix C). If required to

encourage further participation after the electronic distribution of flyers, physical flyers were distributed across institution facilities and posted in common locations inside the office as permitted by the institutions.

A survey form link and QR code were added on all physical and virtual flyers to direct them to the Qualtrics survey platform, where I obtained consent, screened for participation eligibility, and gathered demographic information from those electing to participate in the study (see Appendix D). The provided consent form outlined the study's purpose, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, voluntary participation, and procedures for withdrawing from it. A consent form was first delivered via the Qualtrics survey platform. The demographic data I gathered for this study includes characteristics such as years of experience in academic advising, the current title of the academic advisor, majors serviced, and training connected to disability services, if any. The participants' race/ethnicity, career, and educational background were also included in this demographic collection.

All qualifying individuals were contacted and invited to participate in an interview until saturation was achieved. The email included an electronic calendar invite for the interview time and date, a Zoom link (Appendix E), and a second copy of the informed consent (see Appendix D). I did not collect signatures for the informed consent form unless required by the Institutional Review Board. I clarified verbally at the start of the interview that a participant's decision to proceed with the interview implied their consent to participate in the study. I reminded participants that the interview was voluntary, and they could opt out anytime.

Data Collection

Academic advisors were interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview (see Appendix F). The interviews conducted lasted approximately 60 minutes. Within this research's scope, individuals were asked to respond to open-ended questions that align with the methodology, theories, and research questions about the perceptions of academic advisors regarding their work with SWD. All interview sessions were conducted via Zoom video conferencing, and the interviews were video/audio recording, with audio transcriptions provided by the Zoom software platform.

Participants were urged to give truthful and thorough answers. To establish rapport with participants and provide a secure space for them to express positive and negative opinions, all in hopes of counteracting impression management, I established trust by reminding them that there were no hard-and-fast answers and that I was interested in hearing their stories. In addition, I used active listening strategies like verbal and physical affirmations to reaffirm participants during the interview and reassured them that it was appropriate to have both enjoyable and unpleasant experiences. The interview questions probed their academic advising backgrounds, responsibilities, thoughts on serving SWD, education and training, adaptation methods, and recommendations for how to assist SWD better. After evaluating their transcripts, participants received a thank-you email with a gift card incentive and requests for final modifications if needed (see Appendix G). I also emailed each participant their interview transcript and asked if they would prefer any modifications; however, no participants requested any changes to their data for this study.

Data Analysis

This study employed a structured thematic analysis approach. In analyzing narrative data, the researcher broke down the stories' meaning by paying attention to their layers (Chase, 2018). Academic advisors' perspectives were multi-layered and intricate, and a thematic approach allowed this study to explore those layers and intricacies. Johnson and Christensen (2017) outline that data analysis methods for narrative inquiry involve considering elements such as place, time, and relationships. In this approach, researchers and participants collaborate to develop stories utilizing narrative threads, tensions, and plotlines (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 424).

Initially, I converted the interviews' audio recordings into written transcripts. After the material was transcribed, I carefully reviewed the transcripts and notes to fully immerse myself in the context and specifics of the information, obtained a basic comprehension, and made notes of early thoughts. Open coding was initiated after the transcribed interviews were extensively read and reviewed. This involved scanning the data line by line and assigning initial codes. Subsequently, the codes were grouped, and themes were identified.

In addition to analyzing responses, the narrative inquiry approach examines the *why* and *how* underlying narratives, offering a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the information. This holds particular significance in studies concerning perceptions and practices since the subtleties of opinion and experience can reveal fundamental factors that influence attitudes and actions (Jones et al., 2022). As the researcher, I scanned my data sets—the interview transcriptions, interview notes, and other materials I collected from the site or system—many times throughout the thematizing process to uncover themes; these themes were then used as the basis for

interpretations that reflected the patterns I discovered (Jones et al., 2022). This methodology facilitated the identification of shared themes that developed across diverse data sets, given the advisors' varied experiences and constructed realities, providing a means for me to observe patterns that surfaced across a range of individual perceptions. Furthermore, the themes created using this approach were closely related to the data and based on the participant's words, contributing to the interpretations' validity and authenticity. This kind of analysis differs from others because it looks at each account and how its parts fit together instead of just looking at the narrative or topic parts (Chase, 2018).

Key themes and patterns that emerged as intriguing or pertinent to my study topics were identified throughout the open coding process while analyzing the data through a selective approach. Initially, I conducted manual open coding by reviewing transcripts and identifying salient responses, creating an Excel codebook to organize interview questions and participant answers. Similar words and phrases from participants were manually highlighted in matching colors, then grouped into broader thematic quadrants. To ensure thoroughness and accuracy, I integrated qualitative software (MAXQDA) by uploading the transcripts along with my manually derived codebook. MAXQDA then supplemented my manual coding as an organizational aid enabling me to systematically cross-check and capture any additional aligned thoughts or ideas, thereby merging manual and software-supported thematic analyses into a cohesive final coding framework. Once identified, I grouped codes into potential themes that captured something important about the data concerning the research questions; it enabled me to compare the content of different stories to create categories and examine the substance of

each participant's story holistically (Abes & Wallace, 2018)—continually refining the themes, checking if they worked about the coded extracts and the entire data set. By repeatedly examining the data, the uncovered themes provided the foundation for interpretations that aligned with the detected patterns (Jones et al., 2022). The themes were reviewed and modified to confirm that the data aligned with the theoretical framework and overall study purpose. Other categories were associated with structural accessibility and societal stigma, which are parts of societal and institutional obstacles. Upon further refining the themes, I defined each theme and what aspect of the data it captured. This study's thorough data analysis method enabled a deeper comprehension of the intricate topic being studied and offered insight for academic guidance to SWD.

Finally, making meaning of oral histories requires careful examination of the interviewees' identities, life contexts, events that may have impacted their recollections, and other contextual elements (Light, 2001). This was essential since it highlighted contextual knowledge for evaluating oral narratives. Every respondent contributed a distinct set of identities, experiences, and life situations that influenced their memories and points of view. Through a meticulous analysis of these variables, scholars can enhance their comprehension of the subtleties and intricacies presented in the testimonies of academic advisors concerning their assistance to SWD. Contextual analysis contributes to more thorough and significant insights into the research by ensuring that the results fairly reflect the wide range of perceptions and opinions within the advisor community.

I incorporated contextual knowledge into my analysis in several ways. The first theme, *Perceptions of SWD*, emerged from diverse personal experiences, educational

backgrounds, and exposure to disability training, which shaped academic advisors' understanding and attitudes toward SWD. I employed participant profiles to discern patterns and variations in perceptions shaped by formal education and years of experience. The specified professional roles of each participant (advisor I, II, and III, or leadership positions such as director) enhanced my comprehension of the advisor's practical involvement and responsibilities in supporting SWD advisees. The second theme, *Advisors' Roles in Supporting SWD*, was informed by contextual insights, including advisors' job titles and institutional roles. This allowed for reflection on how institutional contexts and advisor roles influenced their responsibilities in supporting students with disabilities. The self-reported experiences of advisors, along with their formal disability training, facilitated the development of nuanced insights into the theme. The third theme, *Training and Support Experiences*, draws on data regarding advisors' diverse levels of disability-specific training, including in-person workshops, online webinars, on-the-job shadowing, or the absence of such training. This variation informs the theme by highlighting differences in advisors' knowledge preparedness. A thematic analysis can ultimately yield themes directly influencing actionable suggestions for enhancing academic advising. By identifying the major themes that define advisors' perspectives, researchers may be able to derive focused interventions, tools, and training programs that address the most critical concerns found in the research.

Protection of Subjects

While it is unlikely, participants may have experienced some emotional distress when discussing their perceptions about academic advising SWD, such as feelings of remorse, inadequacy, or irritation with the systems or training in place. The researcher

reduced emotional distress by ensuring participants realized they had complete power over what to discuss and what they chose to reveal. After the interview section of the study, the researcher also reminded each participant about the Employee Assistance Program for Well-being within their university system.

Participants could have opted not to participate or could have withdrawn at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. To safeguard their privacy, all participants' replies were kept anonymous, and any identifying information was substituted by pseudonyms in the study report. During the interview, Zoom video recording devices were employed so that the researcher could transcribe the interview for the study and note any meaningful non-verbal communication from the participants. Participants were alerted before the recording began, and the recording was stored in the researcher's university account behind two-factor authentication. The video recording was deleted after the transcribed interview, and all non-verbal communication was noted on the transcript. The interview transcription was preserved in a password-protected electronic file folder within the researcher's university web storage, also behind two-factor authentication. Each audio recording and transcription was identified with a pseudonym to protect the participants' privacy. The interview files were stored in a separate password-protected folder within an electronic document, also saved within the researcher's university web storage, which included a list of the participants' identities and pseudonyms.

Positionality Statement

With two Air Force veterans as parents, I am the eldest of three children and a woman of African American heritage. I credit being the oldest in my family and growing

up in a military environment for my leadership skills and understanding of and appreciation for individuals from various backgrounds and identities. Throughout my life, I have always placed considerable importance on giving back to the community, as my formative years were centered around serving others. I value giving back and consider myself to be a servant leader.

As a higher education professional, I am eager to advocate for the success of all student groups. As a student affairs practitioner, I want to promote my purpose of serving others through education by emphasizing holistic well-being, inclusive settings, and innovative approaches as cornerstones of success for all students. As a second-generation college alum, I hold an MBA and a BA in English, which I obtained while overcoming obstacles to my mental well-being. Upon commencing my pursuit of a terminal degree, I was diagnosed with general anxiety disorder. Although it is a relatively new addition to my identity, it has significantly impacted my professional motivation. As a student affairs professional and higher education scholar, I understand the importance of following college-level policies and procedures diligently and consistently if I want to succeed academically. I have acquired the ability to surmount societal obstacles that have arisen since my diagnosis, even in situations where support has been scarce. Furthermore, I may use my experiences with the many aspects of my identity to expose gaps in institutions where student support should be improved.

My motivation to strive toward assisting students in achieving success stems not only from aspects of my identity and academic accomplishments but also from my deep-rooted commitment to seeing more students thrive in attaining college degrees. I am driven by the understanding that it is not always easy for individuals to achieve this level

of achievement, and this has motivated me to work on leveling the playing field so that others can pursue higher education with the inclusive opportunity they deserve.

This study intends to shed light on academic advisors' perceptions of supporting SWD, where research is scarce. Throughout my professional and personal life, I have advocated and served those who identify as disabled or disclosed having disabilities. As a researcher, I also offer my experiences with serving SWD, with whom I have interacted and who encountered obstacles to attaining inclusiveness. Professionally, I have encountered various hurdles in obtaining training and resources to assist this student population in academic advising. Even so, it soon motivated me to assist SWD and help provide them with the necessary inclusive support. With insider positionality, the researcher can ask more meaningful and insightful questions since they hold previous knowledge (Darwin Holmes, 2020). With these experiences, I recognize that my position is shaped by the indirect and direct situations I have encountered, which can unintentionally assume deficit based approaches. Therefore, I intend to remain neutral and impartial throughout my research journey and use this insider positionality to ask more meaningful and insightful questions.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. First, participants could review interview transcriptions (see Appendix G) and themes derived from the analyses (see Appendix H) to confirm that accounts were honest and within the participants' integrity through member checking.

Additionally, peer debriefers who now work or have previously worked with academic advisement or DRC were asked to provide their thoughts on the study at the

end of the data analysis. The peer reviewers contributed to the evaluation of the data analysis process and examined open-coded themes to mitigate researcher bias.

To find these peer debriefers, I contacted my professional network, namely colleagues who have worked in or are now working in academic advisement or DRC and have the relevant expertise. An informal email or discussion was the first step in extending an offer to serve as a peer debriefer to gauge interest and availability. Once a quick screening interview took place to discuss the candidates' willingness and confirm they had the expertise necessary, a formal invitation was extended to eligible debriefers to provide their thoughts on the preliminary data analysis. Initially, I explained the perceptions that the study participants shared. Next, I discussed the results of my independent analysis and how my identities may have influenced my research (Abes & Wallace, 2018).

I also practiced reflexivity through journaling to reflect on thoughts that led to uneasiness throughout the study (Jones et al., 2021). For this study to be realistic in representing academic advisors' perspectives, authenticity as a reflective approach is essential. While reflective practice and establishing one's positionality as a researcher do not guarantee higher-quality research, they should improve the researcher (Darwin Holmes, 2020). Examples of reflexive techniques for researchers include self-awareness and critically assessing one's perspective (Esposito & Evans-Winter, 2022). The practical way I intended to remain neutral for my study was to adopt a strength-based perspective that encouraged a more balanced view of SWD and focused on the strengths and abilities of SWD rather than the limitations and challenges they face. I also continued to educate myself on disability rights and culture as it provided a richer and more nuanced

perspective on the study that assisted in framing the research questions, methodology, and analysis in respectful and informed ways. Furthermore, I was able to control my own biases through utilizing my peer reviewers and dissertation committee who reviewed the study and made sure I was adhering to the methodology and headed in the proper direction to increase its validity. By incorporating these strategies, my research could contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and respectful understanding of academic advisors serving a student group that deserves an equal opportunity for success in their collegiate career.

Conclusion

There are several benefits to a well-planned and carried-out research study (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). The substantial contribution of research to academic advising is among these benefits, helping the field step up from rule-based and course-selection-centric approaches. By researching academic advising participants' meaning-making processes around SWD in hopes of better serving an ever-increasing student population in higher education, meticulous attention to data collection and analysis methods becomes essential. This research informs what needs to be done to increase higher education success for academic advisors, SWD, and all students. This narrative research study's deliberate data collection design and analysis aimed to gather academic advisors' narratives, produce themes, and add to the body of research that holds the potential to, one day, revolutionize academic advising beyond just recounting perceptions (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). The findings of this study could potentially inspire and guide academic advisors in their support for SWD, leading to more inclusive and effective academic advising practices and better SA professionals.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

This narrative inquiry study explored how academic advisors perceive their roles in supporting students with disabilities (SWD). Participants were asked to share their experiences with academic advising SWD, sharing any stories are narratives that they found meaningful or memorable. They discussed their definitions of disability and their understanding of SWD. Additionally, they reflected on their perspectives regarding SWD and the academic advising process, considering societal influences on their views and the impact of their own cultural backgrounds. Participants explored their roles as academic advisors in supporting SWD on their campuses and if they adapted their advising strategies to accommodate the unique needs of student-disclosed and undisclosed disabilities. They also addressed the balance between challenging SWD to promote their growth and learning while also providing adequate support to fulfill their academic advising requirements but not so much as to impede student growth and learning (Sanford, 1966). Furthermore, the participants shared stories of both their successes and difficulties in academic advising SWD, instances when they felt they offered effective academic advising to SWD, and a summary and self-assessment of the training they received related to academic advising SWD.

This chapter presents individual data for each participant, detailing their educational background, years of experience in academic advising, current position title, academic major(s) serviced, training around academic advising SWD or any applicable

training received, and their current higher education institution of employment. Significant elements identified through thematic analysis are explored in the following sections. Each participant's accounts are presented in the first-person narrative to convey their reality and perspectives accurately.

Participants' Profiles and Experiences

This study included 13 participants from three universities within a large public university system in the southeastern United States. Most participants held both a bachelor's and a master's degree, while only three participants had a bachelor's degree. Over fifty percent of the participants possessed one to three years of experience in academic advising, five participants had between four to ten years of experience, and one participant exceeded ten years of experience. The participants held titles including general academic advisor, academic advisor I, II, and III, graduation counselor, and director. The participants' academic advisors advised a range of academic majors, including health professions, arts, education, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), business, and humanities. According to the demographic survey participants completed prior to being interviewed, over fifty percent of the participants lacked any training in working with people with disabilities, including SWD. Among those who received training, it included various formats such as in-person workshops or seminars, online webinars or virtual workshops, self-paced online courses, continuing education courses, on-the-job training or shadowing, and formal coursework in their undergraduate or graduate degree programs. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and identifying information was modified to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1

Participants:

Participant	Degree of Education	Years of Experience in Academic Advising	Current Title	Academic Majors Serviced	Received Disability Training	Type of Disability Training Received	Institution of Employment's Carnegie Classification
Ashley	Master's Degree	1-3 years	Academic Advisor III	Health Professions, Policy, Public Health, and Social Work	Yes	In-person workshops or seminars, Online webinars or virtual workshops, continuing education courses (e.g., for educators or healthcare professionals), On-the-job training or shadowing, formal university or college coursework	Four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 university
Brian	Master's Degree	1-3 years	Academic Advisor III	Nursing, Public Health, Criminal Justice, Social Work	Yes	Online webinars or virtual workshops, On-the-job training or shadowing	Four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 university
Caleb	Master's Degree	1-3 years	Academic Advisor I	Marketing, Management, General Business, Supply Chain Management, Accounting, Criminal Justice, Film Production/Visual Arts	Yes	Online webinars or virtual workshops, On-the-job training or shadowing	Four-year, medium full-time, selective, higher transfer-in university
Dana	Master's Degree	4-6 years	Academic Advisor III	Business	Yes	Online webinars or virtual workshops	Four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 university
Elsa	Bachelor's Degree	1-3 years	Academic Advisor	Psychology, Computer Science, IT, Math, and Interdisciplinary Studies.	No	N/A	Four-year, medium full-time, selective, higher transfer-in university
Faith	Master's Degree	4-6 years	Director	STEM, Business, Health	Yes	On-the-job training or shadowing	Four-year, medium full-time, selective, higher transfer-in university

Greg	Bachelor's Degree	4-6 years	Academic Advisor I	STEM	No	N/A	Four-year, medium full-time, selective, primarily non-residential, higher transfer-in college
Hailey	Master's Degree	7-10 years	Academic Advisor III	All pathways are available at the associate's level; Mainly core curriculum	No	N/A	Four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 university
Isaiah	Master's Degree	7-10 years	Academic Advisor (Graduation Counselor)	All	Yes	Online webinars or virtual workshops, Self-paced online training modules or courses	Four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 university
John	Bachelor's Degree	1-3 years	Academic Advisor II	Arts and Education	No	N/A	Four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 university
Kevin	Bachelor's Degree	1-3 years	Academic Advisor II	Criminal Justice, Nursing, Public Policy, Public Health, Social Work, Urban Studies	No	N/A	Four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 university
Levi	Master's Degree	1-3 years	Academic Advisor II	Arts and Education	No	N/A	Four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 university
Monica	Master's Degree	More than 10 years	Academic Advisor III	All	No	N/A	Four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 university

Ashley

With a bachelor's and master's degree and one to three years of experience in academic advising, Ashley is now an academic advisor III at a four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, Research 1 (R1) university, where she academic advises students majoring in health professions, policy studies, public health, and social work. She said she received training around working with SWD through formal university or college coursework, on-the-job training or shadowing, continuing education courses (for teachers

and healthcare workers), and online webinars or virtual workshops. Ashley came to academic advising after years of work in other areas of student affairs, including career advising, residence life, and student health. After deciding to work in higher education and student affairs, she sought a student affairs role in the functional area that she felt was the best fit for her. She described her own love of planning her career, and so she said that she thought she would enjoy the academic planning with students that academic advising required.

Ashley defined disability as referring to circumstances, and more specifically someone's ability or challenge with completing a task. She said whether it is social, emotional, or physical disabilities, they are not defining of the person. She expressed her belief that deciphering between visible and non-visible disabilities is "the challenging part." When asked to elaborate a bit more, Ashley added:

Disabilities are as complex and as diverse as our people, and whether it be mental or social or a learning disability, chances are I interact with people who I did not know had a disability.

Ashley shared her general thoughts towards SWD on her campus, stating:

I think that the initial thought, when I think of SWD at my campus, would be students who need extra assistance or just need a little extra time and grace in helping them achieve their goals.

Ashley discussed that she uses her academic advising skills to serve SWD effectively, stating:

I need to be tactful and understand that types of questions I'm asking, the setting that I'm producing for those students with disabilities is mindful and careful on the academic advising side.

She felt that her strategies were more “covert than overt.” Ashley gave an example scenario of if she is working with a SWD who may have dyscalculia and who is struggling in the math class, she aids the student by recommending course sections and instructors that would likely best accommodate the SWD, while also considering the level of difficulty of the other courses taken the same semester and recommending other courses that might balance out the workload. Ashley then shared how she views her workplace’s attitude towards SWD:

It was interesting coming here as an advisor. And during our training, there really was no mention of treating SWD. But it was interesting to see that coming from a special ed background and not having that as a focus of the training. I think makes advisors a little uneasy as they approach SWD. Because when we do have a student coming in the queue or a scheduled appointment, and then we hear from the assistant director or it’s asked, “Hey, can someone help out with this student?” oftentimes, the majority of the advisors kind of look at each other and they take a beat. And then they’re like, “I guess I can,” or “Sorry, I’m busy.” And they could be busy, things happen, but I think people are fearful or cautious to step up.

Ashley discussed how her own culture has influenced how she thinks about SWD, talking about her own experience working as an executive functions coach (EFC) at a boarding school that housed and educated 6th grade students who were diagnosed with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. She said that part of her role as an EFC was

helping 6th graders with dyslexia organize materials, schedules, and communicate effectively with teachers. Initially, she thought organization was common sense and easy, and “just put everything in a folder.” But working with those students showed her that even with effort, they might struggle, and that's not a reflection on them, but more so on her assumptions about others. She said that experience reminds her now, as an academic advisor, that students’ lives are deeper than what student affairs professionals briefly see in advising sessions, and that sometimes students, with or without disabilities, need extra time beyond the quick interactions academic advisors are accustomed to in most advising sessions.

When asked to share a significant story highlighting her understanding of her role in academic advising SWD, Ashley disclosed that while growing up, math was a big insecurity of hers from fourth grade onward. In college, a class she took required teaching elementary math, and she struggled so much with long division that she thought, “How can I teach math if I can’t do it myself?” Her parents encouraged her to use campus resources, even though she says she was embarrassed to do so. Ultimately, those campus resources Ashley accessed helped, she said, and she passed the class, moved forward with her undergraduate degree, and is now enrolled in a doctoral program. Ashley said that experience helps her understand the fear, shame, and anxiety students may feel seeking resources on campus, and that it taught her to approach SWD—and all students—with grace, realizing they are more than just their classes.

Ashley said she tailors her role as an academic advisor to the needs of each student, including SWD:

When people ask, “What’s your leadership style?” I usually say situational because I try my best to read the room and understand that what works for student A won't necessarily work for student B. Whether it’s leadership or students, I try to shift what I’m doing to their actual needs. In terms of my role, I think another big part of it is being a person of resource. By having those templates, I’m able to store a lot of information, whether it be campus resources or non-campus resources. Of course, everything is Google-able, but I’d like to think that by directing students to the “right” direction or the right office, I at least have helped them get a step closer to their goal.

When asked how she specifically adapted her academic advising to SWD, she talked about adapting her communication strategies:

Oftentimes, I adapt how I communicate with my students. Policies can be complex, so to speak, at length, with next steps, and random conditionals that can be challenging for any student, especially those experiencing an Auditory Processing Disorder. Regardless of if a student has disclosed a disability or if I anticipate that they do, I ensure that the information I share with them is clear, concise, and visual. I will include summary emails with actionable next steps (broken down to manageable bits so they are not to feel overwhelmed).

Ashley spoke about still challenging her SWD enough to promote their growth and development as students, while still offering them supportive academic advising:

They are adults! So, I ought not coddle them, nor solve their problems for them. Overall, I keep the same level of care for all students. I will expand that care, or

add extra time for students needing it, but in a general sense, the growth and actions are left in the hands of the students.

Ashley described encountering difficulties as an academic advisor supporting SWD, one being her current work climate:

There is a culture here, especially during peak times of the semester, to see students as quickly and efficiently as possible. Which I understand. I do not dawdle. I understand using an economy of words to get through as quickly as I can. However, for some student populations, specifically those with disabilities, they do not have the luxury of a quick service. With certain students, they need that extra time. And they often either (a) do not ask for that extra time, and or (b) do not disclose that they have a disability. This can make it challenging for Advisors to accurately read the room, determining how much time is actually sufficient/needed for each student.

When asked to elaborate on an experience of feeling supported by her supervisor or employer while academic advising SWD, Ashley gave the following account that further highlighted her challenging work climate, specifically her supervisor's discriminatory attitude towards SWD:

I knew that I had ample time to assist a student with generalized anxiety and their parents, and did not feel rushed in doing so. My assistant director was overly thankful for me taking "one of those students." I am appreciative that they felt thankful, however it is not a burden to help any student, especially those with disabilities.

Ashley also shared an experience that was easy for her academic advising a SWD, stating:

During this most recent new student orientation season, we were in a new location. While a majority of students were being seen in a large ballroom, students with disabilities were able to request a private session. I was able to meet with students one on one in a quieter environment, away from all of the music and noise. This was also nice because the student and I did not feel rushed. The student would have as much time as they need. As Advisor I would not need to feel rushed either, as I was no longer facing the other incoming students waiting to be seen.

Ashley also shared some insights from her training experiences, saying:

Across our sub-teams we had academic advisor IIIs who were liaisons for various offices. Whether it be the Office of Access and Accommodations or Study Abroad, this advisor would bridge any necessary information between the other campus partners, back to the University Advisement Center. Our liaison, who was the liaison to Access and Accommodations, provided several training courses for current and new advisors. Collaborating with the Office of Access and Accommodations, trainings covered an array of disabilities, strategies on how to approach such students, and best practices for advisors. These were video chats, slideshows, and handbooks.

Brian

Brian has been working as an academic advisor for nearly three years after earning his master's degree. He is employed as an academic advisor III for nursing,

public health, criminal justice, and social work majors for the undergraduate academic degree programs at a four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, R1 university. Brian described his path to becoming an academic advisor with his journey beginning within the same university system within which he currently works:

I have been working in academic advisement for almost three years now. I started all at the same university system I'm going from level one where I mostly saw all students related to the majors that I see. Until moving up to the level of supervisory roles. At this time, I currently see a bit fewer students and work more behind the scenes. But during that time of working with students, I have worked with all types of students from many walks of life and backgrounds. Including people with special needs. Some of which have been identified or relayed to me that they have some sort of special need or disability. And some have not.

Brian discussed reasons he enjoys academic advising, and his enjoyment of connecting people to resources. He said that throughout his career he has always worked in fields where he can provide resources to people in need, and while earning his master's degree in clinical mental health counseling, he learned that he especially enjoys helping young adults. Brian said when he was completing his undergraduate degree, he struggled to figure out his major and career path. Now as an academic advisor, he enjoys helping students alleviate similar struggles and navigate their own college journeys. "College is essentially about figuring out who you're going to be and how you're going to continue on in life," he said.

When asked about his thoughts on disability and his understanding, he stated that disability is a general term for any kind of need for assistance, from learning

disabilities— “like needing extra time or having things done slower” —to physical disabilities. “In general, a disability is just an indication that there's something that you are lacking that you need further assistance in” he said. Brian attributed his knowledge of disabilities to his clinical mental health master’s degree and professional experience working for the Department of Family and Children's Services. He conveyed:

I found that there's a lot of people who in general just need extra assistance sometimes. Again, that kind of comes from all kinds of things. So that can be in the school system now. I found that there's a lot of people who in general just need some sort of extra assistance sometimes. Again, that kind of comes from all kinds of things. So that can be in the school system now. Some people need assistance with test taking because of a lot of anxiety that's going on. And again, so that's kind of what I feel like an advisor is supposed to do anyway. We're supposed to assist in any way possible in the academic success of the student.

Brian said he had substantial experience engaging with individuals from many backgrounds and identities, including those who are disabled. When he works with SWD, his overarching view is that they are just like any other student who needs help discovering what resources are available on campus and beyond. Brian said that “they are just college students seeking their degree.” He further described SWD on his campus:

I feel like on my particular campus I have noticed that many of them are uncertain about different resources. They're uncertain about different accommodations. So, they don't seem to know that there are things available through our campus to assist them. Whereas in other universities that I'm aware of there are resources

that are known, and I guess more readily available for SWD to be able to access them.

Brian also relayed his thoughts on academic advising SWD:

So, I find it intriguing just because I find it just no two people, no matter how similar the disability may seem they are never going to need or want the same assistance. So, I like the fact that each person is really going to be its own individual case and trying to figure out, okay, so how do I best serve this student with their disabilities? And then it's also when they're not disclosed. So, you know, there are sometimes where you can tell that a student has some sort of disability. And then you have to kind of figure out how to best suit this student. Because they haven't disclosed to you anything.

Brian identified the most difficult part of academic advising SWD as the “short meetings” he is forced to have during academic advising sessions:

Because you only have a limited amount of time to work with the students in general. You have to pass along the information they need while also trying to tune it to how they can easily accept the information.

Brian cited cultural and societal influences as having impacted his beliefs around SWD. He expressed how in the past, society viewed people with disabilities as limited or unable to do things. But when he is actually working with them, “you realize they're very smart—they just need information presented differently.” Brian recounted his early experiences regarding SWD as follows:

Where I was kind of raised, I didn't really see a lot of people with any kind of disabilities and the few that I did see were mostly physical. So, there wasn't too

much as far as mental capacity that they weren't able to complete. You just knew physically they had a disability. I wasn't really shown that until I got to maybe like college or into my actual work and career fields.

Brian went into further recollection of his interactions with SWD as he recalled a story about academic advising a SWD. He said a student came in without disclosing any disability, accompanied by a parent who made it clear that the student was leading the academic advising session. The student arrived prepared, knew their academic program's required classes, and actively asked questions. The parent stayed back, assisting only when needed. Disability did not have to come up, Brian said. Instead, he described it as an unspoken presence. The student left confident, knowing their next steps. Brian said he thought that appointment reflected the whole point of advisement—to advise, guide, and not define someone by their disability or ability.

Brian said he adapted his academic advising strategies for all students in order to meet the unique needs of any SWD he might be advising but who have a nonapparent disability or who have not disclosed their disability to him:

So, for some students I know I may be speaking too fast. So, I will slow my pace down and then show my screen the entire time. I have found that sometimes slowing down and showing them what you are doing is often better and gives them a visual of what they can expect at home.

Brian found it difficult to achieve a balance between providing SWD with enough support to satisfy their academic advising needs while also challenging them sufficiently for their development as college students, stating:

It can be difficult because you know what the natural progression should be for someone in their major, and you have to help this student find their own pace within the major. This sometimes means slowing down their progression to get them acclimated to the challenges of college. I have had a few students that went from full-time to part-time and were able to get a grasp of college to then move on back to be full-time their next semester.

Brian added:

The largest difficulty comes when you are trying to work and connect with multiple departments to ensure the student is getting everything that they need. As we are only advisors and can help them with their academic paths we have little control of the rest.

Brian also described some of the rewarding aspects of academic advising SWD on his campus:

There are some students that come in with the best attitude and readiness to learn. I have had a few students that despite their disability are ready to move forward and come to our appointments prepared with questions and our course suggestions. Then we are able to easily go back and forth about how they feel about the schedule and if they think it will give them enough time between classes and really discuss the intricacies that go into registration.

When asked about instances where he received support from his supervisor or employer around advising SWD, Brian shared:

There was a time when the student had both physical and some mental disabilities. The director allowed us to use her [larger] office to hold the

appointment [to better accommodate the physical disability]. She also went out of her way to ensure that [all] the students [with disabilities] were getting everything they needed in order to be successful that next semester.

Brian confirmed that he had undergone training on working with SWD from the access and accommodation center at his university. He explained that the training focused on "how to talk to students with disabilities and things that you can ask to improve communication." He also described additional training he received that taught him "learning de-escalation techniques that can be used for talking with anyone."

Caleb

Caleb is an academic advisor at a four-year, medium full-time, selective, higher transfer-in university who advises students enrolled in marketing, management, general business, supply chain management, accounting, criminal justice, and film production/visual arts majors. He has served 1-3 years in the academic advising field. He says he has received training in working with individuals with disabilities through online webinars or virtual workshops and on-the-job training or shadowing. Caleb described his nontraditional way of entering the academic advising space, relaying:

I came from doing a public administration program at a [four-year, medium full-time, selective, higher transfer-in] university for grad school. I was a graduate assistant at the time, and after I graduated, I ended up working as a student affairs intern at [the same university]. So that kind of exposed me to a lot of different components of student welfare and things of that nature. I worked with the Department of Campus Life, conduct. I also had an opportunity to work with the Veterans Resource Center and even work with Counseling and Psychological

Services. And I like the fact that it's non-traditional because that kind of gives another aspect of the types of things that you bring to the table.

Caleb shared his definition of disabilities: “You know, just any type of delay, you know, whether it's a physical delay or a mental delay or an emotional delay. It's just a delay in the regular experience that others would have.” When asked to say more, Caleb further elaborated on his understanding of disability:

Disability in general is it's pretty much just not even pulling the finish line closer, but maybe taking out some of the obstacles to get to it or finding creative ways to get around those obstacles. You know, when we think about students that may have a learning disability or they have some type of disability when it comes to math or English, you know, and they have those learning support requirements that they have to fulfill.

When asked about his thoughts of SWD, Caleb discussed a lack of comfort SWD have around disclosing their disabilities to him or other academic advisors. He said that Many SWD are not comfortable disclosing their disabilities to student affairs professionals, making it challenging to balance resources. Caleb said institutions often invest in resources that might not be utilized. He has noticed that after the pandemic, students did not always get the support that they needed in high school, so they do not know how to ask for help while enrolled in college. Caleb added that smaller or medium institutions like his often blend academic issues and mental health support—but stressed that they are not the same and need separate, diverse resources and responses from student affairs professionals. Caleb continued his perceptions further, discussing his

thoughts on academic advising SWD, giving his approach to how he serves students with an apparent or disclosed disability:

When I advise students who kind of have that delay, I'm going to look for those telltale signs. And my approach is a little bit softer. You know, I make sure I'm breaking things down. I try not to use so much jargon and things of that nature because I know most advisors, they just kind of have an expectation of, oh, well, a student knows what I mean when I say satisfactory academic progress. It's more so just having that conversational piece, not only with the student, but even sometimes with the parents to try and help them understand that this disability isn't a bad thing. It doesn't have to be an end-all-be-all.

Caleb talked about how society has shaped his approach to academic advising. He shared his belief that everyone should attend college and that the academic advisor has to help all students find the resources available to them along the way. He also talked about how campus partners have helped him serve this population. Caleb said, "College is for anyone and everyone," indicating it is for students with disabilities and without. He described academic advisors as being "like travel guides" helping students navigate their "four-year-long vacation" through trial and error. Early on, Caleb says he connected with his campus' DRC to learn about accommodations, as many students he was academic advising were transitioning from high school where they had 504 plans or IEPs, something he says he could relate to personally. Those students often feel "ashamed" he said, so working closely with campus partners helps him handle difficult conversations with SWD and make his students feel more comfortable with him.

Caleb mentioned how his upbringing has influenced his approach to academic advising SWD, mentioning his mother's profession as a counselor and therapist, as well as his own experience with an IEP. Caleb said his mother works with kids who have disabilities and often gives him advice on approaching students "in a way that's supportive, without being intimidating." Reflecting on his own experience with an IEP in high school, Caleb remembers his teachers and advisors making him feel comfortable, supported, and aware of resources—even though he says he did not end up needing accommodations in college. Now, he says he strives to make his students feel similarly comfortable, informing them about available resources and encouraging positivity.

Caleb told a story of a freshman undergraduate student living in a first-year living-learning community that he academic advised that he felt captured his concept of going the extra mile, or "taking the time out," to support a SWD as an academic advisor:

From day one, he was having issues. Like from day one, he wasn't connecting well with his peers. I noticed that he wasn't coming to class on time. Whenever he would come to class, he would have his headphones in his ears. Like he just was completely tuned out. So, one day, he finally pulled me aside. The student explains that, "It's not that I don't get to work, I'm just not motivated."

Caleb presented an example of how he adapts his academic advising strategies for SWD, scheduling more individualized appointments and including the SWD's advocate (her mother) in their sessions, as formally requested by the SWD:

A young lady had to be escorted out of the room due to being in immediate distress in a group advising session. I was able to follow up with the young lady and her mother in one-on-one appointment the following day, and in the

appointment, the student and her mother had disclosed to me that Jackie suffered from extreme anxiety and had trouble expressing herself in public settings and had a delay with retention of verbal instruction/information. Therefore, the presentation component of our advising presentation during the NSO event, had undoubtedly overwhelmed her. Utilizing my advising strategies, I worked with the student and her mom to properly explain university procedures for students in need of accommodations, while providing access to institutional resources. I also made sure to send various follow up emails after every appointment to the student and her mother so that there was no confusion on what our meetings were about and the necessary information needed from each meeting.

Caleb described using a tailored approach to academic advising SWD, challenging them enough to promote their growth and development as college students while also supporting them by recommending various resources while encouraging their success: “I immediately recommend accessing our student success resources primarily tutoring, academic coaching, writing studio, counseling services, etc. before assuming that the issue is immediately associated with a disability.”

Caleb relayed that he did not have many difficulties when academic advising SWD, but when he did, that he “merely proposes alternatives and secondary approaches to solving their problem while complying with university protocols.” Caleb further emphasized that “there isn’t exactly an easy way to advise any student, regardless of a disability” and added, “I have found it to be easier in general to meet students where they are and tap into the expectations that they have for themselves in the preparation of an advising relationship.”

When asked to describe a time he felt supported by his employer or supervisor while working with an SWD, Caleb shared, “Working with the student, my supervisor at the time made sure to allow me to CC her on all email communications with the student if an issue needed to be escalated to a higher level than what was possible for me.”

Caleb described how he received and still receives training around academic advising SWD:

At the time [I was hired as an academic advisor], I established contact with representatives from the DRC Office to follow up on the best practices for recommending services for students who may exhibit the signs of having a disability but have not disclosed their disability or reached out to DRC indicating a need for support services. I received training on FERPA guidelines as well as external compliance with release of information for students seeking services or receiving them.

Dana

Dana is an academic advisor at a four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, R1 university, serving students enrolled in the majors of the institution's college of business. Dana began by telling her story of how she got into academic advising, relaying that she was recommended to seek employment in the advising department because it is a pleasant place to work. She shared that she calls her students “my babies” and that “I treat them just like I do my child. I hold their hand. I give them whatever it is that they need. Some more than others.”

She said her motivation for continuing her work in academic advising is seeing their outcomes. One student started with a grade point average (GPA) of 1.79 (out of

4.0), and Dana said she told him, “You need to do better; you need to go to class.” And that together with his girlfriend, they better encouraged him. Hearing students come back with success stories and knowing she has impacted their lives is what keeps her going.

When asked to describe disability in her own words, Dana said her initial perceptions of disability were related to physical disabilities, but she has since expanded her thoughts of disability beyond that and to external barriers created by society:

When I started, when I thought of disability, I'm thinking somebody who is visually impaired, hearing impaired or wheelchair bound. That's what I used to think when I thought about disability, but working with students who have disabilities, I realized that there's emotional people that are at emotional disadvantage. They're at a psychological disadvantage. I would define it as someone that has like an emotional, mental, psychological, physical, some kind of impairment that impacts them negatively, well, not necessarily negatively but it doesn't put them on a level playing field with everyone else.

Dana shared her belief that her campus is not offering enough resources to SWD, and her perception of there being a lack of accessibility on portions of her campus, too:

I feel, and maybe I don't, maybe I'm out of touch. And maybe there are more resources than I'm familiar with, but I don't think that there are enough resources for people with disabilities on campus. For instance, on [campus], there's a building, [name] Hall, and there is a ramp. But, in the building I currently work in, the only way up is the elevator and the only way down is the elevator. But if something happens, if something happens and there's a fire, what's happening to those people who are working on the 26th floor? How are they getting down? So,

I don't know what protocol they have in place because waiting for a firefighter to come get you off the 26th floor is probably not the best option. So, it's like, what resources do you have for those people who have those kind of impairments or people.

Dana described how students who disclosed disabilities to academic advisors on her campus receive double the advisement time. She also shared that not every academic advisor in her advising department may be capable of competently academic advising SWD:

If you're disabled, you'll get a 30-minute extra appointment instead of the 15 or if you have a 30-minute appointment, you'll get the hour instead of the 30 minutes. So, they double the time. But everybody in our office is not equipped to handle students with disabilities.

Dana described her perceptions of her role when it comes to academic advising SWD as meeting them where they are:

So, whenever a student with a disability came in, they fell under my meta major. Then I would spend the time talking with them, assisting them, helping them in whatever capacity they need, but also knowing how to be flexible to meet the needs of that student. I'm not scared to say, "Okay, what is it that you need from me that I can do to help you at this moment?" And then they give me that feedback. "Oh, I need this, or I need that." And that kind of helps me know what I need to do.

Dana spoke about learning how to work with SWD's while on the job, and how important those takeaways have been for her going forward in her career as an academic advisor to SWD:

It was understanding that you do need to be face to face to them so they can read your lips. You do need to make it known if you do have to leave or if anything is happening, you have to kind of let them know what's going on in that moment. Sharing my screen with them so I can talk to them, but they can also read whatever it is that I'm saying to them. If they have an interpreter, not just talking straight to the interpreter, but still talking to the person.

Dana discussed her family member having a disability as being her biggest influence on the way she serves SWD:

Having a sister who was paralyzed at one point and seeing the looks that she got from people in wheelchair because she was in a wheelchair, seeing the looks that she got from other people and seeing how people treated her. Seeing how people stared at her because she was in a wheelchair and that was something she can't help. Help me better deal with people. And then there was a time in college, there was a girl in a wheelchair, and I went to go help her and she was like, no, don't help me. So, it's understanding that if you see somebody that's in a wheelchair, don't automatically assume that they need help. And get permission because the wheelchair still is an extension of them.

Dana described her role as an academic advisor to SWD as supporting them like any other student, giving an example of academic advising “a student with an amputation” or an amputee:

I don't treat him any differently. When he comes in and he pulls out his laptop and he gets to typing with both his hands and going across and doing whatever, like, I don't stare I don't make it an issue I know this is what he lives with every day. My thing is to what is it that you need. Let me assist you with your needs. So, my role to me is to still give them the same kind of treatment that I would give anybody else. In some instances, give them the same if they can't be the same because even with students without disabilities, some of them need a little bit more than others.

Dana talked about how she modifies her academic advising style when working with SWD by altering her body language, such as avoiding "direct eye contact" to "make sure the student is comfortable."

Dana revealed how she balances challenging SWD enough to foster their growth and development as college students while supporting them enough to meet their academic advising needs by being direct and not "sugarcoating anything" while advising them and communicating effectively:

Some of them wanted to be treated just like everyone else, but in some instances they can't because they aren't able to handle the workload, and it is hard to articulate that to someone without them thinking you are calling them a failure or lacking believe in their abilities. The easiest student I have is a student who has a missing hand. It is so easy to work with him because he can still function well and he doesn't let the fact that he is missing a hand get in the way of doing what he needs to do. He always comes to visit me to help get registered for classes and sends me emails throughout the semester if he needs help. He makes it easy to help him because he communicates well.

When asked about the support she has received from her employer or supervisor around effectively advising SWD, Dana said:

No one goes out of their way to make sure you are okay when dealing with a SWD. In the beginning when we were getting training and having meetings, I felt supported because we had others to talk to and give pointers on how to handle SWD. Now we don't have that, but I wouldn't say I don't have support I just don't think anyone is concerned with making sure people are able to assist students with disabilities due to other issues that might take precedence in the office.

Dana elaborated on the training she has received around academic advising SWD, mentioning that no such training exists anymore: “Previously there was a committee who would meet with us monthly. They would conduct training and provide tips and resources to develop our ability to adequately assist students with disabilities.”

Elsa

Elsa indicated that she has served as an academic advisor at a four-year, medium full-time, selective, higher transfer-in university for less than three years. She holds a bachelor's degree and offers academic advising to students in the following majors: interdisciplinary studies, mathematics, logic, computer science, and psychology. At one point, she was the academic advisor for around eighteen distinct academic disciplines.

Elsa shared her career story of becoming an academic advisor and said that she initially understood what academic advisors did when she started college in 2018 and became very familiar with her own advisor. Later, she became a peer mentor supporting incoming students, and briefly worked as a writing tutor at the university. She said she learned from a classmate that academic advising could be a career. Given what she saw

as a challenging job market related to her major and her past work experience in higher education as a peer mentor and writing tutor, she thought academic advising sounded interesting, and so she applied for a position.

Elsa explained her understanding of SWD by revealing her own qualification for academic accommodations in school, stating:

I feel like I have a pretty decent understanding because I was one of those students who had accommodations in school. Unfortunately, I got those accommodations my last week of finals in my senior year, but I am one of those students and I don't really know how to describe disability as a whole, but because it's still fresh for me, but I know that it can be a lot better access across all boards.

Elsa shared her perceptions of SWD, emphasizing that she does not perceive them differently:

I usually don't think of them any differently than any other student. I don't know if it's just me not taking that into consideration or not, but I don't really see them differently. I try to treat them the same as I would with any peers. And that means I hold them to the same expectations unfortunately, fortunately for them. So usually, I hold the same expectations and expect them to be able to do what they can do.

When it came to her experiences of working with SWD as an academic advisor, Elsa expressed that her work could be improved, relaying:

I don't think I've ever received any direct training on how to assist students with disabilities. We did have like a brief training about service animals, but they're so rare on this campus that I have not yet encountered that.

She added, “I don't make any assumptions unless my students tell me directly that they do have a disability, I won't know unless they tell me.” Elsa also said, “There's a bunch of history, historical backgrounds where people of color, women, and people with disabilities were prohibited from education,” and that she would always try to explain to them, “Hey, no, this isn't going to be a negative label on you.”

Elsa conveyed how society and having a family member diagnosed with autism has influenced the way she academic advises SWD:

I think like, when growing up, there was really a big stigma against people who have autism. I have a cousin who has autism, and I remember my family would be like calling me things, being like, “Oh, well, he's doing way better than you. Why aren't you doing better than him? Is he supposed to be smarter than you?” And I was like, “How is that negative?” I know there's always been kind of like that negativity towards people with autism or mental illness. Also, I know earlier this year I had a coworker tell me, “Oh, well, you can't talk to someone who has Asperger's like that because we were in a public setting.” We're in like a main street-like area, assisting students of courses, and he was starting to get a little overstimulated, and she was like, “Well, you can't talk to him like that. You can't do this,” and I was doing my best to handle the situation on my own because he calmed down and stepped away for a little bit so he could get breath, but I was getting told like, “Oh, you shouldn't be doing this. You shouldn't be doing that.” And I was like, “Oh, okay. You're telling me this in front of the student.”

Elsa spoke about how an undergraduate course and working with a former colleague influenced her thinking around disability:

I think what really impacted my thoughts about disability when I started actually thinking more and more about it was when I was in undergrad. The first course I took was an accessibility course. So, I learned about a little bit of accessibility for writing. And then when I was a writing tutor, one of my colleagues recently started losing her vision and started becoming more physically disabled and she became a really, really big advocate for disability, and it really opened my eyes to considering more and more about disability and how it looks across the board.

Elsa also provided her perceptions of her academic advisor role in serving SWD:

So, I think for me, I see myself as a person to be assisting them to reach their goals, whether it be here at this institution or not. Because at the end of the day, I want my students to be doing what they want to do. I don't want them to be forced to stay here because we need higher numbers. I want them to be able to achieve those goals, achieve those dreams. I've always been a big advocate for doing more research into different programs if there's no programs here, if you need a certain format of courses, well, we don't have that here. Let's figure out another solution. I'm sometimes very hands-on with my students. And then when it comes to my students with disabilities, I make and then they tell me they have disabilities. I always make sure to be informative with them, listening to them, seeing what they particularly need and finding different ways to share information with them. Like, for example, I had a student come in who was blind. She had low vision, barely seeing, so she needs a larger font. But our handouts are all in paper format and tiny writing, so I had to kind of make my own little makeshift document on word.

Elsa relayed an experience of adapting her academic advising strategies to the unique needs of a SWD:

I had a student come in who had low vision, in fact, I have seen multiple students who have low vision and need a white cane to navigate the campus. They could still see but their vision is limited. I always share my screen with students, so they can see what I can see, but in this case, this wasn't the most effective way for them to go over information. To navigate this, I asked more questions to ensure they understood. I asked them how I could make the document easier to read. I helped register them into their desired courses and explained ways they could register. I did place them in their courses to help make things easier for them. I learned more about accessible type styles so instead of using Times New Roman I used Verdana. Another habit I have, is to leave fidgets on my desk for students to mess with if they so desire. I've seen some of my students use these fidgets in our meetings.

When it comes to balancing challenging SWD adequately for their growth and development as college students but supporting them enough to meet their academic advising needs, Elsa said:

I expect my students to come in knowing what they want, want to ask, and what they need. It is easy to focus on what a student wants but we need to focus on their needs. I challenge students by having them do some of the work. Yes, I could register them for their courses every semester. I can change their schedules if they ask me to. I can do a lot, but I want them to be self-sufficient. So I have them try to do all of these things on their own. I explain to them that there may be

a time when I am out of office, and they need to make a schedule change. I won't be there to help. I ensure they understand the resources we have on campus and how to navigate their degree systems.

When asked about the difficulties of advising SWD, Elsa cited the lack of accessibility provided by her employer and colleagues, as well as unreasonable expectations of parents of the SWD:

I get frustrated when I see that emails aren't accessible or stigmas take control of how we treat a student. While I understand it comes from the goodness of the heart it is frustrating to see my coworkers and peers treat someone to a different standard because they perceive that individual as disabled. What is even more frustrating is how inaccessible our campus is. A student in a wheelchair has to go around our entire building to enter our office since we have construction. The doors are often locked and the accessible door buttons do not work. It's frustrating when I am navigating campus and have to go out of my way to find a new way to access a building. We can do so much better in supporting our students disabled or not.

She discussed another barrier that involves a parent:

I've had parents tell me their students has ADHD or Autism and expect special treatment that goes beyond accommodation. They expect me to call their students daily or to reach out and make sure they are in class. I can't do that. I have over 400 students and if I were to do that it would take away time from appointments. As always, I tell my students to reach out and communicate with me. I foster a welcoming environment and want my students to know that they are safe.

When asked about her comfort of academic advising SWD or competency around doing so, Elsa said:

One thing I have learned over the years is that advising isn't going to be easy. It feels easy but that's because you aren't seeing what's behind you. Every student is different, and every student needs to be treated with the care they deserve and need. Not all students need to be handheld, and some students do need to be handheld. The same goes for those who have disabilities. I hold them to standard, all of them. I expect them to know what they would like to do or at the very least what they are interested in.

When Elsa discussed her experiences with feeling supported by her employer while academic advising SWD, she spoke about the support her SWD offered her, instead: “My students play a key role in my advising session. I always want them to know I support them wholeheartedly. I believe most of them know that and support me in my advising sessions. We support each other.” Elsa stated that she and her academic advising team or colleagues “haven't received any training [on academic advising SWD]. Anything I do is self-taught, self-learned, or researched.”

Faith

Faith described having academic advising experience in several disciplines or majors, including the arts, sciences, business, and health. Faith's journey into advising began with her positive interactions with her own academic advisor in her undergraduate experience, and she initially wanted to “be a professor and also advise.” She discussed her route to becoming an academic advisor:

Once I got out of college, I ended up in mental health. And then ... left that and ended up in financial aid only because I wanted a gateway to academic advising. Financial aid was just the first department that bid. And so, I got to academic advising.

Faith then detailed her interpretation of disability and how she understands the meaning of the word:

Disability can be an array of things on a spectrum. It would just be that subset of people in society that operate outside of what society deems as normal. My understanding of disability as a whole would be, you know, like I was saying, people that are different. They have more differences than what society deems as normal.

Faith then discussed her own perception of SWD on campuses of higher education, including the one where she is currently employed as an academic advisor:

I've always thought of people with disabilities as normal. I myself have never really thought of people with disabilities as very much different. Because for me, coming up or going through college, they went to classes just like I did. Even if they have an aid, the point is, is that they're still gathering the same information that I'm gathering in the classroom. And so, there's nothing that a person with a disability could not necessarily do as far as learning in school, from my viewpoint, not even just going to college and being in classrooms with people with disabilities, but also just in grade school you're in classes with people with different disabilities.

When it comes to effectively academic advising SWD, Faith said she perceives “patience” as key:

I feel like as an advisor, you have to have patience with a SWD, because even if it's a learning or a mental or physical disability, you're going to have to be patient regardless. You could be sitting with a student who may be hard of hearing or something like that. And they may need an aid for that. You're just going to have to be patient because they're going to have somebody with them that's going to have to relay the information to them. And so that's going to take time.

Faith gave an account of how society has influenced her way of thinking about SWD:

When I started off in mental health, I worked at a residential facility. And most that I remember... wasn't necessarily to say like, oh, you should look at them this way, that type of thing. It was more so like, you know, make sure that you don't just kind of like watch your body language because sometimes with neurodivergent people, they may try to read you in a different way than what other people may read you ... Going into academic advising, there was no, there's no training like there's no rule book to say like, “Okay, well, when you're with a student with disabilities, this is what you do.” There's nothing written.

Faith also recalled her childhood experiences as influential to her of thinking about SWD:

Growing up, we played with some kids that had some disabilities. I never had a negative outlook. Kids with physical disabilities we were around those kids and played with those kids. Kids with mental disabilities in your family, which I have.

I guess with that experience, that personal experience, I guess that shapes how I socialize in a space.

Faith discussed what she defines as her role in academic advising SWD from the perspective of her being a director of advising and a liaison between disability services and/or current academic advisors who report to her, stating that she “is to be the main point of contact for the counseling center, also disability services for my own [academic advising] department.” Relaying a story of how she must assist SWD who do not receive adequate academic advice from her academic advisor supervisees, Faith said,

An advisor did not realize that the student may need a little bit extra care, maybe they didn't, they didn't catch that maybe that student possibly needed some accommodations. And then they [the SWD] end up in my office and I'm the one taking the 45 minutes to an hour to actually sit and discuss the hurdles that they're having to go over and talk about the different resources that I can, you know, get them in touch with and to get what they need to do to be successful in school.

Faith conveyed how she adapts her academic advising strategies to meet the needs of SWD by giving them more time in appointments and intentional follow-up emails, stating that she would:

Go over all details step by step and allow them space and time to not only understand but explain any issues they may be experiencing and ask any questions they may have. This is different than usual as typically you have to fit within the appointment time frame of 20-30 minutes. Anything not covered in that time frame would typically be given in a follow-up email.

Faith continued that she “treats SWD the same as my other students when it comes to their responsibility” when describing how she balances challenging SWD adequately enough for their own growth and development as college students but also supports them enough to meet their academic advising needs. Faith expressed not encountering difficulties of her own when academic advising SWD, but she said she has witnessed the frustration of the parents of a SWD when their child was receiving academic advising from another academic advisor. She said that experience caused her to direct that academic advisor to do the following: “Make sure that after she explains everything to a student that appears to maybe have a disability to always send a follow up email with clear concise information and steps to follow.”

When asked about her level of ease with academic advising SWD, Faith stated, “I can deem all experiences easy as I do not mind taking the time to go over everything a student needs to know in detail while also showing them.” Faith said she feels supported by her employer while academic advising SWD, attributing her feelings to her connection with disability services on her campus: “I was able to contact disability services to let them know that my student was on their way to their office for assistance to test for accommodations. That inter-departmental assistance and support was extremely helpful.”

Faith summarized her overall lack of experience with specified training on how to effectively academically advise SWD:

I have not received directed/specific training on how to effectively advise students with disabilities. I believe higher education may expect you to just know to give those students more care and time. I have only received training concerning disabilities in my studies and whilst working in Mental Health ... In advisement,

you shadow other advisors, learn the programs, processes, and majors. If you happen to shadow an advisement session with a SWD, then you're in luck because you get to see firsthand how to advise those students. Otherwise, there's no specific training that takes place.

Greg

Greg completed his undergraduate degree and has been advising students in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields at a four-year, medium full-time, selective, primarily nonresidential, higher transfer-in college for over four years. Greg discussed his journey into academic advising:

I ended up in education starting off as a tutor. But because of ... all the different things that I had learned and all the different places I'd found, that didn't work for me. I always had kind of an advising mentoring angle to what I was doing. My very first job was a ... it was an organization for what we called stop outs and dropouts in DeKalb County. It was all about making connections and helping them be more proactive and more productive than it was about just teaching them the X's and O's. When I began moving up various academic ladders, I found myself in those kinds of positions. And I found myself advising because I was working at the AEC On GGC's campus.

When asked to define disability, Greg said, "I guess the best word would be the word *limitation* sticks out but that doesn't really fit either because there are students that fit into the majority that also have limitations, so I don't know. That's a tough one." When probed, Greg defined disability as "there's something missing."

Greg shared a story about his first encounter with SWD on his campus:

My very first encounter knowingly with a student with disability, it was a physical one. I was working for [university name], and it was my job to help students kind of make their way through a remedial math class. But the problem was that people really did have people that were at different levels. And so, you had one class to help all of them get to the same place. This student was a mother of several children, and she was confined to a motorized chair. And for her, she did not want any special treatment.

When asked about academic advising SWD, Greg wondered aloud “whether or not we are doing it good enough. At my job recently, we have had several semesters in a row of increasing caseloads.” When asked to say more about this, Greg added:

My school does not have the best track record of keeping that [academic advisor] position staffed. So my [academic advising] department is consistently under the personnel mark for the median, I think. One of the solutions to having too many students and not enough advisors is a lack of, well, a lack of qualitative advising. And I find that for SWD, they actually need more of that. And in my department, we are encouraged to keep it [academic advising sessions] at most like half an hour. Simply because we don't have the time. Because we don't have the personnel.

Greg could not think of any examples of how society has influenced his way of thinking around academic advising SWD, stating, “That has never come up. I mean, the feedback would almost be most pronounced because of the silence of it.” When asked to explain more, Greg disclosed:

This is not official. But I have taken two of these such tests. They were both different, but they were both peer reviewed. And if those results are to be believed, I have autism spectrum disorder. But there are certifiable memories and experiences that I've had that now that I know more, I should have been tested. But my culture, the way that I was raised, it was pressed upon me to just figure it out, which is the language that I translated to develop my tools and tool kits.

When asked how Greg perceived his role as an academic advisor to SWD, he said, "My role with SWD is the same as my role for students that don't. And the way that I think about it is my job is to help acclimate students to campus."

Greg spoke of his belief that SWD needs an "adjustment in mindset" and personal referrals to campus partners and resources:

Some of them [SWD] need an adjustment in mindset. And some of them need like evidence, like "This will help you because I have the data" versus "You need to trust me and make this happen." I have put students on emails with people at the AEC [Academic Enhancement Center]. I've given out names [or referrals to other campus professionals]. Giving out names I've found has been part of the comfort vetting. Like, "Don't just send me over there." That human connection is often very [silence], it has a value that I think is understated.

Greg relayed further how he balances challenging and supporting SWD adequately through "the NACADA foundational principle of advising is teaching," ensuring that SWD know their options, explaining the steps to receive accommodations to those who have not yet disclosed their disability to the larger campus: "What you want

to do is reach out to disability services. Have the conversation, get your doctor credentials in place so that your accommodations in place at the start of the semester.”

When asked if he has had any challenging experiences academic advising SWD, Greg recalled a story of serving a student he did not realize had a disability but later learned that he did:

Well, I have the story of the student that I recognized too late he that had issues. I did feel, I have felt, because I found out just today that he got suspended. I felt inadequate. I felt like if I could have had all the time back, I don't know if I could have helped him pass his classes.

When Greg was asked about what additional support he could use to more effectively academic advise SWD, Greg spoke about the role of campus partners:

Being able to go to disability services [would be supportive]. For good or bad. And us being able to have a conversation about that student and me having my own perspectives and them [disability services] having their own perspective. And I was like [able to walk away from that consultation thinking,] “Okay, I feel more knowledgeable, I feel more understanding, I feel more plugged into the situation.” I didn't feel very supported [by disability services] because they're not advisors. They [SWD] need some TLC for real. There's none of that over there [at disability services]. And just understanding what different departments are likely and willing to provide. That helped. But it wasn't very helpful.

When asked about any training he has received around academic advising SWD, Greg shared he had not received any and would have “mixed feelings” about receiving any in the future:

On the one hand, it would be good to have the training about that population of students. On the other hand, it would put into my mind, and I know that it would put things into other people's mind, that you have to get off the main road and treat those students differently. If we treat them all the same. In theory, that's where we're trying to get to.

Hailey

Hailey, a senior academic advisor at a four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, R1 university, has provided academic advising to students enrolled in the university's associate's degree programs for almost ten years, emphasizing the university's core courses for easy future transfer into bachelor's degree programs. Hailey told the story of her journey and motivation to get into the field of academic advising by saying she initially pursued a master's degree in clinical psychology, but later decided to change to the student affairs field:

I decided I wanted a bit of a change of pace. So, I was like, you know, I think higher ed, my skill set is transferable to higher ed. I started out actually at Montclair State in New Jersey prior to coming here, but that was very specific because that was for an academic department. Yeah, so definitely what's definitely motivating and seeing these students graduate. So, I actually had one student who came back from exclusion. She graduated. And she sent me an email and was like, "Thank you so much. You know, your guidance was super helpful."

In her definition of disability, Hailey included the physical, mental, and learning components:

So, disability, I would, to me, is obviously in the physical form. So, what I can see. I mean, it could be physical but not what someone can see, right? They may have like a chronic pain, which is a disability, but it doesn't mean that I can actually see it or that I would know that they have a disability. And then, of course, the mental aspect of it. So, if there's a mental health issue or if there's learning disabilities.

She added that disability is "something that impedes a person or possibly can impede their progress" and clarified:

I think a lot of disabilities are invisible that we won't, that people wouldn't necessarily know that someone has a disability so, whether that is in school, at home, at work. I feel like a disability would impact them across all areas of life.

"A lot of students may be underserved," Hailey added, when asked about SWD at her campus, and elaborated:

At the university level, especially. I feel like some students may not know that [accommodation] services can continue [from high school]. So, if you've had services in high school, that they can continue in college because I've met with students who were like, "Well, I had an IEP in high school or I had a 504." And not realizing that they can contact access and accommodations. But also, I think the barricades, the obstacles also in higher ed. to getting the access and accommodations because these students are also saying, "Well, now that I'm an adult, I have to get all the testing redone."

Regarding her work as an academic advisor for SWD, Hailey reiterated the idea that disabilities are often unseen and said that she must be "more mindful" because of this:

Just being more aware that who's ever coming into your office, you really need to treat them on an individual basis because you don't know what they're going through or what obstacles they may be facing. So just being a little bit more understanding ... So it's like we need to really feel the tone in the advisement office and then just let the student lead, right? Like whatever they're giving back to you, that's kind of what you need to take and figure out what this student may need.

Emphasizing the need for greater awareness of SWD, Hailey highlighted how society has shaped her approach to working with those who have disabilities:

As a group, we've always thought about it like we've looked around our office and we're kind of like really isn't very handicap accessible. So just thinking about those types of things, like if we have a student and we, you know, obviously this is for a physical disability, but if they're in a wheelchair like just, you know, maybe bringing them into the conference room. So, it's a little easier to navigate than back to our offices.

Hailey said her educational experiences have influenced her approach to academic advising SWD:

So, I feel like, you know, I don't know if it's because of the field that I went to school for. But I feel like my education is what made me more in tune to realize that disabilities aren't necessarily just what you see, right?

Hailey recognized her "very important" role as an academic advisor assisting SWD. She noted that "we need to be cognizant of each student who comes in what they may need." While discussing if and how she adjusted her academic advising methods to accommodate SWD, she mentioned that a "tailored" approach may be necessary at times:

We don't really know what each student is dealing with or what obstacles. So, it's just about taking, you know, listening to them, understanding where they're coming from, and then going to whatever level they're at, right? Some students might need me to show them how to register for classes. And then other students are like, yeah, I know exactly what I want to take. It's just about tailoring my advisement session based on the information that I'm receiving from the students. Because I don't feel like most of the time I know if a student does have a disability or not.

Hailey stressed that it is important for academic advisors to "give them [SWD] the ability to find the information and show them where to find the information" when asked how she balances giving SWD just the right amount of challenge while still providing enough support for their personal development and growth. She clarified:

Well, I'll say sometimes maybe I don't give enough. Because, you know, we might be very busy. And I do a lot of drop-ins and maybe from even myself, my patience is just a little lower that day. I think that sometimes they may not get everything that they need or sometimes I feel like sometimes students can be too reliant.

When asked about any difficulties she has had academic advising SWD, Hailey explained that not knowing how to navigate their questions can be tough:

Other than sending them to access and accommodation, I feel like we just haven't been given the guidance necessary to really help the student. We want to be able to help them, provide them with the information. Even if we're not the ones who can resolve the issue but at least be able to give the students some information so they're not going around in circles.

Hailey said she felt supported as an academic advisor to SWD by her supervisor and her supervisor's willingness to step in at any time:

But I do feel like from my direct supervisor that if we ever feel that we've, I want to say, hit a wall, right, where maybe we're not making progress, she's always willing to step in. And her approach can be different than my approach. So, the way that she's speaking to the student may be able to resonate a little better.

Hailey concluded by saying that she has not had any training on how to academic advise SWD but that she thinks that training would be beneficial for academic advisors, both new to the field as well as those who are experienced.

Isaiah

Isaiah has a master's degree and over seven years of experience working at a four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, R1 university, first as a graduation counselor at a K-12 school and later as an academic advisor for all majors. Isaiah discussed his journey into academic advising, beginning with how he was a peer advisor in college and how it "was kind of a natural progression when I took in the other roles," such as academic advising. He further explained his appreciation for his work:

I've kind of enjoyed that aspect of what I do, knowing that if a student is in a bad situation, they have somebody they can come to that's going to be a little bit more understanding and try to reach them where they are.

Isaiah discussed his definition and understanding of disability as a “spectrum” and “anything that can impact your day-to-day life.”

Disability, it's such a broad category now. We might have thought just seeing simply somebody that's in a wheelchair or something physical we can see, but now we know that disabilities aren't exactly physical. There's a lot of consideration that has to be made. Because it comes to that whole non-disclosure thing, too. You can't see a student and say, "Oh, this student clearly has ADHD.” For me, disability is such a nuanced thing. It's person by person. It's experience by experience.

Isaiah mentioned physical disabilities as “the easiest thing to notice.” However, those who notice physical disabilities may not fully understand “what exactly that entails.” He said SWD “take a little bit more patience because they clearly have purpose.” When asked how he approaches academic advising of SWD, he said, “I don't see it as anything other than advising a student.”

When asked if anything like society and culture influenced his way of academic advising SWD, he could not cite “any professionally.” However, Isaiah went into detail about how his own grade school experiences and witnessing the persistence of his wife, who he said has a disability, have both been strong influences:

I think one of the first things you see growing up as a kid is that you see somebody that may be in a wheelchair or something, you have questions. But then

you actually get into schools, and you start to see children like yourself that have, you know, that have severe disabilities. And I think you have questions about that naturally, you know, but of course, your culture is like you don't, you know, you don't stare, you don't ask questions, you just let people be. I see different types of students and even with the aspects of my wife as a student. Because I met her when we were in college. Academically, she was capable, but physically there were some things that she could not do, you know. So, when I saw her struggling and I know that she's capable, I'm sitting there like, well, just keep going. Just keep pushing through it. But it's not really like that. It's just more like, okay, this is what her life has been. This is how she's learned how to navigate her life.

Isaiah discussed what he perceived as his role in supporting SWD as an academic advisor through a story he told:

One of my favorite stories just to go back to that student I was talking about before that had, she had a severe disability. Very independent, comes in on her own. But she can't speak, you know, she has to, you know, we were using a phone to try to communicate sometimes to where she would text something and show it to me and we kind of go back and forth. So, she was interested in taking a class. And she wanted to take English 1101. And she kept saying she wanted to take Professor Luta. And she wrote it down. And she was kind of saying it the best way that she could say it. Trying to understand what she's saying. I'm leaning in. I'm like, "Ludo. I don't" and I'm looking at the thing. And I'm like, oh, she means Ludacris, the rapper. And when I realized that, I laugh and I go, "Ludacris the rapper?" And she looks and, you know, she has some enjoyment on her face as

this whole situation playing out. So, but yeah, it was funny just clearing that up, but also just kind of sharing a humorous moment that a lot of people wouldn't have had, you know, because they might have been a little bit scared as to how to have that conversation or kind of have that connection.

Isaiah spoke about if and how he has adapted his academic advising strategies with SWD, stating that “daily considerations” for the student are his key strategy to serving SWD:

So, I think that's one of the things that I've begun to spend a lot of time on, I believe, with some students is that I can't come out and say, "Hey, I think you have ADHD," right? I don't think that's, that's not in my realm. I can't diagnose. I can't make those statements, you know. What I can do is that I can notice a pattern. I can say, "Hey, it looks like you have concerns about procrastination. It looks like you have concerns about your ability to focus. When you try to do certain things, is it like this?" And when I ask that question, what I'm really doing is that I'm really trying to figure out if it's something that I have personal experience with, you know, if it's in and like, even if I'm wrong, you know, it's still a point for me to try to connect on strategy.

When asked how he balanced both challenging and supporting SWD, he said he tries to offer them a sense of empowerment and equality among all students, stating, “There is no separation for me between a disabled student and what we consider the able-bodied or neurotypical or anything like that. To me, there's no difference. It's a student.”

Isaiah could not recall any difficulties he has had academic advising SWD, only stating that “it's only difficult in terms of the mental energy that you have to give it

sometimes.” Regarding his comfort level with academic advising SWD, Isaiah said, “I can treat it just like I treat anything else. It's really about the flow of information. So as long as I'm giving the information in a way the student can digest it, I feel fine.”

Isaiah also could not recall any times where he felt he received support from his employer while academic advising SWD aside from a situation where he was asked to support a situation involving a SWD who was dissatisfied with their previous academic advising and advisor:

From institutional support, they [the university] did exactly what they do. They come in, they promise support, they give you a contact.... So, the student was happy with what they got after [meeting with me], but I still know that they were frustrated by the whole situation. And that's kind of what gets to me is that when students leave frustrated, to me, there's something that we could have took care of to where this didn't have to happen.

He could not recall any training on how to effectively academically advise SWD; however, he cited receiving some ADA compliance training.

John

John, an academic advisor to a four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, R1 university's art and education bachelor's degree programs, has worked as an academic advisor for less than three years. John began his career in higher education in enrollment services, later moving into academic advising. When asked about his motivation for pursuing this career field, John said the following:

I like talking to students. And it makes me feel good whenever I kind of help them. Like, if we're in a meeting and they're like, "You are so helpful. Thank you so much." I'm like, "Of course, no problem."

John defined disabilities broadly, stating, "There are students who might have physical disabilities, but then disabilities can also be emotional and mental as well."

When asked more about his thoughts on SWD on his campus, John described them as being "challenging" and further clarified:

Especially when certain areas within college aren't set up to help students with disabilities, and then that can be frustrating. I have one student who's a music student and he's blind, and they're not really set up to help him, so he has to jump through hoops to get assistance. That's frustrating for me and for him.

Regarding his comfort level with academic advising SWD, he expressed his ease with working with SWD: "It's easier because they're looking for help; they need the extra assistance."

John said he did not have any prior experiences or interactions with SWD before becoming an academic advisor and shared this:

Think going into advising before having any experience, I might have had the mindset of "I have to baby them," but that's not always the case. More often than not, it's not the case. With no experience and no prior knowledge, I thought I had to be delicate, gentle, hold their hand the whole way, but I've never really had that experience. They're more independent than I initially assumed.

John said one of his roles as an academic advisor is to serve as a "guide" to SWD and that he adapts his academic advising strategy to each student, including SWD:

Always adapt how I do things. I can't show him [a visually impaired student] his Degree Works, so I have to verbally explain everything. Another student is deaf, and sometimes his interpreter can't come with him, so I have to adapt by facing him so he can read my lips, speaking more slowly, sometimes repeating things. I just adapt to make sure they're understanding and try to provide the best help I can.

John spoke about his struggles with striking the right balance of both challenge and support for SWD, stating, "So I feel inadequate like I'm not doing enough to help them in those moments." He cited a lack of resources, knowledge, and support provided by "upper management" as additional contributors to his struggles. However, he did clarify that he does have some level of ease when working with SWD, specifically when communicating with them: "The easiest part is just talking to them. They're often more understanding. Having those one-on-one conversations, just talking in general and explaining things, is the easiest part of the process."

John also added that he did have some support for his work from his employer through the connection he made with his university's DRC:

On a scale of one to ten, maybe a seven. It's extremely helpful having that connection. But there are still some things that neither of us can resolve, and then we're stuck again. Still, it's much better than having nothing.

He reiterated, though, that he did not have formal training in academic advising SWD and relied on "liaisons for each [advising] team" who could communicate with and ask questions of their campus' DRC staff.

Kevin

Kevin is an academic advisor II at a four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, R1 university, serving undergraduate majors in public policy, public health, nursing, and health professions. Kevin shared why he likes being an academic advisor:

One of the things that I really love the most about it is I can have a really profound impact on some students' lives. I know this because a person I encouraged to apply to the nursing program is graduating this semester, after a meeting I had with her two years ago. I know it can be transformative rather than transactional. I did enough transactional work in retail, and I want to be more transformative.

When asked to define disability, Kevin defined it in this way:

It depends on the ability that a specific person may not have compared to others. For instance, somebody could suffer from anxiety in certain situations where other people just breeze through those situations. Or they might have a physical impairment or a mental impairment that isn't so obvious. I suppose it depends on how it impacts their daily life.

Kevin further explained his definition of disability by referring to accommodations and describing disabilities being "wide-ranging:"

My understanding of disability is that the person who's living with that disability may need more assistance in doing certain things or may struggle doing things that the average person without that disability can do more easily. Sometimes it's not obvious; sometimes it's very obvious. It depends on the level of the disability as well.

Kevin said academic advising SWD gives him the opportunity to “work outside my comfort zone because students with those disabilities may need extra support to succeed where the average person may not need as much.” He said he does change his academic advising strategy when working with a SWD based on the “level and type of disability.” He told this story to illustrate that:

I have a particular student I’ve been seeing for two years who has a certain level of anxiety. I know that when he comes, I specifically go out of my way to see him because the more he sees me, the more comfortable he becomes. I adjust my behavior so he feels comfortable expressing himself.

Kevin described his role as an academic advisor to SWD as one where he should relay resources, let SWD know about the “office of accommodations,” and provide a “safe space”:

I become empathetic, provide a safe space, and connect them to resources.

Sometimes I say, “I notice you’re upset; you don’t have to tell me what’s going on, but this is a safe space and we have resources.” Depending on urgency, we have student of concern forms, hotlines, even taking them physically to the counseling center.

Kevin’s approach to striking a good balance between support and challenge is to “address academics first because it’s easier” with SWD, and encourage self-advocacy:

In the last meeting, I challenged him: “If you’re not getting assistance, this is always going to be a roadblock.” He came in to work on an emergency withdrawal and said doing that gives him a panic attack. I can’t do it for him, but being in my office makes him feel more comfortable. I offered input on phrasing,

documentation. Over time, students get consistency and comfort with me, so they can disclose more, and I can offer advice or resources.

Kevin could not recall any situations in which he found it difficult to academically advise SWD but said the work sometimes “pushes boundaries but does convey that where there is ease is in that I know what resources are available and can reach out to people in the office.”

Kevin did indicate that training around advising in general from his current institution influenced his beliefs about SWD. The training taught him how to connect resources to all students and how to gain assistance when needed. It also taught him to be more “empathic” and go beyond “societal norms, prejudices, or biases against people with disabilities.” However, he could not recall any times when he received support from his employer when academically advising SWD, nor could he recall receiving any training around academic advising SWD specifically. Instead, he relied on past work experience in another field: “I may have an advantage from working in retail, learning how to accommodate customers with disabilities. I brought that experience with me.” He did have a positive reaction to the idea of receiving training around academic advising SWD in the future, saying that he “can’t see how it wouldn’t benefit” him or his work with SWD.

Levi

At a four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, R1 university, Levi academic advises students in the undergraduate majors of education and the arts. He has a master's degree and is employed as an academic advisor II. Levi began his student affairs career with the College Advising Corp (CAC), working directly with K-12 students aspiring to go to

college, followed by another position in college admissions. He then began academic advising and shared the part of the work that is most meaningful to him:

I think having some of my CAC kids, you know, I've had them now since they were seniors in high school, and now they're juniors this year. To see some of them still going and pushing on, even when the odds are against them coming from APS schools ... The rewarding part is just seeing the students doing well.

Levi defined disability in a single word: "support." When asked to elaborate, he stated that it is "people who need a bit more support, whether that's emotionally or physically." When asked about his understanding of disabilities, he said that "some people may need support, and some may not, depending on the disability. Some people you can see it automatically, some you may not. But obviously, just being flexible to support whomever it is."

He describes SWD by first talking about inclusivity and campus accommodations, emphasizing "it's awesome that they are able to do these things, right? Because a century ago, they might not have had these opportunities. I'm glad higher education is possible for them." Levi explained his thoughts on academic advising SWD by sharing this story:

In the School of Music, we had a student who was blind, and the School of Music didn't know from a portfolio that he had these needs. He needed sheet music translated into Braille. That's where we have to be their cheerleader—saying to the School of Music, "This is something the student will need. How do we make it happen?" Also showing them why it's beneficial. If you have this ready, it'll help future students, too.

Levi said his colleague, who is a disability services coordinator on campus, is always accessible to him and willing to answer his questions regarding academic advising SWD. He also says his “progressive upbringing regarding people with disabilities” was influential to his current beliefs about SWD:

I never saw issues like no ramps for wheelchairs. I grew up in the suburbs, there was money. Even in the city, people were willing to help. That’s the support part. Growing up around so many different people, nothing really surprises me. If you aren’t used to seeing people who are different, you might react oddly. But I was used to it, so it helps me in advising. You can’t surprise me.

Levi said his role as an academic advisor to SWD is part of a “support system,” and when asked if or how he adapted his academic advising strategies when working with SWD, he referenced a story about working with a visually impaired student: “I turned my screen around to show the evaluation, explaining visually. He mentioned he was blind. I realized I needed to elaborate more verbally.” Levi also said class accommodations are important for SWD, and he said he tells SWD academic advice to “get them.”

Levi said he feels at ease with academic advising SWD, primarily crediting his resource in disability services and how quickly they provide accommodations to SWD: “They got it done in a short time, so I felt supported by them.”

Levi described the training he has received around academic advising SWD: “I think we had a couple of sessions as a team, but not official training. Every situation is different. Maybe we can hone in on specific situations. Overall, it’s fine. I use what I have and my experience.”

Monica

Monica began her career in higher education as a faculty member before moving into a staff academic advising role at a four-year, large, mostly nonresidential, R1 university, where she has worked for over a decade. She said, “I really do enjoy working with students, helping them, giving them advisement as to different classes they need to take, talking to them about possibilities. That’s kind of what led me to academic advising.” When asked to define disability, Monica shared:

That hits a little personally for me because I do have a child who is on the spectrum with autism. So, I think it’s when a person is viewed as not neurotypical or the “average” student, and that they may deal with challenges, whether mentally, cognitively, or physically. From a professional standpoint, I’d say it’s someone who may deal with physical or mental challenges as it relates to academic success. They need certain support, maybe more so than the average student.

She added, “They are capable of having academic success;” however, the supports “need to be put in place.” Monica said she relies on referrals to her campus’ disability resources center, stating, “I’m not sure what all we have to offer.” Monica stated that her upbringing involved an appreciation of people in general, including SWD, relaying:

We’ve done some things to accommodate students with disabilities, but no strong directive other than that. I’ve been raised to treat everyone with respect and view everyone as capable. If I can support them or give resources, that’s what I’m going to do.

Monica described her role as an academic advisor to SWD: “We are to support our students in whatever ways we can academically.” She added that she adapted her academic advising strategies when working with SWD by “providing more detailed information” than she would to students without disabilities.

Monica mentioned that she treats all students equally and does not “reduce challenge necessarily, but I guide them to what might be more suitable.” She could not recall any difficulties she’s had when academic advising SWD and instead said she feels very at ease with them:

I feel in tune with students who display or might have hidden disabilities. Because of personal experience with my child, I’m more aware. If I see signs, I mention ACE [the disability resource center at her campus]. Physical disabilities are more straightforward—adjusting environment, for example.

Monica felt supported by her supervisor and shared, “We had a student with a physical disability who needed a more accessible space. Our supervisor encouraged us to move the meeting to a conference room for comfort.” Monica said she has not received any training around academic advising SWD but “would welcome formalized training.”

Thematic Analysis

Based on the perspectives and narratives of the 13 participants mentioned earlier, this section seeks to illuminate the thematic findings. The research questions explored were the following:

RQ1. What are the academic advisors’ perceptions of advising SWD?

RQ2. How do advisors make meaning of their roles supporting SWD based on their perceptions of SWD?

RQ3. How do academic advisors describe the training and support, if any, they received to effectively advise SWD and their satisfaction with that training and support?

The primary themes identified from the data findings encompass the participants' perceptions of SWD, their roles in supporting SWD, and their experiences and satisfaction with training and support. Four of the eleven themes emerged around the first heading of *academic advisors' perceptions of SWD*, and these themes were: (1) lacking consensus on definitions of disability and SWD, (2) viewing SWD as resourceful and academically capable (3) establishing comfortable connections with SWD, and (4) adjusting academic advising approaches for SWD. Three of the eleven themes emerged around the second heading or research question of *academic advisors' perceptions of their roles in supporting SWD*, and these themes were (1) serving as advocates and liaisons, (2) navigating institutional barriers, and (3) experiencing professional rewards. The final four themes captured participants' experiences and satisfaction with *academic advisors' experiences and satisfaction with training and support* the participants received to effectively advise SWD, and these themes were (1) lacking knowledge, (2) lacking desired training, (3) receiving reactive or insufficient support, and (4) engaging in self-directed learning and networking.

Academic Advisors' Perceptions of SWD

In response to RQ1 (*What are the academic advisors' perceptions of advising SWD?*), four themes were derived from the academic advisors' personal beliefs, attitudes, and experiences regarding SWD and emerged from narratives around academic advisors' perceptions of advising students with a disability (SWD) and how they perceive their

SWD. These themes are: (1) lacking consensus on definitions of disability and SWD, (2) viewing SWD as resourceful and academically capable, (3) establishing comfortable connections with SWD, and (4) adjusting academic advising approaches for SWD.

In other words, the academic advisors in this study lacked a consensus on the definitions of disability and SWD, and each of their definitions informed their perceptions of this populations. Most of the participants viewed SWD as resourceful and capable of achieving academic achievement, and they were able to establish comfortable connections with their SWD during advising sessions, though they did adjust their academic advising methods and approaches when working with SWD. Each of these themes is further detailed below.

Lacking Consensus on Definitions of Disability and SWD

Participants shared various definitions of disability and SWD, citing circumstances, strengths, weaknesses, and self-described neutrality, with definitions ranging from deficit based to asset based approaches. Ashley said: “I would say that disability means *circumstance*, either someone's ability or challenge to perform a certain task.” Caleb said, “I'd like to define it as a pretty much a delay. You know, just any type of delay, you know, whether it's a physical, mental, or emotional delay. It's just a delay in the regular experience that others would have.” Elsa spoke about her awareness of a deficit based approach to SWD and stated:

I think with disability, a lot of people find it as a nasty, dirty word because people are like, “Oh, you shouldn't call them disabled. You should see them as differently abled.” I'm kind of neutral. I think it depends on the individual. But

when it comes to people, I think it's just that having to figure out different navigational ways to access the same information.

One participant, Greg, defined disability as the presence of accommodations: “So my first thought would be an individual requires additional resources and assistance to make their situation equitable alongside the majority of others.”

All thirteen participants of this study expressed how other experiences influenced or shaped their definitions. Elsa relays a reflection here:

When growing up, there was really a big stigma against people who have autism. I have a cousin who has autism, and I remember my family would be like calling me things being like, “Oh, well, he's doing way better than you. Why aren't you doing better than him? Is he supposed to be smarter than you?” And I was like, “How is that negative?” So, I know there's always been kind of like that negativity towards people with autism or mental illness.

For example, Isaiah stated: “I think disability in referencing people it's a spectrum. I mean, there's a lot that we can consider a disability, something that impacts the way that your life, you know, typically has to unfold daily, you know.”

Participants' definitions of disability or SWD encompassed both asset based and deficit based perspectives (University of Memphis, 2018). Two participants who seemed to hold a deficit based perspective expressed a belief that all SWD needed accommodations and that those who identify with this group lack something. Participants who provided definitions that included asset based viewpoints described disability as an actuality where people operate outside of social norms. They said that the term varies

depending on the viewpoint of the other individual or the institution's policies, rather than the SWD.

These varying definitions among participants align with the literature reviewed previously that also presented varying definitions, with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defining it as an impairment or any physical or mental condition that impacts a person's ability to engage in certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the outside world (participation restrictions) (CDC, 2024), while the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 *et seq.* (1990), on the other hand, defines a person with a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such a disability, or a person who is perceived by others as having such a disability."

Participants acknowledged their difficulty in encapsulating disability or SWD in a single description or definition, often pointing to listings or extensive categorization of physical, mental, emotional, and learning characteristics. These intricacies were also found in the literature review, as researchers have classified disabilities in a variety of ways, including "physical" and "mental" (e.g., Adams and Proctor, 2010; Fuller et al., 2009; Olney & Brockelman, 2003), and when defining SWD for this study, even this author included people enrolled in a course or institution of higher education who reported having deafness or serious difficulty hearing; blindness or severe difficulty seeing; serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition; or severe difficulty walking or climbing stairs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a).

Viewing SWD as Resourceful and Academically Capable

Seven participants regarded SWD as capable and resourceful, with Monica noting, "I think they [SWD] are definitely capable of having academic success." This is consistent with Vacarro et al. (2019), noting that SWD successfully navigate disabling environments and related academic barriers was by openly discussing their disability and articulating disability-related needs, as well as utilizing available resources, practicing good self-care, working harder to succeed and challenge stereotypes, and viewing disability as a positive aspect of self. Concerning the abilities of SWD, Brian expressed his views:

There are some students that come in with the best attitude and readiness to learn.

I have had a few students that despite their disability are ready to move forward and come to our appointments prepared with questions and or course suggestions.

Regarding SWD resourcefulness, Faith said "all [her] experiences" advising SWD have been easy, stating that "often they're already aware of what they need to do and may only want to discuss their next semester classes with no need to discuss much."

All thirteen participants said that the SWD they had advised had qualified for and been admitted into college independently and often with more barriers than others, and many noted that self-advocacy by the SWD was pivotal to the SWD's success to date. Participants wanted to encourage self-advocacy and empower their SWD. Many spoke of witnessing SWD being highly successful at their institutions, and seven participants regarded SWD as capable and resourceful.

One participant highlighted the advantages SWD provide to institutions of higher education, an asset based way of thinking that is consistent with SMD (Oliver, 1990):

John stated that “They [SWD] are often more understanding. Having those one-on-one conversations, just talking in general and explaining things, is the easiest part of the process.” According to Vacarro et al. (2019), SWD also question preconceptions, take care of themselves, work hard to achieve, utilize available resources, and view their disabilities as a positive aspect of who they are.

It is worth mentioning that previous literature shows SWD who were previously on IEPs or 504 plans before college are likely more equipped to follow the guidance required to receive accommodations on college campuses (Hoogendoorn, D. 2021; Rogers-Shaw et al., 2023). However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), the SWD six-year graduation rate is 49.5%, which indicates that this student group still faces barriers despite their resourcefulness and capabilities identified by seven of the participants, and the data show that these barriers could be greater for those who have not previously self-advocated for an IEP or 504 or had someone advocate for them.

Establishing Comfortable Connections with SWD

Ten participants perceived SWD as easy to work with, and John said, “They’re often more understanding. Having those one-on-one conversations, just talking in general and explaining things, is the easiest part of the process.” Brian had similar experiences: “I have had a few students that, despite their disability, are ready to move forward and come to our appointments prepared with questions and or course suggestions.” John also expressed, “Students with disabilities, who really look for that help and guidance, are often more appreciative. They’re always great, always fun.”

Greg relayed a story of a SWD who arrived at academic advising in a wheelchair: “And for her, she did not want any special treatment. She wanted the class and the work the same way everyone else did.” Faith said a SWD is a “person with a disability [who] may need a little bit of an aid” but nothing more.

Ten participants said they felt comfortable working with SWD and cited reasons such as consistent communication from SWD, SWD being proactive in their assistance-seeking, SWD having greater self-awareness of their individual needs, the advisor having their own understanding of necessary accommodations and familiarity with disabilities through personal or familial experiences, and the advisor also having empathy for the SWD fostered through established relationships with people with disabilities beyond their university work settings. In her response, Hailey said, “I think it [advising] just goes a little more smoothly the next time when you get more familiar with the student [SWD] and more familiar with their style.”

Adjusting Academic Advising Approaches for SWD

All thirteen participants spoke about ways they adjust their academic advising approach or methods when working with SWD, citing the diverse needs of SWD, personal or educational backgrounds, or the barriers to advising presented by unaccommodating advising or university systems as their reasons for doing so. All participants discussed ways they adapted their academic advising procedures or approaches to better assist SWD. Some were physical adaptations such as “making [advising office] documents easier to read.” Participants discussed making emotional adaptations, including bringing greater “empathy” to the advising session and working to

provide "a safe space and connecting them [SWD] to resources." Dana spoke about a physical adjustment she made:

There is a student in my population who has a stutter and a twitch. I've noticed that when speaking to him, it seems to get worse with direct eye contact or looking at him for too long. So, I have adapted our sessions by not looking at him as much but still showing him that I am paying attention to what he is saying by staying engaged in the conversation without overly staring his way. This makes him more comfortable and has decreased his stuttering and twitching during our visits.

John spoke about adjusting his academic advising approach by using "empathy" when academic advising SWD:

I use empathy. I think, "If I was in their shoes, how would I understand it?" Then I follow up with, "Does that make sense? Should I explain it differently?" If they say no, I try to think creatively of alternative ways to explain it, just trying to find what works best for them.

Faith spoke about adjusting department practices or policies:

I have adapted my advising strategy by allowing more time [than we are normally allowed] for the student [SWD] in the appointment. Going over all details step by step and allowing them space and time to not only understand but explain any issues they may be experiencing and ask any questions they may have.

Isaiah spoke about spending more time building relationships with SWD he academic advises "through building relationship and meeting them where they are: We're really trying to form that connection, make them feel safe in our office and that type of

thing.” In fact, adjustments made to allow for more academic advising time during a session with a SWD were brought up by seven participants.

Participants also spoke about changing policies and procedures to accommodate SWD. For example, Ashley spoke about moving a SWD from a shorter group advising session to a longer private advising session despite only planning to offer the shorter group advising sessions that day. Seven participants spoke about extending the time allotted by their supervisors or universities for individual advising appointments with their SWD. These participants appeared to be naturally employing the model suggested by Zilvinskis et al. (2020) where SWD can receive resources relevant to their requirements by having a personalized academic plan that accounts for their disability and unique accommodations.

Six participants also desired to speak about disability services policies or accommodations in their advising appointments with SWD, despite those conversations being reserved for disability resource center (DRC) staff according to their university system policies, which is consistent with other institutions (Strimel et al., 2023). Participants also spoke about the support they provide SWD only, such as ensuring that they know how to best navigate their college or university campus physical spaces and ensuring that SWD is provided with the resources they need to be successful in their academics, i.e., adapted textbooks, classroom technology, etc. Others, like Caleb, commented on how SWD brought in their advocates and signed permissions to include those advocates in their advising sessions, which ultimately changed their advising method for that individual SWD: “I also made sure to send various follow-up emails after every appointment to the student and her mother so that there was no confusion on what

meetings were about and the necessary information needed from each meeting” Caleb said. Dana reflected on being mindful of the adjustments she makes to her academic advising approach and methods with SWD, communicating that:

Prior being younger, whenever they said somebody was hearing impaired, deaf or whatever the case might be. I noticed people just yell ... It was like watching other people do things. You're like, okay, so I guess that's what we're doing. But as you get older, you realize, okay. That's probably not the best thing to do.

Participants, who came from a variety of cultural backgrounds and some having family members with disabilities or who have disabilities themselves, spoke about how their identities and past experiences influenced adjustments they made to their academic advising of SWD. Greg discussed the influence of his family's "tough love" style: “But my culture, the way that I was raised. It was pressed upon me just to figure it out. which is the language that I translated to developing my tools and toolkits [for academic advising SWD].” Levi mentioned their upbringing as the reason for bringing in more accommodation to his academic advising with SWD: "Growing up in New York, I feel like it was more progressive with access and accommodations early on." Some participants said their prior training and education influence their approaches to academic advising SWD, with one participant saying, "I feel like my education is what made me more in tune to realize that disabilities aren't necessarily just what you see, right?"

Academic Advisors’ Perceptions of Their Roles in Supporting SWD

In response to RQ2 (*How do advisors make meaning of their roles supporting SWD based on their perceptions of SWD?*), three themes emerged around academic advisors making meaning of their roles supporting SWD based on their perceptions of

SWD from the narratives around how advisors interpret their understanding of their roles, responsibilities, professional identity, and how this identity influences their behavior toward supporting SWD. These themes are: (1) serving as advocates and liaisons, (2) navigating institutional barriers, and (3) experiencing professional rewards

In other words, the academic advisors in this study saw themselves as navigating institutional barriers while serving as advocates and liaisons. Despite the obstacles faced or additional work and roles this required of them, the academic advisors' engagement with SWD was fueled by the professional rewards they experienced working with SWD, and the fulfilling nature of these roles. Each of these themes is further detailed below.

Serving as Advocates and Liaisons

Academic advisors in this study described serving as advocates or liaisons to connect academic and university resources, such as the DRC, to their SWD as part of their responsibilities. To ensure that their SWD received the necessary resources, ten academic advisors described going beyond acting as only a liaison and actively advocated to academic departments, faculty, facility staff, and DRC on behalf of their advisee. This experience was consistent with Lombardi et al. (2020), who found that the academic advisor role can encompass helping to create accommodation plans, advocating for student needs with institutional stakeholders, and fostering an inclusive postsecondary setting. It is also consistent with Soria (2023):

Academic advisors play an important role in supporting marginalized and systemically excluded students and facilitating their success in higher education (Museus, 2021). Additionally, advisors help students navigate the higher education culture, direct students to important resources and services, and foster

students' sense of belonging (Hovland, 1997; Soria, 2012; Strayhorn, 2015). (p. 18)

The findings also provide credence to the previous literature's position on academic advisors' roles, which holds that academic advisors should guide students through college life, point them in the direction of useful resources, and inform them of the standards for their chosen major and courses (Hawthorne, 2021). This further aligns with results found by Fleming et al. (2017) that state in order to enhance the academic experience of SWD, as many as three areas in university life must be improved: academics (instructors and advisors, accommodations, and instructions), campus environment (disability awareness, inclusive attitudes, and universal access and accessibility), and campus resources (DRCs, growth areas, and visibility connectedness).

Advisors' narratives illustrated their experiences as liaisons between SWD and their academic departments, parents of the SWD, institutional policies, and institutional resources such as disability resource services and the counseling center. Hailey described her role as being a constant resource guide to SWD:

Making sure that I'm showing them the information, guiding them with the information, maybe even if they say something to me that makes me think like maybe they did get half services in high school or to kind of, you know, have that conversation with them, giving them office and accommodations interpretation, making sure that they understand that they do have rights in higher ed.

Ten advisors said they had acted as advocates for SWD while in their academic advising roles. Levi said, "I just see myself as part of their support system. At a large institution like this, you have to be their advocate, cheerleader, and support."

One participant, Hailey, proactively acknowledged that the role of academic advisor generally includes serving as an advocate and liaison for all students, not just those with disabilities: “I have a level of responsibility and accountability to students. One of my colleagues has a term called the hidden curriculum, which is learning how campus works.” She also said, “When it comes to dealing with students with disabilities, I have to make sure that I don't treat them like their disability.”

Some participants felt their role in supporting SWD was to encourage self-advocacy among their SWD. Caleb would “encourage accountability and independence so that the students set reasonable goals and outcomes for themselves by navigating their learning experience as it relates to their disability.” Many of the ten participants who advocated for the SWD also spoke about their struggles with advocating for their SWD while not fully understanding how to effectively serve them despite their expectations and their employer’s expectations that every student be effectively served. Brian describes the obstacles to advocacy as follows:

When you are trying to work and connect with multiple departments to ensure the student is getting everything that they need. As we are only advisors and can help them with their academic paths we have little control of the rest.

Navigating Institutional Barriers

Participants spoke about navigating institutional barriers when academic advising SWD, and earlier literature indicates that many obstacles prevent SWD from advancing and completing a college degree (Francis et al., 2018). Isaiah explained how he directly contacted his campus's disability resource center to make sure a SWD he was academic advising received a translator after a SWD contacted Isaiah when the SWD was told one

was not available on campus when the SWD was supposed to receive one, “But I'm kind of, and in a way, support because I'm receiving the information in real-time” Isaiah said. The barriers the advisors described were often caused by structural inequalities that Carroll et al. (2020) identified, such as grading systems, attendance restrictions, faculty reporting obligations, and the overall college environment. Lack of institutional leadership intervention was noted as one of the structural barriers two academic advisors in this study faced while working with SWD. Dana expresses a lack of support when effectively advising students in that:

No one goes out of their way to make sure you are okay when dealing with a student with disabilities. In the beginning when we were getting training and having meetings, I felt supported because we had others to talk to and give pointers on how to handle students with disabilities. Now we don't have that, but I wouldn't say I don't have support I just don't think anyone is concerned with making sure people are able to assist students with disabilities due to other issues that might take precedence in the office.

Having to navigate those barriers was, at times, a surprising new role for the academic advisors. Six academic advisors in this study spoke about receiving pushback from their supervisors or university leadership when getting the resources needed for their SWD advisees. Some pushbacks were due to confusion about who should be responsible for serving the specific needs of the SWD, whether it be the academic advisors, DRC staff, faculty, physical environment staff, etc. John explained:

I have difficulties with upper management. I'll try to get resources or special petitions for students, and they'll say no, or they don't know who to talk to.

Sometimes I have to fight a bit on behalf of the student, which isn't fair to them.

So, lack of support or knowledge from above can be challenging.

Participants also noted the institution's expectation for large academic advising caseloads and limited appointment periods or times as structural barriers. Ashley expressed the frustration of navigating through what was made to feel like transactional advising periods with SWD:

There is a culture here, especially during peak times of the semester, to see students as quickly and efficiently as possible. Which I understand. I do not dawdle. I understand using an economy of words to get through as quickly as I can. However, for some student populations, specifically those with disabilities, they do not have the luxury of a quick service. With certain students, they need that extra time.

Experiencing Professional Rewards

Participants also found academic advising SWD fulfilling because it gave their professional duties or responsibilities greater purpose, and this fulfillment was cited as why some of them decided to become academic advisors—being a resource to students and seeing SWD succeed. Nine participants discussed how their roles in academic advising SWD are rewarding and make their work more meaningful. “I really enjoy trying to assist students [SWD] in finding their way,” Brian said. Faith agreed that “to help students [SWD] realize their passions and their goals” is rewarding, and that advisors desire to make a “profound impact on students’ lives” through their academic advising work.

Monica addressed what led to and still motivates her to maintain her professional role in academic advising, stating, “I really enjoy working with students [SWD], helping them, advising them on which classes they should take, and talking to them about possibilities.” While discussing why academic advising has been a more rewarding job than other ones he has held in higher education, John asserts, “I enjoy advising. I believe that advising is one of my strongest skills in higher education. I enjoy chatting to students. And it makes me feel good to help them.”

Academic Advisors’ Experiences and Satisfaction with Training and Support

In response to RQ3 (*How do academic advisors describe the training and support, if any, they received to effectively advise SWD and their satisfaction with that training and support?*), academic advisors' shared their experiences and evaluation of professional development resources or lack thereof, encapsulating experiences related directly to their professional training, preparedness, resources, and satisfaction with institutional support. Subsequent themes capture participants' experiences with any training and support they received to effectively advise SWD and their satisfaction with that training and support. These themes are (1) Lacking Knowledge, (2) Lacking Desired Training, (3) Receiving Reactive or Insufficient Support, and (4) Engaging in Self-Directed Learning and Networking.

In other words, the academic advisors in this study reported lacking knowledge and training on how to academic advise SWD. Due to the lack of knowledge and training, the participants relied on support from their supervisors and institutions—support that they described as reactive or insufficient—as well as engaged in self-directed experiential

learning and networking with campus partners, like DRC staff, to cover their knowledge gaps. Each of these themes is further detailed below.

Lacking Knowledge

Participants spoke about not knowing or understanding the full extent of their SWD needs or what academic advising accommodations or resources to provide them. This is particularly concerning given that approximately one out of five undergraduate students now report having a disability (Snyder et al., 2019), and that out of all students enrolled in four-year institutions, approximately 20% have learning disabilities; 32% have ADHD; 26% have a mental illness; 12% have health disabilities; 18.5% have hearing, mobility, sight, or speech disabilities; and the remaining 3% had other unclassified disabilities (Stolzenberg et al., 2019). Through her perspective, Hailey emphasized the difficulties of this lack of knowledge when she said, “that is a challenge because I really, other than sending them to access and accommodation, I feel like I haven't been given guidance necessary, you know, to really help the student.”

Lack of understanding of what the employer viewed as the participants' role in serving SWD effectively and ensuring they were fully doing their jobs was another area where academic advisors felt they needed training and support. Ashley explained that her supervisor's goals for advising SWD were unclear in the following way:

During our [onboarding] training, there really was no mention of SWD. It was interesting to see that coming from, um, you know, that special ed background, not having that in the focus of the training, I think, makes advisors a little uneasy as they approach students with disabilities. Because when we do have a student coming in the queue or a scheduled appointment, and then we hear from the

assistant director, or it's asked, "Hey, can someone help out with this student?"

oftentimes, the majority of the advisors kind of look at each other and they take a beat. And then they're like, "I guess I can" or "sorry, I'm busy." And they could be busy, things happen, but I think people are fearful or cautious to step up.

Isaiah reflected on the helplessness he felt when not knowing how to accommodate a SWD in need of academic advising:

I don't think I have very many challenges to where I say it's difficult. It's only difficult in terms of the mental energy that you have to give it sometimes. But the difficulty of it, I think it was really hard for me to see how I can help, you know, especially in a situation like that where it feels like the parent doesn't know what to do.

John expressed the inadequacies he feels when academic advising SWD at his university:

I often feel that with my music student who's blind, I'm not supporting him the way he needs. He struggles getting material converted into Braille for his music classes, and I don't know who to contact in the department to get that fixed.

Unfortunately, SWD have also reported poor working relationships with academic advisors due to their lack of knowledge around accessibility (Hong, 2015). The SWD have called for more intentional support from their academic advisors, given that they, along with instructors, significantly promote or hinder educational outcomes for SWD (Hong, 2015).

Lacking Desired Training

Many participants said that there was no formal training specifically in advising SWD. This lack of training is likely being felt by SWD who have previously reported that accommodations services were too generic, alluded to a need for more training for higher education professionals on serving their student population, and expressed dissatisfaction with insufficient services, claiming that university staff lacked the necessary resources to handle their needs appropriately (Francis et al., 2018).

Seven participants in this study indicated on the electronic demographic survey they completed prior to our interviews that they had not received training to advise SWD effectively. The six individuals who indicated that they did receive training reported diverse modalities of training to effectively advise SWD, including in-person workshops, online webinars, continuing education courses for educators or healthcare professionals, on-the-job training or shadowing, and formal university or college coursework. One of the participants who stated they had received related training explained that a senior-level academic advisor on their team was a liaison to the DRC on their campus and that the senior-level academic advisor provided “several trainings for current and new advisors” on how to serve SWD through the liaison role. “Trainings [the liaison offered] covered an array of disabilities, strategies on how to approach such students, and best practices for advisors.” While participants in this research study came to the profession of academic advising from various other career fields, including retail, nonprofit, K–12 education, and other areas of student affairs, it is also worth noting that degrees in social science disciplines such as social work and counseling were held among the four participants, and that those four participants with these degrees spoke about having had the opportunity to previously interact professionally with people with disabilities and receive training

related to this population as part of those degree programs. Despite this, the majority (eight) of the participants said they lacked the training they felt would be necessary to advise SWD effectively.

There was an expressed desire from most of the participants in this study to be trained to effectively advise SWD. For example, one participant wondered if, when a SWD disclosed struggling with sensory issues, the advisor should present a course plan that would not include back-to-back courses without significant breaks in between to prevent sensory overload that could harm the SWD and their performance within their courses. Another one questioned whether it would be appropriate for them to suggest courses where rooms are closer to each other to a student with a physical disability to allow for easier campus navigation even if the SWD did not ask for such guidance. These findings align with earlier studies that found only 44% of advisors have taken a disability-related college course; 47% admitted to having no ADA training; advisors' comfort levels vary greatly when it comes to working with SWD; and student affairs practitioners feel unprepared to support SWD (Preece et al., 2007; Vaccaro & Kimball, 2017). Again, most advisors in this study said they would welcome training around effectively advising SWD as they did feel inadequate or as though they did not have all the necessary tools that they needed to be able to serve SWD competently. Although they did not know specifically which training recommendations they would offer—aside from the one participant who said they enjoyed having SWD advocates within the office and available in the form of a committee—being able to dictate and co-design the training themselves was desired by the participants.

Most participants could not offer specific recommendations for what those training programs around effectively advising SWD would include. However, one participant, Dana, referenced a former training format that was valuable to her: “Previously, there was a committee who would meet with us [academic advisors] monthly. They would conduct training and provide tips and resources to develop our ability to assist students with disabilities adequately. However, that no longer exists at this time.” Many participants re-articulated a necessity for specialized training around effectively advising SWD with remarks such as “I think we need more information or more training in our department as it relates to supporting those students” and “more training [that] would help us know what to do.”

Receiving Reactive or Insufficient Support

To serve as many students as possible within the university, some advisors reported that they were limited to the amount of time they could devote to every academic advising session, including those with SWD. They often could not establish a good rapport with their SWD and had to switch to a more transactional advising approach. This included 45-minute appointments or even instances where drop-in-only formats served students for as little as 10 to 15 minutes at a time. Participants said these time limits failed to recognize that SWD might require more time to simply use their accommodations appropriately within the advising sessions, such as loading screen readers or waiting for an interpreter to arrive who could aid the necessary communication of information. These time constraints caused participants to feel unsupported by their university when advising SWD.

Five participants said their supervisors provided reactive support to advising a SWD more effectively when support was requested by the advisor or when the supervisor became aware of the disability. Ashley spoke about her supervisor granting her a private session at a group advisement session at orientation and allowing her to take additional time with a SWD, but only after the supervisor became aware of the disability: "I knew that I had [been given by my supervisor] ample time to assist a student with generalized anxiety and their parent, and did not feel rushed in doing so [academic advising them in private]." But Ashley noticed how inequitable that arrangement could be for other SWD not noticed by the academic advising supervisor or who did not want to disclose their disability. High caseloads overall and unreasonable expectations by others were other areas that impacted their effective academic advising of SWD and contributed to participants feeling a lack of institutional support. Elsa conveyed:

A challenge I face a lot is the expectations some have for disabled students. I've had parents tell me their students have ADHD or Autism and expect special treatment that goes beyond accommodation. They expect me to call their students daily or to reach out and make sure they are in class. I can't do that. I have over 400 students and if I were to do that it would take away time from appointments.

Similarly, Monica recalled that her "supervisor encouraged us to move the meeting to a conference room for comfort," referring to an instance when she had been advising a SWD with a physical disability since Monica's own office was too small to accommodate the necessary accessibility to assist a SWD. Hailey expresses how her supervisor provides reactive support when she encounters barriers in advising SWD:

I do feel like from my direct supervisor that if we ever feel that we've, I want to say, hit a wall, right, where maybe we're not making progress, she's always willing to step in. And her approach can be different than my approach. So, the way that she's speaking to the student may be able to resonate a little better, right? So, I do feel if I ever get to a place where I feel like I'm not connecting with that student or they're not understanding, or maybe I'm just maybe not understanding them right and what they need, that I can bring in my direct supervisor and she definitely would be able to help me in that situation.

Although the expectation of the university system campuses where these participants worked was that DRC staff would determine the most appropriate accommodations for SWD navigating all areas of university life, participants spoke about the accommodations deemed necessary for the SWD within the classroom not also providing to the SWD during advisement appointments, leaving students without the necessary university support to receive effective academic advising. Those included accommodations provided in the classrooms to hearing and visually impaired students and those with mobile or physical disabilities but not provided elsewhere, including during academic advising. Isaiah illustrated this when he described a difficult advising circumstance his SWD was subjected to:

We had a student that was deaf or hard of hearing. And there was no translator available for her on campus [during our academic advising appointment]. That student came into my office with their aunt. And for a while, we just kind of struggled to try to figure out how to communicate [through the aunt who was not a trained interpreter].

Participants identified a lack of emotional support around their work with SWD as they made meaning of their work and roles through their own identities, or after providing emotional support to an SWD and having some emotional transference occur while academic advising an SWD. Greg describes his perspective in this:

My first thought is whether or not we are doing good enough...we have had several semesters in a row of increasing caseloads. I have also been told that a norm of advising is burnout. And in my department, we are encouraged to keep it at most like half an hour. Simply because we don't have the time. Because we don't have the personnel. And for many students [SWD], that is fine. But for some, they really need to work through some things. So my thought on advising is that it is fairly inadequate. The feedback I've gotten from my students [SWD] is that the appointments are not... they weren't good enough. They didn't last long enough. They weren't informative enough. And I took all of that to mean that they just weren't addressed. They weren't met where they were.

Engaging in Self-Directed Learning and Networking

Another theme that emerged was that participants often relied on their self-directed learning around effectively academically advising SWD and that they took the initiative to adapt advising strategies or implement advising accommodations for the SWD independently. For example, some supervisors asked for private rooms or extra time to advise SWD. Some participants connected with and even built professional relationships with DRC staff so that they refer students whom they believed needed academic or other accommodation, believing that those personal referrals would create a more positive university environment for their SWD or so that they could receive

guidance from the DRC staff on being more accommodated in academic advising sessions with SWD. Earlier research has shown that collaboration with other university professionals on campus, including academic advisors, significantly benefits the work of DRPs and the success of SWD (Strimel et al., 2023). John discussed his ties with campus partners in DRC:

I built a connection with someone in Access and Accommodations. He's always there to help when I don't know how to handle something, and I can help him, too. We have a mutual bond, and that's where most of my support comes from. I do appreciate that help.

Many participants said they were forced to rely on self-directed ways of receiving training on how to work with SWD. Elsa said, "We haven't received any training; anything I do is self-taught, self-learned, or researched." Some participants said they drew upon transferable skills from other jobs, such as mental health counseling, social services, or customer service. Kevin shared:

I don't think I received any formal training. Maybe some advice here and there, but no specific training geared towards advising students with disabilities. I may have an advantage from working in retail, learning how to accommodate customers with disabilities. I brought that experience with me.

Although eight participants spoke of not receiving the amount or appropriate type of training they felt necessary to advise SWD effectively, they took other initiatives to learn about supporting SWD. Elsa expressed that "we haven't received any training, anything I do is self-taught, self-learned, or researched." Faith highlighted experiential learning experiences as one way she learned about supporting SWD:

In advisement, you shadow other advisors, learn the programs, processes, and majors. If you so happen to shadow an advisement session with a student with disabilities, then you're in luck because you get to see firsthand how to advise those students.

Four out of the six participants who indicated that they had received some type of related training attributed their relationships with their campus disability resource centers as the reason for their prior learning and ability to gather formal and informal training and resources on effectively advising SWD. Caleb spoke of his taking the initiative to create a professional network of resources of his own on his campus to support his SWD better:

I established contact with representatives from the DRC office to follow up on the best practices for recommending services for students who may exhibit the signs of having a disability but have not disclosed their disability or reached out to DRC indicating a need for support services.

Knight et al. (2018) state that partnerships like these between DRCs and campus professionals, including academic advisors, could assist SWD in progression, retention, and graduation to connect those SWD and exhibit indicators of academic risk with additional campus resources (Knight et al., 2018). They add that by including resources for SWD in every aspect of university life, SWD may use the knowledge of all campus professionals and avoid being dependent just on the DRCs (Knight et al., 2018).

Chapter Summary

This chapter included an overview of the participants and their narrative responses to the interview protocol. Four themes of academic advisors' perceptions of

SWD, three themes of their perceived roles in supporting SWD, and four themes of their experiences and satisfaction with training and support emerged from the participant narratives. Chapter five will briefly review the data analysis, discuss the study's results and findings, and explore this study's broader implications and future recommendations.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore academic advisors' perceptions around advising students with a disability (SWD), how they perceive SWD, their self-perceived roles in supporting SWD on their campuses, and their training around advising SWD. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1. What are the academic advisors' perceptions of advising SWD?

RQ2. How do advisors make meaning of their roles supporting SWD based on their perceptions of SWD?

RQ3. How do academic advisors describe the training and support, if any, they received to effectively advise SWD and their satisfaction with that training and support?

By using Oliver's (1990 and 2013) social model of disability (SMD) and Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support (CS) to frame the study, the goal of the study was to determine how academic advisors may have better experiences serving SWD on their college campuses.

Summary of the Participants and Findings

Thirteen participants completed the study. Nine participants held both bachelor's and master's degrees; the remaining four earned bachelor's degrees only. At the time of the study, participants all worked as academic advisors on an institution campus of a large, public university system in the southeast of the United States. They all performed

their roles under the same university system policies, guidelines, and training materials. Notably, two participants served as institutional leaders of academic advising while still directly advising students at the time of the study. Among the participants, years of experience as an academic advisor ranged from one to more than ten years. Arts, business, education, social science, STEM, and health professions were among the many associate and bachelor's degree majors that participants collectively advised. To their knowledge, all the participants confirmed having professional academic advising experience with at least one SWD. These participants' qualitative accounts highlight and reaffirm Rothwell and Shields (2021) claim that academic advising is an essential academic support in higher education.

The primary themes identified from the data findings encompass the participants' perceptions of SWD, their roles in supporting SWD, and their experiences and satisfaction with training and support. Four of the eleven themes emerged around the first heading of *academic advisors' perceptions of SWD*, and these themes were: (1) lacking consensus on definitions of disability and SWD, (2) viewing SWD as resourceful and academically capable (3) establishing comfortable connections with SWD, and (4) adjusting academic advising approaches for SWD. Three of the eleven themes emerged around the second heading or research question of *academic advisors' perceptions of their roles in supporting SWD*, and these themes were (1) serving as advocates and liaisons, (2) navigating institutional barriers, and (3) experiencing professional rewards. The final four themes captured participants' experiences and satisfaction with *academic advisors' experiences and satisfaction with training and support* the participants received to effectively advise SWD, and these themes were (1) lacking knowledge, (2) lacking

desired training, (3) receiving reactive or insufficient support, and (4) engaging in self-directed learning and networking.

Discussion of Findings

The SMD and CS frameworks were used to frame the study and provide a lens through which to interpret the findings. By integrating SMD with CS theory, an understanding of the academic advisor's perceptions supporting SWD can be enhanced, and societal structures and advising practices that should be adjusted, if necessary, can be identified to support the educational journeys of SWD better and improve the workplace of academic advisors and other student affairs professionals.

SMD: Academic Advisors Removing or Creating Hurdles for SWD on Campus?

The SMD indicates that disability barriers are formed mainly by societal norms and physical hurdles rather than innate characteristics of the individual, and this approach suggests that for SWD to engage in all facets of campus life fully, society—including the academic advisors—must adjust and remove these barriers (Oliver, 2013). This theory suggests that academic advisors create barriers or remove hurdles for their SWD through their advising work. It helps to understand the social and cultural influence of the advisors on the campus and their SWD through a new perspective, as the medical and social construction models—rather than this SMD—are particularly prominent within academic and university research contexts (Kimball et al., 2016).

None of the participants shared a definition of disability or SWD, and all their definitions were unique. While one participant sought out training and four participants in this research study came to the profession of academic advising from degrees in social science disciplines such as social work and counseling and spoke about having had the

opportunity to previously interact professionally with people with disabilities and receive training related to this population as part of those degree programs, the majority (eight) of the participants said they lacked the training they felt would be necessary to advise SWD effectively. This study's findings are consistent with those of Francis et al. (2018) and Hong (2015), who found that higher education professionals lack the necessary resources and training to effectively support SWD. Among the participants who had received training, some spoke about having to seek it out themselves through their professional networks and through self-directed learning. There were also different levels of satisfaction with that training and how it applied to their academic advising of SWD work, and they specifically highlighted the lack of training tailored to advising SWD as a major issue. This finding is consistent with an earlier study by Preece et al. (2007), who found that academic advisors lacked formal ADA training, indicating a specific need for this specific type of professional development. Overall, these narratives viewed through Oliver's (2013) SMD lens informed the themes of *lacking consensus on definitions of disability and SWD*, *lacking knowledge*, *lacking desired training*, and *engaging in self-directed learning and networking*. These uniformed views can lead to negative academic advisor perspectives and stigma that have all contributed to SWD less-than-ideal experiences (Abes & Wallace, 2018).

In this study, participants who had worked with multiple SWD or had related training appeared to feel more comfortable advising SWD and aligned more with Oliver's (2013) SMD perspective or asset based approach, and the *viewing SWD as resourceful and academically capable* theme emerged. Some came into almost perfect alignment with SMD by emphasizing that the difficulties faced by their SWD did not originate with

the students themselves but were rather a product of the institutional barriers, including those in academic advising, in which the SWD found themselves.

These results suggest that exposure to training around SWD and to the SWD themselves can create more confident academic advisors who feel prepared to work with SWD and even warrant establishing comfortable connections with the *SWD* theme. Further, advisors who perceived the SWD as "resourceful and capable of academic success" and aligned with Oliver's (2013) SMD approach that moved their advising practices from a deficit to an asset based approach appeared better able to identify how societal and institutional impediments at their campuses affected the SWD, rather than focusing on individual deficiencies of SWD. Advisors' awareness of existing institutional policies and procedures as barriers align with Oliver (1990, 2013), who asserted that societal adaptations, rather than merely individual accommodations, are required for inclusion. Therefore, the campuses of these academic advisors and their students appeared to benefit from their academic advisors being in better alignment with Oliver's (2013) SMD approach, as they embodied the *serving as advocates and liaisons* and *navigating institutional barriers* themes.

As they worked to remove campus barriers for their SWD, participants discovered they served as advocates and liaisons for their SWD between DRC and other campus partners. However, society's or the university's acceptance of the academic advisors as advocates or liaisons for their SWD varied. This variation was illustrated by the *receiving reactive or insufficient support* theme and could be seen from the viewpoint of one participant who felt supported when a supervisor "gave ample time to assist a student and not feel rushed" as opposed to another participant who did not feel supported

unless an “escalation arose,” indicating that leadership had to step in and make reactive decisions. Results indicate that academic advisors may be able to provide insights into the experiences of SWD on their campuses and also advise campus planners and leaders on how to be more accommodating to this growing student body.

While all of the academic advisors in this study shared narratives that illustrated *adjusting academic advising approaches for SWD* theme and how they altered their advising approaches in their one-on-one sessions with SWD, nearly all them, including those in leadership roles, also felt they lacked the authority and capacity to make the necessary changes to eliminate systemic obstacles preventing SWD from succeeding within their larger “society” or university environments. Many expressed frustrations with the barriers they encountered, as well as admiration for the self-advocacy many of the SWD had displayed and continued to display. Some advisors also described feeling unprepared or even surprised when encountering some of these structural obstacles firsthand.

Unfortunately, it appeared that sometimes the advisors themselves contributed to the “society” that implemented barriers for SWD on campus. For example, one participant described viewing disability as “delay,” and another referenced his own K-12 academic experience when defining how he viewed disability: “It was sort of a negative connotation. They had to be taken out [of the classroom] for special help.” These participants appeared to view disabilities as medical issues, which has been found to lead to criticism and the belief that people identifying with having disabilities need to have their disabilities *fixed*, per se, before they can fully participate in society (Kimball et al.,

2016). There appeared to be no recognition by these participants that disability barriers on their campus were formed mainly by societal norms and physical hurdles.

Even though some SWD do not require accommodations to succeed in college, some participants appeared to believe that all SWD required accommodations and additional support in all aspects. This might shed some light on why SWD reported that the societal obstacles in their surroundings were more significant barriers than their disabilities (Vaccaro et al., 2019). This deficit based approach these participants held runs counter to SMD theory that redirects attention from the public perception of those with disabilities to the biases encountered by such individuals (Goering, 2015), and these same participants also appeared to be deprived of the benefits of advising SWD that nine other participants spoke about, such as the rewards the role provides that was captured with the *experiencing professional rewards* theme. These results bolster the recommendation for more training on academic advising SWD, as it might not only serve the students but could also make the work of the academic advisor more rewarding for these student affairs professionals.

Finally, four participants shared their frustration with the lack of accessibility of their campuses, specifically how they are built in a way that is inaccessible. For example, Elsa articulated her displeasure over inaccessibility by stating:

What is even more frustrating is how inaccessible our campus is. A student in a wheelchair has to go around our entire building to enter our office since we have construction. The doors are often locked, and the accessible door buttons do not work. It's frustrating when I navigate campus and have to go out of my way to find a new way to access a building.

Dana also said, “In the building I currently work in, the only way up is the elevator, and the only way down is the elevator. But if something happens...If something happens and there's a fire, what's happening to those people who are working on the 26th floor? How are they getting down?”

CS: Balancing Challenge and Support for SWD within the Academic Advising Workplace

Sanford's (1966) CS theory indicates that when the academic advisor provides too much challenge for SWD and insufficient support, the SWD will not grow; alternatively, SWD growth will not occur if the academic advisor provides too much support and not enough challenge. Sanford's (1966) CS theory examines how academic advising might be optimized by advisors correctly balancing both challenge and support to serve SWD as they face their own increased challenges in their professional college and university workplace environments.

There was no consensus definition of disability or SWD among participants in this study, hence the *lacking consensus on definitions of disability and SWD* theme. According to the U. S. Department of Education (2022), students who disclosed having a disability were more likely to access supportive academic services, such as tutoring, writing centers, as well as study groups or office hours, compared to their peers who did not disclose their disability; therefore, many assume that SWD will actively and willingly seek necessary support from institutions when they are overly challenged (Squires et al., 2018). However, not having a shared definition of disability between students and student affairs professionals on campus could further impede this disclosure that increases chances for success through finding the right balance of challenge and support, and Los

Santos et al. (2019) found shame and a reluctance to disclose disabilities among most SWD, which can contribute to lower graduation rates. Beyond defining disability and SWD, Los Santos et al. (2019) said that administrators and university stakeholders must clearly define what constitutes accommodation in their student affairs divisions, including academic advising, and develop a comprehensive list of accommodations utilized in all areas of higher education in order to better support SWD.

All of the advisors in this study adjusted their advising strategies for SWD in order to maintain an appropriate balance of challenge and support, with all of them recognizing that they modified their advising approaches in some way for their SWD, hence the *adjusting academic advising approaches for SWD* theme. Many of them did so while acknowledging that they received no training or ineffective training on how to modify their practices, bolstering the lacking knowledge and *lacking desired training* themes, and many described doing so with little or reactive support from their supervisors or universities, also bolstering the *receiving reactive or insufficient support* theme. Reactive institutional help was common because of the excessive caseload and time limitations, indicating the academic advisors themselves were experiencing their own imbalance. SWD have reported poor working relationships with academic advisors due to their lack of knowledge around accessibility and have called for more intentional support from their academic advisors, given that they, along with instructors, significantly promote or hinder educational outcomes for SWD (Hong, 2015). Both sides—the SWD and their academic advisors—are dissatisfied and seem to be suffering from *lacking knowledge* and *lacking desired training* among the academic advisors and their *receiving*

reactive or insufficient support from their supervisors or university employers on how to appropriately support SWD facing challenges.

Advisors highlighted how some of their SWD only succeeded with their tailored, rebalanced, and extended approaches that were different than what they used with other students, as well as how rewarding that work with SWD was to them, and the *serving as advocates and liaisons, navigating institutional barriers, and experiencing professional rewards* themes captured these narratives. These findings indicate that academic advisors may need to make additional efforts to ensure that they strike the right balance between providing support and challenges to their SWD in order to achieve the optimal growth that Sanford (1966) intended, and doing so may cause them to act as advocates and liaisons for SWD within their university as they navigate the systemic barriers and help their students succeed and derive the reward of a ‘job well done’ upon that SWD success.

Other participants spoke about their ability to effectively balance both the necessary challenges and support they provide as academic advisors to their SWD by doing the same thing they now do for all students, not just SWD, illustrating the *viewing of SWD as resourceful and academically capable*. Ashley stressed, “They are adults! So, I ought not to coddle them or solve their problems for them. Overall, I keep the same level of care for all students.” Dana said, “I don’t treat him any differently” and avoided “sugarcoating anything” when speaking about advising a SWD. One participant said he is sure to give SWD referrals to the resources available to all students, not just the resources reserved for SWD, “I immediately recommend accessing our student success resources, primarily tutoring, academic coaching, writing studio, counseling services, etc. before assuming that the issue is immediately associated with a disability.”

Most participants in this study spoke confidently about balancing the practical challenges SWD faced with the ability to give them the supportive resources they require for academic advising sessions, such as adaptive technology, including screen readers, that they can use with their advising platforms or ensure a student with hearing loss has an interpreter at their advising sessions. The *establishing comfortable connections with SWD* theme emerged through their narratives.

Finding the balance in other areas was not so easy, according to the participants' narratives. For example, Brian spoke about it being difficult for him when he felt forced to advise a SWD to slow down their progression to degree completion, specifically advising them to temporarily enroll only part-time while they get "acclimated to the challenges of college" and are "able to get a grasp of college." Dana spoke about difficulties she had around an advising a SWD who was failing in their coursework, "Some of them [SWD] wanted to be treated just like everyone else, but in some instances, they can't because they aren't able to handle the workload and it is hard to articulate that to someone without them thinking you are calling them a failure or lacking belief in their abilities." Caleb spoke about balancing challenges and support being difficult for those with nonapparent or undisclosed disabilities: "A lot of our SWD are not always comfortable disclosing that they have a disability, so, it's kind of hard to really balance out those resources for what we don't know." Uncertainty about balancing these areas was echoed in the need for training, as many sought out self-directed learning and networking with other student affairs professionals on campus who might be able to provide them insights on how to do so, as captured by the *engaging in self-directed learning and networking* theme. Knight et al. (2018) suggested that partnerships between

DRCs and academic advisors could provide SWD the support needed for progression, retention, and graduation by connecting those SWD to additional resources, and in their discussion about supporting SWD, Kimball et al. (2016) argued that higher education needs to move beyond compliance and toward a place where colleges and universities provide support for every student.

With the combination of SMD and CS, this study may inform the foundational training all academic advisors should receive to better balance challenge and support for their SWD alongside being proactive change agents at their university by removing societal barriers. In other words, examining these results through a lens that integrates the SMD with CS frameworks emphasizes both the need for academic advisors to remove the larger social and environmental barriers on their campuses while also underscoring the crucial intimate role of academic advisors in balancing challenges and support in their advising sessions with SWD, all to create an inclusive educational environment that promotes equality and student success for SWD as well as an effective and rewording workplace for these student affairs professionals.

Implications for Practice

The participants in this study expressed the following: a desire for more time in appointments with SWD, a belief that group advising could be harmful to successful academic advising of SWD, and a lack of knowledge about who needs more time or who may not benefit from group advising, which could contribute to confusion about what advising practices would best benefit the entire student group.

This study's implications for practice include considering or reconsidering the training and professional development given to academic advisors around effectively

advising SWD that follows Oliver's (2013) SMD approach and helps academic advisors strike the balance between challenge and support that Sanford (1966) intended among their SWD. The academic advisors expressed a desire to be included in the design of these pieces of training, and the findings of this study suggest that related trainings offered in degree programs in the social science disciplines such as social work and counseling might provide good starting examples of trainings, since the four participants with those degrees spoke about having had the beneficial opportunity to previously interact professionally with people with disabilities and receive training related to this population as part of those degree programs.

Another example of what these training courses could include, as cited by a participant, was a consensus definition for disability on campuses and SWD, as well as descriptions of the array of disabilities, strategies on how to advise SWD, and best practices for student affairs professionals serving SWD. Training programs focused on the campus' concept of supporting SWD might benefit other staff members in student affairs, not just professionals in academic advising. In summary, institutions that adopt a more deliberate strategy for providing academic advisors with disability training would align with recommendations made by Vaccaro & Kimball (2017) and Fleming et al. (2017), guaranteeing that student affairs professionals can assist diverse student groups, including SWD, to advocate for these specified training programs.

Establishing connections or facilitating relationships between DRC staff and other campus partners, including academic advisors, is recommended, as so many participants spoke about the value of those connections within their network. One participant recommended forming a committee of student affairs professionals already trained in or

interested in working more effectively with SWD, and that could be beneficial. This finding coincides with former research thoughts from Strimel et al. (2023) and Knight et al. (2018), who were in support of institutional stakeholder integration of campus-wide support to increase SWD student outcomes.

Academic advisors and their professional organizations should also consider non-traditional training resources to enhance academic advising of SWD. As the former president of NACADA suggested, higher education in America can overcome the challenges that lie ahead and create better people who can use their education for their personal growth as well as the benefit of their country and the globe (White, 2015). It could be beneficial for universities or professional organizations to develop and offer training modules to academic advisors that review specific guides for best practices in advising SWD, such as NACADA's *Advising Students with Disabilities: Striving for Universal Success* (Vance & Bridges, 2009). This manual covers advising strategies for SWD, developing self-advocacy skills, coordinating services with disability offices and others on campus, acknowledging the existence of multicultural issues or multiple perspectives, and incorporating universal design or access techniques to a larger population. In addition to providing strategies for identifying different forms of disabilities, this guide offers advice on how to effectively collaborate with DRCs (a partnership recommendation from this study) and adapt advising approaches to the diverse population of SWD. This resource addresses the demands for additional advising time or customized advising techniques mentioned by advisors in this study.

Another training framework that could be considered is the Universal Design for Advising (UDA), as implemented by the University of Washington's DO-IT program

(Burgstahler, 2018). This training framework was created to provide academic advisors with a solid basis for promoting equitable access to their SWD (Burgstahler, 2018). This training framework moves from reactive to proactive creation of universal design techniques, moving away from possible harmful group advising techniques as well as ensuring equitable access for SWD. Of similar possible benefit, the University of Memphis's *Module 4 - Asset Based Community Engagement - UofM's Urban-Serving Research Mission* could help academic advisors and others in student affairs adopt asset based approaches to their work consistent with Oliver's (2013) SMD approach (University of Memphis, 2018). This would notably help advisors by increasing their capacity to focus on SWD's strengths rather than their limitations and possibly lead to more inclusive campuses, greater student success, and a more rewarding workplace for the academic advisors and other student affairs professionals.

Several academic advisors in this study maintained an asset based view of SWD, which tended to lead to them reducing barriers that were in the way of supporting SWD. It is also important to consider the barriers that advisors themselves face through serving as advocates, acquiring the training resources they need to support SWD, and seeking support from their supervisors and institutions. As a result, institutions should support their academic advisors through funding of their professional development and setting an asset based tone, considering that the long-term advantages that would be greater for the institution.

Furthermore, the training materials themselves should incorporate universal design principles to be inclusive of all advisors, promoting more representation of people with disabilities among academic advisors. Finally, a centralized space for training

materials, such as on the institution's or professional organization's website, should be made easily accessible.

Limitations

A limitation was the ambiguous concept of training, which appeared to be interpreted differently within the demographic survey than the actual interview questions by some, resulting in inconsistent answers on whether formal training for academic advising SWD had been received, and that required clarification during the interviews. Another related limitation to this study is the possible impression management done by participants who wanted to align with an asset based approach or appear more knowledgeable than they might be in academic advising SWD.

Recommendations for Future Research

The perspectives of academic advisors' support for SWD were the main subject of this study, which also established the groundwork for future research on this topic. Similar research might be conducted for other institutional bodies, including HBCUs and private institutions, to compare perceptions of academic advisors at various kinds of institutions. Research should also be expanded to include the experiences of SWD who have received academic advising. More generalized studies might explore how other student and academic affairs departments or divisions at institutions could adopt UDA procedures. Additional research may also encompass training methodologies, definitions of training, and barriers to training for SWD. Although the focus of expansion varies, there is one common idea: ongoing evaluation of academic advising SWD in higher education is necessary to guarantee further student success within this student population and career success for academic advisors.

Conclusion

The main conclusions of this study are presented in order of the research questions. Regarding RQ1 (*What are the academic advisors' perceptions of advising SWD?*), academic advisors lack a consensus on the definitions of disability and SWD, which would be helpful to first establish in order to aid the necessary discussions about effectively serving this population. Academic advisors view SWD as resourceful and capable of achieving academic achievement, and they are able to establish comfortable connections with their SWD experience, though they do adjust their academic advising methods and approaches when working with SWD.

Answering RQ2 (*How do advisors make meaning of their roles supporting SWD based on their perceptions of SWD?*), academic advisors see themselves as navigating institutional barriers while serving as advocates and liaisons. Despite the obstacles faced or additional work and roles this requires of them, academic advisors' engagement with SWD is fueled by the professional rewards they experience working with SWD and the fulfilling nature of these roles.

Finally, responding to RQ3 (*How do academic advisors describe the training and support, if any, they received to effectively advise SWD and their satisfaction with that training and support?*), academic advisors report lacking knowledge and training on how to academic advise SWD. Due to the lack of knowledge and training, academic advisors rely on support from their supervisors and institutions—support that they describe as reactive or insufficient—as well as engage in self-directed experiential learning and networking with campus partners like DRC staff to cover their knowledge gaps.

To foster an inclusive advising environment for SWD, there is a need for institutional reform in alignment with the SMD (Oliver, 1990) and CS theory (Sanford, 1966). For SWD to have more inclusive and beneficial advising experiences, advisor training and institutional support will be essential. Additionally, moving from a deficit based approach to an asset based one might strengthen academic advisors and, in turn, SWD. It is the duty of higher education institutions to guarantee that all their members gain accessibility to the necessary supports, including academic advising, for success. The work of academic advisors plays an integral role in building an inclusive and effective educational experience for SWD. They are not only positioned to ensure that SWD receive invitations to the party but also to help break down barriers so that they can dance (AppNexus, 2015).

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[19-25](https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-19-25)

Appendix A

GATEKEEPER RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear [Academic Advising Director]:

My name is Bianca Singleton, and I am a graduate student enrolled in the Student Affairs Leadership doctoral program at the University of Georgia (UGA). I am seeking participants for my research on academic advisors' perspectives on advising students with disabilities. **Would you be willing to forward this email and its attached flyer to the academic advisors in your office?**

UGA's IRB has approved this study, and I am happy to provide you with a copy of the approval upon request. Also, if possible, please respond to this email (at bianca.singleton@uga.edu) to confirm that you are willing to circulate this to the academic advisors in your office so that I can calculate a more accurate sample size.

Thank you for your time. I hope to hear from you soon.

Best Regards,

Bianca L. Singleton, MBA

Doctoral Candidate, Doctor of Education

University of Georgia

Pronouns: she/her

Appendix B

RECRUITMENT FLYER

SEEKING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS!
PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE A \$20 AMAZON GIFT CARD

ACADEMIC ADVISORS' PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (SWD) WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA



ELIGIBILITY

- Currently working within the University System of Georgia.
- Works as an academic advisor.
- Minimum 1 year advising experience.
- Advised or currently advising SWD.



WHAT'S INVOLVED?

- Complete a pre-screening survey (10–15 minutes)
- Reading Consent Form.
- A 60-minute interview conducted via Zoom.
- Option to review the transcription for accuracy (20–30 minutes)

INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING?
TO SIGN UP OR LEARN MORE, SCAN THE QR CODE ABOVE OR
VISIT THIS LINK:

[HTTPS://UGORGIA.CA1.QUALTRICS.COM/JFE/FORM/SV_25AGPIWHSRSDDKY](https://UGORGIA.CA1.QUALTRICS.COM/JFE/FORM/SV_25AGPIWHSRSDDKY)
OR EMAIL THE CONTACT BELOW!



Interested, please contact:
Bianca Singleton, MBA
Doctoral Candidate, University of Georgia
bianca.singleton@uga.edu



Mary Frances Early
College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

SEEKING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS!
PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE A \$20 AMAZON GIFT CARD

ACADEMIC ADVISORS' PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (SWD) WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA



THIS RESEARCH AIMS TO EXPLORE THE PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC ADVISORS IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR STORIES AND INSIGHTS TO IMPROVE INCLUSIVE ACADEMIC PRACTICES AND SUPPORT SERVICES.



INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING?
TO SIGN UP OR LEARN MORE, SCAN THE QR CODE ABOVE OR
VISIT THIS LINK:

[HTTPS://UGORGIA.CA1.QUALTRICS.COM/JFE/FORM/SV_25AGPIWHSRSDDKY](https://UGORGIA.CA1.QUALTRICS.COM/JFE/FORM/SV_25AGPIWHSRSDDKY)
OR EMAIL THE CONTACT BELOW!



Interested, please contact:
Bianca Singleton, MBA
Doctoral Candidate, University of Georgia
bianca.singleton@uga.edu



Mary Frances Early
College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Appendix C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Academic Advisor:

My name is Bianca Singleton, and I am a graduate student enrolled in the Student Affairs Leadership doctoral program at the University of Georgia (UGA). I am seeking participants for my research on academic advisors' perspectives on advising students with disabilities. **Would you be willing to participate in this study?**

If so, please find a link to participate here:

The attached flyer also includes a link to participate. UGA's IRB has approved this study, and I am happy to provide you with a copy of that approval upon request.

Thank you for your time. I hope to hear from you soon.

Best Regards,

Bianca L. Singleton, MBA

Doctoral Candidate, Doctor of Education

University of Georgia

Pronouns: she/her

Appendix D

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY WITH INFORMED CONSENT AND INITIAL SCREENING

Qualtrics Page 1 - Greeting

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study! My name is Bianca Singleton, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia, conducting research for my dissertation.

Study Goal

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of academic advisors' support of students with disabilities (SWD).

Participation Expectations

As a participant, you will be asked to:

- Take part in one interview lasting approximately 60 minutes, which can be conducted via Zoom at your chosen time.

Incentives for Participation

As a token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card upon completing the interview. Incentives will be prorated for participants who withdraw early or do not complete the study.

Your participation will provide valuable knowledge that can lead to more effective advising strategies and a more inclusive campus environment.

Study Participation:

Would you like to proceed with the study?

- Yes
- No

Screening Questions:

1. Are you currently working as an academic advisor at a higher education institution within the University System of Georgia?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Have you worked as an academic advisor for a year or more?
 - Yes
 - No
3. To your knowledge, have you worked as a university academic advisor with one or more students with disabilities?
 - Yes
 - No

End of Survey Messaging

Participants Not Qualified for Study

Thank you for taking the time to complete the screening survey. Based on your responses, you are not eligible to participate in this study.

Qualtrics Page 2 – Informed Consent**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA****CONSENT LETTER****MAY I HAVE THIS DANCE: ACADEMIC ADVISORS' PERSPECTIVES OF
SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Dear Participant,

My name is Bianca Singleton, and I am a student in the Mary Frances Early College of Education at the University of Georgia under the supervision of Lindy Parker, Ph.D. I am inviting you to take part in a research study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of academic advisors as they make meaning of their roles in supporting students with disabilities. This study is being conducted to offer insights into the complexities of supporting students with disabilities from the advisors' viewpoint.

Participant Qualifications

You have been invited to participate in this study due to meeting the study eligibility criteria. Specifically, I am looking for academic advisors who are interested in sharing their perspectives of academic advising one or more students with disabilities.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked ...

- To provide data to the researcher in the form of one virtual Zoom interview that will be recorded and stored on the University of Georgia's servers behind my two-factor authentication University of Georgia login credentials.

- During the interview with the researcher, you will be asked several open-ended questions which allow you to share your perceptions as an academic advisor supporting students with disabilities. Participants will be advised not to share information unless they are comfortable talking about it with the researcher.
- The total zoom interview with the researcher should last no more than 60 minutes.
- The researcher will offer you an opportunity to review the transcript of our interview, and to provide feedback on the analysis and notes.
- The time commitment expected of participants will range based on the individual's degree of engagement. The maximum duration to participate in this research study is expected to be no more than 1 hour, followed by your personal time reviewing the transcript and data analysis.
- After the recorded Zoom interview is transcribed, the recording will be deleted. The transcription and any materials you share with me during the interview will have a pseudonym as an identity to protect the participant's confidentiality.

Risks and Discomforts

- It is possible that participants may feel mild emotional discomfort (e.g., feelings of frustration with the field, guilt, or inadequacy, etc.) when sharing perceptions in supporting students with disabilities. The researcher will minimize emotional discomfort by ensuring each participant understands they have full authority to decide what to share and what not to share. In addition, at the end of the interview, the researcher will provide information to each participant about the [University System of Georgia Contracted Employee Assistance Program for](#)

Well-being resource that all participants, being employees of the system, should have access to if they should need it.

- The researcher takes responsibility to prevent any social risks for participants by ensuring privacy for participants. The researcher's protocol will minimize the risk of participants.

Benefits

- Participating in the study is not expected to provide direct benefits to the participant, although participants may find some personal benefit from talking about their perceptions and being engaged outside of the work environment.
- The researcher will analyze the data provided by participants and publish the findings to inform anyone who supports students with disabilities or works in academic advising. These perceptions will enhance the awareness and understanding college administrators and student affairs practitioners have about academic advisor's perceptions on their support of students with disabilities.

Incentives for participation

Participants selected to conduct the interviews with the researcher are eligible for one \$20 Amazon gift card if they participate in the interview. Incentives will be processed using the email provided in your demographic survey. Please ensure accuracy to receive your incentive.

The researcher will record receipt of the incentive using the participant's pseudonym on the UGA payment log. The payment log will be retained for audit and not shared unless required by law. Incentives will be prorated for participants who withdraw early or do not complete the study.

Video Recording

All interview sessions will be conducted via Zoom video conferencing, and the interviews will be video/audio recorded, with audio transcriptions provided by the Zoom software platform. Participants will be alerted before the recording begins, and the recording will be stored in the researcher's university account behind two-factor authentication. After the interview is transcribed, the video recording will be deleted. The interview transcription will be preserved in a password-protected electronic file folder within the researcher's university web storage, also behind two-factor authentication. Each audio recording and transcription will be identified with a pseudonym to protect the participant's privacy. The interview files will be stored in a separate password-protected folder within an electronic document, also saved within the researcher's university web storage, that includes a list of the participants' identities and pseudonyms.

Privacy/Confidentiality

This research involves the transmission of a limited amount of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort will be taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed. Only data collected in the initial survey will include participant's name or other personally identifiable information. Research participants selected to complete an in-person interview will be asked to provide—or if preferred, assigned—a pseudonym upon agreeing to participate in an interview. The researcher will use the pseudonym throughout the interview including on printed materials used in the interview, data analysis, and in the findings to maintain the participants' confidentiality as much as possible.

All electronic files will be retained for one year after the analysis is written and reported. The project's research records, except the actual names of participants and the assigned pseudonym, may be reviewed by the Office for Human Research Protections and by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight only when required by law.

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone without your written consent unless required by law. The information will not be used or distributed for future research, even after identifiers are removed.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. Your decision about participation will not impact your employment or your relationship within the University System of Georgia.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to commit to a virtual interview with the researcher. There will be 1 session. The session will be 60 minutes and will be via the Zoom platform. There will be a video recording of the interview for transcription purposes. All responses and results from the research are kept confidential and will be reported in a dissertation study available to all participants on completion.

If you have questions about this research, please feel free to contact me at 404-324-0638 or bianca.singleton@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the University of Georgia IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

Consent:

Please choose one of the options below to indicate your consent to participate in this study.

- Yes, I consent to participate in this study.
- No, I do not consent to participate in this study.

Qualtrics Page 3 – Demographic Survey Questions

1. Select the race or ethnicity you identify with.
 - Black/African American
 - American/Alaskan Native
 - Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
 - Non-White Hispanic
 - Mixed-Race
 - White
 - Other
2. What is your highest degree of education? (If you are currently in school, please list the highest completed degree to date)
 - High School Degree
 - Some college, no degree
 - Associate's degree
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Master's Degree
 - Professional Degree
 - Doctorate
3. How many years of experience do you have in academic advising?
 - 1-3 years
 - 4-6 years
 - 7-10 years
 - More than 10 years

4. What is your current title as an academic advisor? Please specify your level or any specific rank associated with your role.
 - Academic Advisor I
 - Academic Advisor II
 - Academic Advisor III
 - Assistant Director
 - Director
 - If other, please specify [Write-in]
5. Which academic majors do you primarily service?
 - [Write-in]
6. Have you received any disability training?
7. If yes, specify the type of disability training you have received (Select all that apply)
 - In-person Workshops or Seminars
 - Online Webinars or Virtual Workshops
 - Professional Certifications (e.g., Disability Services Certification, ADA Coordinator Certification)
 - Continuing Education Courses (e.g., for educators or healthcare professionals)
 - On-the-job training or Shadowing
 - Self-paced Online Training Modules or Courses
 - Formal University or College Coursework
 - Training Conferences (e.g., National Disability Rights Network Conferences)
 - If other, please specify [Write-in]

- If yes, please specify the type of training you have received (e.g., workshops, certifications, on-the-job training, etc.) _____
8. While working as an academic advisor, to your knowledge, have you advised one or more students with a disability?
- Yes
 - No

Qualtrics Page 4 – Demographic Survey Questions (Continued)

9. Name [Write-in]
10. Email [Write-in]
11. The name of the institution where you work as an academic advisor [Write-in]
12. Interview scheduling: Please scroll through the available options below and select your preferred time for a 60-minute Zoom interview with the researcher. (Select all that apply)
- Morning (8 am-10am)
 - Late Morning (10 am-12 pm)
 - Early Afternoon (12 pm-2 pm)
 - Mid-Afternoon (2 pm-4 pm)
 - Late Afternoon (4 pm-5 pm)
 - Evening (6 pm-8 pm)

Qualtrics Page 5 – Messaging for Participants Qualified for Study

Thank you for your time; you are eligible to participate in the study! The researcher will follow up with you within 48 hours via bianca.singleton@uga.edu using your email address. The email will provide you with a calendar invitation and Zoom link for your

interview during the time you selected. You can re-enter it below if you need to provide a different email address or made an error. [Write-in]

If you have any questions, you can reach me at bianca.singleton@uga.edu.

End of Survey page:

Thank you for your time!

Appendix E

SCHEDULING EMAIL/CALENDAR INVITE AND SECOND COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM

Meeting Date:

Meeting Time:

Zoom Link:

Subject: UGA Study Interview

Email/Calendar Invite Text: Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study around academic advisors' perceptions of advising students with disabilities!

As a reminder, you will be asked to:

- Take part in one interview lasting approximately 60 minutes, which can be conducted via Zoom at your chosen time.
- Share your perceptions about advising students with disabilities. The interview will include open-ended questions that allow for a rich, narrative discussion about your professional perceptions with supporting SWD.
- You can review the analyzed data and provide feedback to ensure your perceptions are accurately represented.

Confidentiality: Please be assured that all your responses will be kept confidential, and any identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms in the research report to protect your privacy.

Incentives for Participation

As a token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card upon completing the interview. Incentives will be processed using the email provided in your demographic survey. Please ensure accuracy to receive your incentive. Incentives will be prorated for participants who withdraw early or do not complete the study.

Informed Consent

Please find a copy attached. (Appendix D)

If you have any questions or need additional information between now and this interview time, please feel free to contact me at bianca.singleton@uga.edu or 404-324-0638.

I appreciate your time and look forward to interviewing you!

Sincerely,

Bianca L. Singleton, MBA

Doctoral Candidate, Doctor of Education

University of Georgia

Pronouns: she/her

Appendix F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL/QUESTIONS

Introduction

Hello, [Participant's Name],

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is Bianca Singleton, and I am a student in the Mary Frances Early College of Education at the University of Georgia under the supervision of Lindy Parker, Ph.D. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of academic advisors as they make meaning of their roles in supporting students with disabilities. Your participation is incredibly valuable and will help offer insights into the complexities of supporting students with disabilities from the advisors' viewpoint.

Review Informed Consent (Appendix E)

Important to know:

- Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study without penalty.
- All information you provide will be confidential and used solely for research.
- You will be asked to participate in an interview.

Before we proceed, please review this informed consent document (Appendix C)

carefully:

- It outlines the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and how your information will be protected.

- If you have any questions about the study or the consent form, please do not hesitate to ask.

Finally, I want to assure you that this is a safe space for you to express all positive and negative opinions. This can be uncomfortable and awkward to talk about, and there are no hard-and-fast answers. Also, I am interested in hearing your authentic stories, and I want to reassure you that in any advising situation, it is appropriate to have both enjoyable and unpleasant experiences. I'm hoping to hear about whatever happened—the good and the bad—in the advising sessions we discuss today.

Do you have any questions about this research study before we continue?

Okay, I am about to start the video recording. This recording will be used for transcription purposes only and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	RATIONALE
1. To start, could you tell me about your journey into academic advising and what aspects of the role you find most meaningful?	Transition Question
2. In your own words, how would you define disability in reference to people? a. Based on what you described, what is your understanding of disability.	
3. Tell me what you think about SWD.	Social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), RQ2

a. <i>Possible probe:</i> What do you think about students with disabilities on your campus? b. <i>Possible probe:</i> What do you think about students with disabilities enrolled in colleges and universities?	
4. Tell me what you think about academic advising students with disabilities, anything and everything you can think of. a. <i>Possible probe:</i> How do you perceive that aspect of your job, specifically your work advising SWD?	Social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), RQ1
5. Tell me about a time when, I will call it, “society,” told you a way to think about students with disabilities and academic advising them. Maybe a colleague or your training program informed your beliefs about students with disabilities and academic advising them—can you tell me about that?	Social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), RQ1, RQ2
6. Tell me about a time when perhaps your own culture, maybe where you come from, or those who raised you, or your own cultural	Social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), RQ1, RQ2

identity—informed the way you think about students with disabilities and academic advising them. Can you tell me about that?	
7. Tell me about what you perceive as your role to be in supporting students with disabilities on your campus. a. Possible probe: Can you share a significant narrative or personal story highlighting your understanding of this role supporting a student with disabilities? How does this viewpoint shape your approach to advising?	Social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), Challenge and support theory (Sanford, 1966), RQ1, RQ2
8. Tell me about a time when you adapted your academic advising strategies to meet the unique needs of a student who you suspected had a disability or who disclosed to you that they had a disability. a. <i>Possible probe:</i> What considerations guided your decision-making process?	Challenge and support theory (Sanford, 1966), RQ1, RQ2
9. Tell me about how you balance challenging your students with disabilities adequately for their own growth and development as college	Challenge and support theory (Sanford, 1966), RQ1, RQ2

students while supporting them enough to meet their academic advising needs. a. <i>Possible probe:</i> Is there a time when you felt like you did not strike the right balance between challenge and support, and if so, tell me about that time? b. <i>Possible probe:</i> Does this balance between challenge and support change or differ between your students with and without disabilities, and if so, how?	
10. Tell me about one or more times you encountered difficulties as an academic advisor when supporting students with disabilities. a. <i>Possible probe:</i> How have these difficulties influenced your professional identity, growth, and/or development?	Social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), RQ3
11. Tell me about one or more experiences where academic advising a student with a disability was easy for you.	Social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), RQ3

a. <i>Possible probe:</i> Tell me about what made it easy.	
12. Tell me about a time when you felt supported while effectively advising a student with a disability. a. <i>Possible probe:</i> Tell me a story about encountering broader institutional support (or lack thereof) for academic advisors in their roles supporting students with disabilities. b. <i>Possible probe:</i> How have these narratives influenced your perspective on institutional support? c. <i>Possible probe:</i> Tell me about your level of satisfaction with that support and why you describe it that way.	Social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), RQ3
13. Tell me about the training you received to advise students with disabilities effectively. a. <i>Possible probe:</i> Tell me about your level of satisfaction with that training and why you describe it that way.	Social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), RQ3

Interview Wrap-Up

- At the end of each interview, turn off the audio recording.
- Ask each participant how they feel about the interview and the process.
- Remind participants they can inform you anytime if they do not wish their data to be included in the study.
- If participants want to continue, inform them you will follow up with notes and initial findings.
- Mention that they will be included in the member checks process.
- Offer my contact information again if they have any questions or concerns after the interview.
- Thank the participants for their time and contribution to the study.
- Remind participants of available support resources if they experienced emotional discomfort during the interview and drop a link to those resources in the chat:
<https://benefits.usg.edu/work-life/employee-assistance-program>.

Appendix G

PARTICIPANT THANK YOU EMAIL (FOLLOWING INTERVIEW)

Dear Academic Advisor,

Once again, thank you for taking the time to participate in the research study I am conducting to complete my doctoral dissertation. Your time is valuable, as are the perceptions you shared with me. Please find attached a copy of our interview transcript. Please let me know if you find any errors in the transcript.

In the coming months, I will analyze the data to write an analysis that will illuminate the perceptions you and other participants have had in their careers as academic advisors. You will then receive another email from me inviting you to review the interpreted themes of the data via email. Please feel free to provide feedback to me at that time to ensure that what you intend to describe in your interview is portrayed in the data.

The analysis and narratives will support academic advisors, administrators, faculty, and others who work with students with disabilities on campus. I intend to make recommendations to those who serve students with disabilities in the academic advising field on college campuses. As promised, a \$20 Amazon voucher can be redeemed by following this link:

If you have any problems with the link or questions, please call Bianca Singleton at 404-324-0638 or email me at bianca.singleton@uga.edu.

Best Regards,

Bianca L. Singleton, MBA

Doctoral Candidate, Doctor of Education

University of Georgia

Pronouns: she/her

Appendix H

PARTICIPANT MEMBER CHECKING EMAIL (FOLLOWING INTERVIEW)

Dear Academic Advisor,

Once again, thank you for taking the time to participate in the research study I am conducting to complete my doctoral dissertation. Your time is valuable, as are the perceptions you shared with me. Please find attached a copy of the data analysis that includes data from your interview and other participants. After you review the themes, please feel free to provide feedback to me. I want to ensure that what you intend to describe in your interview is portrayed in the data. For feedback from you to be incorporated into the analysis that is included in my dissertation, I must hear back from you by this date:

Again, I believe this study will support academic advisors, administrators, faculty, and others who work with students with disabilities on campus. I intend to make data-informed recommendations to those who serve students with disabilities in the academic advising field on college campuses. Thank you for your help with my work!

Best Regards,

Bianca L. Singleton, MBA

Doctoral Candidate, Doctor of Education

University of Georgia

Pronouns: she/her