ACADEMIC ADVISING: VOICES OF LATINX FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS ABOUT
THEIR ADVISING EXPERIENCES AT A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

By

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ABSTRACT

ACADEMIC ADVISING: VOICES OF LATINX FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR ADVISING EXPERIENCES AT A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

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Advising is one of the most important resources available to college students, especially historically underrepresented first-generation students. While research suggests various student groups might benefit from specific approaches and promising new practices, but few have focused on Latinx students at research universities. In this qualitative study, I explore recently graduated, first-generation Latinx students' experiences with advising to understand how these experiences might be improved. Drawing on 16 interviews with recent Latinx graduates, I found Latinx students described helpful advisors as: (a) cultivating caring relationships, (b) being informed about curriculum, policies, and procedures, and as (c) sharing common identity-based experiences related to being Latinx and/or being a first-generation student. Conversely, Latinx students suggested advisors hindered them when: (d) they had limited time for students, (e) were distracted by other duties and technologies, (f) exhibited biases in their advising, and (g) failed to validate. The results of this study can directly inform the creation of more equitable and culturally competent advising practices that support first-generation Latinx students in achieving academic success.

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Introduction

For the past 14 years, I have worked as an academic advisor in university settings and have often connected with students who are not my assigned advisees. Students of Color (SoC)—specifically Latinx[1] students—have explained they feel comfortable with me because I share their Latinx identity. Our shared identities and identity-based experiences have been a way for us to create the trust necessary to process their academic and personal concerns (Museus & Neville, 2012). With my clinical social work background, I have developed a skill and appreciation of deep listening and I enjoy giving students space to share while I listen. I know that listening is a critical component of building trust with students and wonder if students come to me for that very reason rather than sticking to their assigned advisors.

Given the above, this study seeks to understand the role of advisors and advising in first-generation Latinx undergraduate student success at Michigan State University (MSU), a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest. MSU enrolls approximately 40,000 undergraduate students. The 2019 six-year graduation rate average for all first-time undergraduate students was 81% and 69% for Hispanic/Latino/a students (Diversity at MSU, 2020). However, Latinx students have also had the second largest graduation rate increase of any racial category from 62-69%, just behind the 68-79% increase in international student graduation rates (Diversity at MSU, 2020). According to a recent study by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), advisors are essential to first- and fourth-year students (Elfman, 2020). As an advisor at MSU and a member of the Latinx community, it is important to me to bridge the

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[1] I use the term "Latinx" in this dissertation to be more inclusive. However, when authors and government sources use Latino/a or Hispanic, I will use Latino/a or Hispanic. Both terms are pan-ethnic categories.

student success gap in higher education for the Latinx population. It is also important to me to provide Latinx students an opportunity to share their stories and have their voices heard (Negroni-Rodriguez, et al., 2006), which can in turn inform and positively transform traditional, top-down advising practices. This study combines both of these priorities to achieve the goal of learning more about how Latinx students experience advising at MSU.

Extant literature in higher education indicates Latinx students face challenges in achieving success and that, despite these challenges, they are finding ways to persist (Ayala & Contreras, 2018; Batista et al., 2018; Nuñez et al., 2013; Torres et al., 2019). This literature has focused on specific portions of the Latinx population, such as first-generation students (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016), graduate students (Espino, 2016; Negroni-Rodriquez et al., 2006), and transfer students (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Harris, 2017; Suarez, 2003). Researchers have shown that almost half of all Latinx undergraduate students are first-generation students, meaning they are the first in their families to enroll at college (Santiago, 2013). Researchers have also established that many Latinx students start at community colleges with intentions to transfer to four-year universities (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2018; Crisp & Nora, 2010). However, family obligations and work responsibilities often mean Latinx students transfer at a low rate (Batista et al., 2018; Nunez et al., 2013). Moreover, because many Latinx students are first-generation, transferring to four-year institutions is not always affordable and institutions are not always located in the most supportive areas (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Robertson et al., 2016). These factors are symptomatic of higher education's origins in the exclusion of SoC and other minoritized groups, and has resulted in frequent reports from Latinx students that developing a sense of belonging can be difficult (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Lamont Strayhorn, 2008).

However, student success researchers and leaders in higher education have found advising and advisors can positively impact student experiences and outcomes, especially among historically marginalized students (Elfman, 2020; Negroni-Rodriguez et al., 2006; Torres et al., 2006). Indeed, there is a robust and growing body of literature on advising that has begun to highlight promising practices, such as Hagen's (2018) *Narrative Theory in Academic Advising*. Yet, while this literature is helpful, it often does not distinguish between different types of advisors and advising. For example, some professional academic advisors' central responsibility is to provide advice about academic course work and planning. There are also faculty advisors who advise in addition to offering students disciplinary based advice, as well as coaches and mentors who are expected to provide a wide variety of support, including general mentoring and access to resources and opportunities (Baker & Griffin, 2010; Negroni-Rodriguez et al., 2006; Torres et al., 2006).

The multiplicity of these advisor positions suggests there are several kinds of advising styles, such as Strength-Based, Appreciative, Intrusive, Proactive, Learning-Centered, and Advising as Coaching. Developmental and intrusive advising are the most common approaches. Torres and Hernandez (2009) and Negroni-Rodriguez et al. (2006) have defined developmental advising as "the advisor adapts methodologies and strategies to accommodate the needs of advisees for more advanced and expanded responses to their immediate needs" (p. 8). Given this, many scholars agree developmental advising combines advising and mentoring. On the other hand, coaching is "a process of individualized guidance, where an academic coach employs active listening and questioning to help a student focus on her or his learning experiences, address a problem, and work towards a specific goal" (Pechac & Slantcheva-Durst, 2019), while

mentoring "involves a relationship between individuals where a more experienced person is committed to providing developmental support" (Crisp et al., 2020, p. 58).

Notably few studies on advising have explicitly focused on Latinx students' experiences with academic advising. Among those that have, cultural competence has been commonly cited as crucial to advising Latinx students (Negroni-Rodriguez et al., 2006), particularly in terms of how Latinx students seek academic information (Torres et al., 2006; Torres & Zerquera, 2012). One example of this is Negroni-Rodriguez et al.'s (2006) study on Latino/a student experiences in graduate social work programs. In generating a model that combined advising and mentoring concepts with a culturally competent perspective, they found, "advisors are teachers and role models who have a tremendous positive impact on Latino/a advisees" and that "advisors become part of the broad network of family members" (p. 217). The authors further acknowledged the importance of authority, but noted such relationships must be upheld by trust. This differs from the model developed by Torres et al. (2006) through their study of undergraduate students at two Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and two predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Their model assumes (1) "when first-generation Latino/a students first enter college they lack information" (p. 67) and (2) "students failed to recognize advisors as authority figures" (p. 67). Based on their findings, the authors argued that advisors and mentors should reach out to students first instead of waiting for students to come to them.

Indeed, academic advisors possess institutional knowledge that can benefit students and help them succeed. For example, advisors have access to personal student data, such as first-generation status, ethnicity, and the locations of a student's home and high school—all of which can be utilized to foster connections with and support students. Longwell-Grice et al., (2016) found that "when [first-generation students] see evidence that people at their university care

about them, students feel more motivated than when they perceive that stakeholders care only for students established within the majority culture" (p. 42). All students should feel welcomed and cared for throughout their studies, and academic advisors are some of the key professionals in institutions of higher education who can provide this outreach and guidance. It has been shown that the more first-generation students meet with their academic advisor, the more likely they are to persist (Swecker et al., 2013). This is especially important given that "first-generation students were approximately 80 percent more likely to leave college during their second year of enrollment" (Ishitani, 2016, p. 28). Moreover, in a study on first-generation students, Glaessgen et al. (2018) found first-generation students with undecided majors sought advice and information from several people before meeting with an advisor. It is therefore necessary to further research on the advising relationships of Latinx first-generation students to assist with student success.

Beyond regularly meeting to offer advice, scholarship indicates advisors should strive to build relationships with students who may not feel a sense of belonging on their campus. Lee's (2018) study on students from historically marginalized communities, specifically Black students, has shown that "providing an affirming environment for students can lead to high-quality interactions between students and advisors" (p. 81). To form such relationships, advisors should regularly engage in reflection and attend trainings to deepen their knowledge of biases, diversity, equity, and inclusion (Lee, 2018). It is also important they remain aware of how they frame questions like "where are you from." Advisors should pay close attention to body language and try to understand the campus climate for Latinx students and colleagues, especially when there are few students, staff, and faculty who share the same identity. In terms of advising Latinx students, Negroni-Rodriguez et al. (2006) has shared that "advisors should possess

knowledge of the Latino culture and the socioeconomic and political conditions of Latinos/as" (p. 211). In other words, advisors should work to build trusting and caring relationships and work towards cultural competency.

Yet, it must also be understood that the Latinx population is not monolithic. According to Nuñez et al. (2013), "once Latino students arrive on campus, advising about classes, formal coursework on study skills and information on the process of transition can help students garner the tools necessary to manage their studies and time" (p. 62). Understanding that there are many different ways that students identify, including first generation, could determine the information students are in need of to assist with student success. In addition, Bettinger and Baker's (2011) study showed statistically significant results (i.e., a positive impact on persistence) when Latinx students had access to regular advising (what they called "coaching"). Studies like these show the value of studying advising in relation to Latinx student experiences, but most of this work was conducted when Latinx students were still enrolled. As such, it is not clear whether the students were retained and whether they graduated. I thus interviewed recent first-generation Latinx graduates to better understand the role of advising in their student experience and success.

Statement of the Problem, Research Questions, & Research Approach

In general, Latinx students are less likely to complete high school than their white peers. Those who do go on to enroll in college have been shown to exhibit lower retention and graduation rates. As some of the first "institutional agents" (Museus & Neville, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 2011) students interact with (usually at orientation before classes), academic advisors are in a unique position to positively impact Latinx students' experiences of higher education. Through the advisor-student relationship, academic advisors have the opportunity to act as a resource and guide for students to ensure they are enrolled in the appropriate courses for

graduation. Advisors are equipped with valuable knowledge about intuitional policies, procedures, and resources to assist with student acclimation. As long as higher education continues to enforce the systemic barriers that negatively and disproportionately affect marginalized communities, including Latinx students, it is necessary for academic advisors to learn about Latinx student experiences and draw on those experiences to enhance their success. However, few studies have examined how advisors shape the academic experiences and outcomes of first-generation Latinx students. As such, this dissertation study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Latinx first-generation students describe their experiences with advising?

   a. What are helpful advising approaches for Latinx first-generation students?

   b. What are hindering approaches for Latinx first-generation students?

For the purpose of this study, I am chiefly concerned with professional academic advisors.[2] Academic advisors are professionals whose main responsibility is to assist students with course planning and degree completion, clarifying policies and procedures, navigating the institution, and providing resources and referrals. I focused on professional academic advisors rather than faculty or other university members serving in an advising capacity because professional academic advisors' primary responsibility is to assist students with meeting graduation requirements, providing academic and career advice, and referring students to resources, whereas other advisors (e.g., faculty) have additional responsibilities, such as teaching and research. The focus on professional academic advisors is particularly relevant to MSU, where I conducted this work. Not all institutions hire academic advisors but MSU has a

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[2] At Michigan State University, where I conducted this work, academic advisors are also known as "Specialist-Academic Advisors," and will be the focus of this study.

professional advising structure, meaning they hire and expect advisors to provide students sound

academic advice. To be clear, the campus employs other types of staff who may informally serve

as advisors or mentors to students, but I am curious about how first-generation Latinx students

experience advising with people employed for the express purpose of guiding their academic

experience.

Accordingly, this dissertation study is qualitative and informed by the constructivist

paradigm. In working with this paradigm, I assume knowledge to be co-constructed and ever

evolving rather than individual and stable. It is in this spirit that I value the views and opinions of

the students that I interviewed and worked with them to create knowledge based on their

uniquely situated perspectives. I was largely inspired by Charmaz's (2014) constructivist

approach to grounded theory research because she sought to create a methodology that placed

"participants' views and voices as integral to the analysis" (p. 235). As a grounded theorist,

Charmaz wanted "to create theory that has credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness"

(Charmaz, 2014, p. 235) to those directly affected by a phenomenon. Although I did not use

Charmaz's grounded theory methodology, I was deeply inspired by the idea of listening and

learning from first-generation Latinx students and subsequently developing insights for advisors

based on their voices and experiences. When working from a constructivist paradigm,

researchers can use many data collection methods. I specifically chose to use semi-structured

interviews and used the literature to guide my prompts and simultaneously created a space to

listen to and learn from the participants. I relied on interviews with Latinx students because I

believe, as experts of their own experiences, they are the ones who can best tell me about the role

academic advisors played in their undergraduate experience. Moreover, as a researcher, advisor,

member of the Latinx community, and first-generation student, it is important to me to uplift and

amplify the voices of Latinx students in ways that are useful and practical for them because their voices have been silenced for too long. Given this, I ultimately spoke with 16 first-generation Latinx undergraduate students. All had graduated from MSU within the last three years and were able to recall experiences with advisors.

Significance

Torres and Hernandez (2009) have noted that, for Latinx and first-generation college students, "many times encouragement comes from mentors and advisors within the college setting" (p. 144). Thus, as the number of first-generation (Baker & Griffin, 2010) and Latinx students (Bauman, 2017; Gramlich, 2017) grows, so too does the necessity of advising relationships. Yet, little is known about first-generation Latinx students and their advising experiences. Most research on advising has focused on students who are still enrolled in school. While useful, these students do not yet have the benefit of retrospection to fully understand the role their advisors played in their education. For this reason, I chose to interview recent MSU alumni, which is a distinct contribution of this work. My study further provided first-generation Latinx students the opportunity to share their experiences, which is important because students from marginalized backgrounds often feel their voices are unheard or framed via a deficit perspective (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Museus & Ravello, 2010).

This dissertation study also has implications for institutional leaders and decisionmakers concerned with improving graduation rates among MSU's Latinx student population. MSU's six-year graduation rate for the 2014 cohort was 81% and 72% for Hispanic/Latinx students. The university has implemented a specific admissions welcome day for Latinx students that includes their families and advisors. As colleges and universities are continually searching for ways to meet admission goals, advisors must be part of these conversations. Many are involved and

participate in admissions initiatives, like hosting college and major-specific presentations, meeting with prospective students and families, and sharing information about the role of an advisor. As Latinx and first-generation populations continue to be two of the largest growing groups among college enrollees, institutions must work diligently to understand how to structure and maintain welcoming, safe, and supportive spaces for Latinx students.

Definitions

In this study, I use several key terms, which I define below.

Academic advisors are professionals who assist students in academic and non-academic areas. For the purpose of this study, *academic advisor* will be defined as an undergraduate's major advisor. Undergraduate major advisors spend most of their time advising. Given this, faculty advisors will not be considered as advisors, as they dedicate more time to teaching and research.

Academic advising (also referred to as *advising* in this dissertation) has a broad range of definitions. For the purpose of this study, it is defined as a shared responsibility between students and advisors, through which advisors assist with course planning, share institutional knowledge regarding policies and procedures, and provide resources both in relation to students' area of study and their personal needs.

First-generation student has also been variously defined. For example, students at MSU are coded differently by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) than they are by the MSU Office of Admissions. For instance, FAFSA asks students for their parents' highest educational level and their answer to this question can determine their different state aid options. Some definitions of first-generation in the literature include: students of parents who have not attended college (Ward et al., 2012), students of parents who do not have more than a high-

school education (Pascarella et al., 2004), and students whose parents do not have a bachelor's degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). However, as my work was situated at MSU, I use the same definition as the Office of Admissions, which is students whose parents or guardians have not obtained a bachelor's degree.

Latinx is a term that first appeared in the United States around 2014. It generally refers to those with Latin American heritage, with the 'x' functioning as a political attempt to be more gender inclusive (Vidal-Ortiz & Marinez, 2018). Usage of the term has become more frequent in the context of higher education (Salinas & Lozano, 2017). At MSU, however, while some administrators use the Latinx referent, the admissions and institutional data offices still use the term "Hispanic." In this this dissertation, I use "Latinx" to be more inclusive and use other terms, such as "Hispanic" and "Latino/a," when referring to research that uses these terms. Moreover, I recognize "Latinx" to be a social construct and acknowledge that the Latinx population is not monolithic. Within the Latinx identity, people identify in a variety of ways, including identifying as white.

PWI, or predominantly white institution, is not an official designation. PWIs are institutions of higher education whose student body is mostly white. Using critical race theory, Bourke (2016) has asserted "that the word 'predominant' reflects an ongoing social practice according to which whiteness maintains a place of supremacy" (p. 15). According to the Diversity at MSU Report (2016-2017), MSU is a PWI because the undergraduate student population is constituted of 76.2% White, 8.3% African American/Black, .2% American Indian/Alaska Native, 5.9% Asian, .1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 5% Hispanic/Latino/a (of any race), and 3.5% Two or More Races. The faculty and staff at MSU are 79.5% White, 6.0% African American/Black, .4% American Indian/Alaska Native, 8.4% Asian, .1%

Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 4.9% Hispanic/Latino/a (of any race), and .7% Two of More Races (Diversity at MSU, 2016-2017).

Chapter Summary

The introduction provided an overview of my research interest, driving questions, the study's significance, and key definitions. In Chapter Two, I review the existing literature on the Latinx population in higher education and discuss Latinx student outcomes and experiences to help readers establish a historical understanding of Latinx and first-generation students in U.S. higher education and academic advising. I will also present the conceptual framework for this dissertation study. In Chapter Three, I provide an overview of my methodology, positionality, research design, recruitment, and data collection methods, followed by a report of the research findings in Chapter Four and further discussion in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

My review of the literature in this chapter focuses on two key areas: Latinx students in U.S. higher education and university-academic advising. The first area consists of two sections, one on Latinx students in U.S. higher education and one on Latinx student experiences in higher education. The second addresses academic advising and consists of one section on The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA). I conclude Chapter Two with a presentation of my conceptual framework, which includes four main considerations: (1) the importance of student experiences (Batista et al., 2018), (2) advising relationships, (3) advising approaches, and (4) students' meeting frequency with advisors.

Latinx Students in U.S. Higher Education

According to the United States Census Bureau (2018), the Hispanic[3] population is one of the largest and fastest growing ethnic populations in the country. For instance, Bauman (2017) has reported the Latinx population grew "by 0.7 million from 1996 to 2006 and that the college enrollment of Hispanics went up by 1.7 million from 2006 to 2016" (para. 6). Of this increase, Bauman has explained that "the result has been an overall tripling of college enrollment by Hispanics over the past two decades" (para. 6). Many of these Latinx students are the first in their families to attend college, or "first-generation" college students. Yet, despite this marked increase in enrollment, Latinx students still have the lowest attainment of bachelor's degrees at 15.5% compared to White (36.3%), Black (22.5%), and Asian (53.9%) students (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Mexican Americans are the largest subgroup of Latinx students in the U.S. and

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[3] The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are broad terms that encompass many ethnic groups. The U.S. government has consistently grouped and identified persons of "Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018) as "Hispanic" or "Latino."

have one of the lowest levels of educational attainment, followed by Puerto Ricans (Nuñez et al., 2013). Meanwhile, Nunez et al., (2013) found Cuban Americans had the highest educational achievement and socio-economic status among the Latino population. Torres et al. (2019) has noted that "most educators are unaware of and are struggling to understand and apply to their interactions with Latinos" (p. 9). These insights are critical as the majority of Latinx students enroll at community colleges and often experience challenges when trying to transfer (Batista et al., 2018). And although the majority of Latinx students are enrolled at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Latinx enrollment is growing at all institutional types, the patterns of which will be further described in the following section. Given the overall growth of the Latinx population in the U.S., 18- to 24-year-old Latinx students "are now the largest minority group at four-year colleges" (Batista et al., 2018, p. 4). As the Latinx population continues to increase enrollment in higher education, it is crucial that we continue to learn from Latinx students and identify the factors that contribute to their success.

Latinx Student Experiences in U.S. Higher Education

In this section, I review the literature on Latinx students across various institutional types. It is important to note limited research exists on Latinx students in research universities. As large numbers of Latinx students enroll in HSIs, including two- year and four-year colleges, much of the research on Latinx student experiences is set in HSI contexts (Fosnacht & Nailos, 2016). Notably, close to half (46%) of all Hispanic students attend community colleges (HACU, 2018). Researchers suggest there are several reasons why Latinx students choose HSIs and community colleges, ranging from financial concerns, limited resources for college preparation, wanting to be close to family, and a perceived sense of belonging on campuses closer to home (Nuñez et al.,

2013). Unfortunately, Latinx student certificate attainment, degree completion, and transfer to four-year institutions remains low (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2018; Nuñez et al., 2013).

Although many Latinx students start at community colleges or choose to go to nearby HSIs, others enroll in predominantly white institutions (PWIs). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018), Hispanic students represented 4% to 6% of undergraduate students at PWIs compared to 60-68% of white students. PWIs have a historically and primarily white student enrollment and campuses "whose prevailing norms, values, and practices cater mostly to white students" (Chang, 2002, p. 3), a fact that can lead to feelings of isolation in Latinx students. Latinx students on PWI campuses, along with their student of color (SoC) peers, are often the center of student success conversations and initiatives (UIA, 2018) but are expected to assimilate into white culture and campus norms. In a study by Lewis et al. (2000), one student reported the expectation "to be different from Whites in certain ways but, at the same time, to be or at least pursue sameness with Whites" (p. 80). In navigating PWIs, Latinx students often realize that few faculty and staff share their identities. For example, in a study of 29 students enrolled at four institutions, two PWIs and two HSIs, Torres and Hernandez (2007) found college was the first time the students experienced racism and had to work through experiences of being negatively stereotyped. The authors shared that one student "went from seeing Latinos/as in professional positions to a PWI where the only Latino/a employees she saw were service workers" (p. 572). In fact, as further described below, Latinx student experiences across all types of colleges and universities are often characterized by a sense of isolation and lack of belonging.

Isolation

Navigating higher education can be lonely and isolating for Latinx students (Gonzalez et al., 2018). Von Robertson et al. (2016) have reported that "Latino/a students frequently reported racism, discrimination, and isolation while attending PWIs" (p. 716). Students are often the only SoC in their classrooms, especially at PWIs (Adams & McBrayer, 2020). Many SoC report that their loneliness in PWIs worsens when they do not have a cultural space to call home (Turner, 1994). In the absence of such spaces, Castro Samayoa (2018) has shown some students seek advisors with whom they have a "shared cultural background," as such connections allow them to envision their own success. Batista et al. (2018) have similarly stressed the importance of representation in student success, noting that "the lack of culturally identified role models and mentors will continue to have a hindering effect on Latinx/a/o student success, degree persistence, and degree completion" (p. 324). In addition, PWI's often treat their Latinx student populations as one monolithic group, wherein Mexican students are the most represented. This can lead to further isolation for non-dominant Latinx groups, such as Asian-Afro-Latinos (Gonzalez et al., 2018). Overall, the studies mentioned above have shown that Latinx students often have feelings of isolation, both inside and outside the classroom, in higher education.

Sense of Belonging

Gaining a strong sense of belonging is another challenge Latinx students face in U.S. higher education. According to Hurtado & Carter (1997), a sense of belonging "contains both cognitive and affective elements in that the individual's cognitive evaluation of his or her role in relation to the group results in an affective response" (p. 328). Building on this definition, Strayhorn (2008) has indicated that sense of belonging "refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, that experience of mattering or

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feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or others on campus" (p. 3). This construct has been used to study Latinx students' interactions with higher education intuitions (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Nuñez, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). These studies have found that attending college at a PWI can be a significant culture shift for Latinx students. Situations involving limited interactions with faculty, staff, and advisors (Gonzalez et al., 2018), combined with microaggressions (Von Robertson et al., 2016), can create unwelcoming spaces for Latinx students that hinder their ability to succeed. Harper and Hurtado (2007) and Strayhorn (2012) found Latinos and other SoCs found campus environments to be less welcoming than their white peers. Similarly, Nuñez et al. (2013) shared that "Latinos from more concentrated Latino neighborhoods who enter predominantly White institutions (PWIS) might experience a 'culture shock' when confronted with unfamiliar norms, values, and discursive styles" (p. 25). Strayhorn (2012) has thus advocated for academic advisors to have ongoing conversations with Latinx students regarding success strategies and provide information to assist them in balancing academics, family, and employment at PWIs.

Some research has highlighted that Latinx and first-generation students' sense of belonging can improve when they are given the opportunity to find counterspaces, such as ethnic studies courses (Nuñez, 2011). These courses give students the chance to connect with affirming faculty who may recognize the importance of being bilingual. Despite these patterns, researchers have also identified several ways Latinx students find welcoming and supportive spaces. For example, in a small qualitative study of seven students at a PWI in the Midwest, Gonzalez et al. (2018) found first-generation Latinx students experienced feelings of isolation until finding a Latinx student organization. The students shared feelings of experiencing a pervasive "whiteness" on campus and reported feeling relief as well as a sense of community and

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belonging in their involvement with the Latinx student organization (p. 67). In another study, Latinx students found helpful counterspaces on campus in faculty and Greek life (Von Robertson et al., 2016). Beyond formal groups and classrooms, Bordes-Edgar et al. (2011) have also stated that "having a mentor or perceiving that someone on campus cared about one's academic success was strongly related to staying in school" (p. 359). Zalaquett and Lopez (2006) have also discussed how educators and university staff can assist with mentoring that "can open doors for these students and help increase the number of Latino students applying, attending and completing degrees in higher education" (p. 349). As advisors play a similar role to that of mentors and are often compared to them, (Negroni-Rodriguez et al., 2006; Torres & Hernandez, 2009; Torres et al., 2006), it is important to consider the unique ways advisors can help students establish a sense of belonging during their studies.

Academic Advising

Advising plays a critical role to student success in college. According to Light (2001), "good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience" (p. 81). Within their roles, advisors fulfill a variety of different roles, including advising, teaching (first-year seminar courses), curriculum development, outreach, and administrative duties. They are often among the first professionals with whom undergraduate students interact in postsecondary education. Advising professionals guide students through course selection and are usually tasked with providing academic, career, extra- and co-curricular opportunities, and research opportunities. By connecting students with these resources, academic advisors assist with creating a sense of belonging for students. However, Musoba et al. (2013) found Black and Latinx students had mixed experiences with advisors in the context of an HSI. In interviews and focus groups with 43 students, some mentioned feeling distrust toward

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advising after receiving incorrect information from their advisors. These students reported frustration with having to return to their advisors multiple times to ask the same questions. The students also noted that, due to advisors' large caseloads, their relationships felt impersonal. Still, other students expressed hope and suggested strengthening the advising-advised relationship by having advisors serve as first-year instructors to get to know their students better.

In addition to enhancing students' sense of belonging, advisors are trusted professionals who draw on institutional knowledge about policies and procedures to connect and refer students as necessary. Advisors start meeting and communicating with students at various points throughout their transition to an institution and have the opportunity to provide resources. Medina and Posadas (2012) found students expressed a need for a more supportive transition from high school to college and better advising at both levels. Moschetti et al. (2018) also found Latina/o students enjoyed and benefited from a peer mentoring program, but shared that they would like their peer mentors to be even more knowledgeable and involved with activities and academics through activities such as personal tutoring. Overall, the studies shared above found that Latinx students desire advising and knowledge about resources.

The organizational structures that support and house advising vary by institution, college, department, and offices. While some institutions utilize faculty advisors, others hire professional advisors or have a combination of both faculty and professional advisors. Advising can also be centralized, where all advisors work out of a single location on campus, or decentralized, where advisors are located in different departments across campus. Regardless of setup, advising involves engaging students in critical thought about their futures (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). It is sometimes conducted in one-on-one appointments and other times conducted in groups. Advising most often occurs through face-to-face appointments, email, phone, and video

conferencing. Depending on the advisor's style, students may be encouraged to lead their appointments with their questions and concerns. Other times, advisors lead the conversation to learn more about the student and share information. Advisors are thus trained in and rely on information from various places, including student development theory, institutional policies, and procedures, The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA), scholarly inquiry, and continued professional development.

NACADA: An Organization for Professional Advisors

NACADA is the main professional organization for academic advisors. As previously noted, most of the literature on advising stems from NACADA's work. Unlike faculty advisors, the majority of professional academic advisors' time is allotted to advising instead of teaching or research. Professional advisors are therefore expected to be aware of institutional policies and procedures to effectively guide students and refer them to the resources they need to persist and succeed. Their main responsibilities are to focus on academic planning and to be proactive in assisting students with degree attainment (King, 1993). The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) has also stipulated that advisors "must hold an earned graduate or professional degree in a field relevant to the position they hold or must possess an appropriate combination of educational credentials and related work experience" (2011, p. 10). Additionally, according to a survey by NACADA, "two thirds of survey respondents indicated that a master's degree was the most common credential earned among professional advisors at their institution" (Taylor, 2011).

Overall, academic advising can be a key element of undergraduate students' experience. Advisors should therefore be well equipped with the knowledge and skills to assist all students in achieving success. To realize this goal, NACADA has developed a Race, Ethnicity, and

Inclusion (REI) work group. One of the REI workgroup's main purposes is to train leaders in

NACADA to assist with becoming a more inclusive and equitable professional organization that

can create more diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces for colleagues and students. NACADA

also has an Emerging Leaders program that has existed since 2007 and that specifically

"encourage[s] members from diverse groups to get involved in leadership opportunities within

the organization" (2017, p. 1). As advisors continue their personal growth through opportunities

like those offered by the REI workgroup and the Emerging Leaders program, it is key to keep the

intersections of student populations in mind.

NACADA has four pillar documents that guide academic advising: (1) concepts of

academic advising, (2) core values of academic advising, (3) core competencies of academic

advising, and (4) CAS Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising. In the following

sections, I review the first three pillars, as they are particularly relevant to this dissertation.

Together, the pillars provide an operational definition of advising and address specific factors

that guide the advising relationship.

Concepts of Academic Advising

According to NACADA, academic advising involves advancing student learning

outcomes through curricular advising and pedagogy. Curriculum includes content like an

institution's mission, culture, academic programs, goals, resources, policies, and procedures

(NACADA, 2006). The pedagogy of advising (i.e., teaching and learning processes and

practices) is a mutual relationship between advisors and students built on a foundation of trust

and respect and student learning outcomes are "are guided by an institution's mission, goals,

curriculum and co-curriculum" (NACADA, 2006). Although institutions can develop their own

pedagogies and outcomes, NACADA provides a list of suggestions that includes making

educational plans, setting goals, and meeting program requirements. The overarching goal of advising can therefore be viewed as assisting students in understanding their goals for their educational experiences so that they may effectively take their learning beyond the institution.

Core Values of Academic Advising

NACADA (2017) suggests advisors be guided by a set of core values, including care, commitment, empowerment, inclusivity, integrity, professionalism, and respect. Caring involves building relationships through "empathetic listening," while commitment entails not only being "committed to students, colleagues, institutions" but also to the profession. To empower students, advisors should "motivate, encourage, and support" while also offering inclusivity by "respect[ing], engage[ing], and valu[ing] a supportive culture for diverse populations." Finally, advisors should show integrity by being ethical, adhering to professionalism by following the values, and "understanding and appreciating students' views and cultures" (NACADA). The values are periodically reviewed and updated to ensure they continue to meet the organization's core expectations of advising.

Core Competencies of Academic Advising

In addition to providing definitional parameters and guiding values for advisors, NACADA also offers an academic advising model with a three-dimensional framework (see Appendix G). The three dimensions address: conceptual, informational, and relational competencies. According to NACADA (2017), "the purpose of the model is to identify the broad range of understanding, knowledge, and skills that support academic advising, to guide professional development, and to promote the contributions of advising to student development, progress, and success." NACADA's (2017) conceptual area has six competencies that advisors really need to understand: (C1) the history and role of academic advising in higher education,

(C2) NACADA's core values of academic advising, (C3) theory relevant to academic advising, (C4) academic advising approaches and strategies, (C5) expected outcomes of academic advising, and (C6) how equitable and inclusive environments are created and maintained. The conceptual dimension provides the setting for assisting advisors with the delivery to their students.

The informational component refers to the elements of academic advising. NACADA's (2017) informational competencies encompass seven areas: (I1) institution-specific history, mission, vision, values, and culture; (I2) curriculum, degree programs, and other academic requirements and options; (I3) institution-specific policies, procedures, rules, and regulations; (I4) legal guidelines of advising practices, including privacy regulations and confidentiality; (I5) the characteristics, needs, and experiences of major and emerging student populations; (I6) campus and community resources that support student success; and (I7) information technology applicable to relevant advising roles. All of the above areas are information that advisors should be knowledgeable of and receive continue training on to assist with guiding students through their academic journey.

The relational component is essential is advising. It is important that advisors and students work together to build a trusting relationship. NACADA's (2017) relational component includes the following seven competencies: (R1) articulate a personal philosophy of academic advising, (R2) create rapport and build academic advising relationships, (R3) communicate in an inclusive and respectful manner, (R4) plan and conduct successful advising interactions, (R5) promote student understanding of the logic and purpose of the curriculum, (R6) facilitate problem solving, decision-making, meaning-making, (R7) planning, goal-setting, and engage in on-going assessment and development of advising practices. The relational component "provides

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the skills that enable academic advisors to convey the concepts and information from the other two components to their advisees" (NACADA, 2017). The relational component is essential is advising.

Academic advisors have some of the most daily interactions with students navigating higher education. Additionally, understanding Latinx students' experiences in higher education including isolation and sense of belonging at various institution types assisted with the development of the areas of exploring the four areas below in my conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

In this section, I introduce my conceptual framework. Weaver-Hart (1988) has defined a conceptual framework as "a structure for organizing and supporting ideas" (p. 11). Robson (1993) has added that:

> Developing a conceptual framework forces you to be explicit about what you think you are doing. It also helps you to be selective; to decide which are the important features; which relationships are likely to be of importance or meaning; and hence, what data you are going to collect and analyse. (pp. 150–151)

Given the above, my conceptual framework combines insights from the literature reviewed in the previous sections, NACADA's Core Values and Competencies, and my professional experience in the academic advising profession. I selected these components because I believe the literature and my professional experience can testify to their importance. The literature offers a lens of advising and student experiences specific to Latinx first-generation students. Additionally, my professional experience is relevant as I have worked in academic advising in higher education for several years. More specifically, I have worked with Latinx first-generation students in different capacities such as advising and mentoring. My conceptual framework is composed of four main

considerations: (1) the importance of the students' experiences (Batista et al., 2018; Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Daniels et al., 2016; Vaquera & Zehr, 2007; Yosso, 2005); (2) the content of advising relationships (Nuñez et al., 2013; Strayhorn, 2012; Tovar, 2015); (3) advising approaches (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2018; Castro Samayoa, 2018; Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Chacón, 2012; Museus & Neville, 2012; Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010; Suarez, 2003); and (4) the frequency of meetings between students and their advisors (Bettinger & Baker, 2011; Musoba et al., 2013; Swecker et al., 2013). This conceptual framework was used to form the research questions driving this study. It also guided my interviews, as well as the analysis and organization of the data. Moreover, as shown in Figure 1, the content of advising meetings, approaches, and frequency are a part of the advising process to assist with understanding student experiences. What advisors share in meetings and how information is delivered, the way that advisors build relationships with students, and the amount of time students have the opportunity to meet with advisors all are key in their overall advising experiences.

Student Experiences

As previously noted, research on Latinx student experiences has often revealed these students' struggle with isolation (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Nuñez et al., 2013; Von Robertson et al., 2016) and a lack of sense of belonging (Gonzalez et. al., 2018; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nuñez, 2011; Nuñez & Sansone, 2016; Strayhorn, 2012). These issues have been found to significantly impact Latinx students' experiences and success in higher education. Notably, the literature on Latinx students does suggest that the NACADA framework could potentially capture the concerns (i.e., isolation, need for reliable information, etc.) of first-generation Latinx students. In my personal experience, first-generation Latinx students have described meeting with advisors and not returning because they felt unheard or that they were given incorrect information. These

feelings contributed to the isolation the students were already feeling at the university. In contrast, other Latinx students have shared with me that they remained enrolled at the university because of their advisor. These advisors all took time to share their personal stories with advisees, which included experiences Latinx students could relate to, such as being away from family and working through college. The students found these personal stories motivating and helped them see their advisors in a different light as individuals who have had the same challenges and experiences.

Content of Advising Meetings

The content covered in advising meetings is important because the information shared can be critical to student success. NACADA, a professional advising association, also includes the "substance of academic advising" in their informational component. NACADA's contribution is important as the organization has allowed space for a significant impact in the area of academic advising research which includes why content of advising meetings is important. Students, especially first-generation students, may often not know the purpose of academic advising or what to ask beyond course enrollment questions. To address this, the literature has recommended advisors assist by employing proactive advising (Museus & Ravello, 2010; Swecker et al., 2013) and reaching out to first-generation Latinx students first, but also by asking questions and sharing important resources to help guide the conversation. For instance, as an advisor, I first invite students to ask questions and then share relevant sources of support and opportunities depending on what I have learned in our meeting. Overall, it is important for advisors to be prepared to share and ask more questions in advising meetings so that students leave with an understanding of the content that was covered. Additionally, connecting early, sending notes regarding meeting content, and sharing resources is valuable.

Advising Approaches

Having advisors who care and offer a welcoming space is beneficial to the advising experience. However, as Lee (2018) reminds us, it is not enough to be nice to SoC. Rather, advisors must work to understand their own biases and be prepared to effectively advocate for SoC. Understanding the many nuances of being a student of color at a PWI is critical as well. Museus and Ravello (2010) have accordingly emphasized the importance of "humanizing" (p. 53) the advising experience. I embody this in my own approach to advising by sharing something personal about myself with students to interrupt and refigure the power dynamic between us. It has been a key step in forming strong advising relationships based in trust.

Meeting Frequency

Research has shown that meeting frequency may assist in student retention (Swecker et al., 2013), such that more frequent meetings between first-generation students and their advisors can support student retention. By acting as institutional or "cultural navigators," advisors can be a resource through which students hold themselves accountable to their educational goals and future aspirations (Strayhorn, 2015). In this role, advisors can assist students in not only selecting and planning courses, but also in processing their experiences—all of which can significantly facilitate student success.
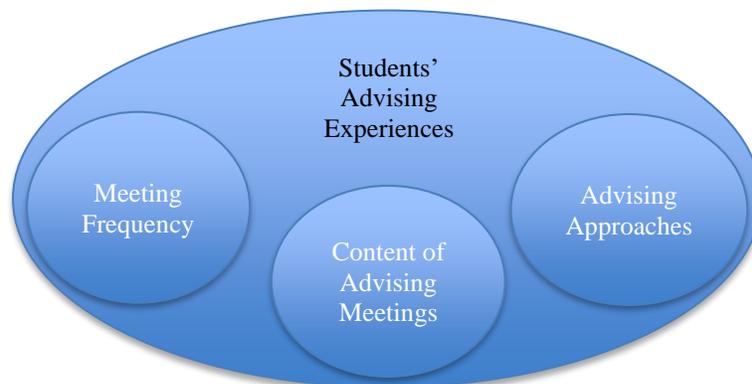
Figure 1: First-generation Latinx students' advising experiences

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed several areas of literature, including Latinx student enrollment, Latinx student experiences, and academic advising. I then presented a conceptual framework based on this review that I used to guide my exploration of Latinx student experiences with college advising. Readers will see in later chapters that, in line with the literature, I asked students to describe the frequency of and content covered during their advising meetings, as well as their advisors' approaches in order to best understand their advising experience.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In this chapter, I describe my methodology, data collection methods, analytical strategies, and the measures I implemented to ensure trustworthiness. As this dissertation study was qualitative and largely informed by the constructivist paradigm, I begin by defining qualitative inquiry and describe my positionality in regard to advising, first-generation Latinx students, and higher education at a PWI. I then move into the research design and describe the study's setting, and proceed to detail my recruitment and participant selection process, data collection, analytical strategies, and trustworthiness. I conclude by offering boundaries for the study that share the importance of the research.

Qualitative Inquiry

A qualitative study was important for this study as it would allow Latinx first-generation graduates an opportunity to share their voice so that their experiences in advising could be further explored and understood. Qualitative researchers "seek to make sese of actions and narratives, and the ways in which they intersect" (Glense, 2016, p. 1). Qualitative inquiry allows you to be descriptive, interpretive, or exploratory which are all important elements when asking participants to share. Having an opportunity to further explore and be descriptive when asking questions and analyzing data provides more opportunity to expand the research. The interpretive approach, which is similar to Charmaz's (2014) writing on constructivism, aligns best with my study. Both interpretive and constructivist approaches to research seek "an understanding of how things work in particular settings and how people make meaning of particular occurrences" (p. 40). Moreover, positionality is important to qualitative and constructivism research.

Positionality

As with all research, it is important to acknowledge my positionality as a researcher in relation to this topic, my participants, and the study itself. As one who identifies as Latinx, an advisor, and a first-generation student, this dissertation is personal to me in several ways. On one hand, I have been an advisor in different capacities for 14 years at MSU, where this study was conducted. As I tend to advise and mentor students in professional relationships that often last beyond their time at the university, I consider my work as an advisor to be a very personal part of my life. My work is directly related to this study because I often engage with and informally advise Latinx students. As an advisor, I understand the importance of advising interactions in the small amount of time I am with advisees. I believe a good advisor generally has the following traits: willingness and ability to listen; ability to be honest with students, an interest in empowering students, shows respect for students; employs a caring ethic; is committed to continued training in diversity, equity, and inclusion; and are willing to provide resources for advisees. From my experience as a first-generation Latinx student, I did not seek an advisor because I did not know who they were, how they could help me, or if they would help me. When I met with my major advisor, I felt so clueless and unaware. I expected them to provide me the information I needed but instead received limited instruction that was not very helpful. I then tried to navigate the institution on my own and failed several times. Yet, this experience also taught me something else of value: that there are advisors out there who can be caring and invested in Latinx students. I was eventually connected with an advisor who identified as Latinx and they provided me the motivation and understanding I needed to complete my undergraduate degree.

Given the above, I understand that being an employee, student, and researcher at the very institution I am employed allows for personal bias in various ways. On one hand, I want my institution (MSU) to be successful. On the other hand, I acknowledge that, as a Person of Color (PoC), this campus is not always comfortable nor safe. I am also frequently called for service work due to my Latinx identity and it is important for me to acknowledge that I recruited participants for this study due to their identities as Latinx first-generation graduates. It is critical that I remain mindful of this throughout the research process, as my goal is for students' voices to be heard so other advisors can adapt to their students instead of the students always being asked to conform to the institution.

It is worth noting here that I have collaborated with other Latinx colleagues to start an initiative on campus for Latina students. This project has further deepened and nuanced my understanding of what Latinx students need from advisors, mentors, and role models. Through the informal advising and mentoring I have done in this capacity, I have formed three implicit theories that inform my research in both positive and limiting ways: (1) if Latinx students have opportunities to connect with a professional on campus in ways that are meaningful to them, they may feel a greater sense of belonging to the institution; (2) if advisors have a deeper understanding of the overall experiences first-generation Latinx students have, they may be able to shift their advising approaches when working with these students; and (3) as advisors develop and implement more promising advising practices in relation to deeper understandings of Latinx students, their experiences, and their advising experiences, these students may attend more advising sessions, which can lead to higher retention and graduation rates. Finally, I want to disclose to readers that this work is also important to me because I want my children to know that, while these spaces may have not been created with them in mind, they do belong; they have

a voice and there are institutional professionals who hear and respect them. With these factors of my own positionality as a researcher in mind, I detail my research design and strategies in what follows.

<div align="center">

Research Design

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For this project, I designed and organized a total of 16 semi-structured interviews with recent MSU graduates who identify as first-generation Latinx college students. Below, I discuss each element of this dissertation study, beginning with a robust description of the research setting.

<div align="center">

Academic Advising at Michigan State University

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Academic advising is a key component in undergraduate education. In this section I will give an overview of academic advising at MSU. According to CAS (2011), academic advising programs "must be consistent with the mission of the department, college, division, institution, and applicable professional standards" (p. 6). As such, in the undergraduate education office, the university academic advising mission and core expectations (see Appendix F) are shared across the entire academic advising community. MSU itself has 17 degree-granting colleges with over 200 undergraduate, certificate, and graduate programs.

Academic advising at MSU is a mutual relationship between advisor and student. Students are assigned to an advisor(s) with whom they are encouraged to regularly connect and are responsible for knowing their major requirements, including university, college, and department or school requirements. Advising is an ongoing process throughout a student's undergraduate years. To ensure students can make the most informed decisions for their academic careers and beyond, advising involves discussing educational goals, area of study, career advising, providing resources, and interpreting policies and procedures.

Notably, academic advising at MSU is decentralized, meaning all colleges and departments have their own advising structures. They thus have the power to determine whether to utilize professional advisors, faculty advisors, or ask others (e.g.., department chairs) to help. Each major is assigned at least one advisor while some majors have several with varying responsibilities, such as teaching and administrative duties. While there are no official numbers, advisors may have small or large cohorts of students that range from 60 to 600 students. To meet students' needs as effectively as possible, the average recommended caseload should ideally be closer to 350.

In terms of space, advisors usually have an office. This is important, as student information is private under the Family Educational and Rights Act (FERPA). Some advisors let students decide whether they prefer the door to be open or shut during their meetings. Other advisors close their doors during meetings if others are in close proximity and can hear the conversation. This privacy is paramount, as students may discuss a variety of topics during an appointment that range from academic planning to mental health concerns.

Advisors generally meet with students for 30-minute appointments. These appointments are offered in a variety of forms, including, in-person, phone, email, and video conferencing. Students can view their advisors' availability and schedule appointments online as needed. When a student schedules an online appointment, the advisor receives a notification and their calendar is blocked off. The email notification contains key information, such as appointment method and any comments a student may have written regarding what they want to discuss during the appointment. This allows the advisor to adequately prepare and ensure the student is meeting with the correct advisor. Advisors can cancel appointments if they are scheduled with the

incorrect advisor and may send the student a separate email to refer and connect them with the correct advisor. Some advisors also work through email to schedule appointments.

During appointments, advisors have several tools for reviewing student information, including (but not limited to) high school information, test scores, majors, minors, transcripts, grades, and a picture of the student. Teachers may additionally submit grade reports for students throughout the semester so advisors can review this information and check-in with students about their academic progress.

Recruitment

After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I began recruiting potential participants using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling selects participants based on the requirements of their study, which can sometimes be considered a weakness (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Yet, because I am familiar with MSU as both a student and as an employee, and because I interact with the on-campus Latinx community, I had the benefit of insider knowledge and networks. In other words, purposeful sampling was not limiting for me because I knew who to contact to identify recent alumni for this study.

My recruitment plan was two-fold. First, I completed a data request for the Office of the Registrar of first-generation, Latinx students who graduated in the last three years. At MSU, students are coded as "first-generation" and "Hispanic." The Office of the Registrar pulled a report based on my request and sent recruitment letters (see Appendix A) to participants by email. Second, as these requests took time, I reached out to colleagues working with the Latinx community at MSU and asked for their assistance with sending recruitment letters to eligible students. To connect with interested participants, I included a link to a survey (see Appendix B) in the recruitment letter email asking for demographic and contact information. The purpose of

both the data request and asking colleagues to reach out to graduates was to not only interview students I knew personally; rather, it served to diversify my participant group.

Participant Qualifications

To participate in this study, alumni had to meet the following criteria: (1) identify as Latinx; (2) identify as first-generation, meaning they are the first in their immediate family to graduate from college, excluding siblings; (3) matriculated more than half of their credits at MSU to provide time for advising experiences; and (4) graduated from MSU in the last three years, so that recall of their experiences with advising was more readily accessible.

Using these criteria, I recruited participants from a variety of majors via email invitation (see Appendix C). MSU has 13 degree-granting undergraduate colleges and over 160 majors. Many majors may have one advisor, or advisors advise multiple majors in the same college. For example, an advisor can advise in the College of Natural Science for both Mathematics and Actuarial Science majors. In the initial survey I sent, graduates were asked to identify their college and major. I also inquired about additional declared majors during their undergraduate years because some graduates spent a significant amount of time in an additional major and thereby had access to multiple advisors during their time at MSU. Ultimately, the goal was to generate a sample representative of advising experiences from several colleges.

The focus of my study was on advising experiences with students' major advisors. Some students had multiple majors. While I was confident in having multiple students from a single college, I was aware of the diversity in the data regarding the majors participants declared throughout their tenure as students. Interviewing 16 graduates allowed for an adequately representative sample of no more than two students with the same major.

Participants

In terms of demographics, all participants in this dissertation study graduated from MSU between 2016-2019. They ranged in age from 22-43. Participants represented majors across eight colleges (three participants had two degrees from different colleges). However, 11 participants had degrees from the College of Social Science. Out of the 16 interviewees, 11 identified as women or female and five identified as men or male. Seven participants identified as Mexican, five as Mexican American, two as Latina, one as Guatemalan, and one as Peruvian. Table 1 shows complete participant demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Table

Name (pseudonym)	Year Graduated	Age	Gender, Racial, & Ethnic Identities
Francis	2019	22	Woman, Mexican
Elijah	2019	24	Man, Mexican
Teresa	2019	23	Woman, Mexican-American
Crystal	2018	25	Woman, Latina
Jose	2019	23	Man, Mexican-American
Brenda	2019	23	Woman, Guatemalan
Ana Carmen	2017	26	Woman, Mexican-American
Raul	2016	26	Man, Mexican-American
Victoria	2016	27	Woman, Mexican
Carla	2018	23	Woman, Peruvian
Fernanda	2019	23	Woman, Chicana, Mexican-American
Sophia	2018	23	Woman, Mexican
Ana	2018	24	Woman, Latina
Montezuma	2016	26	Male, Mexican
Ang	2016	25	Female, Mexican
Poncho Villa	2019	43	Man, Mexican

Semi-Structured Interviews

As previously mentioned, I conducted semi-structured interviews with first-generation

Latinx students who graduated from MSU between 2016-2019. Prior to our interviews, each

participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D). Interviews ran from

approximately 60-90 minutes in length. All participants had the opportunity to choose their own

pseudonym and were interviewed once in person or via video conferencing. Given the semi-

structured interview format, I prepared my questions in advance but had the flexibility to ask

questions or follow-up questions as needed. The interviews were guided by the four areas of

focus in my conceptual framework, as outlined in Chapter Two, and consisted of open-ended

questions (see Appendix E) about their experiences with academic advising and specific

questions about their advisor(s). At times, the interviews were emotional not only for the

participants but for me as well. I recorded the interviews using Zoom, an online video

conferencing platform with a digital recorder. I used the transcription service *Trint* to transcribe

interview audio. After receiving the *Trint* transcripts, I carefully reviewed each one, line-by-line,

to check for accuracy. Finally, transcripts were masked and edited before sending to participants

to review for member-checking.

Analytic Strategies

Data collection and analysis in qualitative research involves identifying and interpreting

themes and patterns. In using the constructivist paradigm, my goal was to stay as close to the

data as possible to develop locally informed participant and researcher driven outcomes.

However, Glesne (2016) has warned that "data analysis involves organizing what you have seen,

heard, and read so you can figure out what you have learned and make sense of what you have

experienced" (p. 183) and that researchers tend to "collect more data than [what they] need" (p.

191). For these reasons, it was important for me to develop a process through which I could remain organized yet always open to reviewing and revising what I was learning. In general, my data analysis process followed a few key cycles. First, I actively listened to participant voices in both the interviews and transcripts. While doing so, I kept my research questions and conceptual framework in mind, the latter of which was informed by NACADA's Core Values and Competencies. I then conducted what researchers call "initial coding" before moving on to constant comparative coding. In later phases, I used focused coding. Throughout this process, I worked with a critical friend and my advisor to help me clarify analytical decisions along the way.

Initial Coding

Most qualitative researchers agree that initial coding (also called "first-cycle" or "open" coding) is the first step (Birks & Mills, 2015) of analysis. Initial codes are "provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 117). In this first stage of coding, the researcher moves at a fast pace to capture patterns in the data (Birks & Milles, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). Starting with initial coding allowed me to remain close to the experiences the Latinx graduates shared with me. This entailed reading through every transcript line-by-line and marking data that responded to my research questions about advising practices they found helpful and hindering. I highlighted segments of the transcripts that indicated helpful sessions (e.g., supportive, affirming, accurate advising) as well as segments that indicated hindering experiences (e.g., inaccurate information, rushed sessions). After reading through each transcript once, I re-read each one again and applied my conceptual framework to consider whether and how my coding aligned with the four points of the framework (i.e., students experiences, content of advising meeting, advising approaches, meeting frequency; see Table 2).

Table 2

Initial Coding

Initial Coding with Conceptual Framework	Interview Statement
Meeting Frequency	*He requested that I see him weekly to make sure I'm catching up. (Elijah)*
Content of Advising Meetings	*Mainly it was more about graduation, what classes were hard, what classes were easy, what class should I take, what class [I] shouldn't take, a lot of questions revolved around study abroad. (Ang)*
Approaches to Advising	*I always looked happy with [minor advisor] just because he would offer so much sweets… (Ana)*
Students Experiences	*I felt my plan would always change, like the dates and stuff [and] when I was expected to graduate until I just didn't know. (Ana Carmen)*

Constant Comparative Method

After initial coding, I conducted constant comparative coding, which allows the researcher to make comparisons at various levels (Birks & Mills, 2015). I identified similarities and differences in the data in terms of how participants talked about advising content, advising experiences, and so on. This was when I started to compare and categorize the data as helpful or hindering. To fit into the helpful category, data had to suggest that an advisor or their advising practice was caring, assisted with academic planning, created belonging, or offered a welcoming space. For example, it was clear that advisors' knowledge about course planning was critical. Students explained it was specifically helpful when advisors planned out their courses. To fit into the hindering category, data had to suggest an advisor or their advising practice distracted or undermined a student's academic progress or sense of belonging.

This is also the step at which I noticed gendered differences in participants' expectations of their advisors. The women (n=5) hoped for relational experiences and wanted their advisors to serve as mentors. Men shared they felt comfortable using "walk-in advising" or would just stop

by advisors' offices, while women preferred to schedule appointments but often ran into scheduling conflicts with employment and classes. In terms of similarities, both men and women indicated that, when advisors offered both academic and personal support, they felt cared for and left advising appointments feeling happy. Although I did not pursue a gender analysis in this study, I mention it here because it may be of interest to future researchers. During comparative coding, I also realized students named various offices and people that were not affiliated with a professional advising role or title. I made a note of this because my initial purpose was to study how first-generation Latinx students experience academic advising. However, participants pointed out that people in non-professional, non-advising roles played important advisory roles for them in their schooling.

Focused Coding

In the last phase of my analysis, I used focused coding. Focused coding is more conceptual and involves "naming" or "theming" patterns in the data. Using all the data I had previously coded, I began looking for nuances in the coded data, especially within the strips of data I had coded as helpful or hindering. For example, I noticed in the hindering data that some advisors gave inaccurate information about course enrollment, such that students expressed frustration and even faced financial costs due to these errors. Other times, I had coded practices as hindering because a participant described an advisor as too busy or failing to establish a meaningful rapport. This last phase of analysis was helpful in organizing what I had learned from students into the larger buckets of helpful or hindering practices. I then looked inside each bucket to identity the following subthemes: (a) a caring relationship, (b) informed about key content, and (c) shared identity-based experiences. Data was placed in the "caring relationship" sub-theme when it seemed the advisor had taken time to get to know their advisee by initiating small

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talk, sharing candy, and welcoming the student. I constructed the subtheme "informed about key content" to characterize when advisors were informed about the curriculum and referred students to relevant resources. Finally, when advisors shared stories about their identities (e.g., being Latinx, first-generation, or income related experiences), I placed that data into a sub-theme called "sharing identity-based experiences."

In reviewing the data for the hindering theme, four subthemes emerged: (a) busy, (b) distracted, (c) bias in advising, and (d) invalidating. I constructed the subtheme "busy" when I noticed participants specifically referenced scheduling and availability. I similarly placed data in the "distracted" subtheme when advisors focused more on their cell phones, papers, or computers during the meeting. Next, I noticed data regarding "bias in the advising experiences," as some participants witnessed white students received different treatment and had different relationships with the same advisor. Finally, data on advisors questioning students about their choice in major and grades was placed in the "invalidating" subtheme.

Table 3

Focused Coding

Helpful	Helpful Themes	Hindering	Hindering Themes
My advisor, he would *greet me* where I was at the sitting area, *welcomed me* in and would *catch up with me first*, like, what have I been up to since the last time I saw them. And then resolving whatever issue I had that was conflicting [for] me or answering any worries that I had. (Fernanda)	A Caring Relationship (n=10, women=6, men=4)	I would have to *wait weeks* because the person I wanted was taken and I don't want to go with anybody else so that was a frustration and he's just one person. (Ana)	Busy (n=12, women=10, men=2)

Table 3 (cont'd)

Even if I went in worrying about something,…I [left] the advising appointment mainly stress free, very relaxed, very much more sure of myself after the meeting…because [I felt] *they always had the right answers for me* and *general direction in which I should be heading*. (Elijah)	Informed About Key Content (n=12, women=8, men=4)	I guess I felt like there wasn't really a connection and I don't know if [it was] because this individual had multiple roles. Like, she had other roles going on, so obviously *sometimes she would be on her phone* even when we were going through our stuff. So, I just felt like I wasn't really getting what I was [needing] with my plan and everything. The support, the guidance wasn't there from her. So, I had to figure that out on my own. (Ana Carmen)	Distracted (n=4, women=3, men=1)
I remember talking to her about me being *first generation,* so she completely go it. She's like, "it's okay, we have students that come in that are *first generation* and I'm here to help them." (Brenda)	Sharing Identity-Based Experiences (n=6, women=5, men=1)	Sometimes when I would meet with a *white advisor*, they wouldn't ever share any of their experiences with me. I was like, oh, how do you know what I'm dealing with? (Brenda)	Bias in Advising (n=6, women=6, men=0)
		That's how it translated to me as a student, just like, *well this is how you've been performing*; how do you think you're gonna, sort of like, *they made me question if I really belong there.* (Fernanda)	Invalidating (n=4, women=3, men=1)

Note. This table gives examples of focused coding, including helpful and hindering themes and subthemes.

Trustworthiness

To assist with trustworthiness, I used member checking, triangulation, and an external reader. Member checking is a process through which researchers share data, such as transcripts, with participants to make sure their perspectives are accurately captured (Glesne, 2016). While member checking is not required in a qualitative study, it is a key way of giving participants more agency and involvement in the research process. As it was important to me as a researcher that their voices be centered throughout this project, participants were invited to review the transcripts and provide feedback as they saw fit. Transcripts were sent to participants as soon as they were transcribed, which happened within the same week of their interviews. I also

employed triangulation by gathering data from multiple students, cross-comparing, reflecting on the data through my professional experience, and referencing the existing literature in relation to my findings. I kept notes throughout my analysis to track my process. Finally, an external reader from my cohort was invited to review my coding. This external reader affirmed the findings, noting most data was placed in the appropriate themes and sub-themes but also challenged me by asking me to rethink some of the sub-theme names and questioned whether some phrases were in the appropriate area. Overall, the above ways to establish trustworthiness assisted with me being able to critically reflect on my research to ensure that I was representing participants and interpreting the data correctly.

Boundaries

As a professional academic advisor, the strengths of my research—including my institutional knowledge and professional experience—are also boundaries for this study. For example, since I am an advisor at the same institution the participants graduated from, I wanted to share their voices to catalyze positive change. Moreover, this is especially important as the participants in this study have successfully graduated and institutions continue to seek ways to increase student success and graduation rates.

<p align="center">Chapter Summary</p>

In this chapter, I provided an overview of my study as a qualitative project informed by the constructivist paradigm and shared how this methodology aligns with the study's purposes of centering first-generation Latinx students' experiences with college advising. I explained how this design enabled deeper study in an area with limited research and allows participants' voices to be heard. I also reviewed my positionality in relation to this study, including my professional advising experiences and identity as Latinx. I went on to discuss how this shaped my research

design and recruitment parameters, the latter of which included four qualifications: Latinx, first-generation, matriculated most credits at MSU, and graduated from MSU in the last three years. I proceeded by clarifying the structure of my in-depth interviews and analytical strategies, including initial and focused coding, and concluded with a discussion of establishing trustworthiness through member checking, triangulation, and the shared boundaries of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Through the analysis described in the previous chapter, I determined that the first-generation Latinx graduates in my study described helpful advising and advisors as: (a) being available for appointments, (b) being knowledgeable about the curriculum, (c) providing resources, and (d) demonstrating care for students. When participants reported helpful experiences, they felt happy, powerful, and connected. Conversely, advisors' lack of institutional knowledge, such as (a) not knowing answers about curriculum or academic requirements, (b) not providing referrals to services like counseling, (c) only focusing on scheduling, and (d) not showing any interest or time for the students' non-academic needs hindered their academic and personal experiences. In the latter cases, students described leaving advising offices more frustrated than when they entered, which contributed to an overall sense that they did not belong in their major, college, nor at the institution. Moreover, many of the graduates reported their desire for a connection or relationship with an advisor went unfulfilled. I have thus organized my findings into two broad themes: helpful advising practices and hindering advising practices, each of which contains sub-themes.

My analysis also yielded one unexpected finding: many people, in many different types of positions (i.e., not just academic advisors), played key advisory roles in the lives of the first-generation Latinx students in this study. Although most held titles unrelated to major academic advising, participants consistently described staff members as advisors in their interviews. These informal (or unofficial) advisors included people who worked in career services, the College

Assistant Migrant Program (CAMP)[4], cultural programming, residential and housing services, and exploratory advising. Participants also named faculty as key advisors. Out of the 16 participants, 12 shared stories about the impact these non-major advisors had on their progress. Seven of the 12 particularly spoke about their CAMP advisors, while three spoke about faculty. Another three graduates shared stories about exploratory advising, two shared about their career, two shared about financial aid, two shared about cultural advisors, two shared about their minor advisors, and one about her residential advisor. Nine out of the 16 graduates had a non-major advisor they identified as Latinx. Accordingly, it is important to stress to readers that my findings include data for both major and non-major (e.g., career, cultural, and CAMP) advisors.

This finding was somewhat surprising because, as mentioned in Chapter Three, MSU has a professional advising structure wherein academic advisors are hired and trained to support students, follow MSU's advising core values, and stated advising responsibilities (see Appendix F). With a professional advising force in place, first-year and transfer students are immediately assigned an advisor when they begin their studies. Yet, I found that the graduates I interviewed sought additional connections and academic support from other professionals on campus. In this way, the participants used what Yosso (2005) has called *navigational capital*, which "refers to the skills that SoC often use to maneuver through social institutions" (p. 13) that were originally created for white, middle-class people. The participants in this study were graduates, who persisted by leaning on the "cultural wealth learned in spaces they had experiences," such as their communities and even jail (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2018). For example, Pancho Villa shared, "I'm not supposed to be here, I'm not supposed to be sitting here looking good, smiling

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[4] CAMP is a federally funded program that assists those with migrant and seasonal farmworking backgrounds with their first year of college and at MSU. CAMP serves about 50-60 Latinx students annually.

with a degree and having a job. You know what I mean, theoretically, I'm supposed to be locked

back up." With this in mind, I discuss what the students in my study described as helpful

advising practices in the section below.

Helpful Advising Approaches and Practices

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) defines *help* as "to give assistance or support to."

Participants shared how their advisors and non-major advisors helped in three overarching ways:

(a) providing a caring relationship, (b) informed about key content, and (c) sharing identity-

based experiences. These experiences improved students' sense of belonging, or their "perceived

social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or

feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus

community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 16). Students

additionally shared that advisors were key to their progress in degree completion and helped

connect them with study abroad opportunities and getting jobs. In what follows, I present my

findings using representative data from participants' stories of their experiences with both formal

and informal advisors.

A Caring Relationship

The benefits of cultivating caring relationships with SoC and first-generation students

have been described by Rendon (1994) in terms of validation, which she has described as an

"enabling, confirming and supportive process" (p. 12). Rendon found that, "when external agents

took the initiative to validate students, academically and/or interpersonally, students began to

believe they could be successful" (p. 8). The results of this dissertation study affirm these

findings, as several participants mentioned the ways advisors exhibited caring or validating

approaches that made them feel comfortable and connected, such as asking how they were doing,

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offering candy, providing correct information, and sharing resources. These findings directly relate to NACADA's pedagogy of building trusting and respectful relationships with advisees, as well as with NACADA's Core Values of care. When participants shared memories of their advisors, I noticed that they seemed happier and were smiling. For instance, Fernanda shared:

> My advisor, he would greet me where I was at the sitting area, welcomed me in and would catch up with me first, like, what have I been up to since the last time I saw them. And then resolving whatever issue I had that was conflicting [for] me or answering any worries that I had.

Fernanda's advisor was able to establish a trusting caring relationship by asking and learning more about her before moving into academic issues. Advisors approach to opening meetings with caring questions was key in building the caring relationship. Like Fernanda, many of the graduates mentioned how meaningful it was when an advisor welcomed them and started with small talk. Ana said:

> He'll greet me as like "hi [name]," all excited, and then we'll go in his office. And then that's when he'll ask me questions like "hey, how is your day going?" [and] "Can you tell me some pros and cons with the semester or even the week"…

Again, advisors who are welcoming, establish rapport, and invest in small conversation about students as a person really meant a lot to participants.

Advisors also enacted caring relationships with advisees by taking the time to encourage and reassure them. For example, Brenda's advisor, like many other advisors, shared resources that were helpful to her academic success. When asked if Ana felt her advisor cared, she declared:

Yes, they cared just because they would ask how I was doing each time I visited them

and then they would look at my grades and see if I was in good standing.

This is another example of an advisor's approach of starting the conversation with the well-being

of the student in mind and making a positive relationship with that student. Advisors contributed

to participants' sense of belonging by providing encouraging words like those Elijah shared:

"My advisor would tell me very frequently that he believed in me and that he knows I'm a smart

kid, I can do it. He would tell me like, 'you did really well.'" Carla emphasized:

So, for sure they always made it feel like I belong[ed] here, and that I earned my place to

be in those classrooms. And they would tell me how much of a good student I was. They

reminded me that I had a right to be at MSU and that I was capable of succeeding in

classes.

Similarly, Ana shared how her advisor provided her with reassurance:

I feel like they wanted me to be at MSU, just because at some points I'm like why am I

even here you know? But definitely they made me definitely feel welcome here and that I

actually deserved to be here, and I actually earned it.

As the quotes above indicate, the advisors who took time to engage advisees in open-ended small

talk led to trusting relationships based in care. These relationships in turn empowered the

students to feel a sense of belonging and accomplishment that ultimately boosted their self-

esteem and purpose.

In addition to traditional academic advising, six of the seven graduates shared that their

CAMP advisors provided a supportive and caring environment. For Ang, this support and care

involved access to people with similar backgrounds:

The Migrant Student Services…was an amazing experience because those advisors were amazing. I got to be home away from home, and I was, you know, with a lot of people that were similar backgrounds. So, I could really say that that experience was very amazing in my transition.

For Ang, a caring relationship was having a place on campus with several advisors that she could identify with and that the space reminded her of home. Having access to advisors with similar backgrounds through CAMP, who could provide participants a sense of belonging and model of success, was a helpful advising practice that clearly contrasted with academic advisors who did not take the time to cultivate relationships of care with advisees. Ang described these differences as:

For MSS [Migrant Student Services], I guess I can say that I know them at kind of a personal level, and they know me. But with my [academic] advisor that I saw very often with my [major] classes, I don't think she would know me that well.

According to Ang's and Ana's testimony, the CAMP advisors seemed to purposefully create a family-like environment for participants and gave them a space to identify with others like them at the institution.

Although MSU has a professional academic advising force, some colleges do delegate advising responsibilities to faculty. In speaking on the importance of her faculty advisor, Carla explained:

…from the moment I took her class, I completely loved everything she taught and then I worked for her, and we've kept in touch. So yeah, [she's been] more than a professor. She's been an advisor, a friend, and a mentor too, because she does things that I hope to do.

Here, Carla illustrates how her connection with her advisor went deeper than those most participants described, specifically via mentorship. Carla further detailed that she visited her advisor often and that, through their relationship, she obtained opportunities she would not have had otherwise, such as employment, research experience, and internships.

The university also has a cultural office that supports students and student groups of a variety of different identities. Elijah and Pancho Villa both remarked that their meetings with a Latinx cultural advisor positively impacted their experience of higher education. Elijah emphasized the importance of their relationship by recounting what had been most helpful in their advising practices:

> I think still on a more personal level I knew [them] and [they were] always, without me even asking, [they'd] referred me to resources and everything like that and tell me where to go, as well as helping me with my desire to give back to the community. [They were] my number one [person] who'd helped me [and they] also made sure I took care of myself.

As the above indicates, meeting with different advisors gave Elijah and Pancho Villa access to someone with whom they identified and to be involved with their community beyond the classroom, all of which enabled them to gain a stronger sense of belonging at the institution.

The university offers several minors. Minors are usually 20 to 30 credits of content knowledge in a student's area of focus and is noted on a graduate's transcript. Advisors for minors can be faculty, major advisors, or other staff. Two graduates, Ana, and Ana Carmen shared their thoughts about interactions with minor advisors that were both positive. Ana specifically spoke about the benefits as:

I always looked happy with [my minor advisor] just because he would offer so much

sweets [candy] and with my academic advisor from my [major] I would leave happy just

because I felt relaxed. Because we went through the whole semester together, he didn't

even have to do that. So, overall, I felt it was positive throughout the advising.

Importantly, Ana mentioned being offered sweets at the start of advising meetings, an experience

she shared with Pancho Villa. While a small gesture, participants remembered and associated it

with positive advising appointments and experiences with their advisors, particularly in terms of

how such gestures made them feel comfortable and cared for.

Residential and housing services is similarly a prominent aspect of many college

students' experience. However, only one graduate, Francis, shared stories about how her

residential advisor (RA) helped her feel cared for:

I know my [residential advisor] did because she told me I need to work on balancing

because I was not taking care of myself. I was taking care of my grades, so I know that

she cared about my grades, but she also cared about me.

Francis continued to compare the relationships:

Yeah, I have trust in every single person but him [college advisor]; again, because they

were genuine, they were open with me and you know they seem to actually care. I just

care about people who you know actually care. I don't like people who don't care, it

bothers me.

These quotes indicate that advisors providing validation, being transparent and sharing personal

stories, and checking in on students offered a caring relationship.

Taken together, the participants' stories point to a critical foundation of effective

advising, particularly for first-generation Latinx students. Regardless of advisor type, it was

important to the students' experience of higher education for their advisors to be proactive in building trusting relationships with them. Of this, Torres et al. (2019) has stated that "patience, time, and explicit explanations can help the advisor and the student understand what questions should be discussed" (p. 63). In other words, trust must be built and actively cultivated between students and advisors.

Informed about Key Content

In this section, I explore the participant consensus that advisors were especially helpful when they were knowledgeable about programs and resources in relation to advisees' studies and goals. Dekhtyar et al. (2001) have supported this finding in noting that an advisor's responsibility is "knowing the course offerings and the requirements relevant to the students' academic careers, and interacting with individual students" (p. 1). It is also critical that advisors be knowledgeable about policies and procedures. These competencies directly relate to NACADA's relational and informational areas regarding advisors' understanding of students' academic programs, curriculums, and effective methods of communication to ensure a shared understanding with students. Put another way, advisors should be familiar with the institutional resources available for advisees and be up to date on institutional happenings. Based on participants' stories, I define *informed* in the context of this study as the capability to understand, explain, and synthesize information relevant to advisees' success in a relatable fashion.

One way the theme of being informed emerged as a helpful practice in this study was in the graduates' descriptions of advisors' application of their institutional knowledge to students' academic success. For instance, Fernanda reported feelings of excitement about the academic plan she worked out with her advisor:

I will remember that every time I got out of the academic advisor meeting I would always

call my parents and be like, "I'm excited, and this is how I'm gonna move forward, like

this is how we're gonna make it to graduation."

Here, she describes how the knowledge her advisor employed to help her formulate a degree plan

empowered her to see success (i.e., graduation) as achievable. Ana Carmen expressed a similar

sentiment in discussing the differences between her major and minor advisors:

[Minor advisor] was more helpful. Helpful toward like if I needed help with other classes,

like revising and stuff like that with essays, [minor advisor] was more than happy to help

me with that or they would direct me towards the Writing Learning Center and stuff like

that. So, yeah, they were a lot more helpful than my [major advisor].

While Fernanda described being able to clearly conceptualize her path to graduation thanks to

her advisor's applied knowledgeability, Ana Carmen described being able to achieve academic

success via smaller, more immediate steps to that success (i.e., particular classes and

assignments). In this way, both benefitted from their advisors' help with scheduling and referrals

in ways that made their educational goals attainable.

Participants also noted that their advisors' ability to effectively answer their questions

was especially helpful when advisors did so reliably and in a timely fashion. For example, Carla

articulated:

They always made me feel comfortable with what I was doing and like I said you know

they were always available, [that] if I send an email, they will reply that same day. They

seemed to know every answer that I need[ed].

Her use of "comfortable" indicates Carla felt reassured when her advisor made time to respond to her questions. In being reassured of her advisor's reliability, she felt confident in her progress, which in turn helped increase her sense of belonging at the institution.

Carla and Ana Carmen were not the only participants to appreciate this. Four others shared similar responses regarding how their advisors being informed positively impacted their academic success. In terms of course enrollment, Montezuma shared that his advisor was "very beneficial on the roadmap for the classes that I needed," and Jose noted his advisor assisted with "sign[ing] up for the right classes." while Ana discussed how she "graduated on time thanks to my advisor that helped me plan semesters ahead" and finally Sophia further remarked on her advisor's delivery of academic information:

> They made that [requirements] very intelligible in a way that wasn't condescending or like enforcing their particular views of classes of the department and that was very grounding for me to say, to have somebody lead me through.

Here, she highlights that her advisor's content knowledge was effective because they took care to deliver this knowledge in a way that made sense to Sophia and that centered her as the primary agent of her education.

Another reason participants found their advisors' knowledge helpful was that said knowledge resulted in relevant resource referrals. Graduates particularly indicated that these referrals made them feel cared for because they were tailored to their individual needs. For example, Pancho Villa explained:

> Yeah, a lot of times I didn't ask for resources, but the few times that I did, or I'd ask for direction, yes, [advisor] specifically would tell me…and you know it was that type of thing where she knew the direction I was going and she would advise.

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Elijah shared the same sentiments about his advisor:

> Even if I went in worrying about thinking about something, I would come out of the advising appointment mainly stress free. Very relaxed, very much more sure of myself after the meeting because [I] always felt they always had the right answers for me and general direction in which I should be heading.

The testimonies here demonstrate how Pancho Villa's and Elijah's advisors knew and guided them in their individual paths toward their degrees and thus helped them feel more at ease after their appointments. Brenda shared a similar experience, notably highlighting the kinds of resources her advisor suggested as well as her advisor's method of delivery of this information:

> She would come and ask me, "I can refer you to another person if you're struggling with this or see extra time with another professor to help you out with this." She would send me those resources through e-mail and remind me, "Okay, well this is where your grade is at, just to know where you're at."

For Brenda's advisor, resource referral involved facilitating working relationships between Brenda and content experts (i.e., a person to see if she's struggling and extra time with professor) in conjunction with letting her know her grades so she was equipped to decide for herself which mode of referral she preferred for a given situation.

As the stories in this section show, I began to understand through conversations with participants that, even if advisors did not always know the answer immediately, their ability to find resources or answers and respond rapidly is what positively impacted students by making them feel supported and cared for.

Sharing Identity-Based Experiences

Museus (2021) has suggested that "students of color often identify academic advisors and other educators of color as the institutional agents who provided them with culturally engaging support and access to culturally relevant learning opportunities" (p. 28). Museus also goes on to say that "it is possible that academic advisors of color are more likely to serve students in these ways because they have more intimate knowledge of the racial realities students of color face" (p. 28). Embedded in the NACADA core competencies and values is the importance of building rapport with students and creating inclusive spaces for them to achieve academic success.

In this section, I share my findings around the sharing identity-based experiences sub-theme that the first-generation Latinx students told me they experienced with their advisors. The participants discussed identity in a variety of ways during our interviews. These discussions ranged from advisors acknowledging students' first-generation status to empathizing with their challenges and providing emotional support through a shared sense of belonging. Fernanda affirmed:

> I really like him and I think part of the reason why I kept feeling comfortable to go visit him regularly every month and speaking about my career goals and my long-term goals and graduating was because he was funny and he was Latinx. And [during] the conversation [he] was always interested in my well-being and [saying] "we're going to get you to graduation," [unlike] other advisers that were just down to business. It was like, "How are you not only academically but [also] emotionally and mentally." And given my background, like I'm not from here, I'm first-gen and, in a way, he understood not like my other advisors.

Here, Fernanda describes feeling cared for "not only academically but [also] emotionally and mentally," and that she particularly felt this in relation to her advisor's identity as Latinx. Many participants made similar connections with their advisors' identity that seemed to contribute to positive advising experiences, including feeling more welcome, being informed, and building a trusting relationship.

Having advisors that connected immediately when students disclosed their identity or if the advisor shared the same identity provided a welcoming sense of relief for the participants in knowing that they had someone to help navigate their journey. For example, for Brenda, her advisor's understanding of her identity as first-generation was reassuring in that she did not treat it as a deficit:

> I remember talking to her about like me being first generation, so she completely got it, she's like it's okay, we have students that come in that are first-generation and I'm here to help them.

As the above illustrates, Brenda's advisor both acknowledged the uniqueness of the first-generation student identity and at the same time took care to normalize this identity. This conversation was meaningful to Brenda precisely because her advisor shared that she was not alone as a first-generation student (i.e., there are other first-generation students at MSU) nor was she alone academically (i.e., her advisor was there to help). For other graduates, like Ana, their advisor's sharing of their own identity-based experiences as first-generation and Latinx was important because it signified to Ana that her advisor understood the unique challenges she faced and that she could thus rely on them to for support in ways she couldn't rely on her traditional supports, like her parents:

What has been helpful, honestly having that person that actually knows what you're going through because as a first generation [student] my parents didn't go to college so I can't ask them for help.

Brenda recalled similar a connection with her CAMP advisor:

So, I remember talking to [my CAMP Advisor] too, and she said that she was first-generation too, and there were some things that she struggled with along the way. And she will share stories with me, and then I was telling her I'm going through the same thing, so I guess it's just like making that connection or somebody relates to you and gets it.

Both Ana and Brenda explain above how they connected with advisors who were open and shared information with them about being first-generation. When advisors shared their own stories about navigating U.S. higher education as a first-generation Latinx, the students were able to understand that they were not alone and that it was possible for them to do so too.

In addition to major and minor advisors, as well as CAMP staff, exploratory advisors also proved to be helpful to participants. At MSU, exploratory advisors are situated in the undergraduate education unit and offer the opportunity for students who have less than 56 credits to explore majors of interests. Brenda emphasized the positive helpful experience she had with her exploratory advisor who was Latinx:

I don't think I'll ever forget that moment just because I was really happy somebody was able to hear me out. The struggles that I had with the class but also tying it to something that I love to do, and I feel like that's what [Exploratory Advisor] did throughout the advising. Even though I wasn't able to do it on one side, we figured out another route... And I was just really happy about it. I was like "Dang, I can still do what I want to do and

still take these other classes with [major] classes and I can be in the hospital and still

work with people." But I remember walking out so happy and I had a friend waiting

outside for me and she was like, "You look so happy, what happened?" I was like, "I

changed my major." So I thought that was a good experience, so I don't think I'll ever

forget that just because of how happy I was and how it made me feel just talking to

somebody about it [and] about my struggles, and them getting it and then helping me find

another way to still reach my goal.

Here, Brenda details her relief and happiness at being able to connect with an advisor who

understood her background and the challenges she faced. It is also worth mentioning that she was

specifically happy this advisor was thereby able to help her find an alternative path to her goal

that was both based in the strengths of her identity and that did not stigmatize her identity.

Fernanda had this same advisor assist with her major and had a similar experience:

[Exploratory Advisor] helped me explore more majors because [they're] for people who

haven't claimed a major yet. So with [them], I felt more comfortable, one because [they

are Latinx].

Both Brenda and Fernanda shared how, with the help of their exploratory advisor (who they

mentioned was Latinx), they got directly referred to a new major advisor. They shared that they

felt more comfortable going to this person and that they continued to meet with the new advisor

until graduation. I think this is an example of how this data does not have to be confined into one

category, however that it can speak to sharing identity-based experiences and having an advisor

that content informed.

A common effect of advisors sharing their identity-based experiences with advisees was

the establishment of a sense of trust in the relationship. Take Ana Carmen's story for instance:

They are very caring, welcoming, passionate, inspiring. I mean, I guess the [advisor],

we had similar backgrounds, you know, being first-gen. Also, they identified as Latinos

or Latinx. I guess because we had similar struggles and stuff like that, they tend to know

where I was coming from or anything like that if I ever needed anything. So, I guess I felt

like the advice from the [minor office] was more truthful than the academic advisor['s].

The above indicates that, because the minor advisor understood what it was like to navigate the

academy as a first-generation Latinx student, they were able to better and more accurately

anticipate her needs and offer relevant support. Her use of "more truthful" to describe the advice

of her minor advisor compared to her major advisor seems to suggest Ana Carmen trusted this

advisor more particularly because she shared similar identity-based experiences with her.

In addition to major and minor advisors and CAMP staff, participants in this study also

found career advisors to be helpful. Elijah noted that his career advisor was just as important to

him as his major advisor and cultural advisor:

I'd say what's been most helpful is, first of all, building that relationship. Now, it's a very

general one, really very cliché, but honestly just knowing—especially let's say [career

advisor] came from a low-income, first-generation family like I did—he was the first to

go to college in his family just like I was [and] he was the youngest. I knew a lot about

him; he'd tell me about how he went to college and he struggled and had to pay. He had

to work very hard and the family couldn't support him and that's the same exact situation

I found myself in. [When] I had to go see [career advisor], it felt like I'm coming to see

my good friend.

Elijah's story here echoes the stories shared by other participants in this section and adds how

advisors who shared identity-based experiences with advisees not only earned their trust, but also

their friendship. What's more, this happened across a range of advisors (i.e., major, minor, CAMP, and exploratory) and ultimately, according to the graduates, helped them persist and achieve academic success.

In this subtheme, first-generation Latinx participants shared that they very much enjoyed connecting with their advisors' through identity. Importantly, this often happened through sharing stories. When advisors shared their own experiences, they were able to build trusting relationships that transcended the transactional. In this way, I contend, storytelling can be used in the Latinx community to create a sense of belonging and support.

In sum, participants found advisors to be most helpful when they enacted a caring, relational approach to advising; when they were well informed about academics, policies, and procedures; and when they were willing to share stories regarding common or similar identity-based experiences.

Hindering Advising Practices and Approaches

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) defines hinder as "to make slow or difficult the progress of". In this section, I present the concerns participants voiced about hindering advising experiences. At times, participants felt their voices were not heard or taken into account. This occurred when their questions were not answered, their ability to succeed was invalidated due to academic standing, and when it appeared their advisors were concentrating on other things during their visits. The four sub-themes of hindering advising practices are explored below as: (a) busy, (b) distracting, (c) bias in advising, and (d) invalidating.

Busy

Viandan and Barlow (2015) share how "most academic advisors carry large caseloads of advisees, which may hinder their abilities to undertake additional commitments outside of those

established for day-to-day advising" (p. 23). Additionally, in a 2011 NACADA survey on academic advising that included information on advising caseloads (Carlstrom & Miller, 2013) also showed that, at large institutions, advisors' caseloads were around 600 advisees to each advisor (Robbins, 2013). In such cases, advisors and student affairs professionals often do not have the resources and support they need to effectively advise students, which can severely hinder student success.

In my interviews, graduates reported a lack of advisor availability that left them feeling they could not get the information they needed in a timely fashion. Of this, Ana shared:

> I would have to wait weeks because the person I wanted was taken and I don't want to go
>
> with anybody else, so that was a frustration, and he's just one person. . . . Scheduling
>
> [was frustrating because] sometimes they're always booked for months, and you couldn't
>
> see them.

Fernanda also remarked on this, explaining:

> I think a frustration would be that there is one advisor for hundreds of students, so when I
>
> needed something resolved it would have to be like, in three weeks, and maybe I needed
>
> to get it resolved before that.

The above experiences illustrate how advisors' heavy workloads hindered their ability to support advisees. It is important to note here that the majority of participants shared this sentiment. In addition to delayed responses to students' questions, Brenda indicated that her advisor's limited schedule conflicted with her school and work schedule:

> I would get frustrated with availability, availability because I was working, taking
>
> classes, I had to do things between classes, so it was kind of hard to find time from eight
>
> to five every day, especially because my schedule was: I wake up, I go to work, and then

I got class, and then go back to work or class, then my work was the same time as

advising. Sometimes I would even have to call off work to go meet with an advisor, but

then I would also hate to do that because I know I need the money.

Here, Brenda describes having to choose between getting the money she needed to survive from

work and meeting with an advisor. While she was the only graduate in this study who discussed

the challenges of balancing working, academics, and advising, we know this is a challenge many

first-generation Latinx students face. Their minoritized status can often put them in the

predicament of supporting themselves and their families or attending higher education.

This pattern of limited advisor availability showed up in interviews again and again. In

reviewing the data, it became clear to me that the ratio of students to advisors was not balanced.

The number of students in the two largest colleges at MSU are 5,500 and 4,900. The advisors

listed for the majors within these colleges are 30 and 23, respectively. Although these numbers

seem to be manageable caseloads, many of the advisors have other duties, such as teaching and

administration. Furthermore, the institution does not provide numbers on what percentage of

their time is allotted to advising. Participants were not necessarily frustrated with the advisor

directly, but rather expressed frustration with the system.

Distracted

Torres et al. (2019) share how "patience, time, and explicit explanations can help the

advisor and the student understand what questions to be asked" (p.63). Additionally, the

Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) defines distracted as "having one's thoughts or attention

drawn away" and "unable to concentrate or give attention to something" which differs from busy

as being defined as "engaged in action".

Importantly, the discussions I had with participants regarding their advisors' distractedness were some of the more emotional parts of our interviews. Many shared that such experiences with advisors were harmful and unprofessional. As Ana Carmen recalled:

> I guess I felt like there wasn't really a connection and I don't know if [it was] because this individual had multiple roles. She had other roles going on and obviously sometimes she would be on her phone, even when we were going through our stuff. So, I just felt like I wasn't really getting [the support I needed] with my plan and everything. The guidance wasn't there from her, so I had to figure that out on my own.

This story details how the demands of her advisor's many roles led the advisor to interrupt the student's meetings. This lack of focus on the advisee—these constant distractions—were isolating, as Ana Carmen mentioned having to figure out how to navigate this on her own. She further explained:

> I don't want to be harsh or anything, but [her approach felt] unprofessional because, like I said, there are times where she would be on her phone. I guess I just felt like it wasn't important to her. And, to me, it's like, if you're an academic advisor, you should put your full attention and stuff and make me feel that I belong and that I know that I do well and that you actually care about me graduating, you know?

As the above suggests, advisors who do not or cannot dedicate their full attention to advisees hinder both parties' ability and desire to build trust and, ultimately, a sense of belonging. When students do not receive the guidance they need to graduate and instead get the impression their advisors do not "care," as Ana Carmen shared above, they may end up not having anyone to obtain the correct guidance from, which can severely compromise their ability to succeed.

Notably, participants reported feeling devalued and less important when their advisors engaged in other work during their appointments. Crystal Raquel recalled:

Every time I would come in, she was always like a straight face; she was just typing away. Once I had scheduled that appointment and it was like 15 or 30 or 20 minutes, [a] really short appointment compared to what I'm used to. And I remember she picked up a phone and was texting while I was talking to her. So yeah, she wasn't that great. I wasn't really excited about scheduling appointments with her. That's why I would do most of my scheduling myself and I would just have her review the courses.

Here, Crystal Raquel indicates she valued length in her advising appointments so she could get to know her advisors on campus. For instance, she often met with other advisors for an hour. The low quality of her appointments with her advisor in the story above caused her to resort to "doing the scheduling" herself. Montezuma shared a similar experience with his advisor:

The experiences, again, I can't stress enough how non-personable it is. I mean, it seems like they have a million things in their mind, which I'm sure they do. You know, they barely make eye contact with you and they're shuffling around their desk while asking you, "Hey, so what can I do for you?"

Here, Montezuma's implied desire for a more personal connection underlines the harm of distraction in advisor-advisee relationships, particularly for advisees and especially when those advisees occupy minoritized positions and identities.

According to NACADA, advising is most effective when it is relational or like a partnership. However, the participants in this study had several stories to tell about distracted advisors who would not or could not give them their full attention. As previously discussed, some of the graduates had negative and harmful experiences with advisors who were too busy,

66

unavailable, or distracted. These experiences were so formative that they were still present as a

major part of participants' advising experiences, even several years after graduation.

Bias in Advising

In addition to the aforementioned hinderances, the first-generation Latinx students in this

study also spoke about harmful experiences with identity, power, and privilege. This finding

aligned with extant literature suggesting the "very thing that students of color consider to be

crucial to their success—academic advising—is complicated by America's sordid legacy of race,

racism, and schooling" (Mitchell et al., 2010, p. 7). Such complications cropped up in

participants' stories and considerations of their advisor's identity in relation to their identity and

the identities of other students'. For example, as Ana Carmen asserted:

> I guess because this individual identifies herself as Caucasian, maybe. I don't know if it
>
> has to do with it. I mean, she's very privileged and stuff, so sometimes they don't see,
>
> they try to avoid differences and stuff like that. I felt like maybe there should be
>
> mandatory training for them about equity inclusion and stuff like that, for them to really
>
> know that there are people of color that have different needs than others. Use a different
>
> approach. Learn about this stuff, that way you can work better with students.

Here, Ana Carmen understand the importance of learning about differences. However, as the

student she should not have to take the time to be concerned about advisors' professional

development in diversity, equity, and inclusion, as it serves as a distraction for the services she is

requesting at the moment.

Moreover, it appeared the discrepancies in identities between participants and advisors

were compounded by other advisees' identities, especially when the advisor and other advisees

were Caucasian. Of this, Ana Carmen observed differences in how her advisor interacted with her and another student and explained:

> I remember when I was waiting for my appointment and the student that was there before me, the student was Caucasian, and you could see their relationship was so different. As in, you know, they were laughing and [all] that and yada. So yeah, it was different. To me, I don't know, I kind of felt like an outcast sometimes.

The above experience shows how identity can intersect with and inform a person's sense of belonging. Without communication or effort from her advisor, Ana Carmen felt alienated by their racial and ethnic differences, a feeling that intensified into a double alienation when she observed her advisor treating a Caucasian student more positively. For students to see distinct differences in how advisors treat advisees based on identity can be further traumatizing and reify first-generation Latinx students' isolation and alienation, which ultimately impacts their ability to succeed.

In addition to race and ethnicity, Brenda remarked on the added intersection of gender. She specifically brought this up during a story she shared about a lack of support from her advisor prior to her change in majors:

> I was also thinking, is it because he's a male? I don't know. That had to play a role in something, that he was a man [and] I was a woman coming in, especially a Latina walking in there, you know.

Brenda continued:

> Sometimes, when I would meet with a white advisor, they wouldn't ever share any of their experiences with me. I was like, "Oh, how do you know what I'm dealing with?"

Her story here illustrates several points of interest. One is that she describes how race, ethnicity, gender, and class can intersect in ways that compound and deepen the challenges of higher education. Another is that she was not encouraged to have a relationship of trust with the advisor because he did not share anything about himself. Participants often knew or discovered that the advisors with whom they had the closest relationships were those who identified similarly (i.e., first-generation, Latinx). If advisors share more about their experiences and identities with first-generation Latinx students, they may be better positioned to build the trust required of effective advisor-advisee relationships.

Invalidating

Like biased advising, invalidation can involve rejection, heightened emotional responses, and judgement (Weber & Herr, 2019). It accordingly hindered advisees' ability to feel like they belonged in their majors and left them questioning their presence at the institution. Brenda described this in terms of not feeling supported in her major:

> I felt like they didn't believe in me, that I could do it. So I think I just kind of got upset with him and I was just like, you know what, I think I can just talk to somebody else and afterward I talked to another advisor.

Here, Brenda explicitly ties her sense of belonging to advisor support and notes this lack of support drove her to pursue another advisor. Fernanda had a similar experience:

> That's how it translated to me as a student. Just like, "Well, this is how you've been performing. How do you think you're gonna [finish]?" …they made me question if I really belong[ed] there.

This experience led Fernanda, like Brenda and others, to change her major. While participants did find happiness with other majors and advisors, this pattern led me to wonder how many first-

generation Latinx students are settling for different majors based on the advising experience.

Moreover, Victoria's stories showed how some academic processes can be alienating and

invalidating for students, especially without proper support from advisors:

> I was in a rough situation when I was undecided for that first year [and] a half. I ended up
>
> going to an advisor because I was put in a spot where they told me that, if I didn't declare
>
> a major, I was going to get kicked out…and that encounter wasn't the best.

For Victoria, the institutional process of declaring a major was made more difficult without

adequate guidance and attention from her advisor. She went on to add that her overall advising

experience was overwhelmingly negative and frequently left her with a lack of understanding

that resulted in her taking and paying for unnecessary classes and being confused about next

steps. In general, participants pointed to how advisors' invalidation of the first-generation Latinx

students' abilities drove them off course from their intended studies and that this invalidation

was compounded by a lack of advisor support with inflexible institutional processes.

A final way the first-generation Latinx students in this study felt invalidated by advisors

had to do with financial aid and class privilege. Regarding a meeting with a financial advisor,

Elijah shared:

> So, one thing comes to mind negative for negative events in my advising experience is
>
> definitely with financial aid. I felt in general the experience I had was very [bad]. . . .
>
> There was no understanding and no compassion. I had a lot of financial stress on me up
>
> to the point where like, you know, it started to get to my mental health and everything
>
> like that, and I'd always worry about how I'm going to pay these bills. And I found
>
> myself going to a financial aid senior advisor one time and they told me there was

nothing I could do, very harshly. …I felt like it was a parent, not yelling at me, [but] scolding me.

As Elijah describes above, he did not get the understanding he needed from his financial advisor regarding his very real financial burdens. He came away from this meeting with feelings of alienation and struggle as a result. His story shows that first encounters really matter, and that advisors must thus be sure to take the time to listen to and talk with students, even if they won't necessarily meet with them again.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I shared the findings of my interviews with first-generation Latinx participants' experiences with their advisors. Surprisingly, I found that many people—not just academic advisors—served in both formal and informal advisory roles for these students. My participants further helped me understand how advisors helped and hindered them during their time at MSU. Specifically, the graduates described advisors as helpful if they provided a caring relationship, were informed, and were willing to shared identity-based experiences; and they described advisors as hindering when they were busy, distracted, biased, and invalidating.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of Findings

This dissertation study centered on first-generation Latinx graduates in an effort to understand their undergraduate academic advising experiences. I interviewed a total of 16 graduates of Michigan State University (MSU), a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Midwest. With the stated goal of listening to and learning from participants, I asked the graduates about their experiences with academic advising and found they frequently reported receiving support from a variety of offices and individuals in addition to their academic advisor. Their stories helped me develop a deeper understanding of what they found to be helpful and what they found to be hindering in their advisor-advisee relationships. Helpful practices included (a) a caring relationship, (b) content-informed, (c) and sharing identity-based experiences. Hindering practices included (a) busy, (b) distracted, (c) biased, and (d) invalidating.

The findings align well with my conceptual framework, which suggests advising *quality* can be defined by the content of the advising meetings, meeting frequency, approaches to advising, and student experiences. The findings mapped onto my conceptual framework in the following ways. First, by the content of the advising meetings, which correlated with advisors' knowledgeability regarding courses, institutional practices, and resources. Participants felt one of the main reasons they met with their advisor was to make sure they were on track to graduate. If participants felt they were receiving the correct and relevant information in a timely fashion, they left their appointments feeling relieved and supported. Another part of my conceptual framework, meeting frequency, was evidenced in instances where participants were invited to connect with advisors. In these cases, email and in-person correspondences were recognized as beneficial. Having the opportunity to walk-in for advising was also identified as helpful.

Recall from Chapter Two that my conceptual framework was also concerned with student experiences. Participants whose advisors shared identity-based experiences with them reported feeling more trusting, understood, and supported. What made this a good experience for them was having someone with whom they could identify, as the care they exhibited in their relationships provided motivation for the students to continue. However, what my conceptual framework did not address was the extent to which students might desire a caring approach—a finding that both builds on and complicates my conceptual framework. It became apparent to me in our interviews that the first-generation Latinx students wanted and expected to have more of a caring relationship with their advisor. This contradicted my initial assumption that students would want more of an academic focus in their advising meetings, which is true; they do. However, they also expressed equal desire for someone who can act as a mentor, someone who can talk with them, and someone with whom they can build a relationship of trust and support. In other words, they wanted what I call "a caring approach" to advising.

A caring approach to advising thus warrants further study, particularly for advising literature on first-generation Latinx students. Moreover, if NACADA were to implement a framework for SoC or Latinx students specifically, my study suggests that adding the components of caring, relationship-building, and storytelling can promote Latinx students' academic success. Indeed, many of the first-generation Latinx students in this study shared that they felt more comfortable going to advisors who shared their first-generation, income-level, and race/ethnic identities. As a reminder, these advisors were both professional and non-professional advisors, and most participants noted they had an advisor who shared a similar identity and an advisor who did not. Adopting these components into a framework could benefit advisor training

and has the potential to address and revise some of the hindering experiences the first-generation

Latinx graduates shared in this study.

Beyond the aforementioned helpful practices that related to my conceptual framework,

participants also identified hindering advising practices and their consequences. For example,

when discussing meeting frequency, participants often expressed frustration when their advisors

were too busy to meet or reply to their inquiries. When the graduates did get the opportunity to

meet, they were at times disappointed with the content of the meetings, as some were told the

wrong information. These findings are important in two ways. First, they affirm that advisors

need to be knowledgeable and that institutions must support advisors in ensuring they have

sufficient time to meet with and dedicate to all advisees. Notably, I found that this lack of time

and attention deterred advisors and advisees from building trust in their relationships.

In building my conceptual framework, I noted that students' experiences matter. This was

especially salient in the hindering theme given the biases the graduates experienced in advising.

Specifically, when first-generation Latinx students saw advising relationships that visibly

differed from their own (i.e., white advisors' relationships with white students), they often

wondered how and where they fit at the institution. Furthermore, when advisors invalidated

students by discouraging them from pursuing their majors, they felt more isolated, which added

to their lack of sense of belonging.

All in all, the first-generation Latinx students in my study wanted to connect

meaningfully with someone on campus. Thankfully, each of the students found at least one

member of the institution with whom they could connect. They shared that they wanted and

expected a prescriptive type of advising to ensure they were informed about when and how to

successfully graduate. However, some participants received additional support that proved

helpful, such as tutoring resources and internships. Alternately, other participants mentioned that their advisors did not give them the correct course information. If higher education and student affairs professionals know that first-generation students need someone to rely on for institutional knowledge and to navigate the institution, colleges and universities must prioritize the provision of robust training and support to equip these professionals to serve first-generation students in ways that advance their academic performance, sense of belonging, and overall wellbeing.

Implications for Advising Practice

Overall, the results of this research provide a lens for advisors and institutions to understand how to better serve first-generation Latinx students. In what follows, I present implications for advising practice that includes access to advisors, hiring and training advisors that share the same identities as the students they serve, having adequate resources and support available, and providing professional development opportunities.

Clarifying What to Expect from Advisors

Institutions need to help all students understand the purpose of advisors and what to expect from advising. This is especially true for first-generation Latinx students. The participants in this study had different understandings and expectations of advisors. At MSU, where students start interacting with advisors over the summer before their first semester begins, these clarifying conversations can start early and should come from both the institution and the advisors. However, there is a lot of information shared during orientation; therefore, the conversation and information must be continuously shared. This can be a shared responsibility of administration and advisors in the first year.

Improving Access

This research study reaffirmed the importance of student access to advisors. Based on the findings, I argue institutions must invest in an office specifically dedicated to serving first-generation students and that offers consistent support and resources. As students who have to wait weeks and months to connect with their advisor have expressed feelings of frustration and anxiety, institutions of higher education should invest in student-centered practices and processes geared toward assisting with time to degree. The best way to achieve this is to better balance the student-to-advisor ratio to allow quicker, more meaningful access to advisors. This means more funding must be allocated to hiring and retaining advisors.

Advisor Identity

Several of the graduates in this study shared stories in which they felt a greater sense of belonging with advisors who identified as first-generation and/or Latinx. However, most times, participants were not referring to their major advisors, but rather an advisor in another supportive program, such as CAMP or TRIO[5]. It is therefore important to understand the culture of Latinx students, their communities, and provide advisors with culturally relevant training. The graduates in this study also attested to the fact that representation matters. While it is not always possible, it is essential to understand the importance of differences across races and intersecting identities to build empathy, such as gender, first-generation status, and income. Encouraging advisors to share stories of their own lives and personal experiences can assist in building rapport, as well. Institutions must thus allocate funding and review hiring practices to support the hiring, retention, and promotion of racially diverse advisors.

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[5] TRIO programs are federally funded grant programs to support low-income, first-generation college students and students with disabilities.

Mentorship

Indeed, this dissertation study verifies that first-generation Latinx students can benefit from seeing and interacting with students, faculty, advisors, and alumni who look like them. Establishing a mentorship program that provides a space for students to hear others' stories and that is equipped with the resources to answer questions is essential. Moreover, having an advisor who can provide first-generation Latinx students with generational knowledge can help lay the foundation of their support systems.

Professional Development

This study also revealed that advisory training is needed in a number of areas. First and foremost, advisors must be informed. While many understand and are knowledgeable about policies, procedures, and resources at their institutions, advisors and administration must ensure *all* are knowledgeable and informed because sharing these resources with students and explaining their benefits is a key factor of student success. Institutional funding and support are essential to providing training for advisors in advising practices, policies, procedures, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Advisors must also be given the time to familiarize themselves with course curriculums. Finally, professional development is key for training advisors to understand the importance of relationship building, especially when working with first-generation Latinx students. The participants mentioned that many of their advisors shared personal stories and individualized information during their advising meetings, and that this was how the trust and relationships grew to be less transactional and more reciprocal.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study indicate that it is critical for students, especially first-generation Latinx students, to build meaningful relationships with advisors . As such, I

recommend for future research to include continuous and intentional learning about advising Latinx undergraduate students, research at different institution types, and quantitative research.

Latinx Advising Throughout Undergraduate Studies

While this study focused on first-generation Latinx graduates and their advising experiences, more must be done to understand the experiences of Latinx students who are currently enrolled. Taking the time to have multiple data points throughout a student's undergraduate career (e.g., orientation) each year and post-graduation could help institutions gain more comprehensive understandings of how to serve their students as they progress towards graduation.

Future researchers might also interview, hold focus groups, and survey advisors to learn more about their experiences serving first-generation Latinx students. Trainings can be expanded based on the results of these activities and further applied to practice. Moreover, this study revealed that there are many folks on campus who have made themselves available to serve first-generation Latinx students whom students refer to as advisors. It would thus be insightful to learn more about their roles and how they view their work on campus.

Different Institution Types

This study was completed at a public PWI Research 1 (R1) land grant institution in the Midwest. However, some participants had transferred from other institutions. It is imperative that we learn more about first-generation Latinx students at different institution types, such as community colleges, private institutions, and HSIs, as doing so can provide more research for leadership and advisors to access and learn from. A future study on only first-generation Latinx students who have transferred from community colleges to R1 institutions could additionally yield more insights on these students' sense of belonging within institutions. Finally, future

researchers might conduct a cross-analysis of different advising models (e.g., centralized versus decentralized) that includes an analysis of the number of advisors on campus and the number of Latinx students to better understand how the amount and model of advisors may impact Latinx students' experiences.

Quantitative Research

While this qualitative study was valuable for centering the voices of first-generation Latinx graduates, it would also be helpful to complete a quantitative or mixed methods study. Such research has the potential to positively impact more graduates and thereby benefit from a broader perspective. It is also crucial to acknowledge that the Latinx population is not one monolithic group. If more demographic information is collected and analyzed regarding ethnic and gender identity, specific programming needs might be more effectively met.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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More and more first-generation Latinx students are accepted to institutions of higher education every year. The aim of my study was therefore to help advisors, leaders, and faculty hear the voices of recent first-generation Latinx graduates for the purposes of improving their chances of academic success. Indeed, these students have the right to feel validated and respected, and they have the right to receive accurate information from those charged with professional advising responsibilities. Overall, the 16 participants in this study did persist and graduate. They experienced highs and lows in their journeys, and their advisors were there for both sides of this—the hugs and the tears. When advisors are better educated on all students' needs, they can more effectively implement helpful advising practices and eliminate the hindering ones.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INITIAL INTERVIEW SCREENING E-MAIL

Dear MSU Graduate,

My name is Danielle Flores Lopez. I am a doctoral student in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program at MSU, as well as the Assistant Director for Student Success in the College of Natural Science. I am writing to ask if you would be interested in participating in my dissertation research concerning the advising experiences of undergraduate Latinx first-generation students.

I am seeking participants that meet all three of the following criteria:

1. Graduated in the last three years;

2. Identify as Hispanic/Latino/Latinx; <u>and</u>

3. Were the first in their immediate family (excluding siblings) to earn a four-year degree.

In short, I am interested in learning about your experiences with your advisors, and more specifically, how advisors helped or hindered your success. To learn about this, I would like you to complete a short survey and to interview you at least once for approximately 60-90 minutes. To clarify or elaborate, I might ask for a second interview, lasting no more than 30 minutes.

There are no anticipated risks associated with the study. You will not incur costs other than your time commitment for participating in the study. If you choose to participate, you will not be paid for being a part of the study. The direct benefit of this study is enhancing the current

understanding of Latinx first-generation students' advising experiences at a Predominantly White Institution.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please take a few minutes to review the consent form.

If you agree to the consent form you may proceed to the survey which can be found here.

The survey contains 13 questions and will take approximately five minutes to complete. The survey will be open from July-August 2019. Interviews will take place in July or August 2019.

Participation in this study is voluntary and all answers will be kept anonymous. The results of this study will be published in my dissertation and may be published or presented at professional meetings and conferences, however, the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

Latinx first-generation graduates who meet the study criteria will be contacted by me and may be invited to participate in the study. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to e-mail me at floresd3@msu.edu, or call me at (517) 455-5916. You may also contact my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales (gonza645@msu.edu).

Thank you for your consideration in this research study. I look forward to learning more about your advising experiences.

Best regards,

Danielle M. Flores Lopez

APPENDIX B: INTITAL SCREENING TOOL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name

2. E-mail

3. Phone Number

4. Gender

    a. Please identify your gender (e.g., man, woman, non-binary, etc).

    b. Prefer not to answer

5. Age:

6. Please identify your ethnic identity (e.g., Mexican, Afro-Latina).

7. What is your mother's highest level of education?

    a. No Degree

    b. High School Diploma

    c. Some College

    d. Associate's Degree

    e. Bachelor's Degree

    f. Master's Degree

    g. Doctoral / Professional Degree

    h. Other Degree (please specify)

8. What is your father's highest level of education?

    a. No Degree

    b. High School Diploma

    c. Some College

    d. Associate's Degree

    e. Bachelor's Degree

    f. Master's Degree

    g. Doctoral / Professional Degree

    h. Other Degree (please specify)

9. How many years did you attend MSU?

    a. 1

    b. 2

    c. 3

    d. 4

    e. 5

    f. 6

    g. 7+

10. What year did you graduate from MSU as an undergraduate?

    a. 2015

    b. 2016

    c. 2017

    d. 2018

    e. 2019

11. What College(s) did you graduate from with your undergraduate degree(s)? Select all that apply.

    a. College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

    b. College of Arts and Letters

    c. Eli Broad College of Business

d. College of Communication Arts and Sciences

e. College of Education

f. College of Engineering

g. James Madison College

h. Lyman Briggs College

i. College of Music

j. College of Natural Science

k. College of Nursing

l. Residential College in the Arts and Humanities

m. College of Social Science

12. What major(s) did you graduate with? Please list all majors.

13. What is your highest level of education?

a. Bachelor's Degree

b. Master's Degree

c. Doctoral / Professional Degree

d. Other Degree (please specify)

APPENDIX C: E-MAIL TO THOSE SELECTED FOR INTERVIEW

Dear \FirstName\,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study and for taking the time to complete the initial survey. This study seeks to understand the advising experiences of Latinx first-generation students and advising.

You are invited to participate in this research study. You are being asked to complete one, possibly two, one-on-one audio taped interviews. Please go to (insert doodle poll or WhenIsGood link) to schedule your interview time. The interview can take place on zoom video conferencing or a place that is convenient for you.

Please thoroughly read the attached Research Participant Information and Consent Form before we meet for your interview. I will bring copies of the form with me for you to sign the day of your interview or send them to you via email ahead of time if we meet on video conferencing.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to email me at floresd3@msu.edu, or call me at (517) 455-5916. You may also contact my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales (gonza645@msu.edu).

Thank you again for your interest in participating in this study. I look forward to learning more about your advising experiences as a Latinx, first-generation graduate.

Best regards,

Danielle M. Flores Lopez

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Latinx First-Generation Students and Advising at a PWI

Principle Investigator: Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales, Associate Professor in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education, College of Education, Michigan State University, 620 Farm Lane, Room 426, East Lansing, MI 48824, (517) 353-3387, gonza645@msu.edu.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

- You are being asked to participate in a research study to learn about the advising experiences of Latinx first-generation post-graduation.

- You must be at least 18 years of age to participate.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

- Participation may include up to two parts. The first part is a survey asking demographic and other screening questions. The second part, if selected, is interviewing.

- Participation in the research requires one, possibly two, audio-taped interviews with the researcher and possible follow-up emails and/or phone calls.

- If you agree to participate, I would like to interview you at least once for approximately 60-90 minutes. To clarify or elaborate, I might ask for a second interview, lasting no more than 30 minutes. The interviews would be one-on-one audio taped interviews during July or August of 2019. You might also be asked to respond to additional questions that are developed during data analysis subsequent to the interview via phone, via email, or in person during Summer or Fall of 2019.

- The interviews will take place at a location that is convenient to you or on zoom video conferencing.

- The interview protocol is open-ended, meaning that I have a list of questions that I will ask and there are no right or wrong answers.

- I am interested in your honest answers to questions about your advising experiences.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

- You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the advising experiences of Latinx first-generation students at a PWI.

POTENTIAL RISKS

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

- Participation in this research is voluntary.

- You have the right to say no.

- You may change your mind at any time and withdraw.

- You may choose to not answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY

- There are no costs for participating in the study.

- You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for participating in the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher: Danielle M. Flores Lopez, Michigan State University, 288 Farm Lane, Room 111, East Lansing, MI 48824, (517) 455-5916, floresd3@msu.edu or the PI of the study: Dr. Leslie D. Gonzales, Associate Professor in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education, College of Education, Michigan State University, 620 Farm Lane, Room 426, East Lansing, MI 48824, (517) 353-3387, gonza645@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

If you agree to this consent form you may proceed to the survey.

In-person

If you are selected for an interview, I will require your signature below and will provide a copy

for you if you complete the interview in-person. Your signature below means that you

voluntarily agree to participate in this research study which will include an audio-taped

interview.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Full Name (Please Print): _____

Via phone/zoom

If you are selected for an interview and/or two interviews and you chose to complete it via the

phone or Zoom. By completing the interview(s), you are voluntarily agreeing to participating in

this research study and be audio/video recorded.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Part One—Explanation and Background Questions

I have some questions to start with about advising, however, please feel free to share other thoughts that arise during our time.

1. Who played the role of advisor(s) for you during your undergraduate experience?

    a) How did you meet this person(s)? Who referred you?

    b) Why did you originally decide to meet with this person? Did you continue meeting with them during your undergraduate years?

Part Two—The Frequency of Meetings a Student Has with an Advisor (or person(s) that acted in this capacity):

2. How did you decide you needed to meet with your advisor? What semester/time during the semester? How did you schedule the appointment?

3. How often did you meet with your advisor?

4. How long did you meet with your advisor?

5. How did you communicate with your advisor?

Part Three—The Content Covered in the Advising Relationships (or with person(s) that acted in this capacity)

6. How did you prepare for an advising appointment?

7. What questions did you ask your advisor in the advising appointment?

8. What questions did your advisor ask you in the advising appointment?

9. What resources did your advisor refer you to? Did you go? Why/why not? Was the resource helpful?

10. As a Latinx first-generation student what has been helpful/not?

Part Four—Approaches to Advising

11. How would you describe your advisor's approach-use three words-tell me a story?

12. How did your advisor(s) assist in your transition to the university?

13. Describe the relationship you had with your advisor?

    a. Was it strictly course scheduling?

    b. Did you/would you ask for a letter of recommendation?

14. Did you trust your advisor? Why?/Why not?

15. Did you feel your advisor cared about your academic success? Why/Why not?

16. What do you see the role of advising being for students?

17. Tell me about a time you were frustrated with the advising process (orientation, scheduling, availability, etc.)?

18. Tell me about a time you were happy with the advising process?

Part Five—The Importance of the Students' Experiences

19. Think about your overall undergraduate advising experience. Describe that experience to me.

20. Think about a typical advising experience with your advisor. Describe that experience to me.

21. Tell me about a time when you had a positive advising experience?

22. Tell me about a time when you had a negative advising experience?

    a. What could your advisor have done to make your experience more beneficial/helpful/positive?

23. What are advising practices that you feel Students of Color would benefit from?

24. How have advisors impacted your experience at a PWI?

25. In what way(s) were advisors beneficial to your student success?

26. Do you feel your advisor(s) was invested in your education?

    b. Looking back, what actions or steps did your advisor take that where most beneficial or helpful to you?

27. If there is a piece of information that you would give your advisor what would it be?

Part Six—Participant Feedback

28. Do you have any comments or questions?

APPENDIX F: INSTITUTIONAL ADVISING MISSION

Since my study is situated at MSU, I will share the institution's academic advising mission statement and goals:

MSU expects academic advisors to support students by:

- Reducing time to degree;

- Increasing graduation rates;

- Closing opportunity gaps;

- Creating an inclusive community, and;

- Becoming globally engaged citizens;

Moreover, MSU has core expectations of advisors that include:

- supporting all undergraduate students through graduation;

- commitment to student success;

- listen to student experiences and engage proactively;

- connect with other advisors and community partners;

- create a shared responsibility to assist students with major choice;

- be aware of the curriculum development process;

- develop spaces where students feel valued;

- and, assist with educating students for experiences both inside and outside MSU

Finally, MSUs' Academic Specialist Handbook (2018) includes the following advising responsibilities:

- provide advice on course and curriculum selection;

- monitor students' programs;

- recommend certification for graduation;

- maintain contact with advisors in other units;

- provide incidental information on the relationship between course selection and career options;

- refer students, when necessary, to other units in the University for assistance with educational, career and personal concerns;

- participate in activities devoted to the retention of students within University programs;

- provide assistance and guidance to students reentering programs;

- may be involved in instructional activities associated with classes, labs, and seminars;

- participate, as required by the unit, in professional development activities, both on and off campus, including conferences, workshops and seminars to enhance the ability and knowledge to perform as an advisor;

- participate in department/school, college, and University level committees;

- make a significant professional contribution by making scholarly presentations: present papers, lectures, or workshops on campus or beyond related to academic advising or training;

- assume leadership roles involving the coordination, supervision, and training of new academic advisors.

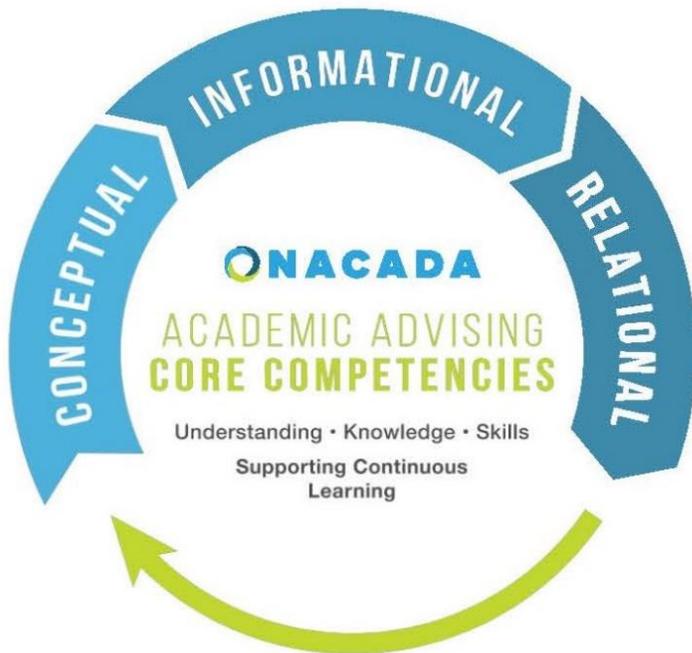**APPENDIX G: NACADA ACADEMIC ADVISING CORE COMPENTENCIES MODEL**

Figure 2: NACADA Core Competences

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