WORKPLACE LEARNING OF PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC ADVISORS AT URBAN UNIVERSITIES: A BASIC INTERPRETIVE QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that high quality academic advising is central to student success. The quality of advising, however, is undoubtedly linked to the training and professional development received by advisors. Unfortunately, the current research related to advisor training and professional development is limited. In addition, while advising is provided by both faculty and professional staff, the perspectives of professional advisors is scarcely represented in the literature.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the workplace learning experiences of professional advisors through the lens of adult learning. Specifically, this study sought to understand how advisors learn to perform their roles, both upon entering the profession and as they develop in their careers, by investigating the role of workplace learning as well as identifying the adult learning concepts evident in their workplace learning experiences. The basic qualitative methodology included interviews and critical incident analysis of six advisors at three Midwestern urban universities.

Findings indicated that hands-on learning experiences have an impact on advisor training and professional development as do advisors’ past workplace learning experiences. Conversely, conferences and workshops are not likely to affect advisor learning. Participants also discussed their perceptions of the inherent qualities possessed by good advisors, and the notion that these qualities cannot be learned through formal or
informal means. Overall, the concepts of experiential learning, self-directed learning, and andragogy were evident in the advisors’ learning experiences, including each of the six characteristics of adult learners outlined by andragogy. Results indicated that adult learning concepts are highly applicable to the workplace learning experiences of advisors. While advisor lack of participation in nonformal learning has been noted previously, reliance on informal learning has not. This revelation informs the literature regarding current practices, as well as disputes notions that training and development opportunities for advisors are lacking. The findings also carry implications for the content and design of future workplace learning opportunities for advisors. Future research should investigate informal learning amongst other types of advisors and institutions, and should continue to apply the framework of adult learning theories to the workplace learning of academic advisors.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Stated most generally, this is an investigation of adult learning; of the ways in which adults prepare for new challenges, draw upon past experiences, develop new skills, and formulate new perspectives. This particular investigation of adult learning, like many others, is set within the context of higher education. However, this study is unique in that it is not focused on the learning experiences of adult students of higher education. Rather, this study focuses upon institutions of higher education as workplaces, and is primarily concerned with the learning experiences of academic advisors within those workplaces. Specifically, this study is concerned with the ways in which full-time professional academic advisors engage in workplace learning, both as they enter the profession and as they develop throughout their careers. Like most research projects, this particular study was born of the researcher’s own curiosity with her professional experiences relevant to academic advising as well as her exposure to the concept of adult learning through her pursuit of a doctoral degree. Thus, the following study will examine the interplay between the fields of academic advising and adult learning. Before proceeding, however, it is perhaps most appropriate to begin with a broader introduction to the fundamental components of the study.
Why Professional Advisors at Urban Universities?

Before embarking on study focused on academic advisors, it is wise to first address why this is a group deserving of study. In 2001, Light published the results of a qualitative study of undergraduate students, in which he famously concluded that “good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience” (p. 81). In addition, Light found that advisors play a critical role in the college experience, due in part to their capacity to “affect students in a profound and continuing way” (2001, p. 84). More recently, Campbell and Nutt (2008) have expanded upon Light’s conclusions, adding that the value of academic advising has been increasingly acknowledged in the literature. For instance, Hunter and White (2004) praise academic advising as “perhaps the only structured campus endeavor that can guarantee students sustained interaction with a caring and concerned adult” (p. 21). Moreover, “advising can serve as the hub of the undergraduate experience, with linkages to curricular and co-curricular programs on campus” (Hunter & White, 2004, p. 21). Time and again academic advising is cited as a critical activity within higher education. Therefore, research relevant to those who provide this service as well as their preparation to do so is called for.

Those who conduct academic advising hold a variety of positions, including faculty, professional staff, and even student or peer advisors (Higginson, 2000). Professional academic advisors in particular, which can be defined as those advisors holding full-time responsibility for academic advising, are being utilized at institutions of higher education at an increasing rate (Reinarz, 2000). According to a recent summary of data from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), members
identifying as professional academic advisors “increased from 2,236 in February 2001 to 5,207 in February 2007 (133 percent increase)” (Self, 2008, p. 268). Although they represent a growing segment of higher education professionals, full-time professional academic advisors are rarely the exclusive focus of empirical research, leading Aiken-Wisniewski, Smith, and Troxel (2010) to conclude that “the advising practitioner is an underutilized source of understanding” (p. 4). Their absence in the literature is clearly problematic, as the recent growth in the profession indicates that professional advisors are becoming commonplace on many campuses, and they are fast becoming the most likely persons on campus to have significant and on-going relationships with students throughout their educational journey (Hunter & White, 2004). This is especially true at larger, public institutions, which are more likely than smaller, private institutions to employ an advising model which utilizes professional advisors rather than or in addition to faculty advisors (King & Kerr, 2005; Pardee, 2000).

Accordingly, this study narrows the context of higher education to those larger, public institutions which commonly rely upon professional advising staff. More specifically, however, this study focuses on those institutions which are also considered to be “urban”, a designation referring to institutions that are located in metropolitan areas and serve a diverse population of students who are often disadvantaged or underrepresented in higher education (Elliott, 1994). Urban institutions, and by extension advisors at such institutions, face significant challenges in retaining the urban student population. Recent research into undergraduate retention rates has indicated that certain student characteristics commonly associated with urban institutions, such as minority status, low socio-economic status, first-generation status, part-time attendance and adult
student status can adversely affect academic persistence (Natalicio & Smith, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Moreover, Tinto (1993), a prolific researcher of student persistence in higher education, states that “the magnitude of the problems these institutions face sets them apart from most other institutions of higher education” (p. 198), highlighting the need for research focused specifically on urban institutions and for those who work with this diverse and challenging population of students. Perhaps best summarized by Allen and Smith (2008), “…good academic advising may very well be the key to success for many students, particularly at urban universities” (p. 409).

**Why Workplace Learning?**

Learning, in general, is often discussed rather myopically, using only the nomenclature common for formal, institutionalized education. That is to say, in this narrow view classrooms are the assumed setting for learning, and learning occurs only through the assistance of those designated as “teachers” or “instructors”. Recently, however, “interest in workplaces as learning environments has intensified” (Billet, 2002, p. 27), with research efforts focused specifically upon the “learning that occurs during the activities and experiences of work” (Rowden, 2007, p. 6). In the context of the workplace, learning is often associated with training, an activity which is most frequently discussed in fields such as training and development (T&D) and human resource development (HRD) as a formal, planned activity led by an expert trainer (Rowden, 2007). By contrast, workplace learning subscribes to a broader definition of learning, which encompasses a wider array of activities. For instance, Marsick and Watkins (1990) have identified three distinct forms of workplace learning: formal learning, which is planned, structured, and institutionalized; informal learning, which is planned, can be
structured or unstructured, and is not institutionalized; and incidental learning, which is unplanned, unstructured, and not institutionalized.

Therefore, workplace learning is not necessarily dependent upon an expert, but rather can be found in “the total of an individual’s acquisition and assimilation of experiences, information, and daily activities” (Rowden, 2007, p. 2). Workplace learning, therefore, does not rely upon the designation of roles such as “teacher” and “student”, reminiscent of the pedagogy utilized in the formal, institutionalized learning of children and adolescents. In fact, Fenwick (2001) has noted that this pedagogical approach of deliberate and planned learning activities is inadequate for many of today’s knowledge-based workplaces. Therefore, instead of a pedagogical model, it is perhaps more appropriate to apply Knowles’ (1990) model of andragogy to workplace learning due to its focus on the unique context of learning in adulthood (Rowden, 2007).

Specifically, Knowles (1990) specifies six characteristics of adult learners, focusing on the learner’s need to know, self-directedness, accumulated experiences, readiness to learn, problem-centered orientation to learning, and internal motivation to learn. However, while andragogy’s assumptions regarding adult learners are ubiquitous within the adult learning literature (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007), there are other complimentary models of adult learning which are also applicable to workplace learning. For instance, self-directed learning emphasizes the idea that adults deliberately plan and execute learning projects on their own, without the assistance of an “instructor” (Tough, 1971). Similarly, experiential learning emphasizes the role that experience plays in adult learning, including learning derived from collaboration with others as well as learning
derived from critical reflection on past experiences (Fenwick, 2003; Kolb, 1984; Meziow, 1998).

Typically, the concepts of academic advising and adult learning are linked in the literature only through investigations and discussions of academic advising as a means of facilitating learning for adult or nontraditional students in higher education. For instance, in *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook*, a text published in conjunction with NACADA featuring chapters by the most prolific writers in the field of academic advising, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) is referenced only in relation to the eight principles suggested for effectively advising adult students (Gordon, Habley & Grites, 2008). In this way, when it comes to adult learning, advisors are cast almost exclusively in the role of teachers. In fact, Crookston (1972) postulated that academic advising constitutes a form of teaching, a paradigm which has persisted within the profession to the extent that it is now the cornerstone of NACADA’s published *Concept of Academic Advising*. However, although he asserted that advisors fulfill a teaching role, Crookston was equally adamant that learning is just as important for advisors as it is for their students, stating that “the student is not likely to learn from the relationship with the advisor unless the advisor himself is also open to learning” (Crookston, 1972, p. 16).

Although Crookston’s analogy between teaching and advising is the most referenced aspect of his seminal article, the role of learning for academic advisors has not gone completely unexamined. A portion of the current literature on academic advisors has indeed discussed advisor participation in learning activities. However, this segment of the research has focused thus far on the lack of opportunities and resources for formal
training and development, as well as the general lack of research related to the ways in which advisors acquire and maintain the skills and knowledge necessary to perform as practitioners (Brown, 2008; Creamer, 2000; Habley, 2000; Higginson, 2000; King, 2000; McGillin, 2000; Reinarz, 2000; Tuttle, 2000). For instance, several decades ago, Ender and Winston (1982) noted that “systematic and in-depth training for academic advisors is rare” (p.98). Cuseo (2003) has expanded upon this concern more recently, adding that the importance of professional development for academic advisors has largely been ignored by national reports calling for higher education reform. This study will pursue this theme, examining the fundamental ways in which advisors acquire and maintain the critical competencies of their profession. Beyond the traditional survey which records degree attainment, conference participation and the like, this study seeks specifically to identify the workplace learning experiences of advisors, and to analyze those experiences using the lens of adult learning.

**Research Problem**

The current state of research related to academic advising has been met with much criticism. Scholars often cite the overwhelming focus on defining best practices as opposed to empirical research as the major dilemmas confronting the field (Aiken-Wisniewski et al, 2010; Kuhn & Padak, 2008; Gordon, 1998; McGillin, 2000; Tuttle, 2000). Within the last few years, calls continue to be made for more stringent research efforts which surpass the common, simplistic investigations of who advisors are and what advisors do (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008). Despite the documented need for a new vein of research, studies which seek to expand upon the viewpoint of the students and record their satisfaction with advising services remain the most common type of research
conducted. As a result, the widespread reliance of student satisfaction surveys as the primary research tool in academic advising has been repeatedly noted and problematized throughout recent decades (Cuseo, 2003; Metzner, 1989; Saving & Keim, 1998; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008; Smith, 2004).

With the majority of research focused on the student perspective of the advising process, there is a call for greater representation of perspectives across the field; a comprehensive assessment effort which “calls for self-reflection on the part of both advisor and advisee” (Hunter & White, 2004, p. 24). The call is clear: research must include the advisor perspective. However, according to Tuttle (2000), “the dearth of advising research is affected by most advisors’ and advising administrators’ overwhelming responsibilities and lack of interest and ability” (p. 21). Due to the fact that faculty are generally adept at and rewarded for research, the limited research which does address the perspective of advisors is often focused on faculty (McGillin, 2000). Even when research is not exclusive to faculty, it often defines academic advisors generally and includes a variety of advisor types, including faculty, professional and even undergraduate and graduate peer advisors. Therefore, with disappointing overall research efforts related to advising in general and professional advisors in particular, there are even fewer studies which seek to highlight specifically the perspective of professional advisors. The perspectives of professional advisors can be considered distinct from the perspective of faculty advisors, given that the structure of higher education is such that faculty traditionally have input into the curricular and policy decisions which influence the complexity of academic advising, whereas professional advisors traditionally do not. Moreover, the perspectives of professional advisors can be considered particularly
compelling as academic advising constitutes the majority of their professional responsibilities, as opposed to faculty who hold other professional responsibilities in addition to advising.

In addition to the lack of research related to the advisor perspective, there is also a critical need for additional research which addresses the professional preparation and development of academic advisors in general, and professional advisors in particular (Brown, 2008; Cuseo, 2003; Ender & Winston, 1982; Habley, 2000). As articulated by Higginson (2000), the general question is:

How do the full array of individuals performing academic advising—faculty, student affairs professionals, graduate and undergraduate students, and full-time and part-time advising personnel—become knowledgeable about necessary information and resources, sharpen their interpersonal skills for relating effectively with students, and learn to use the appropriate information and strategies in the advising setting? (p. 298).

Although Higginson (2000) poses this question for all advising practitioners, it is a particularly salient question for professional academic advisors. Research indicates that the level of degree attainment and subject field of degree attainment vary widely amongst professional academic advisors (Aiken-Wisniewski et al, 2010; Reinarz, 2000; Tuttle, 2000). Thus, it is unlikely that there is a standard knowledge base possessed by advisors upon entering the profession. Furthermore, as noted previously, the absence of systematic training for new advising professionals suggests that advisors neither acquire the necessary competencies through formal education prior to employment nor through formal training at the onset of employment.
Statement of the Problem

The absence of research regarding the process by which academic advisors learn to perform their roles is clearly problematic, as effective advising requires effective preparation (Brown, 2008). Interestingly, although the field of academic advising borrows liberally from other fields and social science theories, there is virtually no confluence between the advising literature and the substantial research related to adult and workplace learning. According to Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008), collaborative inquiry in advising “should span any field that might help answer the research questions at hand” (p. 50). This is echoed in Shaffer, Zalewski and Leveille’s (2010) assertion that “the knowledge base … should include subject matter experts from other academic disciplines” (p. 74), including, in this case, the application of elements of adult and workplace learning.

As mentioned previously, aside from articles which define the characteristics of adult learners and suggest best practices for advising practitioners in working with adult students, there is little which connects the fundamental theories of adult learning with the field of academic advising. Moreover, because the current research related to academic advising is not informed by the fields of adult or workplace learning, the research which addresses training and professional development of advisors is fundamentally flawed in that it focuses exclusively on formal and institutionalized modes of learning such as degree attainment. Most notably, questions still remain regarding how advisors learn to perform their roles (Brown, 2008). Because the research regarding advisor participation in learning activities focuses on formal education as opposed to the other modes of learning highlighted in adult learning theories, it must be considered incomplete. The
distinction between formal and informal modes of learning is particularly salient for a study set within higher education, as higher education itself is a formal educational context. Thus, the tendency to assume that all learning relevant to higher education is formal must be acknowledged and rebuffed. The documented need for additional empirical research in academic advising, which is focused on the perspectives of professional academic advisors as well as their training and development, will be addressed by this study. Moreover, this study will bridge the existing gap between the substantial bodies of knowledge by connecting the academic advising literature to the adult and workplace learning literature.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore, through qualitative methodology, the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors at urban universities through the lens of adult learning. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the overall question of how professional academic advisors at urban universities learn to become advisors. The specific questions that will guide this study are:

1. How does workplace learning impact professional academic advisors’ training and development?
2. What models of adult learning are evident in the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors?

**Definition of Terms**

For purposes of clarification, the following list of terms and operational definitions is provided.
Professional Academic Advisors – this term, along with the more general terms academic advisors and advisors, will be used in reference to non-faculty professionals, for whom advising is a full-time job responsibility. In contrast, the term faculty advisors will be used in instances which refer specifically to faculty also holding academic advising responsibilities.

Urban Universities - Urban universities, urban institutions and urban students are related terms, with metropolitan used synonymously with urban. As presented in the literature review, factors related to ethnic/racial/socioeconomic diversity, academic under-preparedness, adult/nontraditional students, and part-time enrollment characterize urban institutions and the urban student population.

Workplace learning – this is a general term referring to the various formal and informal contexts in which job-related learning occurs in the professional lives of academic advisors. Workplace learning will be discussed both in terms of professional academic advisors’ initial skill acquisition as well as their maintenance and development of skills throughout their careers. In this way, workplace learning encompasses the concepts of both training and professional development.

Adult learning – this is a general term referring to a variety of concepts, models, and theories which seek to describe the unique characteristics of adult learners and the processes by which adults acquire knowledge.

Significance of the Study

A study of this nature is poised to make significant contributions to the field of academic advising. First and foremost, the application of a model from the field of adult learning has the potential to assist in answering long-held questions regarding advisor
preparation. As effective academic advising continues to be highlighted as a key predictor of student retention and student satisfaction (Alexitch, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), a thorough understanding of how one learns to become an effective academic advisor becomes of the utmost importance. As is often the case in exploratory research, this study may lead to replications focused upon other categories of practitioners, such as faculty advisors, or other institutions of higher education, such as traditional residential campuses. Therefore, this study will serve as a catalyst to invigorate current research. Moreover, this study has the potential to impact practice, as a better understanding of effective preparation will lead to improved advising practice and, therefore, improved student and institutional outcomes.

Secondly, the current research defines advisor preparation through a pedagogical lens not informed by the adult or workplace learning literature. Currently, using this limited framework, the research indicates merely that formal learning activities are not common in advising. However, by expanding the definition of learning activities beyond formal, planned activities, an opportunity is created to dispute the dangerous notion that academic advising is a field in which specific preparation is not required and continued growth is not expected. Thus, this study may mitigate a potential threat to the legitimacy of the field of advising. This should be of concern to all advisors, including faculty, but is perhaps more important to professional academic advisors, who are already marginalized within the advising literature. It is in this way that this study has the potential to impact higher education policy, as policy is more likely to be influenced by advisors when the profession of advising is viewed as legitimate. Due to the specific
focus of this study, policy related to advisor preparation and development in particular may be impacted.

Finally, this study presents a means to continue the dialogue regarding adult learning theory. Due to the lack of confluence in the fields of academic advising and adult learning, it is unlikely that academic advisors will describe their experiences in the vernacular common to the adult or workplace learning literature. That is to say, advisors are unlikely to specifically identify experiential learning as a means by which they learned to perform their professional role, and are similarly unlikely to identify communities of practice as a method of professional development, even though these descriptors may be appropriate. Therefore, this study provides the opportunity to expose advising practitioners to the theoretical foundations of the field of adult learning and, conversely, to expose adult learning theorists to the practical implications present in the field of academic advising.

Attention to research on academic advising and, subsequently, on the workplace learning of advisors is prudent given the significant number of stakeholders and the significant impact of advising that is implied by the retention research. The status and viability of the profession of academic advising is certainly important to the practitioners of the field. However, a better understanding of the profession also stands to benefit the colleges and universities which employ academic advisors, and undoubtedly the students who pursue higher education. It is because academic advisors have the potential to impact the education of so many others that their own learning activities become that much more significant.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Although academic advising generates a fair amount of research, many important aspects of the advising process and profession remain largely unexamined. For instance, despite numerous publications attempting to describe student experiences with academic advising, the perspectives of those who provide advising services are not well-represented, yielding research that is far from robust (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2010). In particular, the perspectives of professional academic advisors, as opposed to faculty advisors, are absent within the literature (McGillin, 2000), as is a comprehensive research effort specific to the training and professional development of academic advisors (Cuseo, 2003; Habley, 2000; Higginson, 2000). Therefore, the current state of the literature fails to address the essential question of how academic advisors learn how to advise (Brown, 2008). Thus, this study seeks to develop an understanding of how advisors learn by examining in particular the workplace learning activities of advisors and the ways in which advisors engage in adult learning.

In the words of one researcher, “who advises and how advising services are delivered have been the major questions asked about academic advising in the last two decades” (Tuttle, 2000, p. 16). In fact, this review of the relevant literature will begin
with a discussion of these very topics, beginning with the evolution of the profession and progressing into an overview of contemporary academic advising and the various advising delivery models. However, as implied by Tuttle (2000), an understanding of the field on this superficial level is inadequate. This is especially true given the research related to student retention which suggests that academic advisors play a key role in one of the ultimate goals of higher education (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Cuseo, 2003; Hunter & White, 2004; Light, 2001). Therefore, this review of the literature will also discuss the general state of scholarship of the field of academic advising, and will also review specifically the literature related to advisor training and professional development. Moreover, this review will connect academic advising to the relevant body of research in adult learning, including discussions of dominant theories and models of adult and workplace learning. Finally, existing research which utilizes an adult learning lens to investigate other relevant professions will be examined, and the applicability of this lens to the field of academic advising will be discussed.

**The Evolution of Academic Advising**

Early institutions of higher education were modeled after British institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge in that the campuses were primarily residential and the curriculum was primarily training for the ministry (Thelin, 2004). As such, institutions acted *in loco parentis*, in that administrators acted in place of parents, taking on full responsibility for the enrolled students. The faculty, who were often clergymen concerned with both the intellectual and moral development of the young men, often shared residence with the students and were therefore able to observe and regulate behavior both inside and outside of the classroom (Gillispie, 2003). Formal academic
advising, as it is known today, was at this time unnecessary, as the classical curriculum offered limited choices in terms of coursework (Frost, 2000).

However, as colleges and universities entered the nineteenth century, the administration and the curriculum began to evolve. The curriculum began to expand and the student body began to diversify through expanded access to higher education. Colleges and universities began to implement student affairs officers, due to a combination of factors including expanding enrollments, the disengagement of faculty, and the seemingly growing divide between students and scholastics (Thelin, 2004). “As the research focus of faculty, the diversity of the student body, and concerns about student retention increased, so did the need for professional advisors and comprehensive advising systems” (Tuttle, 2000, p. 15). This is echoed by Frost (2000) who states that the “continued formalization of academic advising on most campuses was one response to two forces: student populations that were increasingly numerous and diverse, and faculties that were devoted to research” (p. 11).

The social aspects of collegiate life were so dominant in the early and mid-twentieth century that the administration began to seek means to rescue the curriculum and solidify higher education as “an association of scholars in which provision is made for the development of traits and powers which must be cultivated” (Thelin, 2004, p. 235). Support for this reform came from administration, faculty, and newly-installed student affairs officers, including professional academic advisors. The role of educators had shifted once again, from the role of the paternal disciplinarian to the role of a mentor, serving an integral role in the development of the student (Gillispie, 2003). The American Council on Education’s 1937 report, Student Personnel Point of View,
supported the notion of holistic learning and broadened the definition of higher education to “include well-rounded development—physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually as well as intellectually” (Caple, 1998, p. 46). To this end, by the late 1930’s almost all institutions had implemented a formalized advising program (Frost, 2000). Thus, academic advising was adopted as a method to meet immediate and practical needs. Over time, the practice of advising became more sophisticated, as developmental psychology and higher education pedagogy replaced an earlier, more rudimentary understanding of advising practice as the prescription of course choices (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008, p. 47).

As campuses expanded, students were moved into newly-built dormitories and, alongside of professional academic advisors, institutions “added new layers of staff to deal with the extracurricular undergraduates: directors of residence life, directors of student activities, athletic directors and coaches, musical directors, health specialists, psychological counselors, career counselors, and so on” (Moffat, 1991, p. 51). In addition to a new-found focus on extracurricular life, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 introduced a new type of student: “students older than the traditional college age of seventeen to twenty-one, students who were married and had children, and students who were disabled veterans” (Thelin, 2004, p. 266). If higher education was to fully address issues of student development, it must now address issues related to the new economic and cultural diversity of the student body. The typical veteran was steadfast in motivation for collegiate study, and demanded academic advising to ensure efficient progression toward a degree and vocational assistance in transitioning to the work force
upon graduation (Horowitz, 1987). Similarly, it was during this timeframe that the administration became concerned about retention and graduation rates, and eagerly complied with student demands for expanded services (Thelin, 2004).

On the heels of this surge in enrollment came the surge of the “baby boomers” of the 1960’s. It was during this decade that “student development issues exploded onto the academic forefront” and “issues of social justice, access, usefulness, and accountability became the focal point of a variety of student services” (Gillispie, 2003, p.1). In the 1980’s, however, fearing future declines in enrollment “due to the looming demographic crisis of a declining 18-year-old population,” administrators began to court additional sources of prospective students (Cross, 2000, p. 10). For the first time, higher education acknowledged part-time and older adult students as lucrative sources of revenue generation and began to offer these constituencies new “courtesies and accommodations” (Thelin, 2004, p. 326), including academic advisement.

Due to the changing demographics of the student body during the 1980’s and 1990’s, and the increasing cost of higher education, education itself became a secondary feature of many students’ lives. Oftentimes, employment or family obligations took priority in the lives of students (Cross, 2000, p. 11). Institutions were expected to recognize and accommodate the shift from residential to commuter students, from recent high school graduates to returning adults, and from full-time to part-time scholars. As a result, institutions began to “specialize” in the new categories of learners and adjusted course and student service offerings accordingly. This shift in the student body was a catalyst for change within the faculty ranks as well. With an array of student affairs professionals in place, faculty became focused upon academic disciplines, teaching, and
research (Moffatt, 1991). Consequently, student affairs professionals, including academic advisors, became increasingly responsible for a significant segment of higher education. Despite the prevalence of academic advisors, however, the activity of advising itself “remained largely unevaluated” (Frost, 2000, p. 12), and in many respects remains unevaluated today.

The ambiguity surrounding the field of academic advising is due, in part, to the general lack of consensus regarding what constitutes common advising practices (Jordan, 2003). Depending upon the institutional context in which advising is delivered, or the general advising delivery model employed, it is common for advising to have a completely different look from institution to institution. As discussed by Jordan (2003), institutions refer to different functions when they refer to academic advising. In some colleges and small universities, academic advising includes admission, financial aid, assessment, and enrollment in classes. Other institutions of higher learning refer to academic advisement as information about degree requirements, course eligibility, and course sequencing (p. 1).

Moreover, there is often confusion as “the terms advising and counseling are sometimes used interchangeably” (Kuhn, Gordon, & Webber, 2006, p. 24), an issue which likely stems from terminology used in compulsory education as well as at specific types of institutions such as community colleges. In addition to the absence of uniform practices and terminology relevant to academic advising across higher education, many institutions have not formally defined their own advising practices. According to a recent national survey, only “61 percent of campuses had a published statement of advising”, outlining
the purpose, function, and components of advising (Habley, 2000, p. 37). Due to the lingering ambiguity and the multitude of variations in the field of academic advising, the following section will discuss the contemporary practice of academic advising, including the theoretical frameworks of advising as well as the multitude of delivery models.

**Contemporary Academic Advising**

*Theoretical frameworks of advising.* As academic advising became a common practice in American higher education, researchers began to postulate theories related to the delivery of advising. In the early 1970’s, a new definition of academic advising was framed. According to Crookston (1972), traditional advising became known as prescriptive advising, in which the student brings problems to the advisor for solutions. In prescriptive advising relationships, the advisor serves as an authority figure who imparts knowledge to the student. Moreover, the role of the prescriptive advisor is limited only to curricular issues. Crookston (1972), however, believed that students and advisors should share responsibility for the advising experience, and that advisors should serve as guides in the student development process. Therefore, he postulated a new definition: that of developmental advising. Developmental advising is “a process, not a routine endorsement of course taking; it is concerned with growth, especially personal goals and objectives; and it depends on ongoing interaction” (Frost, 2000, p. 13).

Hagen and Jordan (2008) note that the concept of developmental advising has persisted over the last several decades of research and practice, and continues to be a dominant topic and term within advising literature. Recent investigations into the concept of developmental advising, however, indicate that developmental advising methods are commonly underutilized by advisors. For instance, in a qualitative study
which examined advisors’ stated advising philosophies and observed advising behaviors, Daller (1997) concluded that developmental advising often occurred in concert with, rather than in place of, prescriptive advising behaviors. Similarly, Smith (2002) conducted multiple focus groups with first-year students, concluding that students primarily experience prescriptive advising. Ender (1994) has offered several reasons why developmental advising has failed to take hold in advising practice, including that advancements in technology are making advising more impersonal and therefore less aligned with developmental advising, and that commitment is lacking on the part of administrators to allow the additional time and resources needed to move beyond prescriptive advising. Perhaps most important to this study, however, is Ender’s (1994) assertion that inadequate training related to developmental advising theory is a key factor in its underutilization in advising practice. Despite these findings and the limitations associated with the implementation of developmental advising, it remains an idealized practice, synonymous with effective advising practice (Cuseo, 2003). If effective advising is related to the implementation of developmental advising theory, and developmental advising theory is hindered by inadequacy of training, advisor training, as a whole, must be investigated.

**Advising models and delivery.** In addition to developmental versus prescriptive approaches, academic advising can also be influenced by the particular model of academic advising delivery implemented by an institution (Habley, 1983; King, 2008; Pardee, 2000). According to King (2008), advising models can be classified into two major categories: centralized and decentralized. In centralized advising models, all academic advising services are provided by a staff of academic advisors who service the
entire student body through one administrative unit from admission through graduation. This model is commonly associated with community colleges. In decentralized advising structures, advising services are provided by faculty and/or professional staff within academic departments. Within decentralized advising structures, two models have been identified: the Faculty-Only Model, and the Satellite Model.

In the Faculty-Only Model, all advising is done by faculty in their department offices, with advisor assignments being made based upon student major. Of those institutions which utilize only faculty for advising, Reinarz (2000) states that most are private two-year and four-year institutions. According to Habley’s (2000) summary of a 1997 national survey, “the tendency to rely solely on faculty to deliver advising has declined” (p. 38). In a follow-up survey completed in 2003, Habley (2004) quantifies that only 22% of public four-year campuses utilize faculty-only models for advising, down from nearly 51% of public four-year campuses in 1987. Thus reliance on faculty-only models is waning, especially amongst public universities. Consequently, “there has been a steady upward trend in the use of full-time and part-time non-teaching advisors” (Habley, 2004, p. 29). Now generally regarded as “the dominant provider of advising services at four-year public colleges” (Habley, 2004, p. 63), professional academic advisors are certainly a group worthy of research efforts.

In the Satellite Model, advising is provided in central offices in an academic subunit, such as a college (Pardee, 2000). In some satellite models, students are served in central offices through graduation; in others, central offices refer a student to faculty advisors at the completion of certain criteria. The latter typifies a Dual or Shared Model, in which “students have two advisors to guide them through their degree program: a
departmental advisor for the major, and a staff member in a central office for general education issues, college policies, and academic procedures” (Pardee, 2000, p. 197). According to King and Kerr (2005), this system for advisement is the emerging trend. In general, this type of model is “associated with larger four-year institutions with more than ten thousand students” (Pardee, 2000, p. 195). Moreover, King and Kerr (2005) assert that

for four-year institutions, the ideal model for advising first-year students is based on the dual model, where faculty members provide advising related to the student’s program of study while full-time advisers or counselors working in an advising office provide advising related to academic policies and registration procedures (p. 327).

In addition to quantifying who provides advising services and how advising services are structured, many researchers have also discussed the merits of utilizing professional or full-time academic advisors. Tuttle (2000) argues that professional advisors are ideal, as they “understand the needs of undecided students, are committed to the retention of students, are more accessible than faculty, and link students with other campus services” (p. 17). Similarly, Reinarz (2000) offers a detailed justification for the superiority of professional advisors.

Foremost, they are committed to the role and choose to work with students in an advising relationship. Their enthusiasm and expertise can be coupled to an infrastructure that provides continuing availability and, with reasonable advisee loads, reliable and regular access for students (p. 215).
Reinarz (2000) implies that it is because of these unique attributes that professional advisors are being utilized at increased rates.

In recent decades, the number of full-time advisors in higher education has increased dramatically. This is a role that is just coming of age. It is no surprise that most institutions (and executive officers) have recognized the importance of full-time advisors because of the unique value they provide in the delivery of effective academic advising (p. 215).

In addition, Huggett (2002) offers further justification for the growth of full-time professional advisors, stating that the increase is due in large part to the ever-increasing demands made upon faculty for teaching, research, and service. To improve access to advising and relieve faculty of this responsibility, full-time advisors, many of whom have backgrounds in specialized areas such as counseling, student affairs, or higher education administration, are being hired at postsecondary institutions (p. 47).

Unlike Tuttle (2000) and Reinarz (2000), however, Huggett (2002) goes beyond simply explaining the reasons for the increase in professional advisors. Suggesting that the change in the composition of the advising profession has the potential to impact higher education in more significant ways, Huggett (2002) states that “as the number of advisors grows, so does advisor representation on campus committees responsible for planning and policymaking” (p. 47).

Beyond statistics related to the utilization of professional versus faculty advisors, empirical tests have also examined methods of advising delivery. In 2004, Mottarella,
Fritzsche, and Cerabino utilized the Academic Advising Inventory to gather the preferences of students, finding that “participants preferred a professional advisor more than a faculty advisor, and they least preferred a peer advisor” (p. 55). Similarly, Smith (2004) examined student perceptions, also finding that compared to faculty or peer advisors, students were most satisfied with advising conducted by professional advisors. As institutions become more likely to rely on professional academic advisors, and as students of higher education express their preferences for working with a professional advisor, the need to examine this profession more closely becomes evident. Although research focused on professional academic advisors is certainly warranted, the following section will detail the need for more rigorous investigations into the field of academic advising in general.

The Need for Additional Advising Research

As stated by Gordon (1988) over twenty years ago, “if advising is to be recognized as a legitimate profession, its practitioners need to establish a sound research reputation” (p. 63). Thus far, however, the research has been fractured due in large part to the array of personnel who provide academic advising. That is to say, there exists a dichotomy between professional advisors, who largely view themselves as practitioners, and faculty advisors, who largely view themselves as researchers. According to Kuhn and Padak (2008), “practitioners and researchers have very different expectations regarding the usefulness and relevance of the professional journals they read” (p. 2). Despite this discrepancy, Gordon (1998) cautions that “the academic community’s lifeblood is research and teaching; thus, academic advising will not gain equal footing in the academic community until it can compete on similar ground” (p. 13).
Moreover, in the higher education context, where most research is conducted by faculty and focused upon students, “the absence of the advisor in research impacts topic selection, daily practice, and the professional development of individual academic advisors” (Aiken-Wisniewski et al, 2010, p. 4). This underscores both the professional value of the act of researching as well as the value that an enhanced research base provides to the profession. Recent reviews of the research base in advising continue to indicate that research conducted by and about professional academic advisors is especially lacking, as “advising professionals represent less than 10% of the first authors of articles published in the NACADA Journal, the flagship outlet for dissemination of scholarship on academic advising” (Aiken-Wisniewski et al, 2010, p. 5).

McGillin (2000) has written extensively on the subject of research in the field of academic advising, specifically emphasizing needed improvements to the current methodological approaches. McGillin (2000) states:

Although willing to borrow a wide range of social science theories, research in advising has rarely borrowed more than one or two methodologies. With almost exclusive reliance on survey data, single-source survey data has dominated the field. Reliance on survey also delayed the introduction of qualitative and contextualized analysis, the missing link in theory-building both for advising and for higher education (p. 366).

Shields (1994) is also critical of the state of research, in which advising has been researched in “only a general way (e.g., number of, length of, or satisfaction with advising appointments)” (p. 23). Tuttle’s (2000) review of articles published in the
NACADA Journal from 1981 through 1997 corroborate Shield’s (1994) criticisms of academic advising research as well. Tuttle (2000) concluded that during this span of time, “the number and quality of articles had declined; that general advising topics, administrative structures, developmental advising, and student populations continued to dominate article topics” (p. 20-21). Moving beyond critique, Tuttle (2000) offers an explanation for the state of the field, postulating that

undoubtedly, the dearth of advising research is affected by most advisors’ and advising administrators’ overwhelming responsibilities and lack of interest and ability as well as by the fact that faculty advisors are much more likely to conduct research in their own disciplines than on academic advising (p. 21).

Thus, it is clear that additional research efforts, especially those which explore new topics within academic advising and include new voices, are warranted. Research focused on the education and training of professional advisors provides one such avenue for enhancing the current literature. Accordingly, the following section will examine what is currently known regarding this topic, in an effort to identify potential areas for new inquiry.

**Education and Training for Academic Advisors**

Even at the most basic level, an academic advisor is required to possess an in-depth knowledge of his or her particular institution, including curricular and co-curricular options. Although this alone represents a substantial amount of knowledge, academic advising has moved beyond a “simplistic, routine, perfunctory course-scheduling activity to a complex process of student development requiring comprehensive knowledge, skills,
attitudes, and behaviors” (King, 2000, p. 289). In order to perform effectively, Creamer (2000) contends that contemporary academic advisors need to be knowledgeable of student development theory, career development theory, learning theory, decision-making theory, multicultural theory (such as racial identity theory), retention theory, personality theory, moral development theory, adult development theory, sociological theory, and organizational theory (p. 18).

In addition to knowledge of a variety of theories, academic advisors also need to be knowledgeable regarding the diverse student populations with whom they work. According to King and Kerr (2005), “academic advising has become a more complex activity in part because of the increasing diversity of the student population and the special needs and issues for each of these groups” (p. 335). King and Kerr (2005) have developed a comprehensive list of these diverse populations, including:

- multicultural students, international students, undecided students,
- underprepared students, gay/lesbian/bisexual students, transfer students,
- adult learners, athletes, honors students, preprofessional students, first-generation students, and special needs students (p. 335).

In contemporary higher education environments, it is undeniable that the demographics of the student body are changing. In fact, “there is ample evidence that students’ demographics have changed drastically in the last thirty years, including race/ethnicity, gender, enrollment status, age, residence, disability, sexual orientation, and nationality” (Upcraft & Stephens, 2000, p. 74). Upcraft and Stephens (2000) also discuss some additional topics which may impact advisors, such as changing student attitudes
and values, changing family dynamics, changing mental and physical health issues, changing academic preparation, and changing sources of financing an education.

As Smith and Allen (2006) note, “the increasing heterogeneity of the student population” (p. 57) is justification for additional research. As a complicating factor, the number of students with risk factors known to impede retention and graduation is increasing, with a disproportionate percentage of students with these factors enrolling at urban universities (Elliott, 1994). Regardless of these trends in the student population, “much of the research on academic advising has been conducted on residential campuses hosting traditional college students” (Smith & Allen, 2006, p. 57). In addition, with regard specifically to the training of those who provide academic advising services to at-risk students, Allen and Smith (2008) note that “developing the requisite skills and knowledge to provide all of the kinds of advising that are important to students, and especially important to underrepresented students, is time-consuming and challenging” (p. 398).

At the same time as students are changing, the ways in which institutions of higher education operate are changing, as technology is implemented to streamline processes. The topic of technology is extremely important to a discussion of academic advisor training and professional development, as technology is advancing at such a rapid pace. More than a decade ago, McKinney (1997) discussed computer technology as a means of systematically storing advising-related information. Just three years later, Pevoto (2000) presented a paper at the Annual Conference of the Association for Career and Technical Education discussing the possible uses of distance learning technology for the purposes of academic advising. Thus, in a relatively short time, technology moved
from a means to supplement the professional work of an advisor to the means to
completely redefine the advisor-student relationship. Due to the rise in technology, “new
sets of skills for academic advisors will be required in the future” (Steele, 2006, p. 54).
Thus, academic advisors are faced with the prospect of changes within the profession, as
well as other external factors that impact the way in which they practice. “Because
academic advising and knowledge of a wide range of complex academic programs is one
of the technically most challenging positions in the area of academic or student services,
training of advisors is a significant concern” (Tuttle, 2000, p. 19). Through an
examination of the education and training of academic advisors, the way in which they
are equipped to manage the challenges of their roles will be clarified.

Because academic advising can be performed by faculty or by professional staff,
it is difficult to discuss the minimum requirements to practice as an academic advisor.
For instance, faculty advisors typically hold a terminal degree in their academic
discipline. According to Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002), many faculty advisors,
although highly educated, “are often trained first as academicians. A few have specialized
training in teaching. Hardly any receive training in advising” (p. 84). For professional
academic advisors, the minimum educational requirement is typically a Bachelor’s
degree, with a strong percentage of institutions requiring advisors to hold a Master’s
degree. Tuttle (2000) investigated the published advertisements for entry-level
professional advising positions and found that 48% of the positions required a minimum
of a Bachelor’s degree, and 43% required a minimum of a Master’s degree. Lynch
(2002) also examined data from the NACADA Academic Advising Survey, concluding
simply that “significant differences in education level exist among advisors”, and that
“regardless of institutional type, most academic advisors (two thirds) hold a master’s degree or a certificate of advanced studies” (p. 65).

Interestingly, investigations into advisor education often indicate the level of formal education attained, but not the content. According to Tuttle (2000), the entry-level advisor advertisements he examined indicated no preference in academic background, meaning that the programs in which advisors have earned their degrees are widely varied. With regard to professional academic advisors, Reinarz (2000) notes that some advising professionals are recruited from backgrounds in counseling, social work, education, or higher education administration. Many have received training (student development theory, for example) as part of their education to prepare them for the advising role. Other professional advisors are drawn from disciplines represented by the advising unit and are educated in the liberal arts and sciences (p. 215).

The educational preparation of professional advisors appears to have remained diversified, as more recent reports indicate that “while individuals with a background in college student-personnel programs represent a significant percentage of professional advising staffs, advisors are just as likely to have come from anywhere in the entire spectrum of disciplinary study” (Aiken-Wisniewski et al, 2010, p. 10).

As discussed previously, academic advisors must have command of a variety of theories and knowledge of the diversity of the student body. Given the results of Tuttle’s (2000) investigation, it seems unlikely that this information is acquired entirely through formal education completed prior to becoming a practitioner. As stated by Schulenberg and Lindhorst (2008), “professional academic advisors have increasingly varied academic
and professional backgrounds and diverse journeys into advising” (p. 49). However, according to Ender and Winston (1982), “it is assumed that full time professional advisors have been educated to perform the advisor functions prior to their employment” (p. 86), which suggests that the standard experience amongst advisors does not include intensive initial training and acclimation to the advising role.

Recently, some researchers have begun to examine the training and orientation received by faculty advisors in particular. According to Templeton, Skaggs, and Johnson (2002) “nearly half of the [faculty] respondents had not received advisement training” (p. 10), and perhaps more surprising, “did not believe future training would be beneficial” (p. 10). Similarly, Waters (2002) drew upon the organizational communication literature to investigate the ways in which faculty advisors, in particular, are socialized into their roles. Waters (2002) found that faculty advisors received more “organizational” information, such as policies and procedures, and rated this type of information as most useful. In addition, Waters (2002) noted that faculty advisors “do not commonly discuss advising issues or responsibilities among their immediate work groups” (p. 23), as they indicated that colleagues, Deans, and Chairs infrequently served as sources of information.

According to Waters (2002), the current lack of understanding regarding the role acquisition process for all types of advisors is problematic, especially in light of the changing demographics of higher education discussed previously. In addition, Waters (2002) notes that “role learning is particularly important because numerous colleges and universities have no clear or comprehensive statement about academic advising” (p. 16). Waters’ (2002) study was specific to faculty and based upon the premise that “because
faculty advising is important to student success, contributors to the academic advising literature should examine the factors that influence faculty role-learning of advising” (p. 15). In addition, however, she also notes that “an investigation of socialization processes could be extended to the experiences of full-time professional advisors” (Waters, 2002, p. 24).

In contrast to training studies focused on initial role acquisition, a small cadre of studies have focused upon professional development and have included the perspective of professional advising staff. However, many of these research efforts are in the form of unpublished doctoral dissertations (Cuccia, 2009; Donnelly, 2006; Epps, 2002), which are unlikely to be widely read by practitioners within the field. Moreover, just as initial investigations into academic advising were criticized for focusing exclusively on student satisfaction with advising services, this new vein of research focuses exclusively on advisor satisfaction with the occupation. For instance, although Epps (2002) utilized qualitative methods to examine the perceived work environments of professional academic advisors, including their professional development opportunities, she focused mainly upon their satisfaction with the level of financial support available for such pursuits. Similarly, Donnelly (2006) focused primarily on advisor satisfaction using a quantitative survey of the broader NACADA membership, finding that advisors are unsatisfied with the amount of support received for professional development. Most recently, Cuccia (2009) examined job satisfaction through a survey of new professional advisors in particular, finding that issues of professional development are of concern to new practitioners.
Calls for increased attention to the training and development of academic advisors are often first addressed to the institutions which employ advisors. However, Habley (2000) suggests that “advising centers are in a state of crisis created by increasing expectations and responsibilities without allocating necessary human and fiscal resources” (p. 38). McGillin (2000) posits that adequate time for training and professional development might also be a confounding factor, as nearly 80% of an advisor’s time is already dedicated to direct contact with advisees, leaving little time for learning pursuits. Moreover, Tuttle (2000) discusses technology itself as an additional compounding factor. Although often “offered as the solution to these advising dilemmas…it has also added to the financial and training burdens in advising centers” (Tuttle, 2000, p. 19). Regardless, “the specialist knowledge base that informs advising continues to grow, and advisors…need opportunities to acquire new information and skills and to reflect upon their current practices” (Huggett, 2000, p. 48). The issue of advisor training has been problematized in the literature for decades, but the need for focused attention in this area is still unmet.

As discussed recently by Brown (2008), “the lack of advisor training has been identified as one of the major weaknesses in academic advising programs” (p. 310). To quantify the extent of the lack of training opportunities for advisors, Cuseo (2003) cites national survey results that indicate that only 55% of American colleges and universities provide any type of preparation or training for advisors of first-year students, who are known to be at risk for dropout. However, addressing issues related to training is made more difficult by the fact that “little formal research has documented advisor training” (McGillin, 2000, p. 372). McGillin (2000) notes a disparity in research which focuses
on faculty who provide advising versus staff who provide advising, noting that “in contrast to the very limited research on advisor training, faculty development has been the focus of considerable scholarship in higher education. However, research on higher education staff training has been as modest as that on academic advising” (p. 372).

Given the lack of emphasis on advisor training, Habley and Morales (1998) submit that if the training and professional development issues are not attended to, “it is virtually certain that the advantages once attributed to advising centers will all but disappear” (p. 64). Despite the consequences discussed by Habley and Morales (1998), it is apparent that even nearly fifteen years later, sufficient attention to advisor preparation has not been given. For example, Brown (2008) writes that
effective advising and effective advisors emerge as the result of intentional planning and development. Therefore, all individuals engaged in academic advising should be expected to participate in pre-service and in-service programs that set expectations and develop the attitudes, skills, and behaviors that produce the kinds of academic advising that students expect and need. Without such programs, competent and effective academic advising may not come to exist (p. 320).

It appears that, in general, training experiences coordinated through the institutions themselves tend to be offered at a minimal level, such that “training for advisors, along with evaluation and recognition and reward, is not mentioned regularly in institutional policy statements” (Higginson, 2000, p. 299). Therefore, educational institutions, the places of employment for academic advisors, by and large do not provide even rudimentary training for academic advisors (King, 2000).
There is, however, a professional association for academic advisors which provides training and development efforts. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was chartered in 1979 and currently boasts more than 11,000 members in the United States and beyond (Thurmond & Miller, 2006). Throughout its over 30 year history, NACADA’s purpose has been “to promote the quality of Academic Advising in institutions of higher education, and to this end, it is dedicated to the support and professional growth of academic advising and advisors” (Beatty, 1991, p. 5). Arguably, NACADA plays a less pronounced role for its practitioners than do the professional associations of other fields. That is to say, unlike doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals, academic advisors are not required to maintain association with a licensing body which then dictates requirements relevant to professional development. Thus, NACADA functions primarily to provide a “forum for discussion, debate, and the exchange of ideas regarding academic advising. It is the representative and advocate of academic advising” (Beatty, 1991, p. 5).

NACADA does offer national and regional conferences, as well as webcasts, seminars, and a peer-reviewed journal. It is argued, however, that these solutions are not comprehensive enough to solve the advisor training and professional development dilemma, as researchers have been critical of the single-day workshop format which has dominated the landscape of learning opportunities (McGillin, 2000). The criticism suggests that these opportunities are inadequate and do not reach the majority of the profession. This is especially true given that advisors elect whether or not to become members of the organization, and that for many advisors and institutions, affiliation with
NACADA and participation in NACADA-sponsored activities are both cost and time prohibitive (Lynch, 2002; Sofranko, 2004).

Periodically, NACADA surveys its members on a variety of topics, including training and professional development. However, caution must be taken when interpreting the results of these surveys. As discussed by Lynch (2002), although these are large-scale, national surveys, “the voluntary nature of the respondents, coupled with the fact that 75% of the respondents were NACADA members, precludes us from considering these data to be representative of all advising in higher education” (p. 74).

The survey summarized by Lynch (2002) indicates that 38% of respondents do not agree that their professional development is sufficiently supported in the workplace, although nearly 95% agree that professional development is important. Approximately 34% of survey respondents disagree that the training and programs offered by their institutions directly address their needs as advisors, and nearly 85% note that their institutions offer no rewards or incentives for participation in training activities.

With regard to incentives, Sofranko (2004) utilized the same NACADA survey dataset to report that more than half of the respondents cited professional growth and the goal of becoming better at their jobs as the most influential factors in their decision to participate in learning activities. Conversely, the respondents have cited a lack of monetary contributions from their institutions and their inability to schedule time away from their offices as the most significant barriers to participation (Sofranko, 2004).

Overall, more than half of the respondents indicated that they spent three days or less in professional development activities over the course of the previous year, which seems
incongruous with the amount of knowledge over which an advisor is expected to have command.

When evaluating the research related to training and professional development, one must be mindful of the frameworks utilized and the operational definitions employed. For instance, the NACADA survey listed structured learning activities from which respondents could select, virtually ignoring less formal learning activities undertaken by the advisor. For example, Lynch (2002) identified seven categories of professional development, the majority of which were formal activities such as conferences, workshops, and outside consultants. Moreover, Lynch’s (2002) summary utilized a definition of training which was operationally defined as the highest degree attained by the respondent. Clearly, this provides only preliminary data as to an advisor’s preparation for their professional role. Therefore, even when viewing the entire body of research related to advisor training and professional development, it appears that the central questions regarding the preparation of academic advisors have not been answered. That is to say, of the limited research on advisor training and development, it appears that most studies offer findings as to what advisors are not doing with regard to formal training and professional development. It is time, then, to reframe inquiries related to advisor training and development. Therefore, the remainder of this review of literature will focus upon the framework of adult and workplace learning, focusing specifically upon the value of utilizing an adult learning lens in examining advisor preparation.

**Fundamental Concepts in Adult and Workplace Learning**

Although acknowledged as distinct fields of inquiry, the adult and workplace learning literatures share essential commonalities. Evidence for this confluence includes
the references made in the workplace learning literature to adult learning theorists, models, and definitions, such as Knowles, Holton, and Swanson’s (2005) definition of workplace learning activities as “all learning activities that occur in the workplace such as on-the-job training, social learning, and informal learning” (p. 317). The overlap in adult learning and workplace learning is also visible in the research conducted within adult learning that utilizes the workplace as a context for adult education. In fact, according to Rowden (1996), “without question, the workplace seems to be the catalyst that is changing the nature of adult education” (p. 3). Therefore, the discussions below will not only introduce several dominant concepts and models of adult learning, but will also discuss these concepts and models specifically as they relate to the workplace as a setting for adult learning.

**Adult learning contexts.** Merriam et al (2007) present a framework which includes three contexts for adult learning: formal, nonformal and informal. Formal adult learning contexts, most commonly associated with classroom settings, are “highly institutionalized, bureaucratic, curriculum driven, and formally recognized with grades, diplomas, or certificates” (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 29). With respect to the workplace, formal learning contexts include a variety of pre-employment educational activities, such as vocational training programs or degrees awarded through institutions of higher education. For some professions, especially those required to participate in continuing professional education, formal learning may continue throughout the span of the career in terms of advanced certification or renewed licensure. By contrast, a nonformal adult learning context, while taking place outside of the formal educational system, is still typically driven by a curriculum and delivered via a facilitator (Merriam et al, 2007).
While nonformal learning is often thought of in terms of community-based activities such as those offered by “museums, libraries, service clubs, and religious and civic organizations” (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 30), nonformal learning can also be found in the workplace in the form of training and development programs sponsored by the employer such as in-service programs and workshops. In this way, both formal and nonformal learning contexts have a role in the workplace, as each offers “discrete planned events used to instruct people how to perform specific defined jobs” (Rowden, 2007, p. 7).

Informal adult learning, however, refers to the “learning that takes place without the externally imposed curriculum of either formal or nonformal educative programs” (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 35), whereby learning is planned and initiated primarily by the learners themselves. The informal adult learning context has received a great deal of attention with regard to workplace learning, as “it has been estimated that the great majority (upwards of 70 percent) of learning in the workplace is informal” (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 36). In fact, Marsick and Watkins (1990) have presented their own typology for workplace learning, focusing on informal and incidental modes of learning. According to Marsick and Watkins (1990), both informal and incidental learning “speak to learning outside formally structured, institutionally sponsored, classroom based activities” (p. 6). Informal learning is primarily experiential, such as “when a coworker shows a new employee how to use a machine through an actual demonstration rather than through a classroom presentation” (Rowden, 2007, p. 7). Conversely, incidental learning is unintentional, “serendipitous or coincidental with some other activity, and largely buried in the contexts of other tasks” (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 8). For example, an employee’s attendance at a poorly-run meeting might teach the employee something
about effective meeting planning, although this is not the purpose of their attendance at the meeting.

Through the use of a shared typology for learning contexts, it is clear that there is confluence in the terminology and philosophy of the adult and workplace learning literatures. That is to say, both share a definition of learning which encompasses far more than traditional classroom learning. Moreover, both emphasize the importance of the informal modes of learning and their ubiquity within the lives of adults, especially within a workplace setting. Fittingly, the following section will introduce several key models and theories in adult learning and will discuss specifically how those models and theories have been utilized within the context of the workplace.

**Adult Learning Models and Theories**

**Andragogy.** As discussed by Merriam et al (2007), “there is no single theory of adult learning. Instead, we have a number of frameworks, or models, each of which contributes something to our understanding of adults as learners” (p. 83). Of the models, perhaps none has received as much attention in the adult learning literature as the concept of andragogy (Merriam et al, 2007). First discussed by Knowles (1970), andragogy is primarily concerned with describing how adult learning occurs. Although andragogy was “initially defined as the art and science of helping adults learn, the term has taken on a wider meaning and now refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages” (Rowden, 2007, p. 42). The concept of andragogy has also been applied directly to learning in the context of the workplace (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Rowden, 2007). In fact, Rowden (2007) states that “the models that guide the field of workplace learning would best be described as that of adult learning and andragogy” (p. 11).
However, as discussed by Merriam et al (2007), “andragogy actually tells us more about the characteristics of adult learners than about the nature of learning itself” (p. 79). Specifically, Knowles (1970) forwarded four assumptions regarding the characteristics of adult learners, which was later extended to six assumptions in subsequent publications (Knowles, 1990). Each assumption is discussed in detail below:

1. **Adult learners have a need to know why they should learn something.**
   
   Adults must experience some level of “dissatisfaction with present inadequacies, coupled with a clear sense of direction for self-improvement” (Knowles, 1970, p. 42) in order for learning to occur. Although this was not included as an assumption in Knowles’ (1970) earliest work, in later writings Knowles (1990) reiterated that “real or simulated experiences in which the learners discover for themselves the gaps between where they are now and where they want to be” (p. 58) serve as potent tools for raising awareness of the need to know.

2. **The centrality of the adult learner’s self-concept results in the need to be self-directing.** The mature self-concept of an adult typically includes a sense of responsibility for their own lives and their own decisions. This same sense of responsibility can be applied to learning and decisions related to learning. In this way, adults are self-directed in their learning, and “take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and materials resources for learning, choosing, and implementing appropriate
3. **Adults possess a wealth of experience which serves as a resource for learning.** Because they have lived longer, adults have accumulated more experience and a wider variety of experiences than children and youth. According to Knowles (1990), “for many kinds of learning the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves. Hence, the greater emphasis in adult education on experiential techniques” (p. 59).

4. **Adults’ readiness to learn is influenced by the life situations with which they are faced.** This assumption is most frequently associated with adults’ changing social roles as they develop, such as the transition to the role of a spouse or the role of a parent. However, any life circumstance can serve as a catalyst for learning. In this way, adults “engage in learning largely in response to pressures they feel from their current life situation. To adults, education is a process of improving their ability to deal with life problems they face now” (Knowles, 1970, p. 48).

5. **Adults are problem-centered in their orientation to learning.** Adults are interested in gaining knowledge that is immediately applicable to their lives and to the problems which they face. Furthermore, not only is the motivation for adult learning dependent on its timeliness and applicability, but its delivery should reflect this as well. According to Knowles (1990), adults “learn new knowledge, understandings, skills, values, and attitudes...
most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations” (p. 61).

6. **Adults are primarily internally motivated to learn.** Similar to the first assumption of adult learners, this assumption was an addition to Knowles’ (1970) original work. According to Knowles (1990), “while adults are responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like), the most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like)” (p. 63).

**Self-Directed Learning.** Closely related to the concept of andragogy is the theory of self-directed learning. In fact, although self-directed learning is discussed as one of the underlying assumptions of andragogy, it has also enjoyed the specific attention of a number of theorists, resulting in the development of several models and its distinction as “one of the most researched topics in adult learning” (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 128). First discussed in the literature by Tough (1971), self-directed learning suggests that adults display a predominantly independent approach to learning. Because self-directed learning is not dependent upon a traditional classroom setting, and occurs with or without the assistance of another, it represents a means of informal learning. In fact, Merriam et al (2007) states that of all the forms of informal learning, “self-directed learning is the most visible and the most studied” (p. 36). However, self-directed learning is primarily defined as an intentional and conscious activity (Tough, 1971), which requires that the learner takes the initiative to determine a learning need, sets a goal, and identifies and implements a learning strategy to achieve that goal. Therefore,
using the framework for informal and incidental learning as established by Marsick and Watkins (1990), self-directed learning, while an informal learning strategy, does not represent a means of incidental learning.

Similar to andragogy, self-directed learning theory has also been applied in the context of workplace learning. For instance, Merriam et al (2007) notes that “self-directed learning activities, such as journal reading, are growing in acceptance as a form of continuing professional education” (p. 125). Continued learning in the workplace has been discussed as particularly important in the knowledge economy, as “knowledge is accumulating at such as fast rate that one must continue to learn to be effective” (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 125). Thus, workers cannot continue to perform effectively based upon pre-employment education or initial training alone, and self-directed learning is a means by which they can continue to learn throughout the span of their careers. To this end, Merriam et al (2007) proposes that future investigations into self-directed learning include questioning whether policies should be formulated such that self-directed learning in the workplace “is recognized as an integral part of education and training programs” (p. 128).

**Experiential Learning.** A final adult learning theory of particular usefulness to the study at-hand is that of experiential learning. As with self-directed learning, the role of experience in learning is also addressed as part of the andragogical assumptions of the adult learner. The concept of learning through experience is certainly not new to the field of education, having been introduced by Dewey (1938) well before the popularization of the concept of andragogy. Kolb (1984) has written extensively regarding the role of experience in the lives of adults in particular, postulating that “learning is a continuous
process grounded in experience. Knowledge is continuously derived and tested out in the experiences of the learner” (p. 27). However, experience alone does not equate to learning. As discussed by Merriam et al (2007), “learners must connect what they have learned from current experiences to those in the past as well as see possible future implications” (p. 162). When these conditions are met, the external experience becomes internalized in the individual, the individual is able to construct new knowledge, and learning has occurred. According to Mezirow (1998), the concept of critical reflection is central to understanding the adult learning process and the construction of knowledge. There is a differentiation, however, between “reflection”, as a simple musing over an experience, to “critical reflection”, as an assessment process which may challenge previously-held habits or beliefs (Mezirow, 1998). For Mezirow (1998), “learning may be understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (p. 190).

Merriam et al (2007) notes a difference between reflective practice, which involves “thinking about and monitoring one’s practice as it is happening” (p. 164), and experimental learning, which is described as “the result of a person experimenting on the environment” (p. 164). While the former indicates intentionality in experience as an informal means of learning, the latter can be viewed as a byproduct of the experience itself. Therefore, according to Marsick and Watkins (1990), experimental learning, in which an individual learns from accomplishment or by trial-and-error, represents an incidental form of informal learning.
Experiential learning theorists contend that learning is rooted in activity. Rather than formalized education or even self-directed learning activities, “real-world context, where there are social relationships and tools, make the best learning environments” (Hansman, 2001, p. 45-46). Commonly, communities of practice are viewed as a means by which individuals can both engage in and reflect upon activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). A community of practice, as defined by Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002), is a “group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 3). Three theoretical constructs comprise the foundation of communities of practice: domain, community and practice. According to Wenger et al (2002), communities of practice are first defined by their domain, or the area of interest. Secondly, communities of practice are defined by their sense of community, as evidenced by the engagement of members in joint activities, discussions, mutual assistance, and information sharing. Finally, communities of practice are defined by their practice outcomes, which include the development of a shared repertoire of resources consisting of shared experiences, stories, and tools. According to Rowden (2007), communities of practice can be particularly valuable within the workplace, and “exist in some form in every organization – whether they have been deliberately created and labeled as such or not” (p. 71).

Similar to communities of practice, mentoring relationships within the workplace can provide a beneficial means of learning through the experience of everyday professional practice. According to Cervero (1992), the knowledge acquired by experience is often more valuable to practitioners than the knowledge acquired through formal education. Hansman (2001) utilizes this notion to argue in favor of mentorship as
a form of continuing professional education, given that mentoring provides
“opportunities for participants to learn from and in a meaningful practice environment,
richly situated with tools, relationships and experiences that help them understand and
reflect upon their workplace knowledge” (p. 8). Mentoring relationships in the
workplace may take a variety of forms, in that they may be informal or workplace-
sponsored, or in that they may include pairings of peers in addition to traditional pairings
of “experts” and “novices” (Hansman, 2001). Regardless of how the mentoring
relationships are constructed, “the most important defining quality of the mentors is their
ability to aid in both psychosocial and career support” (Hansman, 2001, p. 7). Whether
situated within the social context of a mentorship or a community of practice, or
embedded in an individual experience, Billet (2002) contends that “the workplace
provides authentic learning experiences that are highly applicable to the circumstances in
which they are learned. Everyday work activity can also provide combinations of new
learning and practice that can assist, reinforce, refine, and extend what was initially
learned” (p. 30).

**Academic Advisors as Adult Educators**

The previous section discussed the ways in which the dominant models and
theories of the adult learning literature have informed investigations specific to
workplace learning. Similarly, the adult learning literature has also informed the
academic advising literature. Over the last several decades, there has been some degree
of overlap between the bodies of literature in the fields of academic advising and adult
learning, although in a limited way. For instance, Bitterman (1985) discussed the
emerging synthesis of academic advising and adult education given the anticipated
increase in adult participation in higher education. This change in the demographics of the student body has served as the primary catalyst for discussions of academic advising which feature elements of adult education and adult learning. According to Ishler (2005), the demographics of the collegiate student body have changed significantly in the last few decades, with more rapid growth amongst older students than younger, traditionally-aged students. Often, the terms “adult” and “nontraditional” are used synonymously in higher education, with chronological age alone often determining whether or not students are to be considered “adults”. According to Kasworm (2003), however, when reference is made to adult learners in the college or university setting, the reference includes not only those students who are older, but also those students who meet other life circumstance criteria such as a gap in their education, or part-time or intermittent enrollment status. Thus, for a significant portion of academic advisors, especially those working in public or urban university or community college settings, the majority of students with whom they interact can be classified as adults, regardless of their age.

Kasworm (2003) contends that the “adult lifestyle” of the nontraditional student “significantly influences the nature of their participation in college” (p. 2), most often with negative consequences for retention. As a result of the challenges faced by this sizable student demographic, there has been an on-going emphasis within the academic advising literature on best practices in working with adult students. Recently, Hardin (2008) stated that “because of the barriers that they face, careful academic advisement is essential for adult students” (p. 51). Perhaps more importantly, however, Hardin (2008) continued on to assert that “academic advisers should be selected on the basis of
knowledge about and interest in the adult learner” (p. 51), underscoring the importance of academic advisors fulfilling the role of an adult educator. Thus, it is clear that although the literature related to academic advising and adult learning does indeed intersect, it does so only with an emphasis on academic advisors as the teachers of adults. What is still needed, therefore, is a focus on academic advisors as adult learners.

**Academic Advisors as Adult Learners**

As noted previously, Crookston (1972) forwarded the notion that academic advisors engage in a form of teaching in his developmental model of advising. And, as discussed above, the literature of the field emphasizes the advisor as an educator. Also noted within Crookston’s (1972) developmental advising model, however, is the idea that academic advisors engage in learning. According to Crookston (1972),

> of equal importance is the ability of the counselor or academic advisor not only to recognize the need to change himself if he expects to keep in tune with students in a changing world but also to develop the sensitivity to perceive these self-changes as they occur (p. 12).

Therefore, truly successful academic advising involves learning on the part of both the student, which is generally obvious in the academic advising research, as well as on the part of the advisor, which unfortunately is not well represented in the current literature.

However, as evidenced in the initial review of the fundamental concepts in adult and workplace learning, learning opportunities do not need to be institutionalized, such as higher education, or formally coordinated through professional associations to be a significant source of knowledge. Rather, research within the fields of adult and workplace learning commonly discusses the informal modes of learning found in the
workplace, such as mentoring and self-study (Merriam et al, 2007). However, this type of learning has thus far not been extensively pursued in the literature relevant to the profession of advising. As discussed previously, the literature tends to focus upon more formalized systems of training. As a compounding factor, many academic advisors are unlikely to view their self-directed learning efforts or their use of experiential learning as “official” forms of training or development. This problem is summarized succinctly in the adult learning literature:

> although most adult educators suspect that the majority of adult learning is informal – that is, embedded in everyday life – it is particularly difficult to measure because most adults themselves have trouble identifying these episodes (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 60).

There are, however, recent research efforts specific to advising which have attempted to focus on these particular modes of learning. For example, Lewis (2000) investigated whether or not communities of practices exist for academic advisors. His results indicated that communities of practice in a traditional, discernible form did not exist amongst the professional advisors that served as his participants. However, he found that academic advisors relied heavily upon individualized reading and review as a means of obtaining the knowledge necessary to perform their jobs (Lewis, 2000). This type of activity can certainly be classified as self-directed learning, as it is an “intentional and conscious” approach to informal learning (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 36). Regrettably, however, although Lewis (2000) touched on other concepts from the field of adult learning, he did not aggressively pursue these themes as the focus of his study was specific to the existence of communities of practice. Similar to Lewis, Waters (2002)...
focused on faculty advisor role socialization, concluding that “researchers must
acknowledge that role learning may be significantly influenced by the communication
exchanges taking place between advisors and advisees” (p. 23). As such, advisors utilize
their concrete advising experience, reflect on these experiences and construct new
knowledge as a result of these reflections (Merriam et al, 2007, p. 160). Waters (2002)
findings, however, are limited in that she focused specifically upon faculty advisors, as
well as on their initial role acquisition as opposed to the learning that occurs across the
career span.

Similar to their reliance on the informal learning activities of self-directed
learning and experiential learning, the literature suggests that academic advisors also
engage in social learning through their network of colleagues. For instance, the advisors
interviewed by Lewis (2000) discussed the role that mentorship and apprenticeship with
more experienced colleagues played in their training. This mentorship was not a formal
program established by their workplace, but rather an unconscious and naturally-
occurring phenomenon. Although few in number, the research which has been conducted
at the intersection of the academic advising and adult learning fields appears promising.
As discussed above, the use of an adult learning lens in exploring the experiences of
academic advisors has only just begun, signifying that additional research is certainly
warranted.

**Adult and Workplace Learning in Relevant Professions**

A study which applies an adult learning lens in examining the workplace learning
experiences of advisors represents a unique contribution to the academic advising
literature. A survey of the literature of fields comparable to academic advising reveals
that such an inquiry is both appropriate and useful to investigations of workplace learning. For instance, a variety of recent investigations of the teaching profession have successfully utilized an adult learning framework (Burns & Schaefer, 2003; Jurasaite-Harbison & Rex, 2010; Sandholtz, 2002; Terehoff, 2002; Turner, 2006; Williams, 2005; Wilson & Demetiou, 2007). In addition, similar studies using an adult learning lens have been conducted focused upon the professional development of faculty within higher education (Brancato, 2003; Lawler, 2003). These professions can be considered analogous to academic advising, especially given Crookston’s (1972) assertion that advising is a form of teaching. That is to say, teachers, faculty, and academic advisors are collectively viewed as educators, with emphasis on the role they play in the learning experiences of others. Their own learning, however, is no less important. One has only to search the literature for research related to teacher education and training to assess the important role that learning plays for those who serve as educators.

Sandholtz (2002), Terehoff (2002) and Williams (2005), for instance, recently investigated the professional development of teachers. Interestingly, each did so using the framework of adult learning to analyze whether or not the unique characteristics of adult learners were being considered in the development and delivery of professional development activities. As stated by Terehoff (2002), the differences between adolescent and adult learners “deserve careful attention and consideration in the process of professional development because they characterize adults as learners and distinguish them from student learners – a significant concept for school leaders who are engaged in the professional development of others” (p. 67). Although each of the studies utilized the concept of andragogy in discussing teacher professional development, each focused
exclusively on formal, planned programs facilitated by an “instructor”. Conversely, Burns and Schaefer (2003), Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex (2010), Turner (2006), and Wilson and Demetriou (2007) each expanded the definition of professional development to include the informal learning methods employed by teachers, not only with regard to their professional development, but with regard to their initial role acquisition as well.

Similar methods and philosophies have been applied in the literature relevant to higher education faculty professional development. For instance, Lawler (2003) offers that although we may be at ease with thinking of our various learners from an adult learning perspective, we may be shortsighted in not including teachers of adults as well. When we view teachers of adults as adult learners, and their professional development as adult education, we have at our disposal the research and literature from the fields of adult education, adult learning and development, and program development. This rich resource provides us with effective principles and practices, tried-and-true strategies, and practical applications, as well as a wealth of experience to bring to this new audience (p. 15).

Like academic advisors, faculty in higher education are often only associated with the principles of adult learning in terms of their role in educating adults. However, as Brancato (2003) notes, faculty are also “confronted by diverse student needs and expectations,” and therefore must also “continuously learn in order to keep up-to-date with current trends and demands” (p. 61). However, unlike academic advisors, for whom professional development remains largely unexamined, “as more institutions place a
higher priority on student learning, they have begun to emphasize the professional development needs of the faculty (Brancato, 2003, p. 61).

**Conclusion**

Although there is certainly no shortage of published materials on the subject of academic advising, a thorough review reveals that there is much more to be examined. For instance, the viewpoint of those who provide advising services is not substantially represented in the current literature. Beyond the inclusion of alternate voices in the literature, it is clear that the general approach to research in academic advising must both intensify and diversify. In short, publications related to academic advising must move beyond descriptive or best practices pieces and empirical research must begin to fortify the foundation of the field. Moreover, there is a documented paucity of literature specific to the training and professional development of academic advisors in general, and professional academic advisors in particular. In addition, as discussed above, the literature which does discuss this critical topic is limited in that it does not adequately explore the informal learning activities through which advisors may accumulate workplace knowledge. The theories and models of adult learning, with their central focus on informal modes of learning such as self-directed and experiential learning, provides a useful framework for extending the research related to academic advising and allows for empirical and theoretically-based contributions specific to advising practitioners.

Billett (2002) unequivocally states that “understanding how individuals can best learn at work constitutes a worthwhile educational and pedagogical project” (p. 29). This is echoed by Fenwick (2008), who adds that “overall, we have a great need for rigorous in-depth empirical research that traces what people actually do and think in everyday
work activity, and for research methods that can help illuminate the learning that unfolds in everyday work” (p. 25). Thus, the need for research of this type, in general, is documented. However, the need for this type of research specific to academic advisors is also documented. Specifically, according to the literature, the formal education of professional academic advisors is varied and the formal on-the-job training of professional advisors is limited. Therefore, academic advisors typify a specific segment of worker for whom the workplace, and the learning that takes place within that context, holds great importance. In discussing this category of worker, Billett (2002) states that “the experiences and support provided by workplaces are often the primary or only sources of individuals’ initial learning of their vocational practice as well as its further and ongoing development throughout their working lives” (p. 28). As educators of others, the learning undertaken by professional academic advisors is of the utmost importance. Therefore, the workplace of professional academic advisors and its role in their learning must be investigated.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to determine how professional academic advisors at urban universities learn to be advisors. Specifically, this study sought to determine (1) how workplace learning impacts advisors’ training and professional development, as well as sought to understand (2) what models of adult learning are evident in the workplace learning experiences of advisors. In examining the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors, the researcher was not seeking to prove or support a particular adult learning model or theory. Rather, this study sought to employ the use of the multitude of frameworks and models from the field of adult learning in order to gain an understanding of the experiences of professional academic advisors at urban universities. Although a quantitative approach could have been utilized to solicit data from advisors regarding their experiences, the continued reliance on quantitative methods in research related to higher education has been repeatedly criticized. Specifically, noted researchers in higher education Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) argue that quantitative research design is “most useful in painting the broad outlines of the portrait. Rendering tone, tint, texture, and nuance may require the finer brushstrokes characteristic of qualitative approaches” (p. 637).
Moreover, this study sought to give voice to a particular group of practitioners within the profession; a group which has traditionally been absent from the literature. According to Aiken-Wisniewski et al (2010), “the voice and lived experience of the frontline advisor as an active participant within the research are far less common” (p. 4). In order to ensure that the story of these practitioners is represented in the literature, the qualitative research method was the most appropriate research method. By employing a qualitative methodology, the study was able to examine workplace learning experiences from the perspective of the advisor, rather than that of the researcher. By utilizing the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection, as opposed to a pre-determined questionnaire with limited response options, the study gained the ability to adapt to nuances of each data collection situation, thereby yielding more comprehensive and complex data. Finally, the use of a qualitative methodology allowed for the production of rich descriptions of the training and professional development of academic advisors by allowing participants to discuss their experiences in detail and in their own words.

As discussed by Merriam (1998) with regard to educational research, the qualitative methodology is applicable and advantageous to the research questions at-hand. Moreover, the underlying epistemology of qualitative research, with an emphasis on the individual’s construction of knowledge and meaning making (Merriam, 2009), appears to be a natural fit with the aims of workplace learning research. For instance, as discussed by Rowden (2007), workplace learning research focuses upon “the way in which workers, or groups of workers acquire, interpret, assimilate, or reorganize related clusters of facts, skills, and feelings, and how they construct meaning from their personal and shared organizational life” (p. 8). This is also echoed by Fenwick (2008), who offers
that “notions of workplace learning as sense making have become more frequent since the mid-1980’s” (p. 19).

**Basic Qualitative Research**

According to Merriam (2009), the basic qualitative study is the most common form of qualitative study in the field of education. As such, the findings of this study are “a mix of description and analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11), describing the workplace learning experiences of advisors while analyzing these experiences using adult learning theories and concepts. The goal of this study, therefore, was to develop an understanding of the learning process for professional academic advisors, a phenomenon that has not previously been researched in this way. While in this sense, the term “basic” is used to distinguish this study from other more specific forms of qualitative research, such as phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory, it also holds an additional meaning. As discussed by Merriam (2009), the term “basic” also distinguishes this study from an “applied” study. That is to say, the immediate aims of this study included extending knowledge regarding adult and workplace learning in general, and the training and professional development of advisors in particular. Therefore, this research sought to explore an area in order to establish a basic understanding, rather than with the intention of providing evaluative data designed to directly influence policy, as might be the case in an applied study.

**Pilot Study**

This study was piloted in 2010 as part of a course on advanced qualitative techniques and under the supervision of a faculty member specializing in qualitative research. For the pilot study, the researcher developed a questionnaire as well as open-
ended interview questions related to the research questions, which appear as Appendices A and B, respectively. Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the pilot study, one advising unit at a Midwestern urban university utilizing a decentralized and shared model of advising was solicited for participants. In total, three academic advisors consented to participation. The participants included two males and one female, with between two to eleven years of experience as professional academic advisors.

Each of the participants was interviewed via email to provide the opportunity to respond to the questionnaire and interview questions as time allowed. Each of the participants completed the questionnaire and interview questions and returned their responses to the researcher via email within the span of two weeks. In addition, the researcher was able to address follow-up questions and clarifications via email as well. All correspondence related to the research questions were then imported into NVivo, proprietary qualitative data analysis software, and the researcher began to code the interview transcripts. Initial coding and themes utilized the models and theories of adult learning as identified in the participant responses. The themes were then finalized using the words of the participants rather than the terms of the adult learning literature.

The results of the pilot study generally indicated that advisors learn how to advise through reflection on their own experiences as students. For example, the participants discussed the role of particularly positive or particularly negative traits or incidents that they themselves had with advisors on the development of their own style of advising. In addition, the participants learned how to advise by reflecting upon past experience, including their own past experiences as advisors and the experiences of other advisors. In addition, the pilot study found that advisors strongly adhered to definitions and
terminology that are rooted in formal conceptualizations of training and professional development, such as in-service workshops and professional conferences.

Research Site Selection

Several criteria were used to select the three urban universities that served as research sites. Due to concerns related to accessibility for data collection, this study is geographically bound to the Midwest. In particular, the state in which the research was conducted is home to a number of institutions of higher education, making it an ideal research setting. Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the researcher first identified all public, four-year universities within the state. Of those institutions, the researcher then identified five universities in which the main campus was located within a city, as opposed to a suburban or rural setting. One institution was eliminated immediately from consideration due to inherent researcher bias and ethical conflict.

However, as discussed by Elliott (1994), an institution is not designated as “urban” based on solely on its campus location. According to Elliott (1994), an urban university is “one that is located in a city that is engaged with the diversity of people within the community it serves, and that determines its institutional philosophy on the way it sees itself in relation to its environment and to the community in which it is located” (p. 23). Therefore, the researcher examined the institutional mission statements of the four universities that remained under consideration for inclusion in the study. While each university did define itself as either urban or metropolitan both in location and in institutional mission, an additional university was eliminated due to what the researcher determined to be a lack of sufficient diversity in the undergraduate student
body. In particular, the eliminated institution espoused an admissions policy with a slightly higher degree of selectivity, did not offer remedial coursework, and reported a significantly higher percentage of White students as well as a significantly lower percentage of students receiving financial aid as compared to the other three universities. Finally, although perhaps most importantly, through a search of each institution’s website, the researcher was able to confirm that each of the remaining three institutions employed professional academic advisors, either in place of or in addition to faculty advisors. These three sites then became the target sites for inclusion in the study. In order to preserve the confidentiality of the participants, each institution was randomly assigned a pseudonym by the researcher. Therefore, the research sites will be referred to as Alpha University, Beta University, and Gamma University for the remainder of this report.

**Research Setting**

There are a number of commonalities across the three research sites. Specifically, each of the three universities selected for inclusion in the study is an institution of low-selectivity located in either a small, midsize, or large city which offers remedial coursework for students who are not academically well-prepared. In addition, the student body at each institution is diverse, and includes populations who are underrepresented in higher education and/or disadvantaged. For instance, one-quarter or more of the undergraduate student body at each institution is identified as non-White. In addition, each institution reports that approximately one-quarter of the undergraduate student body is an adult/nontraditional student 25 years of age or older, and that approximately 20% of the undergraduate student body is enrolled on a part-time basis. The overwhelming
majority of students at each university receive some type of student financial aid, with more than 30% of students at each institution qualifying for federal financial aid in the form of the need-based Pell Grant. In addition, each offers degrees at multiple levels including Associate’s, Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctor’s degrees. Finally, each of the universities can be considered a large institution. The smallest of the institutions, Gamma University, boasts a student body of nearly 15,000 students while the largest of the institutions, Beta University, boasts an enrollment of nearly 26,000.

Through the data collection process, the researcher gained greater knowledge regarding the way in which academic advising is structured and delivered at each institution. These additional details are provided below, in brief, to provide additional context to the study. However, in the interest of maintaining confidentiality, details will be discussed in summary so as to avoid the possibility that each institution may be identified.

In terms of the delivery of academic advising, all three institutions operate under a shared or dual model of advising, meaning that both professional academic advisors and faculty advisors are utilized in some way. In addition, in terms of the overall structure of advising, each institution operates under a satellite model. That is to say, academic colleges or specialized programs had their own distinct academic advising services, and academic advisors “specialized” in advising either a particular type of student (such as nontraditional, undecided, provisional, or first-year) or a particular discipline (such as Nursing, Engineering, or Business). None of the institutions utilized a true centralized model, where only one unit on campus provides advising services across the student body. Given that each of the institutions were large, public, 4-year institutions, the
identified systems for advising delivery and structure are consistent with those discussed previously during the literature review (King & Kerr, 2005; Pardee, 2000).

Selection of Research Participants

In order to recruit participants, the researcher first searched the staff directories available through each institution’s website and compiled a spreadsheet of individuals employed in academic advising. A total of 120 individuals were identified across all three institutions. Then, an introductory email was sent to each of the identified advising professionals, which explained the purpose of the study and other introductory information as required by the IRB. No criteria other than status as a full-time professional academic advisor was specified, although the email did clarify a preference for individuals for whom advising was a primary responsibility (as opposed to supervision or other administrative duties). In addition, the email emphasized that this research did not aim to evaluate the training or professional development activities of their institution, nor did it intend to draw any conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the institutions’ leadership in this area. A consent form was attached to the email, and interested participants were asked to review and complete the form, returning it to the researcher either electronically or by mail. The consent form is included as Appendix F. As consent forms were received, the researcher emailed a basic demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). As part of the questionnaire, interested participants were invited to provide a pseudonym of their own choosing which would serve to protect their confidentiality. Ultimately eleven advisors agreed to participate, and from that pool two participants were selected from each of the three research sites. Detailed participant descriptions are available in the following section.
The researcher determined that two advisors from each institution, equaling six total participants, was an ideal number of participants utilizing data gleaned both from the advising literature as well as the aforementioned pilot study. For instance, as noted by Sofranko (2004), increased demands on advisors’ time often prohibits or limits participation in professional development. Thus, if advisor time is not sufficient for professional development, it is unrealistic to expect that most advisors will have the time available to participate in a research study. This is especially true given the multi-stage data collection protocol of this study. Therefore, it is assumed that only a limited number of advisors will be available for participation and the target number of participants must reflect this reality. In addition, through analysis of the data collected through only one research site in the pilot study, the researcher noted that variance in participant backgrounds and length of tenure as academic advisors added value to the data collected. For this reason, although participant diversity was enhanced through the use of multiple research sites, including more than one participant from each site allowed for greater representation of the experiences of advisors on each individual campus, rather than allowing only one participant’s experience to be interpreted as representative of that institution.

Fortunately, at least two professional academic advisors from each institution volunteered for participation after receiving the initial email solicitation. At Alpha University, four advisors in total volunteered, while at Beta University, five advisors consented to participation. To determine the final Alpha University and Beta University participants, the researcher utilized the demographic questionnaire to determine which participants would lend the greatest degree of diversity to the study. Those who were not
selected as final participants were retained as alternates in the event that one of the primary participants was unable to continue. In determining final participants, the researcher sought participants with varying educational backgrounds and varying tenure as academic advisors, and emphasized the inclusion of both male and female participants as well as participants from different types of advising units (program advisors, academic college advisors, etc.). In this way, the study utilized a purposeful sampling strategy, which aims to select “individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). In addition, the intentional inclusion of diverse participants allows for maximum variation, a popular strategy in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), “when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of a study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives – an ideal in qualitative research” (p. 126).

In this study, the purposeful sampling strategy aimed to produce a pool of participants with differing backgrounds and perspectives. That is to say, the sampling strategy did not seek to produce a pool of participants that was representative of the professional academic advising population in terms of demographics such as gender and race. Demographic information regarding the profile of academic advisors, in general, is available through NACADA’s Fall 2012 membership report. According to the report, more than 70% of those who responded to the survey were female, with just under 20% identifying as male. In terms of race, more than 60% of the NACADA membership identified themselves as White, with 11% identifying themselves as African American. However, care must be taken when viewing these numbers as they are representative only
of those academic advisors who are members of the organization, and also include those who are faculty advisors, advising retirees, as well as student members who aspire to become advisors. Therefore, while these numbers provide some insight regarding the composition of the advising profession, they cannot provide a profile of practicing professional academic advisors in particular.

Participants

A diverse range of advisors were included in the pool of participants. Overall, the sample included three males and three females, with ages ranging from 29 to 63 years of age. Of the six participants, five identified their race/ethnicity as white, while one identified himself as African-American. With regard to their service in the field of higher education, the participants ranged from five years of service to over 20 years of service. Finally, in terms of tenure as professional academic advisors, the participants held between one and 18 years of experience.

Two participants, both male, represent Alpha University. Richard, the youngest participant of the study at 29 years of age, serves as an academic advisor for a particular academic college at Alpha University, working with all levels of undergraduate students. Richard’s formal education at the Bachelor’s level focused on disciplines unrelated to his work as an advisor. However, his formal education at the Master’s level centered upon the discipline of business, which is the area of interest of the undergraduate students who he now advises. Having worked in higher education for a total of five years in positions related to marketing and recruitment, Richard has served as an advisor at Alpha University for three years.
Robert, a 52 year-old African-American male, serves as an advisor in a specialized program at Alpha University that focuses upon returning adult students who are seeking degrees in a variety of academic areas. At 20 years, Robert has the longest tenure in higher education of any of the participants, having spent substantial time in the area of admissions and student affairs. However, he has the least experience with academic advising, having served as an advisor for one year at Alpha University. Robert holds a baccalaureate degree in an area unrelated to his current profession, although he does hold a Master’s degree in education. Both Richard and Robert are the most educated of the participants, with each additionally holding a doctoral degree in education.

Participants from Beta University include Terry, a 47 year-old white male who serves as an advisor in an academic unit to students seeking technical degrees and students who have been provisionally admitted to Beta University. For the majority of his 12 years of experience in higher education, Terry has been an advisor at urban institutions and has been with Beta University in particular for over three years. His formal education includes a Bachelor’s degree in an area unrelated to the disciplines upon which he now advises, although he holds a Master’s degree in education.

Jillian, the eldest participant of the study at 63 years of age, serves as an advisor at Beta University. Jillian has spent the entirety of her nine years in higher education at Beta University as an advisor in a unit that works specifically with underprepared students in a variety of disciplines. Jillian joined the academic advising profession later in life, after retiring from her previous career working with young adults in the K-12
education system. While her formal education at the baccalaureate level is not relevant to her current professional role, Jillian holds a Master’s degree in counseling.

Two additional participants, both female, represent Gamma University. Lucy, 54 years of age, serves as an advisor to a specific health-related academic program at Gamma University. Having worked in higher education for 13 years, Lucy has been serving as an academic advisor for eight years. Like Jillian, Lucy is also a career-changer; therefore her formal education at both the Bachelor’s and Master’s level are more relevant to her previous career in the business private sector than to advising. However, Lucy also holds a second Master’s degree in counseling.

The final participant, Frances, is a 50-year-old white female. At Gamma University, Frances is primarily responsible for advising first-year students in a scientifically-focused academic college. Of all of the participants, Frances has the longest tenure as an academic advisor, having served as an advisor for 18 years. Although she has only been with Gamma University for the last four years of her advising career, all of Frances’ advising experience has been earned at urban institutions. Like each of the other participants, Frances’ undergraduate degree is not related to the disciplines in which she now advises. However, she does hold a Master’s degree in education.
Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisor</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years as an Advisor</th>
<th>Years in Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jillian</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

Prior to data collection, a research proposal for the study was submitted to the IRB of the researcher’s institution. Provisional approval was granted, on the condition that institutional approval was also obtained from each of the urban universities that served as research sites. Therefore, the IRB of each research site was contacted, and each provided a letter of approval. For reasons related to the maintenance of confidentiality, the individual site approval letters do not appear as appendices and are instead on file with the IRB of the researcher’s institution. Once the site approvals were submitted to the IRB of the researcher’s institution, the study received full approval, which is documented as Appendix G. After final approval was received, data collection commenced. Primarily, this study utilized semi-structured interviews and an adaptation of the critical incident technique described below in order to gather data.
Critical incident technique. The critical incident technique is a research approach that offers a practical and streamlined approach to collecting and analyzing information specific to human activities and the significance of those activities to the people involved. Given its basis in qualitative research, the critical incident technique is capable of yielding rich data that reflect real-life experiences. According to Kain (2004), the critical incident technique essentially allows “respondents to identify events or experiences that were “critical” for some purpose. These incidents are then pooled together for analysis, and generalizations about the event or activity are drawn from the commonalities of the incidents” (p. 71). The critical incident technique was first published by occupational psychologist John Flanagan (1954), after he had used the technique to elicit information regarding the job requirements of aviators in World War II. Since its introduction, the critical incident technique has been used to investigate a number of occupations, and therefore has a strong association with workplace research. In fact, Flanagan (1954) argued that the technique is best suited for practical aims, such as developing training programs or job evaluation tools. Recently, however, use of the critical incident technique has expanded, and many studies that utilize this technique can be found within education and social science fields (Kain, 2004).

Initially, the technique as described by Flanagan (1954) was reliant upon careful observations of workers, typically conducted by their supervisors or another researcher who was trained to identify incidents of critical importance. However, in keeping with Flanagan’s (1954) assertion that the critical incident technique should be viewed as a “flexible set of principles which must be modified and adapted to meet the specific situation at hand” (p. 335), more recent research has employed the use of self-report as
opposed to the observations of an outside observer (Kain, 2004). Kain (2004) cites that a key advantage in using the critical incident technique includes the focus on “real-world examples and behaviors, minimizing the subjective input of the researcher” (p. 77). In addition, the critical incident technique is considered especially useful in exploratory research, in the “early stages of understanding a phenomenon” (Kain, 2004, p. 78). However, Kain (2004) cautions that this technique may be unfamiliar to many readers, and may be criticized for its reliance on self-reports.

Flanagan’s (1954) introduction of the critical incident technique established a five-step process as follows (see Table 2 for a summary):

1. Establishing the aim
2. Establishing plans and specifications
3. Collecting the data
4. Analyzing the data
5. Interpreting and reporting

The first step in utilizing the critical incident technique is to define the activity to be studied and the aim of that activity. In this case, the activity to be studied was workplace learning, operationally defined as all training and professional development activities, both formal and informal. The aim of the activity of workplace learning, according to the researcher, was defined as the development of understanding and the acquisition of knowledge.

Second, the plans and specifications of the study were identified, using the four key considerations posited by Flanagan (1954) of situation, relevance, extent, and observers. The situation refers to the location of, conditions of, and participants in the
activity under investigation. As discussed at length in the preceding sections, the location of the study was specified as three Midwestern universities. The conditions of the activity included the fact that each of the three research sites were considered urban institutions, which suggested that those institutions faced more significant challenges with regard to student retention. Finally, the participants in the activity under study were six professional academic advisors employed by the three Midwestern urban universities.

In terms of relevance, the critical incident technique necessitates that the researcher specify both the type of critical incident and the nature of the critical behaviors which are relevant to the study. For the study at-hand, the critical incidents were defined as instances in the advisors’ early professional lives in which they felt they required additional information or skills, as well as instances in the advisors’ professional lives in which they felt that they had learned a new skill or acquired new knowledge. Accordingly, the critical behaviors were defined as the actions the participants reported having taken after recognizing a deficit in their skills or knowledge, as well as the actions that the participants attributed to their acquisition of new skills or knowledge.

With regard to the extent of the study, Flanagan (1954) suggests that a researcher utilizing the critical incident technique defines the significance of the critical behaviors, in terms of their positive or negative effect on the general aim of the activity. Although this research sought primarily to identify the behaviors that reportedly contributed to the acquisition of skills and knowledge, the discussion of behaviors that the participants felt were not helpful in the acquisition of skills and knowledge may prove just as insightful for an exploratory study. Therefore, behaviors with both positive and negative effects on workplace learning were included.
Finally, with regard to observers, researchers applying the critical incident technique must ensure that those who serve as data collectors are familiar with the activity being studied. The focus of this study in particular is profession with which I, as the researcher, have had several years of professional experience. Therefore, the researcher’s familiarity with the activity under investigation is adequate. As the sole instrument of data collection, the training of additional data collectors was not a concern.

Within Flanagan’s (1954) discussion of the critical incident technique, several detailed instructions for data collection are provided. Individual interviews or direct observations are the preferred means for data collection of critical incidents. In this study, individual interviews were utilized for two primary reasons. First, individual interviews allowed for research participants to use critical incidents that occurred at any point in their career, rather than only those that took place while under observation. This allowed the participants discretion in determining the most significant incidents in their professional experience, thereby yielding richer data. Second, the researcher determined that direct observation was not a realistic method of data collection given the activity under investigation. That is to say, it is not necessarily possible to predict when learning may occur in the workplace, especially in a study such as this which extended the definition of learning to include informal modes. In addition, adult learning theorists posit that learning occurs as a result of reflection (Kolb, 1984), meaning that it is often an internal process and, therefore, not observable. To elicit contextualized examples of workplace learning, the critical incident protocols implemented during the individual interviews consisted of a set of questions which asked the participants to identify a
critical incident of workplace learning, to describe the relevant circumstances, to describe their actions, and to reflect upon the result of their actions (see Appendix E).

Flanagan (1954) also stressed the importance of transparency, emphasizing that research participants should be fully informed of the purpose of the research. As described in the discussion of the selection of research participants above, the recruitment strategy included full disclosure of the study’s aims. In addition, Flanagan (1954) also endorsed the use of a pilot study as a means of minimizing ambiguity and testing the wording of interview questions. As discussed above, a pilot study was undertaken prior to the study at-hand. The adjustments which were made to the data collection process as a result of the pilot study will be discussed in the following section.

The final two steps are not unique to the critical incident technique process and are instead consistent with the qualitative research method in general. For instance, with regard to data analysis, Flanagan (1954) suggested that analysis be conducted concurrently with data collection. This was indeed the approach utilized in this study. Similarly, Flanagan (1954) did not offer strict guidelines regarding the format of a final report. He did, however, emphasize the important role that a comprehensive discussion of the research methodology plays in a study’s overall credibility, as well as the role that a comprehensive discussion of context plays in a study’s overall generalizability. Because these notions are not specific to the critical incident technique and are instead applicable to any qualitative study, they will be discussed more fully in the following sections of this chapter.
Table 2
Application of Flanagan’s (1954) Critical Incident Technique Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Application to The Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establishing the Aim</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Workplace learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>Understanding/acquisition of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Establishing plans and specifications</td>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conditions</td>
<td>Urban universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>6 professional academic advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Critical Incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical Behaviors</td>
<td>Actions which led to construction of knowledge or skill acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extent</td>
<td>Actions that had both positive and negative effects on the construction of knowledge and skill acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observer(s)</td>
<td>Researcher with relevant professional experience serving as primary instrument of data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Collecting the Data</td>
<td>Individual interviews; participants informed of the purpose of the study; use of a pilot study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Analyzing the data</td>
<td>Concurrent data collection and analysis; identification of categories and sub-categories that emerge from the data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Interpreting and reporting</td>
<td>Transparent methodology enhances credibility; detailed context enhances generalizability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Interview protocol.** In the first phase of data collection, the researcher developed several demographic questions regarding the advisor and his or her formal educational and career history. This questionnaire was distributed to all those who indicated an interest in participation and completed the consent form. As discussed previously, the questionnaire was used to ensure diversity amongst the participants, but the primary function of the questionnaire was to allow the researcher the opportunity to become familiar with the participants prior to the in-person interview session. Also in preparation for the interview, the researcher emailed each participant an outline of the critical incident questions, which appears as Appendix E. Although the critical incident was not discussed until the time of the in-person interview, the advanced distribution of the questions assisted in preparing participants to identify for discussion a critical incident within their training and professional development, thereby yielding more useful data. This was especially useful for the veteran advisors, who would require additional time to recall instances from years back in their professional experience.

As discussed previously, the interview protocol was piloted by the researcher during a pilot study in 2010 which utilized email interviews. From this experience, the researcher learned of the difficulties that arise in asynchronous interview situations, as participants in the pilot study often failed to address the question in their initial response, therefore requiring an additional follow-up question from the researcher. In addition, the email interview format lacked verbal and nonverbal cues that likely would have enhanced the data. As noted by Merriam (2009), a distinct advantage of qualitative research and the use of the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection is the researcher’s ability to gather feedback through both verbal and nonverbal communication. When a
participant responds in writing, the researcher loses the ability to sense emotion, either by facial expression or vocal intonation, or to determine where the participant paused or struggled within a response. Thus, the researcher determined that the final study would include face-to-face interviews and other forms of verbal synchronous communication, such as telephone interviews.

Given that the participants in the pilot study displayed a tendency to rely upon terminology and definitions consistent with formal learning experiences, in developing the final interview questions care was taken to ask questions using general language as opposed to the language specific to the literature of adult and workplace learning. In this way, the questions did not lead participants toward particular answers and the risk of using terminology unfamiliar to the participants was minimized. Using the follow-up questions used to re-direct participant responses during the pilot study, minor revisions were made to both the questionnaire and interview questions, which appear in Appendices C and D, respectively. As is typical of a semi-structured interview protocol, the questions were used flexibly in guiding the interviews conducted in the current study (Merriam, 2009).

Although prompted to identify a critical incident in their training prior to the interview, the participants provided the first oral report of a critical incident during the in-person interview. To ensure participant comfort, the interview itself took place at a date, time, and location mutually convenient for the participant and the researcher, and each interview was audio-recorded. In addition, the researcher recorded field notes during each interview. The field notes served as a means of notating general topics discussed by the participant, which aided in locating key information on the audio recordings. In
addition, the researcher made notes regarding follow-up questions as well as preliminarily highlighted data which was congruent with the responses of another participants. At the conclusion of each in-person interview, the researcher provided each participant with an outline of the questions for the second critical incident regarding professional development. Participants were contacted a few weeks after the in-person interview by telephone, again at a date and time convenient for the participant. During the telephone interview, which was conducted via a speakerphone feature in order to allow for audio recording, participants were asked to provide a second oral critical incident report. In addition, the telephone interview provided the researcher the opportunity to follow-up on any statements made during the in-person interviews or to pursue new lines of questioning that had arisen during other participant in-person interviews. After initial data analysis, each of the participants was again contacted by email, and given the opportunity to review the researcher’s initial summaries and themes and to revise or clarify any statements. Therefore, from the initial questionnaire through the member-checking phase, the researcher had (at a minimum) five interactions with each participant:

1. The email distribution of the questionnaire.
2. The email distribution of the questions for the training critical incident.
3. The in-person interview including the discussion of the training critical incident and the distribution of the questions for the professional development critical incident.
4. The follow-up telephone interview including the discussion of the professional development critical incident.
5. The email exchange for the purposes of member checking.

Data Analysis

A total of more than eight and a half hours of audio recordings from the six in-person interviews and six telephone interviews were then transcribed by the researcher. The recordings were transcribed with the assistance of Soundscirber, an open-source software tool designed for digital audio file transcription assistance. Care was taken to remove or edit sensitive or identifying information, especially the removal of participant names and the substitution of the pseudonyms that each participant had selected. The researcher then utilized the assistance of WeftQDA, an open-source software package designed for qualitative research, in the management and analysis of the transcripts. Each transcript was imported into the software package and labeled according to the participant and university pseudonyms. In order to ensure findings relevant to the research questions, the researcher did not code statements that were unrelated to the research questions in the analysis. That is to say, statements that were not relevant to workplace learning were not considered to be statements of significance and were therefore not coded in any way. Initial coding and classification schemes were derived from the adult and workplace learning literature to ensure that the final themes appropriately addressed the research questions at-hand. Therefore, participant statements were initially coded according to whether the experience discussed was an example of informal learning or formal learning, etc. A subsequent round of analysis allowed the researcher to apply more specific coding terms, such as self-directed learning and experiential learning. The researcher then employed the constant comparative method, a strategy which involved comparing individual segments of data (Merriam, 2009), to
review all statements and codes developed during the initial round of analysis and
determine larger, overarching themes. Although the codes used in the initial data
analysis were derived directly from the field of adult learning, the final themes were not
tied exclusively to the jargon of the field and were instead more reflective of the words of
the participants. A thorough discussion of each of the identified themes is presented in
the following chapter.

**Trustworthiness.** Rather than being evaluated on the basis of its validity,
reliability, objectivity, and generalizability, qualitative research is typically evaluated
based upon its credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Marshall &
Rossman, 2010). Together, these constructs indicate the overall trustworthiness of the
study. The trustworthiness of this study was enhanced in several ways. First, credibility
was enhanced through the use of multiple approaches to data collection, including
interviews, critical incident reports, and field notes. In addition to multiple approaches to
data collection, the credibility of the research was also enhanced through the use of
multiple research sites, multiple participants and, perhaps most importantly, multiple
contacts with each participant. The latter in particular assisted in establishing a rapport
between the researcher and each participant, which allowed for greater candor on the part
of the participants as well as created the opportunity for clarifications. In this way,
multiple contacts with each participant allowed for more accurate data collection.

In addition, the researcher employed member checking to ensure the accuracy of
interpretations. During the member checking phase of the research, the researcher
compiled summaries of each theme, which included a brief description of the underlying
concept of the theme as well as excerpts from the transcripts which supported the theme.
These summaries were then emailed to each participant, and each participant was asked to review the interpretation of the researcher and to respond with any feedback or objections. The responses received from each participant indicated that the themes developed by the researcher, and thus the researcher’s interpretations of the data, were accurate and did ring true to their professional experiences related to workplace learning. According to Marshall and Rossman (2010), the triangulation of data from multiple sources, the prolonged engagement of the researcher and participants, and the sharing of data and interpretations with participants are primary strategies for ensuring credibility.

With regard to confirmability, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail of the data collection and analysis process, which allows for the reconstruction of the study or for the external examination of the choices and interpretations made by the researcher. In this way, the logic and interpretations of the study was made transparent to others (Marshall and Rossman, 2010). Finally, the thick, rich descriptions presented in the research findings provide an additional degree of transparency between the data collected and the researcher’s interpretations. This transparency lends itself to the transferability of the study. By providing the reader with detailed accounts of the research setting, participants, and findings, the reader may make more informed decisions regarding the applicability of the study to other populations and contexts. In addition, the inclusion of diverse participants through the use of the maximum variation sampling strategy is useful in increasing the transferability of the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

Acknowledgement of the Researcher’s Perspective

Throughout this study, I, as the researcher, have identified myself as having professional experiences relevant to the study. From a professional standpoint, I can
recall the limited formal training experiences that I had upon entering into the field of academic advising, and have also given much thought to the context of my own professional growth and development. In addition, as a supervisor of professional academic advisors, I have personally been involved in the design and implementation of training for new advising staff, some of whom were veteran advisors and others who were just entering the profession. Moreover, my professional experience in higher education has been uniquely centered on urban institutions. As such, I am tremendously interested in understanding the training and development experiences of advisors, both in general and specific to urban institutions. It is my hope that the insights gained from this study will be useful to me in understanding my colleagues (locally and globally) as well as the staff for which I am responsible.

In discussing my professional experience, however, I am aware that this is potentially troublesome for the ethical considerations of the research as I am a member of the academic advising community within the region under study. In order to ensure that the research was conducted ethically, the research was conducted at sites with which I have no current professional affiliation, and using participants with whom I do not have direct professional relationships. In this way, I hoped to minimize the possibility that any potential participants would feel pressured to participate, and also minimize any discomfort that participants might feel in attempting to navigate dual roles as both advising colleagues and research participants. The research questions address the individual experiences of the participants, and the participants should be free to discuss any aspect of their experience that is particularly meaningful to them, without fear of a breach in confidentiality or retaliation for the expression of negativity.
In addition, the inherent biases that I may bring to the research as a fellow academic advisor must be addressed. As a doctoral student familiar with a variety of adult learning theories, naturally I have contemplated my own training and development experiences as an advisor as well as those of my staff through the lens of adult learning theory. While my role as a qualitative researcher allows for my interpretation of participant responses, I must not approach the research with my own preconceived notions. Rather, I must present the findings in a way that is truly representative of the participants’ voices. However, this study did not contain a particular hypothesis regarding the types of adult learning experiences that would be uncovered as a result of the study. That is to say, this study sought to explore the experiences of advisors, as expressed by the participants themselves, and to utilize the framework of adult learning theories to organize and discuss those experiences. Therefore, because of the exploratory nature of the study, the danger of my analysis being distorted in any way by my own point of view, either consciously or subconsciously, was minimized.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The aim of this research study was to explore, through qualitative methodology, the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors at urban universities through the lens of adult learning. This study sought to answer the overall question of how professional academic advisors at urban universities learn to become advisors by (1) identifying the impact of workplace learning on advisor training and development, and (2) identifying the models of adult learning evident in the experiences of advisors. A total of six professional academic advisors from three Midwestern urban universities participated in two rounds of interviews, each of which included sharing specific critical incidents from their workplace learning experiences. Comprehensive descriptions of the participants and the research design used in this study were included in the preceding chapter. From the interviews conducted, verbatim transcripts were produced. From those transcripts, significant statements regarding workplace learning were extracted and clustered into general topic areas derived from the adult learning literature. Each general topic area was then examined relative to the research questions, and for each of the two research questions, several distinct themes emerged.
The following themes emerged during the analysis of the impact of workplace learning on professional academic advisors’ training and development: (1) the need for hands-on experience; (2) personal characteristics of academic advisors; (3) using past workplace learning experiences to shape the experiences of new advisors; and (4) inadequacies and conflicts hinder participation in nonformal workplace learning. In the analysis of the models of adult learning evident in the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors, the following three themes emerged: (1) experiential learning; (2) self-directed learning, and (3) andragogical principles. The experiential learning theme, in particular, included four distinct sub-themes, including: (1) using personal experience; (2) using professional experience; (3) communities of practice; and (4) the role of mentoring. In addition, the andragogical principles theme included four distinct subthemes which mirror the assumptions outlined by the model of andragogy (Knowles, 1990): (1) the learner’s need to know; (2) readiness to learn; (3) problem-centered orientation, and (4) internal motivation. Each theme is discussed in more detail below, including relevant supporting excerpts from the participant interviews.

**The Impact of Workplace Learning**

The first research question of this study focused upon the role that workplace learning plays in the overall training and development of professional academic advisors. Participants discussed a variety of learning experiences, including formal pre-employment learning in graduate-level programs, the structure and content of their training upon first assuming the role of an advisor, structured development opportunities, and their social and informal learning as practicing professionals. The themes detailed below provide insight into the role that these accumulated workplace learning
experiences played in the advisors’ training and professional development, and provide information regarding which experiences led to the development of professional confidence and competence amongst the academic advisors interviewed.

**Theory isn’t everything: The need for hands-on experience.** The first theme to emerge from the data centers upon the participants’ discussion of the need for hands-on, practical experience above all else. Although there was variation in the participants’ discussions of how relevant or useful their formal, pre-employment education was, or how relevant or useful their initial training upon becoming advisors was, each participant directly addressed the need to supplement, or in some case supersede, the theoretical foundation of academic advising with the practical knowledge that can only be derived from experience. For example, Robert, a veteran higher education professional but relatively new advisor, found his formal education, which was focused upon the field of higher education, to be highly relevant to his work. He stated, “yeah, my education really prepared me because I knew theoretically how students were”. However, he immediately goes on to underscore the importance of applying and testing the theory he had learned, by continuing on to say “but then I learned practically how it applied and how factual it was”.

Frances, the most experienced advisor of the participants, was also in agreement with the idea that theory alone cannot provide everything that an advisor needs to be effective. Although she notes that “there is nothing wrong with the theory that you learn,” Frances emphasized that advisors must “realize that anything that you read in the books, it’s nice but you know what, nothing that you read in the books is real life”. In a later clarification of her statement, Frances stated that “what you read in the textbooks is
not exactly how it is. It’s nice, to say ‘oh, I wish that would work that way’, but it doesn’t. You really do kind of have to experience it”. Frances revisits this same theme one additional time, this time with some criticism of those advisors who are, in her mind, overly dependent upon theory alone:

   Until you actually start advising or sitting in with students, you can watch and you can read, but you’re not going to be able to do the job. There are a variety of people that would say that they want some kind of book, but just because you read something in a book that doesn’t make you a good advisor. You’re only a good advisor once you start doing it. (Frances, Gamma University, October 2011)

Terry, who has extensive experience as an advisor at urban institutions, was perhaps the most outspoken regarding the distinction between theory and practice. In his opinion, there is more to be learned from working directly with students and witnessing their development than there is from reading about student development theory. In discussing his formal education, Terry stated that his graduate program:

   Was so broad on theory that I had to definitely mold myself…you know, Chickering’s Vectors and all those, I can’t recall the last time other than in mocking that I’ve really thought about it. Ask me about the vectors, or Piaget or any of that…they’re great and they’re wonderful but academic advising is such a feel, instinct, gut-based job. You could spout off study, you could spout off the vectors…I don’t know…but it ultimately comes back to what’s my gut saying about how I can help this student? I hear what they’re saying, how can I help them get there or can I be truth serum
to them? And I don’t think about any of the vectors or anything. And I would challenge most advisors to be able to rattle off any of those things.

(Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

Like Robert and Frances, although Terry recognized the applicability of the theory that he learned previously, he found it to be less useful than his own experience as an advisor, which allowed him to react to day-to-day scenarios without referencing theory.

Jillian, the eldest of the participants who joined the advising profession after retirement from her first career, expressed thoughts that also echoed those of her fellow participants. However, Jillian discussed theory imparted through the initial training provided to new advisors, as opposed to theory imparted through formal, pre-employment education. She stated simply that advising “isn’t something that you get trained on so much as you get experience with and you have to learn”. Although at her institution she is responsible for coordinating the training of new advisors, she admits that the theoretical foundation and theoretical scenarios shared during training do not provide full preparation for serving as an academic advisor. In her words:

I don’t think you train for 85 hours and then it’s all over and these people are somehow experienced experts at advising. I think that lots of what we train is trained in a vacuum. There’s no practice for it, other than the simple exercises I’ve come up with, but again it’s not a real person sitting in front of you. We do role playing, but again that person playing the student is an advisor, so there’s something very artificial about a lot of all of it. (Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)
Jillian’s statements regarding training add a new dimension to the idea that exposure to theory alone is insufficient in developing competent advisors by suggesting that the training phase for new advisors is incomplete until hands-on experience is gained. In analyzing the aggregate comments of professional academic advisors at urban universities, it is evident that they believe that hands-on, practical knowledge is a key component of advisor training and development, and is perhaps paramount in their workplace learning experiences. Workplace learning in the form of hands-on experience, therefore, has a substantial impact on the training and professional development of advisors.

**I can’t teach you that: Personal characteristics of academic advisors.**

Although the first theme, discussed above, indicated that practical experience is perhaps more valuable to advisors than exposure to theory, the second theme which emerged from the participant interviews suggests that there are components of being an academic advisor which are rooted in neither theory nor experience. That is to say, many of the participants suggested that workplace learning, whether formal, nonformal, or informal, cannot impart the personal characteristics which practicing academic advisors consider to be the essential skills of successful or effective advisors.

Richard, the youngest of the participants, introduced this idea when he described academic advising as a service industry. According to Richard, “It’s nice if you understand the nature of higher education…but, just having a very nice service mentality goes a long way and sometimes you can teach that, and sometimes you can’t.” Frances made similar comments regarding “teachability”. Based on her extensive experience as an advisor and her observations of others in the profession, Frances stated that “in seeing
some advisors, it’s not teachable. It’s just not… I think it’s just something that you have within you”. Jillian also recognized that there are certain personal characteristics which she felt must be inherent within the individual. She provided perhaps the most specific example of a quality which must exist within an advisor in her discussion of the ever-changing nature of policies and procedures in higher education. According to Jillian, because of the complex nature of the work, advisors must possess a quality of flexibility, “a sort of learning to bend with the wind”. Jillian continues on to say that “if you can’t do it, this is a horrible job”.

Although each of the participants discussed in some form the personal characteristics required for effective advising, Lucy and Terry provided the most pointed commentary on this idea. Lucy, a career-changer with several years of experience as an advisor, stated very directly, “there probably are some people who just shouldn’t be advisors. I think you have to really genuinely like people; you cannot be afraid to be honest with a student”. Lucy then expanded upon this notion, comparing the skills required for advising to those required for writing:

I think a big part of it is your personality. It’s like - I’m going to equate this to writing. I can make you technically a decent writer. I can make sure that your commas are in the right place and that you write sentences that aren’t fragments, whatever. But I cannot make you a brilliant writer; I can’t make you a writer that people want to read…And I think that part of that, I can’t teach you that…And I’m gonna guess that the good advisors, it’s already built into their personality and you either have it or you don’t. I can’t train that into you. I can teach you about the policies but I can’t
make you a nice person, I can’t make you motivate others, I can’t do that.

(Lucy, Gamma University, October 2011)

Terry provided a similar viewpoint, expressed in a similar way. Rather than writing, however, Terry discussed the similarities between academic advising and the art of playing the piano. In Terry’s words:

You can train a person to do the job, the actual skills of how to do the job, but this job entails so much gut, and heart, and head, that you can’t train a person to do that. Can I train a person to play the piano? Yes, but can I train them to really put the feel into the music piece? No, you can’t.

That’s just gut, head, and heart… and you’ve gotta want to do this. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

What Terry describes simply as “gut, head, and heart”, seems to summarize the personal characteristics discussed by all of the participants. Whether the participants pointed to the ability to be flexible or to a specific type of interpersonal skill, the participants each discussed their belief that there are personal characteristics that advisors must possess in order to be effective, and, moreover, these qualities are not likely to be taught or otherwise imparted through workplace learning experiences.

**Baptism by fire: Using past workplace learning experiences to shape the experiences of new academic advisors.** In discussing their own initial training experiences, there was great variance in the depth of training that each participant reported taking part in when first becoming an academic advisor. Fortunately for the profession of academic advising, newer advisors interviewed such as Robert and Richard seem to have experienced more purposeful and comprehensive on-the-job training.
However, two veteran advisors in particular, Terry and Jillian, reported having virtually no structured training upon first entering the field, and each expressed their dissatisfaction with the way in which they were trained. Interestingly, both Terry and Jillian now play active roles in the training of new advising professionals; Terry in an informal capacity and Jillian as part of her formal work responsibilities. Terry and Jillian, the only two participants who discussed their responsibilities for training other advisors, both described using their own largely negative initial workplace learning experiences as motivation for the way in which they now approach the training of others. Thus, their own personal workplace learning experiences are now directly impacting the workplace learning experiences of others; this phenomenon represents the third theme to be derived from the data.

Jillian quite directly explained the impact of her own inadequate training upon the training she now provides, stating that:

One of the reasons, probably the most important reason why I am the coordinator of training and wrote a training manual that is a couple of hundred pages long, is because of the training that I had as an incoming advisor. (Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)

Jillian expanded upon this further, providing additional details regarding her insufficient training:

I really felt, as my Director at that time said to me the first day in my own office, “you realize that this is a baptism by fire, that’s what we believe in – you’re going to learn this job by doing it”. That’s exactly what it was. I walked out of “training” into my own office with students like overnight,
and felt horribly undereducated about everything, but like everything else it is a job that you learn by doing. But I didn’t feel that I had a good framework. It wasn’t anybody’s fault, it was just how it was at that time. And out of that evolved what we have now, which is a very formal training program which has been highlighted a number of times.

Sometimes out of the depths emerges something pretty good. (Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)

Similarly, although Terry is only informally involved in the training of new advisors, he echoed the same sentiments as Jillian. Terry indicated that his own training was lacking, and went on to discuss how this experience influenced his approach to assisting in the orientation of new advising professionals. He stated:

We kind of decided amongst ourselves that we weren’t going to let that happen to the next generation of advisors to come in… We made it a conscious effort, we are not going to let the next group come in without them knowing, hey, my door is always open; why don’t you come in and sit and talk and we’ll do these things together. We all said okay, we’re going to take these people under our wing, and we’re just going to help them as best we can. How did it go; what’s going on; my door is always open. When I started, I sat in and observed a couple of people, but hindsight being what it is, I don’t think they were the best – they were good role models for what not to do. So, it’s still valuable, I took learning from that…but we all decided that with the next set, we would take them under our wing and it wasn’t even a joking discussion, it was kind of a
conscious effort that we all made that the way we got brought in was far from being good. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

Neither Jillian nor Terry’s own initial workplace learning experiences appear to have had a significant impact on their own training as advisors. However, it is interesting to note that their experiences did impact the workplace learning experiences of newer generations of advisors, as they were able to take their experiences and use them to craft more effective training for others. In this way, their own workplace learning experiences resulted in incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins, 1990), in that as a byproduct of their own problematic training they learned how training should be structured in order for it to be effective. Their experiences seem not only to have taught them the value of adequate training, but also seem to have motivated their personal commitment to serving as a resource to their colleagues. It stands to reason that good, high-quality initial training directly and positively impacts the training of academic advisors. The experiences recounted by Terry and Jillian, however, suggest that even poor initial training experiences impact the overall training of advisors. In this case, the unfavorable training experiences served as a catalyst for fundamental change in the way that subsequent generations of advisors were trained.

**Those conferences get frustrating: Inadequacies and conflicts hinder participation in nonformal workplace learning.** The final theme related to the impact of workplace learning experiences on advisor training and development focuses on the limitations that the advisors interviewed have noted with regard to participation in nonformal workplace learning. Nonformal learning opportunities, which in a professional setting include activities such as workshops and conferences at the institutional, local,
and national level, do not appear to play a significant role in the training and development of academic advisors. According to the participants, there are a variety of reasons why nonformal learning plays a minimal role in advisor workplace learning, including inadequate resources; lack of administrative support; conflicts in personal philosophy; and the perceived uselessness of available opportunities.

In discussing inadequate resources, the participants discussed limitations related to time as well as funding. In discussing her professional development activities through the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), Jillian stated that “we are encouraged, although we’re not subsidized, to go to NACADA conferences at the regional, state, and national level”, indicating that such activities are viewed as important by her administration and institution, and supported philosophically although not financially. She also continued on to note that, in terms of other types of professional development such as “working on research, writing articles, developing presentations for conferences, that sort of thing, is all done on your own time – and it is not compensated”. Like Jillian, Frances also has experienced situations where her administration recognized the opportunities available yet did not provide the funding needed for participation. Frances discussed her direct supervisor’s unwillingness to provide financial assistance for a particular conference, stating that “while he supports the fact that we could go, he is not going to provide any money whatsoever. He won’t even pay for our membership to NACADA. So, in terms of professional development, there’s not a whole lot”. Lucy also provided additional commentary on the lack of financial support of such learning activities, stating that “one thing that we should do for professional development is that
we should do more with webinars and stuff like that, but you know it’s just too hard to get anybody to pay for anything.”

In addition to a lack of money, a lack of time also appears to contribute to limited participation in nonformal learning opportunities. Even Robert, who unlike other participants has received encouragement and monetary resources to take part in various types of professional development, acknowledged that there are opportunities of which he cannot take advantage due to inadequate time. Terry addressed this concern most directly, lamenting that “it’s tough for me to justify in my head taking four days off to go talk about economically-challenged, first generation students when I should be here working directly with them”. Terry also discussed other types of learning opportunities, such as more localized efforts at the institutional level, which are thwarted due to a lack of adequate time. According to Terry:

There hasn’t been much, at least as far as my experience here, as far as okay we’re going to have a whole day workshop where we go and talk about new theory…part of that, at least here, it’s not the fault of anybody… it’s just been our circumstances – this office has been dramatically short-staffed. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

In addition, adequate time appears to be a concern not only for participation in learning opportunities but for the implementation of what is learned as well. That is to say, even participants who are able to find the time to participate often find that they do not have the time to implement the knowledge gained. Jillian described in great detail an experience she and her colleagues had after returning from a recent national conference:
Everybody was so excited to come back and they were talking about all this, but nobody did anything with it. Now, I’m not saying that these are all bad people who get excited and then forget about everything so much as it brings up another issue in advising and that is that we are all so busy as advisors. And there are so many things on our plate, and now so many of our administrators expect us to be retention specialists on top of everything else. As much as we would like to do this stuff, that would probably be very beneficial for students and for us so that we don’t get burned out on the negative, we don’t have time to do it! And so it’s a great idea, but it’s on your desk, and then it’s on your chair, and then it’s in a file folder, and then it’s forgotten. (Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)

The participants’ statements above indicate a lack of support from administration, either in terms of a lack of financial contributions or a lack of appropriate resources in terms of staffing. However, according to Richard, there are also cases in which administrators themselves are opposed to the idea of continued development for advising professionals. Although he acknowledges that this is his own perception, Richard stated his belief that “sometimes training and developing employees can be seen as a threat, to people that may have some security issues”. According to Richard, supervisors may feel threatened by members of their advising staff becoming empowered through participation in professional development. Richard went on to offer that “if some offices are not supportive of training, it might just be that they like the predictability of knowing that their staff is going to be there for 25 years and there’s a continuity that’s there.”
Therefore, a lack of support for the concept of continuing education can have as limiting of an effect on participation in learning opportunities as a lack of monetary or other resources.

In some cases, it is evident that the advisors themselves do not appear to support the notion that this form of continuing education should be a high priority. Although he makes it clear that he is in no way less committed to his role as an academic advisor, Terry expanded upon this notion further:

So, for me to just consciously say that I am going to block off three hours a day three days a week so that I can work on presenting for a conference has just never been the focus of my philosophy. I know there are people who really, really like to put those together, and God bless them we need them, otherwise conferences would be really boring. But that’s just not me. It’s just, to me, I’d rather be interacting with my students. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

Terry’s personal philosophy places a higher emphasis on his day-to-day work with students then upon his participation in a nonformal learning pursuit. In fact, he places a higher premium upon the learning of others in general, including his newer advising colleagues. He stated, “I view my role here as, we’ve got five new advisors, and I am best serving new advisors by staying here and helping them. I’ve got to focus locally”.

Finally, along with the limitations discussed above, the participants discussed the notion of the uselessness of the information gained through participation in nonformal learning opportunities. Lucy in particular addressed the futility of the knowledge gained from conferences. She stated, “one of the things that I have always heard about people
that go to conferences, and it is problematic, you go, you are inspired, and then you think, oh, we’ll never be able to do this here”. Terry touched upon this same dilemma, in discussing the problem of applying information gleaned at conferences from often dramatically different types of institutions. Being an advisor at an urban university, Terry summarized his dilemma as follows:

And a lot of times these people come in with these presentations, and it’s wonderful and it works well for their university, and ooh, the title is so catchy-catchy and draws you in, and then you realize that what you are dealing with is a rural, predominately residential, small, faith-based college… But to have somebody come and present… saying, “oh this works here for us”, doesn’t apply to one of the urban schools. So, those conferences get frustrating to me. A lot of times it does feel like we are sitting around the camp fire singing Kumbaya. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

Although he acknowledged that the same may not hold true for newer advising professionals, as a veteran advisor, Terry contends that conferences “after a while, just became the same old, same old.” Jillian’s assessment as a veteran advisor is similar to Terry’s, as Jillian explained that:

I have not missed a NACADA conference since 2002 until this year, and the reason that I didn’t go this year is because I am tired of it. It’s a lot of listening to the same thing I’ve heard a thousand times before, and I’m not taking anything away from it anymore so I just didn’t go this year.

(Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)
Jillian’s statement acknowledged the same frustration as Terry, but then also went on to address the same issue of the inability to utilize the information and the inapplicability of the information that both Lucy and Terry had discussed above. According to Jillian:

You can gather some really good ideas, but if you don’t implement them to see if they fit who you are and what you do and what your institution is about, then it’s just a trip, going someplace and coming home and doing nothing with the material. (Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)

It is evident that there are a number of factors that limit advisor participation in nonformal types of workplace learning activities such as workshops and conferences. The conflict may be at the individual level, such as an advisor’s assertion that their time is better spent elsewhere or that they do not have time available for such pursuits; at the institutional level, such as a lack of encouragement or a lack of monetary resources; or the inadequacy may exist within the nonformal learning opportunity itself, in terms of its applicability or usefulness to the learners. The latter of these issues will be discussed in the subsequent section of this chapter, as there is overlap between the reasons that advisors are critical of nonformal workplace learning opportunities and Knowles’ (1990) characteristics of adult learners. Regardless, the commentary of the participants suggests that this particular type of workplace learning does not have a great impact upon overall advisor training and development.

**Summary: How does workplace learning impact training and development?**

When one examines the four emergent themes related to the impact of workplace learning on professional academic advisors’ training and development, it is clear that hands-on experience derived from the workplace plays an important role. That is to say,
each of the respondents discussed the importance of knowledge gained from direct professional experience over knowledge gained from theory. However, all of the respondents were equally adamant that there are aspects of being an academic advisor that cannot be taught, either through exposure to theory or through hands-on experience, concluding that there are qualities which must be inherent in an individual prior to becoming an advisor and upon which workplace learning has no impact. Although the respondents reported varied experiences with an initial, structured training upon first becoming academic advisors, it is clear that this initial experience resulted in a valuable learning experience for all respondents. For those who reported an adequate training experience, the direct impact upon their training and development is evident. However, those who reported inadequate training also articulated how this experience indirectly impacted training and development by teaching them how to create more effective training for future new advising professionals. Finally, the respondents addressed a specific type of workplace learning in their discussions of nonformal learning opportunities. Through the participants’ varied criticisms of workshops and conferences, it is evident that participation in this particular type of workplace learning is problematic due to inadequate resources, a lack of support, a conflict with personal priorities, or issues of relevancy and applicability. Therefore, in contrast to learning derived from experience, nonformal learning has a limited overall impact on advisor training and development. Each of the themes related to the impact of workplace learning are summarized below.
Table 3

Summary of Themes for Research Question #1: How Does Workplace Learning Impact Professional Academic Advisors’ Training and Development?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Supporting Excerpt</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Theory Isn’t Everything: The Need for Hands-on Experience</td>
<td>“what you read in the textbooks is not exactly how it is. It’s nice, to say ‘oh, I wish that would work that way’, but it doesn’t. You really do kind of have to experience it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I Can’t Teach You That: Personal Characteristics of Academic Advisors</td>
<td>“I’m gonna guess that the good advisors, it’s already built into their personality and you either have it or you don’t. I can’t train that into you. I can teach you about the policies but I can’t make you a nice person, I can’t make you motivate others, I can’t do that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Baptism by Fire: Using Past Workplace Learning Experiences to Shape the Experiences of New Academic Advisors</td>
<td>“this is a baptism by fire, that’s what we believe in – you’re going to learn this job by doing it. That’s exactly what it was… And out of that evolved what we have now, which is a very formal training program.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Those Conferences Get Frustrating: Inadequacies and Conflicts Hinder Participation in Nonformal Workplace Learning</td>
<td>“But to have somebody come and present… saying, ‘oh this works here for us’, doesn’t apply to one of the urban schools. So, those conferences get frustrating to me. A lot of times it does feel like we are sitting around the camp fire singing Kumbaya.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Diagram of themes for research question #1: How does workplace learning impact professional academic advisors’ training and development? Hands-on experience (top) appears to have the largest and most direct impact, whereas poor or inadequate past workplace learning experiences (left) appear to have a delayed impact. Problems with participation in nonformal learning (right) diminishes its impact. Personal characteristics (bottom) are believed to be inherent within advisors and are therefore unable to be impacted by training and professional development.

Models of Adult Learning

The second research question of this study focused upon identifying which models of adult learning are evident in the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors. The analysis of the participants’ responses yielded three distinct themes related to the experiential learning model, the self-directed learning model, and the concept of andragogy. Further examination of the examples of experiential learning and andragogy in particular yielded several additional subthemes. Within the theme of experiential learning, participant responses centered upon the use of personal experience, the use of professional experience, communities of practice, and the
role of mentoring. Likewise, participant responses related to andragogy were clustered around subthemes which reflect the specified assumptions of andragogy, such as the learner’s need to know, the learner’s readiness to learn, the importance of problem-centered learning, and the role of internal motivation (Knowles, 1990).

**Experiential learning.** As presented in the literature review, experiential learning is a prominent model of adult learning which emphasizes the important role of hands-on learning as well as the important role that reflection upon experience can play in learning (Kolb, 1984; Merriam et al, 2007; Mezirow, 1998). The participants identified experiential learning in various ways; in fact, the critical role of hands-on learning experience was featured as a primary theme for the first research question, which investigated the impact of workplace learning on advisor training and development. Learning derived from experience, however, comes in many forms, including learning from one’s own experience as well as learning through the collective experiences of others (Hansman, 2001; Kolb, 1984; Wenger et al, 2002). Therefore, the participants’ examples of experiential learning will be further categorized into one of four related subthemes in the discussion that follows below.

**I can relate: Using personal experience.** From the commentary provided by the participants, it appears that academic advisors utilize their own personal experiences to help inform their professional practice. For some advisors, this includes drawing from their own personal experiences in order to find more effective ways to relate to their students and to fulfill their professional roles. For others, personal experience from previous professional roles helps to inform their approach to their current professional role as an advisor. For example, Robert discussed how he utilizes his personal hardships
and experiences to develop empathetic relationships with his students. Robert, who works primarily with returning and adult students, provided the following explanation:

These are real challenges that people are facing, you know, just like myself. I mean I was laid off, really, just like 3 years ago and with a family, like them, wondering about my education and wondering whether or not I would have a job even though I had a degree, and they’re wondering if a job will be there when they finish their degree. But having bills, having rent, having all these things just like they do, I could really empathize with them and really encourage them. (Robert, Alpha University, October 2011)

Like Robert, Richard also was able to use on his own personal experience as a tool in his professional practice. Because he advises students who are interested in pursuing a career in business, and he himself holds a Master’s within that discipline, Richard has learned that he can improve his effectiveness as an advisor if he draws upon this commonality. According to Richard, having a program of study in common with the student is important. In his words:

The student then feels that, okay, someone was able to get through that and overcome a hurdle. I probably rely more on my own personal experience, because I think that the questions that I tend to get, I am able to relate more on a personal level with them. (Richard, Alpha University, October 2011)

Like Robert and Richard, both Frances and Terry also draw upon their experience as students. However, they have learned how to incorporate their negative experiences as
students into their professional practice. For Frances, who advises students in demanding science and technology programs, this is as simple as being honest with her students, and sharing her own experiences. She stated:

When I went to college, I was not the brightest student there, I probably could have been better. So when I talk to my students, I am talking from how things were, that I could have been better had I studied more…but I didn’t. (Frances, Gamma University, October 2011)

As an advisor who is charged with working with provisionally-admitted students who often struggle with the college curriculum, Terry also incorporates the challenges he experienced as a student into his advising approach. In his words:

I pull my college experience quite often because as an undergraduate, I was a lousy student. I really was. And I’m not saying that this is the preferred path for academic advisors is to almost get their butt kicked out in their first semester, probably not, but in my case it worked because I am able to draw upon all of my struggles. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

It is clear that both Frances and Terry have learned that their personal experiences as college students are useful in their current roles as advisors. For other advisors, personal experiences in other aspects of their careers have come to play an important role in their advising practice. For instance, Richard discussed how drawing upon the skills that he learned through his previous roles in higher education has influenced his ability to advise. Richard stated:
Having the experience in recruiting allowed me to develop the interpersonal skills. Using somewhat of a sales background to help encourage students to keep on going and to sell them on the idea that education was a good idea and that completing college was worth it for their economic future and their self-esteem. Just having the experience of two years of recruiting students in admissions work helped me. (Richard, Alpha University, October 2011)

The same holds true for Jillian, who was able to draw parallels between the work of an advisor and her previous career working with young adults in a high school setting. Due to the similarity in age between high school students and traditional college freshmen, Jillian’s past profession allowed her to develop “a pretty good handle on what university students were all about”. In addition, Jillian saw similarities between the K-12 and higher education working environments, and credited her previous career with allowing her to develop “quite a tolerance for ambiguity”, which she finds essential in performing the work of an academic advisor. From the examples provided above, it is clear that the personal experiences of the participants, whether derived from their experiences as students or from other professional experiences, do serve as learning opportunities which assisted these advisors in becoming more effective in their professional practice.

Specifically, the advisors demonstrated having reflected upon their personal experiences, and because of that reflection were able to apply new knowledge to their professional role. It is in this way that the model of experiential learning, a well-recognized mode of adult learning (Merriam et al, 2007), is certainly present within the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors.
Like riding a bicycle: Using professional experience. Similar to the first subtheme discussed above, the participants also clearly articulated the important role that accumulated professional experience as an advisor plays in their continued professional development. The idea that advisors improve their abilities through continued hands-on experience was a common thread discussed by all of the participants. It was also discussed in the previous section as it was repeatedly emphasized by the participants as having a substantial impact on their ability to learn their craft. Frances, with nearly two decades of professional experience, implied that experienced advisors typically have a professional advantage over less experienced advisors. She stated, “It’s just kind of like, the years that you’re listening to students, sometimes you know when to believe them and you know when they’re just trying to tell you a story because you know what, you’ve heard it all”. Terry also discussed the importance of his previous professional experience as an advisor. In addition to agreeing with Frances’ assertion that experience leads to improved practice, Terry also indicated that he relies upon his experience more than any other source of knowledge. In his words:

Okay, my experience says that this is what I should be doing. Do I really need to have a case study to back me up? I rely more on my experience because no two students sitting in that chair have the same life experiences or the same goals. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

Not only does Terry believe that his experience is the most valuable tool at his disposal, he also believes strongly in the value of negative experiences in the workplace, stating that “if you can’t take something away from each of your mistakes, then you’re not paying attention”. This serves as an additional example of incidental learning (Marsick
& Watkins, 1990), as it demonstrates how errors, although not made intentionally, can assist in constructing new knowledge. In addition, in this case, Terry’s reflection upon negative experiences and his intentional use of those experiences as a means to construct knowledge is crucial, as it represents critical reflection and the intent to use experiences to guide future actions (Mezirow, 1998).

As part of the interview protocol, the participants were asked to identify critical incidents in their workplace learning experiences, and to reflect specifically upon a professional scenario in which they did not feel adequately prepared. Generally speaking, each participant discussed a critical encounter with a particular type of student with whom they felt unprepared to work. While some of the participants discussed segments of the student population with special and complex advising needs, such as transfer students, adult students, student athletes, or institutionally defined “at-risk” students, other participants discussed dramatic encounters with students in crisis. In their discussions of these incidents, it became clear that confidence in the ability to serve as an academic advisor is an important component of effective advising practice. And, as discussed below, this confidence is a result of having accumulated significant professional experience. For instance, Lucy addressed this notion in stating that “once you have the knowledge and you’re more comfortable talking to students and knowing that you are giving them the right information, that confidence comes”. For Lucy, being an effective advisor “has to do with age and confidence and knowing what to do and how to handle the situation”. Having accumulated several years of direct advising experience after entering the field from the private sector, Lucy summarized:
I still get things that I will sit there and I will shake my head and say, “boy I’ve been in this office for nine years and I didn’t see that coming!” But you are less likely to be thrown a curve ball and, when you are, you have the confidence and the knowledge to deal with it better. (Lucy, Gamma University, October 2011)

Richard offered similar sentiments. As a relatively new professional, Richard acknowledged that “in the last year and a half, I’ve become a lot more confident, and I’m able to better relate with the student because I am just more confident in knowing the material”. He continued on to explain:

I just feel like the more experience you get in this profession, the better you are able to feel that you can respond to any kind of situation, and it just comes with the experience. Sometimes you don’t know how to deal with a student who is physically threatening to you until you actually have the experience. You don’t know what it’s like to have a drunk student in your office until you’ve actually sat across the way from someone who probably needs medical attention. You just don’t know what it’s like until you get there. (Richard, Alpha University, October 2011)

Finally, Robert offered additional commentary on the role of hands-on experience in assisting advisors to grow professionally. To Robert, the evolution of an advisor is almost simplistic. According to Robert:

Advising is kind of like riding a bicycle; once you do it, you’re comfortable with it. After you’ve done it a little while, you are confident in your ability to relate to people and to relate in an educational setting and
you know that your product, education, is something that you can feel comfortable with and you know it’s a good product. So it’s kind of like putting two and two together. It’s almost easy. (Robert, Alpha University, October 2011)

For Robert, like all of the participants, advising acuity is improved with experience. While it is certainly logical to state that more professional experience yields more confidence in one’s professional abilities, the model of experiential learning is a particularly ubiquitous concept in adult learning (Merriam et al, 2007). Therefore, it is worthwhile to discuss the importance of direct, hands-on advising experience in the workplace learning of academic advisors.

*We learn from each other: Communities of practice.* In addition to the learning that can be derived through reflection on one’s own personal or professional experience, learning is also quite frequently derived from the experience of others (Wenger et al, 2002). In the adult learning literature, this is reflected in the concept of communities of practice, in which the exchange of information between practitioners serves as a resource for learning (Rowden, 2007; Wenger et al, 2002). As discussed within the review of the relevant literature, the concept of a community of practice is founded upon the idea that members of a group who share a common interest and a common passion for something learn how to do that something better as they interact with one another (Wenger & Lave, 1991). Their interactions are sometimes purposeful and planned, but can also be informal (Wenger & Lave, 1991). Within workplaces in particular, practitioners with common interests discuss their interests, assist one another, and share information, which results in a shared pool of resources (Wenger et al, 2002).
According to Frances, the usefulness of the experience of others can be summarized quite simply: “if you don’t know something, you just find someone and ask the question”. For Frances, the experience of her colleagues is a near-effortless means by which she can gain needed knowledge. Frances also discussed the role that communication with her colleagues plays in improving policies and practices at her institution. She explained:

You learn; you have something in place and you kind of follow it and you talk about it, and you see what works and then the next semester you figure out what you need to do…you try something, and you look at it and you decide that it is not working. And you don’t look at it as a failure, you look at it as okay, we tried it, it didn’t work well this way, so let’s move on to trying something different. (Frances, Gamma University, October 2011)

Jillian discussed a similar practice amongst her colleagues, in which efforts are made to determine best practices. In discussions with her colleagues, Jillian learns “about something that we do, how we do it, the worksheets that we use, the approach, the questions…this seems to have been beneficial because it’s amazing what we learn from each other by accident”. At Jillian’s institution, the idea of information sharing amongst the advisors has become a prominent part of the professional culture. She explained:

The only thing that we’ve always had in this department, and it’s something that I am very proud of, is this open door policy. We were encouraged and we still do that – don’t ever guess, don’t ever try to bluff your way through a question. If you don’t know, ask. And every advisor
on this staff will stop immediately what he or she is doing to answer another advisor’s question. We have a rule around here that we don’t pick up the phone if we are with a student, because that’s what voicemail is for and the person in front of you is more important than the person on the phone. But if we look over and we see that it is a new advisor, we always excuse ourselves with the student and say, “this is a new advisor with a question and I’ll just be a moment” and we pick up. So, we have that - that has always been the culture of this department. (Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)

Terry, an advisor at the same institution as Jillian, also mentioned this same cultural expectation. He stated:

The atmosphere coming in here was always ask, never worry, the door’s always open. So the atmosphere I came into here was great. And we’ve just sought to perpetuate it along the way with the new advisors that came… It’s been an open door. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

In the experiences of Frances, Jillian, and Terry, communities of practice exist as unplanned, somewhat organic occurrences embedded in the culture of the workplace. Lucy, on the other hand, describes a more formal and intentional form of a community of practice involving her advising colleagues. At her institution, there is a formal group that meets regularly for the expressed purpose of professional development. Lucy explained one such group activity, a journal club, in which the participants “pull a journal article once a semester, we all read it, we talk about it”. Richard also described a formal
group at his institution, and discussed specifically what he gained from his participation, especially as a new advisor. For Richard:

Going to the meetings and meeting advisors from engineering, pharmacy, education, health science, you just get a lot of perspective on the different ways other colleges advise students, how they do it, the role of faculty in advising, and just learning a lot from other people helped a lot. (Richard, Alpha University, October 2011)

Like Richard, Robert also benefits from the regular, formal gathering of colleagues at their institution. Robert described it as follows:

Once a month all of the advisors all meet. All across the university, and they have an information session about new policies. For example, one month they shared new math policies toward meeting the math general education requirement. And then they had someone, an instructor, come in and explain the philosophy about this math change, you know. And then also other announcements. In fact, the advisors present will announce things from their colleges. So once a month the advisors do meet and there’s a sharing of information university-wide, and particularly from different departments they are able to share if they want about new policies that they are implementing. (Robert, Alpha University, October 2011)

Although other professional advisors appear to be a prevalent source of information, Lucy and Richard also discuss the importance of information sharing with their colleagues on the faculty. For Lucy, the relationships that she has developed with
the faculty in her department have increased her knowledge of the health-related
discipline on which she advises to the point where her students assume that she must also
be a trained health professional. Richard also discussed the important contribution that
information sharing with the faculty has made to the effectiveness of advising.
According to Richard:

    We have a very good working relationship with all of our faculty and they
share with us when new courses are coming up, what kind of content is
covered, and who the course is appropriate for. The fact that we have such
a good working relationship with faculty really helps us be a lot better at
what we do. (Richard, Alpha University, October 2011)

In analyzing the comments of the participants, it is clear that valuable job-related
information can be shared in a variety of modes. Whether with advising colleagues or
others within the university setting, and no matter whether that information sharing is
formal or informal, it appears that the concept of communities of practice is evident in the
workplace learning experiences of the advisors interviewed. In terms of the theoretical
constructs of communities of practice (Wenger et al, 20002), it is clear that the domain of
the communities is defined by the members’ passion for and commitment to academic
advising. Casual interactions with those who share this passion and commitment,
intentional information sharing sessions, or a simple willingness to be available to assist
one another and answer each other’s questions help to build relationships and networks
within these communities. The result, in accordance with the concept of communities of
practice (Wenger & Lave, 1991), is a collective wealth of experience, knowledge, and
tools situated within the advising workplace. Not only is the concept of communities of
practice evident, but it appears that utilizing the knowledge and experience of others is one of the primary ways in which advisors add to their knowledge base and develop their skills.

**Find thyself a teacher: The role of mentoring.** Similar to the previous subtheme of learning from others through communities of practice, an additional means through which advisors learn in the workplace is through the development of mentorships with other, more knowledgeable, advisors. As described by the participants, these mentoring relationships may take on a variety of forms, including informal relationships and workplace-sponsored programs (Hansman, 2001). For some of the participants, a veteran mentor was assigned as part of the training process. For others, mentors were informally identified and developed somewhat organically over the course of a new advisor’s acclimation to the job. For others, although true mentorship was lacking in their own training, they have now taken on the mentoring role for other new advisors.

Richard recalled his orientation to his role as an advisor and the role that his direct supervisor played in imparting knowledge to him through the initial training process. He described the process as follows:

I sat in with my boss and with other advisors to actually watch them do what they do, and how they interact with students, the way they answer questions so there was a little bit of a mentorship that took place before we were released. (Richard, Alpha University, October 2011)

For Richard and the other new advisor who was training along with him, the direct guidance that he received from his supervisor and his more seasoned colleagues was an integral part of his initial learning. In fact, when Richard, still a relatively new advisor,
was honored with an award for his professional performance, he credited the mentorship of his colleagues and supervisor. He stated:

I really grew because I had such a positive training experience. I know a lot of advisors are thrown into their jobs and they have to sink or swim, and there’s not a lot of experience there to help develop a professional and I had that. I’ve never been to a NACADA conference, but I got so much experience here just getting the experience and then also talking to people who had been through it, and they helped me understand the experience very well. (Richard, Alpha University, October 2011)

Like Richard, Robert also discussed a positive learning experience with one colleague in particular. For Robert, this individual served as a role model and was instrumental in his workplace learning. Although not formally paired up with her as part of his training, Robert found his mentor through a referral, in which another colleague advised him to “just get with her. She’ll show you how to do it. Anything, and any question I had, she showed me. So it wasn’t anything formal”. Even though this was his first experience as an advisor, Robert’s mentorship was not merely part of his initial training; it was in fact the extent of his training. He described the process as follows:

I had a really good person; it was funny… she wasn’t even really an advisor. She had been a scientist and lost her job, and got the job as an advisor and became very good at it and very concerned about the students and real helpful and giving of her time, real generous, so she was a good role model for me. She was a mentor. She walked me through everything – that was her training style. She would sit and talk to me about things but
a lot of it she would just show me how to do it, and I would watch her so
she really was a mentor and that was really the training. (Robert, Alpha
University, October 2011)

Frances described an experience very similar to Robert’s, in which her training
when she first became an advisor consisted of the assistance of more experienced
advisors. In Frances’ case, both of the existing advisors in her department helped her to
understand what the advising role entailed. As she described it, they “gave me my first
inkling into what is advising and how are we doing it in this office”. According to
Frances, she learned how to advise by mimicking the actions of her more experienced
colleagues. This experience was so powerful to her that it shaped her definition of
training, as she stated that her definition included:

  Being with someone and seeing how they do things and then almost kind
  of like in the beginning, mimicking what they are doing until you feel
  comfortable with saying the information and it becomes second nature to
  you. And then, once you start doing it, it’s kind of like the repetition of it.
  The more you do it, the more comfortable you become with it. (Frances,
  Gamma University, October 2011)

During her training, Frances did not draw from her formal education or from training
manuals, but instead relied upon her mentors and a process of repetition. She described
the process as follows:

  Sitting in with them and listening to what their flow was for talking with a
  student, and what they did in terms of classes, and kind of like their
  thought process on the next class that a student would be taking. So it was
all really kind of like a hands-on. You listened to it, and then you’d start
doing it and have them sit in with you to see if you were saying the same
thing. (Frances, Gamma University, October 2011)

Similar to her fellow participants, Lucy also was able to identify a particular
colleague whom she credited with her initial orientation to the advising role. In reflecting
upon her transition from her first career into academic advising, Lucy described her
experience as follows:

I had a mentor, and she is still there, and I stuck to her like glue, and I
couldn’t, in a lot of ways, I couldn’t have gotten better training because it
was really geared toward my college, toward my students, toward exactly
what I did. I actually felt sorry for her, I really felt that she should have
gotten supplemental pay… and really to this day, and I have been there 8
years, I still ask her questions. There are situations where I say, “what do
you think we should do about this”? And I love that interaction. I love
that because so much of our job really is subjective. It’s not always black
and white, it’s interpretation, it’s critical thinking. (Lucy, Gamma
University, October 2011)

Lucy’s comments on her mentor not only indicate the role that she played in her initial
training, but also the role that her mentor has continued to play throughout her
professional development. Therefore, mentorship appears to serve an important role not
just in initial workplace learning, but in continued learning as well. In addition, Lucy’s
comments highlight the multifaceted role that mentoring can play within the workplace.
For instance, it is clear that Robert, Richard, Frances, and Lucy all received role-related
assistance from their mentors. In addition to role-related information, however, the
mentorship experienced by Lucy also served as a source of support (Hansman, 2001).

While thus far each of the participants has commented on their good fortune at
being able to identify a competent and caring mentor, Terry and Jillian presented a
dissenting view. Similarly, in the preceding discussion regarding inadequate or
nonexistent training experiences, it was Terry and Jillian who were vocal regarding their
insufficient orientation to their professional roles. In this instance, Terry and Jillian again
express a lacking in their training, this time in the form of mentoring. This suggests that
the inability to identify and connect with a mentor may be one component of an advisor’s
perception of poor or inadequate training.

In Terry’s experience, the type of assistance which the other participants were
able to find was not as readily available to him. Terry described his experience as
follows:

No specific hey, you’re going be mentored by this person, there really
wasn’t any. Informally, you had to seek it out. You really had to seek out
– find thyself a teacher almost – you really had to do that. And I did the
best I could with who there was around at the time to seek out other
advisors to ask questions of. That was challenging. (Terry, Beta
University, October 2011)

However, Terry did also describe the role that his supervisor played in mentoring him in
one specific aspect of his advising role: his competence with the at-risk student
population. Of his supervisor, Terry commented:
She was helpful. Fortunately too, because of that kind of population, in a lot of ways we developed a rapport, where there was almost a safe zone to be able to talk with her about it. Because I am not first generation. I did not come from an economically challenged background. I did not come from living in a major city. So, I came from suburbia almost, the white picket fence, mom, dad and two and a half kids, they both work and I had no idea… I was raised with college as an expectation. So she was able to help me. She was definitely able to help me. She provided me with, I guess you would call it a safe zone…so I could be free with her to talk about what I was seeing. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

Although he was not able to find a mentor to guide him through the additional aspects of the advising role, Terry’s remarks showed that he was able to learn from the direct guidance of his supervisor in a relationship built on trust and information sharing.

Like Terry, Jillian also found that mentoring was not a large part of her initial role acquisition. However, Jillian did discuss the role that she now plays as a mentor to newer professionals. In particular, Jillian described her work with a graduate student who aspires to be an academic advisor. She described at length her process in working one-on-one with the student and crafting scenarios in which the student could gain practical experience under her guidance. Of this process, Jillian stated:

I think it’s going to make a huge difference in her comfortability with each of the new challenges that come along. Otherwise we have to rely on a new person going back into a manual and reading, and that doesn’t do much good. (Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)
Therefore, even though she did not benefit directly from a mentorship herself, Jillian’s current approach to training indicates that she, like all the other participants, not only finds value in the concept of mentoring new professionals, but considers it to be preferable to more traditional and formal modes of learning. This is consistent with the “Baptism by Fire” theme, in which poor or inadequate training motivated advisors to take on a role in the training of new advisors. In this instance, however, her inability to find a mentor motivated Jillian to ensure that mentorship was a part of the experience she provides to new advisors.

According to the participants, mentoring, in general, not only utilizes the experience of veteran academic advisors, but also allows newer professionals to accumulate their own reservoir of knowledge and experience under the guidance and direction of another. In this way, mentoring may be viewed as an example of the ultimate means of utilizing experience for the purposes of learning. It is therefore a fitting final subtheme to support the notion that experiential learning plays a prominent role in the workplace learning of academic advisors.

**Figuring it out: Self-directed learning.** In addition to the prevalence of the concept of experiential learning, the comments of the participants also clearly indicated that self-directed learning is a prominent component of their workplace learning experiences. Self-directed learning, like experiential learning, is well-researched within in the adult learning literature (Merriam et al, 2007). Simply stated, self-directed learning experiences are those experiences for which the learner takes responsibility for identifying the need for additional knowledge and in crafting the necessary learning experience (Tough, 1971). Because of its informal and individualized nature, examples
of self-directed learning in the workplace can take a wide variety of forms. Some of the participants demonstrated their use of self-directed learning in describing simple, commonplace scenarios in which they adapted to new challenges while others described embarking on more complex, purposeful scholarship. The interview excerpts which follow provide evidence of the ways in which the concept of self-directed learning is evident in the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors.

Even prior to being hired as an academic advisor, Robert describes having engaged in self-directed learning in order to arm himself with more information about the prospective job. For instance, Robert described his preparation process:

You do your little preparation and research on the university and try to learn how many colleges, how many students, what the demographics are, what are the majors, the colleges, what the university takes pride in, the different things its famous for, the degrees and disciplines that its noted for. (Robert, Alpha University, October 2011)

Not only is this an example of engaging in a learning experience of his own design, but Robert also goes on to discuss the importance of this process now that he has assumed the role of an advisor. According to Robert, “those were some of the things that kind of exposed me to the university,” and ultimately allowed him to have the foundation necessary to understand what was required of him as an academic advisor.

Frances commented directly on the idea that advisors need to take responsibility for ensuring that they have the requisite knowledge required to perform their work. In her words, “In some cases it really is not rocket science”. Frances’ critique of other advisors’ inability to engage in self-directed learning is evidence of her own approach to
learning, as she mused, “you’ve been around for six or seven years, and you can’t figure out that you take a look at a curriculum, and you look at prerequisites, and you ask questions?” Clearly for Frances, the responsibility for learning lies with the individual and advisors should not expect others to dispense information to them. When asked for a specific example of how she adapted to a new challenge in the workplace, Frances again discussed being in control of the learning process. In describing the implementation of a new software program at her institution, Frances summarized her learning process quite succinctly by stating that the bulk of her learning was derived “just using it, you know…by trial and error. You know you try something, and it doesn’t quite go, and you ask for assistance”. From her comments, it is clear that Frances takes an active role in her learning, and, moreover, utilizes the self-directed approach rather than waiting for others to provide instruction to her.

Lucy also echoes the same philosophy as Frances, especially with regard to her criticism of advisors who do not actively engage in on-the-job problem solving. For Lucy:

The more I live to see things in higher education, the more I think it’s all about critical thinking. It’s thinking your way out of a situation, and that’s what thinking outside the box is. How can I do this better, how can I do this more efficient? And if you are not at that point, if you are just trying to get through the day, I don’t know if you ever get to that higher level thinking. And I think that’s important for us as advisors, I really do. You know, we need to be more efficient with students. (Lucy, Gamma University, October 2011)
The “critical thinking” described by Lucy is a key component of any self-directed learning experience, as it indicates that the advisor is taking an active role in identifying workplace problems and in developing solutions to those problems. Lucy also discussed how learning on one’s own does not necessarily mean abandoning other, more formal, sources of learning. She expressed this in her commentary on the learning pursuits undertaken by her advising colleagues:

I wish more people would read journals, and keep active with the field. I mean, before my boss paid for my NACADA membership, I paid for my own. And that’s, I know that that’s hard because that’s a lot of money, but I don’t know. I think part of professionalism is self-directed, you know what I mean? I want to be known as a professional in my field, therefore I’m going to do these things. (Lucy, Gamma University, October 2011)

Based upon her comments, it is clear that Lucy is committed to pursuing new knowledge and to understanding what is available to her in order to manage her own learning and assist her in problem solving in the workplace.

Similarly, Terry also discussed how what he was learning on his own was also supplemented by other, more formal, means of learning. Specifically, Terry discussed how he learned about the urban student population, and how he became acclimated to working with this particular group. Terry described the learning process that he undertook as follows:

A lot of it was trial and error – winging it – I hate to say it that way but there was never a handbook that was handed to me and no one said okay, here’s how you deal with these students. It was get in there, get to know
them… And almost doing my own self-survey in my head, because after a while I was asking a lot of those questions and more of the “intrusive advising” if you want to use that as a descriptor. I noted some commonalities, and then I would go off to conferences … and find out that a lot of what I was thinking was very perceptive and I had learned some new things. (Terry, Beta University, October 2011)

While Terry gathered the bulk of information about the urban student population from his own system of “trial and error”, he also used the expertise of others at conferences to confirm what he was experiencing in his own workplace. His commentary regarding the “self-survey” that he was keeping in his own head, as well as his utilization of the information he gathered from conferences, illustrate clearly that he was actively seeking information relevant to his work and was closely monitoring his own learning progress.

Richard provided an additional, and very specific, example of a time in which he and his colleagues had to take responsibility for ensuring their own learning. In his example, Richard discussed a training session provided by his institution on a new software program that was being implemented. In Richard’s opinion, the training session did little to assist him in understanding the new system and, as a result, he devised his own means to become acclimated to the new software. As part of this process, Richard “ended up going back to our office and creating binders and job aides”. In other words, Richard independently identified and organized the information that was relevant to him, and as a result was able to learn how best to utilize the new software system in his own work. It is furthermore interesting to note that in this example, not only is Richard’s self-directedness evident, but his experience also underscores that he found his
own independent learning experience to be more valuable than the experience that had been provided through the formal instruction of an “expert” on the new software system.

Finally, Jillian provided the most specific and detailed account of a self-directed learning project. Jillian began her self-directed learning project by first identifying the information that she was seeking. As an advisor to academically under-prepared students, Jillian became interested in determining what types of interventions were effective in assisting these students in becoming successful. According to Jillian, this interest “was pretty much a curiosity thing…even though I had done some reading on helping dismissed and returning students, what to do with probation students and all of that”, indicating that she had already begun independently gathering relevant information. However, Jillian went beyond this initial stage of information gathering and designed an informal study, in which she identified a target group of students, tried a new form of advising intervention, and monitored their academic progress as a result. Jillian even emphasized during the interview that the project “was completely independent and self-directed on my part. I had no help whatsoever”. Perhaps more interesting than her acknowledgement of the independent nature of the project, however, were her subsequent thoughts. In the following excerpt, Jillian underscores the value of having embarked on this project personally rather than relying on what she had already read or heard at conferences. As she stated:

I really didn’t know what I was doing, and I didn’t need to know. I wanted to work with what I understood. Here’s the grade point average when they started, here’s what they did on the returning semester, and did they persist beyond that semester and did any of them eventually graduate
– that’s really all I cared about because I wanted to see if my intrusiveness was making any difference. (Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)

Through the example that she provided, Jillian clearly illustrates the use of a self-directed learning approach as she detailed her motivation to learn more about a given subject, her methods for learning more, as well as her desire to be an active part of the learning rather than simply a passive recipient of the information. As discussed above, each of her fellow participants was also able to easily recall an instance in which they managed their own learning in various ways, which often included independent reading and research related to topics of interests as well as the use of “trial and error” experimentation. Moreover, the learning that each participant discussed led to perceived increased competency in their professional work, ranging from greater competency and confidence with new academic curricula, new software, or new student populations. In this way, the experiences described by the participants underscore the important role that self-directed learning plays in the workplace learning of academic advisors.

**Andragogical principles.** The final theme to emerge from the participant’s recounting of their workplace learning experiences is derived directly from one of the most ubiquitous concepts in adult learning: andragogy (Merriam et al, 2007). Andragogy is often described as a variation of the concept of pedagogy. While each outlines the principles which comprise the learning process, andragogy seeks to differentiate the learning process of adults from that of children (Knowles, 1970; Knowles, 1975; Knowles, 1990).

The concept of andragogy is often used as a foundation for designing learning experiences for adults (Rowden, 2007). More useful to this analysis, however, is its
focus on defining the characteristics of adult learners. Andragogy posits a set of six assumptions regarding adult learners, each of which are discussed in detail in the literature review section (Knowles, 1990). Two of the six assumptions are tied to other prominent models of adult learning which have already been discussed as their own independent themes above. Specifically, the assumption that the wealth of experiences accumulated by adult learners serves as a resource for learning was thoroughly discussed in the first theme of this section, which explored experiential learning through the four distinct subthemes which emerged relevant to advisors’ use of personal experience, professional experience, communities of practice, and mentoring. In addition, the assumption that adults have a need to be self-directed in their learning was discussed in the previous theme regarding advisors’ utilization of a self-directed learning process. Therefore, the final theme will be divided into four subthemes, each of which addresses one of the remaining principles of andragogy: the learner’s need to know; the learner’s readiness to learn; the importance of problem-centered learning; and the role of internal motivation (Knowles, 1990).

I already know how to advise: The andragogical principle of the learner’s need to know. This first subtheme centers upon the idea that adults need to know why they need to learn something (Knowles, 1990). In other words, adults are more likely to engage in learning when they can determine the relevancy and usefulness of the information that is to be learned. Therefore, this subtheme will explore the ways in which the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors demonstrate that advisors, as adult learners, evaluate their need to know prior to engaging in learning. For example, as a veteran academic advisor, Frances addressed the transition process that she
experienced in joining her current institution. In her discussion of this transition, it is
evident that Frances was acutely aware of the information that would be useful to her,
and conversely was aware of the information that she, as an experienced advisor, did not
need. She stated:

After you’ve been an advisor for a while, you know what you need to be
doing; it’s always then been I need to learn the specific programs and the
curriculum and that. It’s not that I need to learn how to be an advisor, it’s
just that I need to know what’s new to that university. (Frances, Gamma
University, October 2011)

Terry addressed this same issue, as he, like Frances, also transitioned from
serving as an advisor at one institution to another. He described the learning process in a
similar way, stating that “with my second position, it was now let me learn the nuts and
bolts… because I already know what it means to be an academic advisor”. For both
Frances and Terry, the workplace learning that they required was driven by their needs as
learners. As each had already been an advisor at an urban institution, they did not feel as
if general information regarding the role of an academic advisor or the demographics of
an urban institution was useful or necessary. Instead, each emphasized that the
knowledge that they required was specific to the programs, curricula, and policies of their
new institutions. In this way, their “need to know” dictated their expectation of the
content of their workplace learning experiences.

Another example which demonstrates this characteristic of adult learners can be
seen in advisor criticisms of various types of professional development. Although this
notion was addressed previously in the theme which discussed the inadequacies and
conflicts which hinder academic advisors’ participation in nonformal learning opportunities, the notion is also relevant to a learner’s need to know and therefore bears repeating within this subtheme. Previously, Terry’s criticisms of conferences were discussed, in particular his frustration over conference presentations which sound useful and interesting at first glance, until it is revealed that the presentation is being centered upon advising practices at a small, rural, faith-based college. In other words, given that he is an academic advisor at a public, urban university, Terry is unable to find applicability in the information provided by a dissimilar institution. Thus, Terry was unable to identify a need to know the information presented by this school, and therefore did not perceive it to be a worthwhile learning experience.

Jillian also directly addressed this same notion in her criticism of conferences. Jillian summarized her experience with particular conference sessions by stating that “what I found was that half of them were silly. It’s all common sense, so I take nothing away from them”. In the example that she provides, it is evident that Jillian does not need information on such a basic level, and therefore does not consider conferences to be useful learning experiences. The experiences that were recounted by both Terry and Jillian clearly support the andragogical assumption that learners must recognize a need to know (Knowles, 1990). In each of the examples given above, the need for and the perceived salience of workplace-relevant learning was dependent upon the advisor identifying information that would be useful to them and would add to their professional competence. When such a need could not be identified, or when the available learning opportunity did not appear to fulfill the advisors’ needs, the advisors appeared to be hesitant to participate in that particular learning opportunity.
A fish out of water: The andragogical principle of readiness to learn. The second subtheme regarding a learner’s readiness to learn shares some similarities with the first subtheme regarding a learner’s need to know. However, whereas the learner’s need to know is based upon the learner’s recognition of the usefulness of the learning experience, the learner’s readiness to learn is typically based on the learner’s recognition of the need to remediate a gap in his or her existing knowledge (Knowles, 1990). In the case of the examples that follow, an advisor’s readiness to learn stems from an experienced or perceived disconnect in what the advisor currently knows versus what they need to know in order to be comfortable and confident in performing their job.

Robert summarized the dissonance caused by a recognized gap in knowledge, and how that dissonance created a readiness to engage in workplace learning. In particular, he discussed his experiences when he first began working with student athletes, a population with whom he had no previous experience. According to Robert:

Initially that was a little nerve wracking. But I just kind of began to read their records and talk to my other colleagues and they walked me through some of the different points to consider when advising an athlete, and I’m still learning about it, still learning about them. (Robert, Alpha University, October 2011)

Robert’s recounting of this process suggests that his decision to engage in workplace learning and build a competence with student athletes was a result of his recognition that he did not yet possess the necessary skills. This recognition, in the language of andragogy, is synonymous with his readiness to learn (Knowles, 1990).
Similar to Robert, Richard vividly described an experience that he had in which he felt unprepared to assist a student who presented him with a challenging academic transcript. Richard described the experience as follows:

I had no clue. I was totally like a fish out of water. And I was apprehensive, I went into panic mode and just didn’t know what to do. And I felt very incompetent that I didn’t know how to answer the questions. I went to my supervisor and I asked for input and help on what are these courses and how do they translate into today’s requirements, and even then after I got that information I didn’t know if I could answer any additional questions. I felt like a failure because I’d have to go back every time, well, I don’t know the answer to that question, I don’t know… you have to keep on going back. And that’s really frustrating. (Richard, Alpha University, October 2011)

In this example, Richard recognized that he did not possess all of the information necessary in order to properly assist the student. The incompetence that he felt made him immediately ready to learn, and he promptly engaged in learning through the assistance of his supervisor. In other words, as a result of being confronted with a particular professional inadequacy, Richard identified the need for and participated in work-related learning.

Jillian and Lucy provided rather dramatic examples of how recognizing a deficiency in work-related skills leads to workplace learning. Both Jillian and Lucy recounted traumatic experiences that ultimately exposed gaps in their competence as advisors and led to their readiness to learn. Jillian described meeting with a particularly
challenging student who was experiencing severe psychological distress. This encounter was a learning experience for Jillian, as her discomfort with the situation prompted her to seek additional resources and knowledge. In her own words, Jillian described that student encounter as a situation “where I literally felt that someone had to walk me through what to do”. In other words, Jillian felt compelled to immediately engage in learning in order to be able to manage the situation at hand.

Similarly, Lucy provided several examples of students facing life crises with which she felt unprepared and unable to assist, such as a homeless student, a student who had been raped, and a student suffering from drug addiction. As she described it, “I just remember being horrified, not at those students, but at my inability to fix those problems”. As a result of these experiences and her recognition of her current limitations, Lucy sought out additional information to add to her arsenal as an advisor. Lucy demonstrated that she has grown professionally as a result of these experiences. She stated:

As a new advisor, I just did the best I could, you know what I mean?... I wished that I would have said you know what, I’m not a counselor and I can’t help you, but this is what I want to do. I would do that now. The second one with the drugs, now, I would certainly refer her out. The homeless kid I know exactly what to do now. (Lucy, Gamma University, October 2011)

Lucy’s expressed confidence with the idea of having to deal with students in similar crises indicates that her first exposure to these types of problems did indeed serve as a catalyst for learning. Her first exposure, although traumatic, revealed an inadequacy in
her skills that she then ameliorated by learning more about the resources available to
students. It is this revelation or recognition of inadequacy that indicates that one is, in
fact, ready to learn (Knowles, 1990). As discussed within the concept of andragogy and
now illustrated through the experiences of the participants, readiness to learn is an
identifiable component of advisor workplace learning experiences.

Practical application: The andragogical principle of problem-centered
orientation. A third subtheme drawn from the concept of andragogy focuses on the
notion that adults possess a problem-centered orientation to learning and are therefore
most interested in learning experiences which have direct applicability to their lives
(Knowles, 1990). In the case of academic advisors, the comments of the participants
indicate a preference for workplace learning opportunities which can be directly and
immediately applied to their day-to-day working lives. This is evident in the experiences
of three participants in particular, Jillian, Richard and Frances, each of whom are critical
of their experiences with content-oriented learning as opposed to problem-oriented
learning.

Jillian discussed the value of practical application generally, as part of a larger
discussion regarding the usefulness of conference sessions. In discussing her preferences
for the format of conference sessions, Jillian stated:

If they start spouting a bunch of statistics at me I fall asleep. But if they
actually have a case study, this is the student, this is what we did together,
and this is how it turned out, that sort of thing, I’m kind of interested in
that. But the bottom line is, if I don’t do it it’s pointless and I forget I even
heard it. (Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)
Jillian’s comments are relevant to the andragogical principle of problem-centered orientation in two essential ways. First, Jillian stated her preference for the case study format. As noted by Merriam (1998), the case study design is especially well-suited to applied fields of study such as education because the research is anchored in real-life situations. Second, Jillian emphasized the importance of personally incorporating the knowledge gained into her professional practice. On this second point, Jillian expanded, “it’s like everything else. If you don’t do it relatively close to the time you heard about it and learned about it, it goes right out your head and you don’t know anything”. This last comment certainly provides direct evidence for Jillian’s desire, as a learner, to immediately apply what she has learned to her work. Thus, Jillian’s problem-centered orientation is revealed.

Richard provided a very specific account of a learning experience that, in his opinion, was flawed due to its failure to incorporate the element of practical application. Richard’s example centers upon the implementation of a new software at his institution. In this instance, there was a training series offered to employees of the institution; however, the training was general and the content was not tailored specifically for academic advisors. Richard stated, “I know the purpose was for them to be helpful, but quite often they weren’t because they weren’t designed specifically for my population, or it didn’t take my experience level into consideration”. In Richard’s view, because the training did not take into account who he was and what his needs were as a learner, it was not able to provide him with information that he could immediately use as an advisor. In fact, Richard ultimately created his own problem-centered guide in order to assist himself and his colleagues in becoming acclimated to the new software. He discussed the process
through which he identified various actions that an advisor would need to perform using the new software, and printed the associated screens. In his words, he said that he:

   Ended up growing a new binder of this is what you need to manually do to make a course substitution, to delete a requirement, to change a requirement. Just to make it a lot easier, so that if I had issues with a particular case, I could go back to my binder and flip through it to see, okay, this is how you actually do this stuff. (Richard, Alpha University, October 2011)

Thus, it was not until he saw the practical applications of using the software as an advisor that Richard felt he had learned anything about the software.

   Similar to Richard, Frances also recounted a workplace learning experience involving the implementation of a new software program at her campus. Although her approach was less formal than Richard’s, Frances also ultimately learned how to use the software by first identifying the ways in which she would need to use it as an academic advisor. Rather than creating a binder, however, Frances simply relied on trial and error. She stated, “the more you play around with the program, the more you learn and the more you are able to do”. Both she and Richard acknowledged that the availability of a general user’s guide for the software was ineffective as a means of acclimation. Instead, both Frances and Richard emphasized the need for the software training to be specific to the needs of advisors, and to be tailored to include real examples of how an advisor would use the software. The fact that each engaged in a self-directed learning process in order to increase their competence in working with the new software is evidence of their dissatisfaction with their initial software training. Furthermore, their independent
learning related to the software provides evidence of the need for learning experiences to be problem-centered in their orientation.

Even though they learned the basics of the new software, or as Richard stated, the “very top-level view”, they did not learn how the software would immediately apply to their daily work. In other words, learning how to use the software was not synonymous with learning how to use the software as an advisor. Richard summarized this point through the use of a metaphor, in which he stated that the training “was just focused on process, and how you get access to the keys. But then, no one actually tells you how to use the keys to open the lock – that’s the problem”. This metaphor, and moreover the experiences of Jillian, Frances, and Richard are demonstrative of the andragogical principle of problem-centered orientation to learning (Knowles, 1990). From their accounts, it is clear that the learning experiences that were deemed most useful were those that had direct applicability to their daily work and could be utilized immediately within the context of academic advising.

*It’s a calling: The andragogical principle of internal motivation.* The final principle of andragogy posits that adults are primarily internally motivated to learn (Knowles, 1990). One might assume that within the workplace, adults engage in learning activities primarily as a means to external rewards such as promotions or a salary increases. However, the concept of andragogy argues that internal sources of motivation are more salient for adult learners than external sources of motivation (Knowles, 1990). Thus the final subtheme presented will discuss the participants’ view of the profession of academic advising as “a calling”, including how this viewpoint of the profession serves as motivation to improve as professionals and, thus, to engage in workplace learning.
In discussing their training and professional development experiences, each of the participants referenced the idea of rewards. In keeping with the andragogical principle of internal motivation, the participants generally rejected the idea that they are driven by an external motivator such as money. For instance, in discussing some of the challenges that she has faced as an advisor and the learning that came from those challenges, Frances acknowledged that “yea, you have some bad things happen with students, but you know what, it’s the triumphs and that’s kind of like the money that you receive. That’s why I’ve been doing this job”. Terry echoed the same sentiment as he discussed the sometimes frustrating nature of higher education and the constantly changing curricula and policies with which advisors must contend. After beginning to discuss his frustrations, Terry paused and prefaced his comments by stating, “I love what I do, first and foremost, I love what I do. The old saying that if you love what you do you’ll never work a day in your life”.

Similar to Frances and Terry’s discussion of the satisfaction that they receive from being effective advisors, Robert discussed his personal desire to be the best advisor he can be for his students. In his discussion, it is clear that he derives a sense of self-worth from his role as an academic advisor. Of his decision to become an academic advisor after several years in other areas of higher education, he stated, “I wanted to do something that I thought was important, not just a job”. He went on to discuss his motivation further, reflecting on his own experience as a student and stating:

I remember how I was so impressed with instructors and people at the university that it motivated me to say that I want to be that kind of person
for them. Not just a person that does their job, but has an interest in the
students being successful. (Robert, Alpha University, October 2011)

For Robert, the desire to develop as a professional is not driven by external
acknowledgement, but is instead driven by an internal investment in the success of his
students. Robert, as well as other participants, made multiple references to the idea that
academic advisors are drawn to the position and remain employed in the profession based
primarily on internal factors of motivation. Jillian, for instance, stated the following:

If you think you’re going to become rich, you’re an idiot because the only
riches you’re going to get are the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and the
intrinsic. You’ll make enough to live on but that’s all there is to it. I think
advising is the same way, it’s a calling…it’s not a job, it’s a calling.

(Jillian, Beta University, October 2011)

Similarly, Frances stated, “you don’t go into this career because you want to make tons of
money. It’s just where it is. You go into it because you really enjoy working with
students”.

Although these comments are more indicative of the individuals’ motivation to
enter and remain in the field in general, they are still relevant in a discussion of
workplace learning. That is to say, one may infer that someone who enjoys what they do,
believes in the value of what they do, and is committed to doing it well is far more likely
to engage in activities to enhance their professional skills. Or, in andragogical terms,
they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to learn (Knowles, 1990). Of all the
participants, Lucy most succinctly discussed this point in particular. In discussing
opportunities for professional development, she stated:
that’s the first thing that gets blocked off my calendar, you know, any opportunity to learn. And I always thought that motivation comes from within. I think if you want to be a better advisor, you are not going to be motivated by awards and money, I think you’re just gonna want to do that.

(Lucy, Gamma University, October 2011)

She continued with a final declaration regarding what motivates her personally to participate in professional development, stating “I want to be known as a professional in my field, therefore I’m going to do these things”.

The words of the participants clearly indicate that each finds the profession of academic advising to be intrinsically rewarding. Their motivation for entering the field, their motivation for remaining in the field, and consequently their motivation for participation in professional development is all derived from internal sources. Moreover, the participants not only discussed the prevalence of internal sources of motivation, they specifically rejected the idea that similar motivation was or even could be derived from external sources such as money or awards. In this way, the viewpoints of the participants are in keeping with the final principle of andragogy and support the idea that internal motivation is a prevalent characteristic of adult learners (Knowles, 1990).

**Summary: What models of adult learning are evident in advisor workplace learning experiences?** A careful analysis of the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors provides plentiful evidence of the most popular models of adult learning, including experiential learning, self-directed learning, and andragogy. It seems that experiential learning, in particular, is evident in a variety of forms as the participants discussed how their own personal and professional experiences helped to inform their
professional practice. In addition, the participants’ discussed the usefulness of the experience of others, whether that experience was shared via a community of professionals or individually in a mentoring relationship.

Self-directed learning, in addition to experiential learning, was also present in the participants’ accounts of their workplace learning experiences. Although their accounts varied in terms of scope and complexity, each discussed how when confronted with an inadequacy in their professional skills, they were able to recognize the need to enhance their professional knowledge and skills and engage in a workplace learning experience. In some cases, advisors categorized their actions as purposefully embarking on professional development while in other cases the advisors simply sought additional information with less formality.

The presence of experiential learning and self-directed learning examples also plays a role in identifying examples of the assumptions of andragogy in the workplace learning experiences of advisors. That is to say, the idea that adult learners derive knowledge from their accumulated experiences and the idea that adults are primarily self-directed in their learning are two of the six characteristics of adult learners which underlie the concept of andragogy (Knowles, 1990). The remaining four andragogical principles are likewise evident in the accounts of the participants. In discussing their own workplace learning experiences, the participants repeatedly made reference to the importance of understanding the relevance of learning opportunities (a learner’s need to know) as well as the importance of being ready to engage in a learning experience (a learner’s readiness to learn). In addition, the participants discussed their preference for information that was immediately applicable to their daily professional lives (a problem-
centered orientation to learning). Finally, in discussing their motivations for serving as advisors and investing in their own professional development, each cited internal factors such as job satisfaction over external factors such as promotions (internal motivation to learn). Therefore, although the concept of andragogy is based on multiple assumptions regarding the characteristics of adult learners (Knowles, 1990), each of these assumptions is readily recognizable within the recounted experiences of the advisors. A comprehensive summary of the models of adult learning, as identified in the experiences of the participants, is provided below.

Table 4

Summary of Themes for Research Question #2: What Models of Adult Learning Are Evident in the Workplace Learning Experiences of Professional Academic Advisors?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Supporting Excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Experiential Learning</td>
<td>1. I Can Relate: Using Personal Experience</td>
<td>“I probably rely more on my own personal experience, because I think that the questions that I tend to get, I am able to relate more on a personal level with them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Like Riding a Bicycle: Using Professional Experience</td>
<td>“advising is kind of like riding a bicycle; once you do it, you’re comfortable with it. After you’ve done it a little while, you are confident in your ability to relate to people and to relate in an educational setting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. We Learn from Each Other: Communities of Practice</td>
<td>“we talk about something that we do, how we do it, the worksheets that we use, the approach, the questions…this seems to have been beneficial because it’s amazing what we learn from each other by accident.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Find Thyself a Teacher: The Role of Mentoring</td>
<td>“No specific hey, you’re going be mentored by this person…you had to seek it out. You really had to seek out – find thyself a teacher almost – you…you seek it out yourself”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2. Figuring It Out: Self-Directed Learning

“I think it’s all about critical thinking… How can I do this better, how can I do this more efficient. And if you are not at that point, if you are just trying to get through the day, I don’t know if you ever get to that higher level thinking.”

3. Andragogical Principles

1. I Already Know How to Advise: The Andragogical Principle of the Learner’s Need to Know

“after you’ve been an advisor for a while, you know what you need to be doing, then it’s I need to learn the specific programs and the curriculum and that. It’s not that I need to learn how to be an advisor, it’s just that I need to know what’s new to that university.”

2. A Fish Out of Water: The Andragogical Principle of Readiness to Learn

“I had no clue. I was totally like a fish out of water. And I was apprehensive, I went into panic mode and just didn’t know what to do. And I felt very incompetent that I didn’t know how to answer the questions.”

3. Practical Application: The Andragogical Principle of Problem-Centered Orientation

“it’s like everything else. If you don’t do it relatively close to the time you heard about it and learned about it, it goes right out your head and you don’t know anything.”

4. It’s a Calling: The Andragogical Principle of Internal Motivation

“And I always thought that motivation comes from within. I think if you want to be a better advisor, you are not going to be motivated by awards and money, I think you’re just gonna want to do that.”
Figure 2. Diagram of themes for research question #2: What models of adult learning are evident in the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors? Andragogy (top right) and the six characteristics of adult learners are evident. The Self-Directed Learning Model (left) is also evident and overlaps with one of the adult learner characteristics, as does the Experiential Learning Model (bottom). Four specific methods of learning from experience are also evident.
Table 5

Overlap Between Themes and Adult Learning Models/Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Relevant Adult Learning Model/Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Theory Isn’t Everything: The Need for Hands-on Experience | Experiential Learning  
- Learning from Personal Experience  
- Learning from Professional Experience |
| Baptism by Fire: Using Past Workplace Learning Experiences to Shape the Experiences of New Academic Advisors | Experiential Learning  
- Communities of Practice  
- Mentoring  
- Learning from Professional Experience |
| Those Conferences Get Frustrating: Inadequacies and Conflicts Hinder Participation in Nonformal Workplace Learning | Andragogy  
- Learner’s Need to Know  
- Learner’s Need to Be Self-Directed  
- Learner’s Experiences Serve as a Resource  
- Learner’s Readiness  
- Learner’s Problem-Centered Orientation |

Chapter Summary

Applying the theories and concepts of adult learning to an analysis of the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors appears to be a worthwhile research endeavor. By doing so, new information regarding the way in which advisors learn to perform their professional roles, both upon entering the profession and as they develop throughout their careers, has been gained. Specifically, with regard to the first research question of this study, the application of an adult learning lens to the analysis of the workplace learning experiences of advisors has yielded four distinct themes regarding the
impact that workplace learning has on professional academic advisors’ training and development. In the first theme, which focuses upon the need for hands-on experience, the participants emphasized that personal hands-on experience, more than any other source of knowledge, plays a substantial role in their acquisition of the skills required to perform the role of an advisor. However, in the second theme, which explored the personal characteristics of academic advisors, the participants were equally emphatic that there are certain qualities that are perceived to be essential to advisors. Moreover, these qualities are not likely to be imparted through any form of workplace learning.

The third emergent theme discussed how advisors use past workplace learning experiences, especially those that are inadequate or negative, to shape the experiences of new advisors. Within this theme, participants who were provided no training or minimal training discussed how these experiences impacted the way in which and the degree to which they now participate in the training of new colleagues. Although their experiences obviously had little, if any, positive impact on their own training, those experiences later proved valuable in shaping better, more effective training experiences for others and deepening their commitment to serving as a resource for others. The final theme focused upon the various inadequacies and conflicts that hinder advisor participation in nonformal workplace learning, such as conferences and workshops. For a variety of reasons, the participants were critical of these types of learning opportunities, which are commonly associated with the concepts of training and professional development. Clearly, these modes of workplace learning do not have a significant impact on advisor training and development as advisors find participation in them to be highly problematic.
With regard to the second research question of the study, several models of adult learning became evident in the analysis of the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors. First, the experiences of the participants provided evidence of the experiential learning model. Under the umbrella of the experiential model were four additional sub-themes, including: the use of personal experience; the use of professional experience; the role of communities of practice; and the role of mentoring. The participants discussed the frequency with which they draw upon previous personal experiences, including their experiences as students themselves or experiences in previous careers, in performing their roles as advisors. Similarly, the participants indicated that their repertoire of previous advising experiences served as a substantial source of knowledge as well as a source of confidence in their professional abilities. In addition, the participants noted that the experiences of their colleagues also served as a resource for learning. That is to say, the participants described the existence of communities of practice amongst their advising colleagues, and discussed how the sharing of experiences and best practices amongst their peers played a key role in their professional development (Wenger et al, 2002). Similarly, but on an individual level as opposed to a group level, the participants discussed the key role that the development of a mentoring relationship with a trusted, experienced colleague played in the development of their own professional skills. Again, in accordance with the principles of mentoring, having access to the experiences of their mentor, and having the opportunity to discuss their own experiences with a mentor resulted in a rich resource for workplace learning (Hansman, 2001).
An additional adult learning model evident in the workplace learning experiences of advisors was that of self-directed learning. Through discussions of critical incidents in the workplace, the participants shared stories which demonstrated their ability to diagnose a deficit within their knowledge base and to design a relevant learning experience. Whether self-designed quasi-experiments or simple trial-and-error, the commonality amongst these examples of workplace learning is that they were pursued independently by the advisor, a hallmark of self-directed learning (Tough, 1971).

The final adult learning concept evident in the experiences of the participants was that of andragogy. As discussed by Knowles (1990), andragogy is comprised of six assumptions which describe the characteristics of adult learners. Two of the characteristics of adult learners posited under andragogy are part of other, larger models of adult learning. In particular, the idea that adults have a reservoir of experience that serves as a resource for learning is consistent with the finding that experiential learning, in its variety of forms, is evident within the workplace experiences of advisors. Similarly, the idea that adults have a need to be self-directed in their learning is consistent with the finding that advisors engage in self-directed learning within the workplace. The remaining four assumptions of andragogy were also evident in the experiences of the advisors. Specifically, the participants provided criticism of the usefulness of some of the learning opportunities presented to them, demonstrating the importance of the learner’s need to know. In addition, the participants discussed instances in which they recognized a deficit within their knowledge, illustrating the importance of the learner’s readiness to learn. The advisors interviewed also indicated a clear preference for learning that was situated in the context of their day-to-day working lives, highlighting the adult
learner’s problem-centered orientation to learning. Finally, the participants discussed their motivation to enter the profession and to perform effectively as advisors. Each of the participants rejected the idea that monetary rewards or other external sources of motivation played a role in their commitment to professional development, supporting the notion that adults are internally motivated to learn.

The recounted experiences of the participants provide ample evidence of the ways in which they have acquired and refined the skills and knowledge necessary to perform their roles as academic advisors. In addition, as discussed in the preceding analysis, it is clear that a variety of concepts and theories of adult learning are highly applicable to the workplace learning experiences of advisors. The preceding chapter aimed to thoroughly discuss the findings of the study, and to provide context for the findings through the use of the participants’ voices. Most importantly, however, this chapter aimed to provide answers to the research questions which guided this study. Having achieved these goals, the final chapter will discuss the implication of these findings, and suggest how this research may be extended in future investigations.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This study employed qualitative methodology and the theoretical frameworks and models of adult learning to explore the training and professional development of professional academic advisors at urban institutions. Specifically, the researcher sought to understand professional academic advisors’ workplace learning experiences, with the research goals of (1) identifying the impact of workplace learning on advisors’ training and professional development, as well as (2) identifying the models of adult learning evident in those workplace learning experiences. Generally speaking, the topics of advisor training and professional development are discussed quite frequently within the academic advising literature. As discussed in the review of the relevant literature, calls have repeatedly been made in the academic advising literature for more investigations into the training process for new advisors (Brown, 2008; Cuseo, 2003; Ender & Winston, 1982; Higginson, 2000; King, 2000; Waters, 2002). At the same time, researchers have also cited a need for investigations into the quality and frequency of advisor participation in professional development (Cuccia, 2009; Cuseo, 2003; Donnelly, 2006; Epps, 2002; Habley, 2000; Habley & Morales, 1998; Huggett, 2000; Lynch, 2002; McGillen, 2000; Sofranko, 2004). This is true for all categories of academic advisors, but especially
important for professional academic advisors whose educational backgrounds vary widely in terms of discipline and degrees attained. In addition, professional academic advisors are being utilized more frequently, especially at large, public universities where they are being increasingly called upon to play a significant role in student retention (Huggett, 2002; King & Kerr, 2005; Lynch, 2002; Reinarz, 2000; Tuttle, 2000).

Moreover, professional academic advisors at urban public universities, in particular, work with a greater proportion of at-risk students (Allen & Smith, 2008; Natalico & Smith, 2005; Tinto, 1993) and, therefore, became the primary focus of this study.

This study is unique in its approach to investigating the training and professional development of academic advisors, as this study applied the lens of adult learning to the long-held questions regarding how academic advisors become equipped with and maintain the knowledge and skills necessary in order to perform their professional roles. In simple summation, the frameworks and models associated with adult learning suggest that adults learn in fundamentally different ways than children (Merriam et al, 2007).

More importantly, however, adult learning expands the definition of learning activities to include more informal experiences rooted in everyday life along with the more traditional modes of instruction as “teacher”-guided activities. For example, adult learning models highlight the role that the learner’s own experience plays in learning, as well as highlights the learner’s ability to direct his or her own learning activities (Knowles, 1990; Kolb, 1984; Merriam et al, 2007; Tough, 1971). This is an important distinction to make, especially in an investigation that centers upon the workplace as a research setting. As noted previously, past research in academic advising suggests that institutionalized learning opportunities, such as conferences and workshops, are underutilized by
academic advisors and their content is often criticized (Cuccia, 2009; Donnelly, 2006; Epps, 2002; Lynch, 2002; Sofranko, 2004). By expanding the definition of learning (and therefore the definition of training and professional development) to include less structured modes of learning such as learning from hands-on experiences, the current study makes it possible to transcend previous basic survey research regarding participation in learning and instead offer insight into how it is that advisors actually learn their craft. The value and significance of a research project of this sort is addressed within the workplace learning literature, with calls being made for research that aids in understanding how individuals learn within the workplace (Billett, 2002; Fenwick, 2008).

The interpretive qualitative method was the most appropriate approach for this investigation, given that the study sought to highlight the lived experiences and perspectives of the academic advisors who served as the research participants. The six advisors, two from each of the three Midwestern urban universities that served as research sites, shared their workplace learning experiences over the course of two interviews. Collectively, these three men and three women held 77 years of experience in higher education, with 50 years of collective experience as academic advisors at the time of their participation in the study. The multiple interview format of the study allowed the participants to provide rich detail and valuable context regarding their experiences, rather than select from a list of pre-determined options as they may have in a quantitative study. The utilization of the critical incident technique, in particular, provided the research participants with the opportunity to identify and reflect upon the experiences that they considered to be salient instances of workplace learning, and to discuss those instances in great detail. The critical incident technique has long been associated with research that is
focused upon the workplace, and recently its application has been expanded beyond occupational psychology to fields like education (Flanagan, 1954; Kain, 2004). It was therefore well-suited for an investigation of this sort. Similarly, because this study sought to probe an under-examined component of the advising profession in a new way, the general intent of the research was exploratory in nature. That is to say, rather than intending to prove a particular hypothesis, this study instead aimed to illuminate an area overlooked in the existing literature. Therefore, the qualitative methods used in this study enabled the collection of data that was truly reflective of the participants’ lived experiences with training and professional development.

**What Impact Does Workplace Learning Have on Advisor Training and Development?**

**The role of hands-on experience.** As discussed at-length in the preceding chapter, the analysis of the data derived from the interviews yielded several themes. In particular, the query regarding the impact of workplace learning on professional academic advisors’ training and development yielded four distinct findings. First, the participants repeatedly emphasized the role of hands-on experience, indicating that the workplace learning derived from direct personal experience had a significant impact on their initial acquisition of skills as well as their on-going maintenance of professional competencies. Hands-on experience was universally and repeatedly emphasized by the participants. The substantial impact of this type of workplace learning is underscored by the fact that, in contrast to hands-on experience, training in the form of a pre-employment degree program was not considered by the participants to be a significant source of knowledge and, in some cases, was only discussed specifically in terms of its
inapplicability to the profession. Similarly, the value of training in the form of a comprehensive orientation at the onset of employment was also not emphasized by the participants and was frequently discussed in terms of its general shortcomings or, in some cases, its complete absence.

The personal characteristics of academic advisors. Second, the participants conveyed the importance of certain personal characteristics, such as the possession of particular interpersonal skills, an ability to work in ambiguity, or an innate interest in helping others, and how those characteristics are essential to practitioners. Most notable in a study of workplace learning is that the participants specifically discussed their perception that these qualities could not be imparted through training or otherwise “learned”. According to the participants, if advisors did not possess these characteristics upon entering the profession, they were not likely to procure them at any point in their career. In light of the research question at-hand, this indicates that this is an aspect of the profession which is not impacted through workplace learning.

Using past workplace learning experiences to shape the experiences of new academic advisors. Third, the participants recounted how their past workplace learning experiences, especially those that were inadequate, influenced the way in which they participated in the workplace learning experiences of new advisors. Specifically, those advisors who experienced poor or nonexistent training were motivated by those experiences to develop comprehensive training programs or to serve as mentors to newer professionals. In this way, it appears that even poor or limited workplace learning has a substantial impact on advisor training, even if that impact is delayed. In other words, the failed training experiences may not have impacted the
learning of those who experienced them, but did appear to positively impact the way in which workplace learning experiences were structured for future advisors.

Inadequacies and conflicts hinder participation in nonformal workplace learning. Finally, the participants discussed the myriad of inadequacies and conflicts that hinder their participation in nonformal workplace learning. As defined by Merriam et al (2007), nonformal learning activities are those which are driven by a curriculum and delivered via a facilitator. In the context of the workplace, nonformal learning includes activities such as conferences and workshops. Due to issues such as a lack of encouragement from their employing institutions, limited funding, an inability to find adequate time for participation, and the perceived uselessness of information presented, the participants indicated that they rarely participate in what are commonly thought of as the main forms of training and professional development within a professional setting. Based upon the experiences of the participants, this form of learning has an extremely limited impact on their training and professional development.

What Models of Adult Learning are Evident in Advisors’ Workplace Learning Experiences?

Experiential learning. The second main query of this study focused upon identifying the models of adult learning that are evident in the workplace learning experiences of professional academic advisors. In performing this analysis, three themes emerged. Each of the themes relate directly to the most prevalent models within the adult learning literature, including experiential learning, self-directed learning, and andragogy. The identification of the experiential learning model, in particular, included four distinct sub-findings. First, the participants emphasized the significant role that their own
personal experiences played in their advising practice, including how reflection upon the experiences that they had as students helped to shape them as professionals (Mezirow, 1998). Similarly, the participants discussed the ways in which they utilized past professional experience, indicating that their professional skills were enhanced through a process of repetition, reflection and practice (Kolb, 1984). Third, the participants discussed the learning derived from participation in communities of practice. Specifically, the participants cited how learning arose through the process of information sharing with advising colleagues and developing shared resources and tools with their peers (Wenger et al, 2002). Finally, the role of mentoring was discussed. Although none of the participants participated in a formally-sponsored mentoring program, each recalled having contact with at least one experienced advisor with whom they could ask questions and upon whom they could model their professional practice, allowing them to learn from experiences situated within the workplace (Hansman, 2001). The four subthemes illustrate the various ways in which advisors’ experiences factor into their training and professional development, making the adult learning model of experiential learning quite evident.

**Self-directed learning.** In addition to experiential learning, the participants’ experiences also provided clear evidence of their use of self-directed learning in the workplace. In some cases, advisors recounted the means by which they, as new professionals, initially learned about the institution or the student population. In other cases, advisors recounted how they indulged curiosities, conducted inquiries into some aspect of their practice, or sought the information necessary to retool their knowledge as curricula or policies changed. In the examples provided by the participants, the advisors
discuss a variety of methods with one commonality: reliance upon their own ability to seek out needed information. Whether through reading relevant articles in professional journals, designing a small quasi-experiment, or using a trial-and-error technique, the methods through which the participants engaged in workplace learning demonstrate the principles of the self-directed model of adult learning (Tough, 1971) and are evidence of its prevalence in the advising profession.

**Andragogical principles.** The identification of the experiential learning and self-directing learning models in the experiences of academic advisors allows for the identification of the final adult learning concept of andragogy. The concept of andragogy is comprised of six tenets or assumptions which define the characteristics of adult learners (Knowles, 1990). One of the stated characteristics of adult learners is that they possess a wealth of experiences, which andragogy suggests plays a key role in learning (Knowles, 1990). This is clearly closely related to the experiential learning model. A second characteristic of the adult learner is a mature self-concept, which andragogy suggests makes adults primarily self-directed in their learning, a clear overlap with the self-directed learning model (Knowles, 1990; Tough, 1971). There are four additional assumptions of andragogy, however, which could be identified in the recounted experiences of the participants: the learner’s need to know; readiness to learn; problem-centered orientation; and internal motivation (Knowles, 1990).

The learner’s need to know can be identified most clearly in the participants’ discussions of conferences and workshops, in which they were openly critical of the usefulness and applicability of the material to be learned. In fact, their perceptions that they do not need or will not be able to use the information gleaned from these events is
the reason that they provide for not attending, underscoring the influential power of the learner’s need to know (Knowles, 1990). Similarly, the learner’s readiness to learn is typically prompted by an experience which highlights the need for additional information or skills (Knowles, 1990). In their discussions, the participants provided examples of critical workplace learning incidents, some quite dramatic, in which they immediately felt a gap in their knowledge and were motivated to remediate that gap. Their action step of engaging in additional learning provides support for the assumption posited through andragogy that adult learners must reach a point of readiness in order to participate in learning (Knowles, 1990). Andragogy also suggests that adults are problem-centered in their orientations to learning (Knowles, 1990), and this too was supported by the experiences of the participants. For instance, the participants discussed ineffective workplace learning experiences that they had. In their description of these experiences, it was clear that what made them ineffective was their lack of relevancy to real-life problems encountered by advisors. The participants expressed a preference for training and research that is situated within the context of academic advising, and that provides solutions to day-to-day problems encountered within advising. In this way, they demonstrated the adult learning characteristic of a problem-centered orientation. Finally, andragogy suggests that adults are primarily internally motivated to learn (Knowles, 1990). Each participant directly negated the idea that advisors engage in professional development for external rewards such as promotions or raises, citing that no such reward structure exists within the profession. Moreover, each participant emphasized their affinity for the profession, and their personal desire to perform to the best of their abilities. Therefore, their motivation to improve themselves as professionals by engaging
in workplace learning is clearly internal. Thus, all six of the characteristics of adult learners as posited by Knowles’ (1990) concept of andragogy are evident in the experiences of the participants, including significant evidence of the use of experiential and self-directed learning.

**Application of the Theoretical Framework**

The adult learning literature provided the theoretical framework which guided and defined the scope of this study. As such, concepts such as formal, nonformal and informal learning (Merriam et al, 2007) as well as theories such as experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), self-directed learning (Tough, 1971), and andragogy (Knowles, 1990) defined the viewpoint through which the data was analyzed and interpreted. In this section, the alignment of the research findings with the central tenets of the theoretical framework will be discussed. Through this discussion, the researcher aims to demonstrate that the findings support the assertions made by the leading researchers and theorists within the field of adult learning, and also intends to demonstrate that the application of an adult learning framework was appropriate to the research questions at-hand.

In the preceding discussion of the research findings, the prevalence of three models of adult learning was clearly evident: experiential learning, self-directed learning, and andragogy. In addition to these specific adult learning concepts, the findings also suggest a general predominance of informal learning strategies in the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors. That is to say, the participants frequently referenced drawing from their own experiences, utilizing trial-and-error strategies, and capitalizing on the resources available within their colleagues as the primary means by which they
initially acquired or currently maintain the skills and knowledge required of an advisor. In fact, as demonstrated by the “Theory Isn’t Everything” theme, hands-on experience, not formal pre-employment education or structured on-the-job training, was repeatedly emphasized as the strategy that the participants felt had the most impact on their training and professional development. This type of learning, which is not institutionalized in any way and does not have any sort of imposed curriculum, is categorized in the adult learning literature as informal learning (Merriam et al, 2007).

The inclusion of informal learning strategies, alongside of more formal strategies such as instructor-led training or courses, as a legitimate and commonly-utilized learning strategy is a cornerstone of the field of adult learning. This is especially true of the learning that takes place within the workplace, as Merriam et al (2007) notes that “it is estimated that the great majority (upwards of 70%) of learning in the workplace is informal” (p. 36). Although in this instance Merriam et al (2007) attempts to quantify the occurrence of informal learning in the workplace, it is widely noted within the adult learning literature that the nature of learning is complex, and that learning may result from a variety of activities and contexts, sometimes occurring simultaneously. In fact, the existence of a variety of theories of learning, such as behaviorism, humanism, cognitivism, social learning theory, and constructivism, underscore the complexity of the learning process (Merriam et al, 2007).

Regardless of whether it is possible to accurately quantify the percentage of informal learning taking place within the work environment, it appears that the findings of this study support the notion that the majority of workplace learning opportunities are informal in nature. However, while Merriam et al (2007) makes reference to the rate at
which informal learning occurs, the participants in this study made specific reference to the impact informal learning has had upon their training and professional development. This is perhaps a more notable finding; not only did informal learning occur more often than formal or nonformal learning within the workplace, but informal learning was perceived by the participants to be a more valuable form of learning. This is consistent with views expressed by Cervero (1992), a noted researcher within the field of adult education. In discussing the topic of continuing professional education, Cervero (1992) stated that “popular wisdom among practicing professionals is that the knowledge they acquire from practice is far more useful than what they acquire from more formal forms of education” (p. 91).

The above-referenced literature on adult learning emphasizes the role of informal learning in the lives of adults, especially within the workplace. In addition, the concept of andragogy in particular is often enlisted in scholarly investigations into workplace learning. For instance, Rowden (2007) stated that “the models that guide the field of workplace learning would best be described as that of adult learning and andragogy” (p. 11). As discussed above, Rowden’s claim that the models and concepts of adult learning, in general, are highly applicable to workplace learning are substantiated by the findings of this study. Moreover, the findings of this study provide support for Rowden’s claim of the applicability of the concept of andragogy, in particular, to workplace learning, as an analysis of the experiences of the participants yielded themes that aligned with the six assumptions of adult learners that serve as the basis for the concept of andragogy. Thus, andragogy does in fact appear to be highly relevant to workplace learning.
The experiences relayed by the participants demonstrated a strong alignment with the theories and concepts of adult learning, especially modes of informal learning. Thus, the adult learning lens was an appropriate choice for this investigation. Unfortunately, reflection upon one’s workplace learning experiences using the framework of adult learning is not commonplace. In fact, the participants appeared to experience a great deal of difficulty in articulating the process through which they had acquired the skills and knowledge required of their professional roles. Like the workplace learning experiences shared by the participants, the experience of identifying and discussing particular instances of workplace learning is also consistent with what is noted in the adult learning literature. Specifically, as discussed by Merriam et al (2007), examples of informal learning are often difficult for learners to identify and recognize, largely due to how embedded they are in their everyday lives. This particular pitfall will be discussed later as a limitation of this study.

Using the theories and concepts of the field of adult learning to investigate workplace learning, in general, is not unique to this study. On the contrary, as referenced above, the confluence between the fields has been noted by some of the most prominent researchers in each field (Merriam et al, 2007; Rowden, 2007). Clearly, the adult learning framework is largely considered to be appropriate for investigations of workplace learning. This study, however, focused upon the workplace learning of academic advisors in particular. Within the academic advising literature, there is little confluence with the field of adult learning, with the exception of advising research which seeks to define best practices for working with adult students (Bitterman, 1985; Kasworm, 2003). However, given the aforementioned association of adult learning
theories with investigations of workplace learning, the selection of adult learning as the framework for this study was fitting. Not only was adult learning an appropriate lens through which to view the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors, it was also a lens which was easily applied due to the number and variety of theories and concepts which comprise the adult learning literature. Most importantly, however, the use of an adult learning framework held substantial explanatory power given that the adult learning lens had not been previously applied to academic advising research in this way. Moreover, the advising literature left issues of workplace learning, including advisor training and professional development, largely unexamined (Brown, 2008; Cuseo, 2003; Ender & Winston, 1982; Higginson, 2000; King, 2000; Waters, 2002). Therefore, applying the adult learning lens not only represented a new way for the field of academic advising to utilize the adult learning literature, it also held the potential to shed light upon a long-overlooked component of advising practice.

**Research Implications**

This study sought to build understanding regarding the phenomenon of workplace learning for professional academic advisors at urban institutions. Primarily, the findings of this study assist in developing an initial understanding of the advisor training and professional development process. In addition, the findings of this study also serve to challenge and extend existing knowledge regarding workplace learning within the profession of academic advising. The following section will detail the ways in which the current literature related to academic advising and workplace learning is enhanced with the addition of the findings of this research study.
First, the findings of this study help to build a greater understanding of the types of activities that contribute to advisor learning. Criticisms regarding the various inadequacies and conflicts that surround nonformal learning activities such as workshops and conferences are well-documented in the advising literature (Cuccia, 2009; Donnelly, 2006; Epps, 2002; Lynch, 2002; Sofranko, 2004). In fact, the findings of this study support previous research that indicates that advisors see participation in these activities as problematic, largely due to inadequate resources of time and money. Therefore, the addition of these findings to the current literature continues to call into question the value of nonformal learning activities for academic advisors. The consistent criticism of these types of learning activities in particular, in both the current literature and in this study, carries implications for those who are invested in professional growth for academic advisors. For instance, if inadequate time and money are consistently cited by advisors as obstacles to participation in conferences and workshops, institutions of higher education which employ advisors should consider the re-allocation of resources in order to eliminate these obstacles. Similarly, those who organize conferences and workshops for advisors should reconsider the design of these opportunities with issues of cost and convenience at the forefront. An alternative solution, admittedly more difficult to implement, is to encourage advisors to reconsider their notions of professionalism, especially as it relates to financial responsibilities. That is to say, in many professions, it is the expectation that professional pursuits are funded through the individual, and are not the responsibility of the employer. Faculty in higher education, for instance, often assume responsibility for the cost of memberships in professional organizations as well as conference fees and participation. Given the perceptions of those who served as
participants in this study regarding attending and participating in professional development, this would represent a significant change to the culture of advising.

It is also important to note that criticisms regarding nonformal learning such as conferences and workshops are not limited to issues of cost and convenience. Rather, the findings of this study add an additional layer of criticism which is focused upon the specific design and content of these types of learning opportunities. Specifically, the findings of this study emphasize advisors’ preferences for learning opportunities that are designed with the characteristics of adult learners, such as those outlined by andragogy (Knowles, 1990), in mind. Recognizing the unique needs of adult learners and developing appropriate learning experiences for adults is the focus of the field of adult learning and, as such, much theorizing on this topic has been done and much research has been conducted (Merriam et al, 2007). Although the field of advising acknowledges the need to address adult learners as a unique entity when it comes to advising adult students (Bitterman, 1985; Kasworm, 2003), the field has yet to acknowledge the learning needs of its practitioners in a similar fashion. Undeniably, the findings of this study, especially the advisors’ criticisms of the available nonformal modes of learning, underscore the need for those who design educational opportunities for advisors to develop familiarity with the concepts and theories of adult learning, especially the concept of andragogy (Knowles, 1990).

This study investigated beyond simply whether or not advisors participate in a particular type of training and development activity. It is valuable to know that advisors are not reliant upon nonformal learning activities, for instance, and likewise helpful to know the reasons why they are not participating in nonformal learning. However, ending
the investigation into advisor workplace learning here leaves larger questions regarding training and professional development unanswered. Therefore, this study attempted to identify instances of workplace learning in order to determine what sort of learning activities were impacting advisor training and professional development. In other words, if conferences and workshops do not factor significantly into advisor training and professional development, through what means does advisor training and professional development occur?

In addition to conferences and workshops, previous investigations of advisor learning have also examined the existence of other types of learning activities such as communities of practice (Lewis, 2000). Lewis’ (2000) research on academic advisors did not support the existence of communities of practice as defined by Wenger et al (2002). Lewis’ (2000) finding is directly challenged by the findings of this study, which did find ample evidence of purposeful collaboration amongst advising colleagues that serves as a resource for their collective learning. The existence of communities of practice, as indicated by this study, is supported by a noted researcher within workplace learning. According to Rowden (2007), “communities of practice exist in some form in every organization – whether they have been deliberately created and labeled as such or not” (p.71). Interestingly, although Lewis (2000) concluded that communities of practice did not exist, he did conclude that mentoring was commonly utilized by academic advisors as a learning strategy. The use of mentoring as a means of learning situated within the context of the workplace (Hansman, 2001) was supported by the findings of this study as well.
However, as is often noted in the mentoring literature, it must also be
acknowledged that mentoring can also represent a potential danger in cases where
individuals abuse their power as mentors (Hansman, 2001) or, in the case of workplace
mentoring specifically, when those who mentor are not vetted in terms of their
professional competence and therefore are not appropriate role models. However, the
perceptions of the participants in this study suggest that communities of practice and
mentorships are able to provide valuable workplace learning to academic advisors.
Given these findings, institutions of higher education and those in positions of leadership
within academic advising units should encourage the formation of these relationships and
networks amongst advising colleagues in an effort to foster workplace learning. As
discussed in the adult learning literature, communities of practice and mentorships need
not be formally constructed or labeled, but rather may occur naturally if advising
practitioners are given the opportunity to collaborate and interact with one another rather
than interacting strictly with students (Wenger et al, 2002; Hansman, 2001).

Both communities of practice and mentorships represent socially-based modes of
learning situated in experience. In both of these modes of learning, the interaction and
exchanges between advising practitioners, either in a group setting or in a dyad, result in
the creation of knowledge and resources. Waters (2002) contends that advising
knowledge and resources can also be created through interactions and exchanges with
students. In an attempt to understand specifically how members of the faculty learn to
perform their advising roles, Waters (2002) concluded that “researchers must
acknowledge that role learning may be significantly influenced by the communication
exchanges taking place between advisors and advisees” (p. 23). As such, learning is
derived directly from the experience of advising, in that advisors utilize their concrete advising experience, reflect on these experiences, and then construct new knowledge as a result of these reflections (Mezirow, 1998). The findings of the current study support Waters’ (2002) conclusions that emphasize the substantial role that the hands-on experience of working with students plays in advisor training and professional development. The importance of hands-on experience carries implications for structured, institution-sponsored training or professional development activities by suggesting that these activities should be designed such that the individual experiences of advisors and reflection upon those experiences should be made central. The greatest implication of the importance of hands-on experience, however, lies in the emphasis that this places specifically upon informal learning strategies in the workplace learning of academic advisors.

In the current study, the findings overwhelmingly indicated advisor reliance upon informal learning strategies, especially in the form of experiential learning and self-directed learning. These findings are valuable in two ways. First, given that previous research has suggested that nonformal learning is not the standard means by which advisors learn their craft due to the inherent problems regarding participation (Cuccia, 2009; Donnelly, 2006; Epps, 2002; Lynch, 2002; Sofranko, 2004), these current findings shed light upon how it is that advisors learn to perform their professional roles by expanding the definition of training and development to include other forms of learning such as informal learning. Secondly, advisor reliance on informal learning strategies specifically disputes the notion that a lack of participation in nonformal activities such as conferences and workshops equates to a disinterest in professional growth or a general
lack of learning on behalf of advisors. For example, given the lack of emphasis on advisor training and professional development indicated by the advising literature, Habley and Morales (1998) warned that if these issues of workplace learning are not attended to, “it is virtually certain that the advantages once attributed to advising centers will all but disappear” (p. 64). The findings of this study, and in particular the revealed reliance on informal learning in the advising workplace, suggest that these issues have been attended to in a different way than expected. Specifically, it appears that advisors turn to other modes of learning to acquire or refine their skills and knowledge. With few exceptions (Lewis, 2000; Waters, 2002), prior to this study, these alternative modes of learning have not been the focus of research regarding advisor training and professional development. In this way, the findings of this study help to reframe the conversation on advisor training and professional development, expanding the definition of what is considered workplace learning and allowing for more comprehensive discussion of how learning unfolds in the workplace.

It is also important to note when examining the findings of this study that the lack of institutionalized, structured, or instructor-led experiences does not appear to be an indication that advisors require limited knowledge and skills. Likewise, the lack of these types of learning experiences does not imply that the professional duties of an academic advisor can be performed without first establishing a significant foundation of knowledge and skills, or without providing due attention to the maintenance of relevant knowledge and skills as one progresses in his or her career. On the contrary, the revealed reliance on informal learning supports the perspective of a cadre of advising scholars who have noted that there is a wide array of knowledge and skills which must be possessed by academic
advisors (Creamer, 2000; King, 2000; King & Kerr, 2005; Upcraft & Stephens, 2000). Furthermore, not only is a wide array of knowledge and skills required, but the knowledge and skills required are so specific to the practice of advising that they are best learned in the situated context of the workplace. This is evidenced by the advisors’ reliance upon experience-based learning methods such as hands-on learning and mentoring which underscore the importance of situated learning (Cervero, 1992). This carries clear implications for those charged with developing training and professional development opportunities for advisors. As indicated by these findings, those seeking to impart the necessary skills and knowledge to advisors may be best served fostering informal learning rather than designing formal or nonformal opportunities.

Recently, Brown (2008) posited that advisors “should be expected to participate in pre-service and in-service programs that set expectations and develop the attitudes, skills, and behaviors that produce the kinds of academic advising that students expect and need” (p. 320). The language utilized by Brown (2008), in particular the reference to programs, implies that formalized, structured learning activities are the only types of learning activities that can result in the development of competent and effective advisors. However, as found in this study, informal learning opportunities also appear to present effective, if not advisor-preferred avenues of training and professional development. Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that there is at least a subset of attitudes, skills, and behaviors that are considered to be inherent within advisors and, therefore, cannot be learned through training and professional development. In this case, even if Brown’s (2008) assertion was extended to include informal modes of training and
development, the findings of this study challenge the idea that all of the skills required of advisors can be taught.

With a specific focus on professional academic advisors, the current study centered upon a segment of advising practitioners that have been previously ignored in the literature (Aiken-Wisniewski et al, 2010). In addition, this study focused upon the topic of advisor training and professional development which, as noted previously throughout this chapter, does not represent a particularly robust subset of the advising research. This alone attests to the value and importance of this study to the body of research related to academic advising. In addition, this study adds new knowledge and encourages a new perspective and dialogue on the issue of learning in the workplace through its unique application of theories and concepts from the field of adult learning. The greatest contribution of this study, however, may be that the findings draw new conclusions than did previous investigations into training and development for academic advisors. Not only do the findings contest the conclusions of previous research, they specifically dispute notions which have been detrimental to the status and reputation of the profession of advising. For instance, these findings challenge the notion that advisor training and professional development is limited, or that limited skills and knowledge are required of advisors. Therefore, in addition to adding new knowledge in general to the academic advising literature, these findings may serve as a means to elevate the status of the profession.

**Recommendations for Practice**

As discussed above, the findings of this study carry several implications for the field of academic advising. While researchers may appreciate the findings for the ways
in which they support or challenge currently held notions in the field of academic advising, practitioners, on the other hand, are likely more interested in determining what these findings mean with regard to the practice of academic advising. The following section, therefore, will outline several recommendations for practice specific to the workplace learning of academic advisors.

First, additional thought should be given to the hiring practices for academic advisors, taking into account the advisors’ assertions that certain personal characteristics are essential for effective advising. With regard to professional academic advisors, institutions may wish to review or revise their current position descriptions with a specific focus on personal characteristics and other “soft skills” such as those that the findings of this study suggested were essential to advisors, including a desire to help others, a customer-service orientation, a tolerance for ambiguity and an ability to motivate others. In this way, these qualities become just as valuable as an advisor’s work history or educational background. Along these same lines, institutions may wish to reconsider the interviewing process for new advisors to focus on ascertaining whether or not candidates possess these qualities, such as adding a mock advising session to the interview. With regard to faculty advisors, those responsible for determining which members of the faculty are to serve as academic advisors should also take into account these qualities in order to ensure that the individuals appointed are well-suited to the advising role. When all members of the faculty serve as advisors, those who possess more of these qualities should be assigned to higher-risk student populations, such as first-year students. It is also important to note, however, that the participants of this study expressed a belief that these personal characteristics cannot be taught, and given the
nature of qualitative research, their perceptions should not be interpreted as proof that these qualities cannot be taught. Therefore, an additional recommendation for practice is for institutions to develop training programs targeted at assisting those who advise in acquiring these beneficial personal characteristics, which may include role playing activities or peer observation.

Second, with regard to the general workplace conditions for academic advisors, institutions should consider the importance of manageable workloads for advising staff. If reasonable advisor to student ratios are maintained, advisors would have more time available to pursue the types of learning activities that were highlighted in the findings of this study. For instance, a smaller caseload of advisees would theoretically afford an advisor more time within the day for reflection upon his or her individual student interactions, increasing the opportunity to learn through professional practice. Similarly, an advisor with a manageable workload would have more time for contact and interaction with his or her advising colleagues. As discussed above, increasing the opportunity for interaction with colleagues, who share a common interest in academic advising, increases the likelihood of the formation of a learning community or of individual mentoring relationships. In a related recommendation, institutions should examine the office locations of advisors and their proximity to others with advising duties. When advisors work in isolation, it is unlikely that they will develop the types of networks with their colleagues that lead to efficient and effective workplace learning. Purposeful planning regarding office locations and the appropriation of designated meeting space for advisors could serve as a means by which institutions could encourage advisor workplace learning.
Third, the format for the training of new advisors should be reconsidered in light of the findings of this study. Specifically, rather than focusing training on the theoretical underpinnings of academic advising, the findings of this study suggest that training should be based on hands-on learning activities. Observations of more experienced advisors could provide more valuable and practical information than could self-study of theories relevant to advising. Moreover, training alongside a more experienced colleague could lead to the development of a beneficial mentorship. In addition, training should be focused upon “doing”, which will allow a new professional the opportunity to perform the duties of an advisor in a way that also provides the necessary guidance and correction. Institutions should also carefully consider who leads the training activities for new advisors. It may be commonplace for the supervisor of an advising unit to serve as the trainer to new advisors, but hands-on advising may or may not constitute a large part of the supervisor’s duties. The findings of this study suggest that academic advisors with significant advising experience, such as the most senior advising staff members, are the most valuable learning resources due to their personal wealth of knowledge.

Similarly, the format for professional development opportunities for academic advisors should be reconsidered. As discussed within the findings, webinars and conferences alone are not likely to provide useful learning opportunities. Rather than attending presentations on specific topics, advisors may find it more beneficial to have the opportunity to ask questions of one another and share best practices. Given the apparent lack of funding for webinar and conference participation, institutions may instead prefer to locally (internally within an institution or regionally) organize these opportunities for networking and information sharing amongst advisors. It is unlikely,
however, that this type of activity will replace more traditional types of professional development opportunities. Based on the findings of this study, professional development opportunities in the future should consider the unique needs of adult learners. Academic advisors should first be surveyed in order to determine their learning needs and topics of interest. Then, the learning activity itself should be carefully designed to involve the advisor as a participant, to take into account the experience level of the advisors, and to provide practical examples situated within the context of academic advising. Researchers in adult education have provided useful roadmaps for optimal program planning for adult learners that can easily be applied to the learning opportunities provided to advisors. These models place specific emphasis upon the importance of “transfer of learning” (Caffarella, 2002, p. 203), and aim to ensure that learners integrate what they have learned back into their professional lives. By borrowing from the field of adult education and including activities in the workplace and at conferences focused on improving transferring what was learned to useful daily applications, conferences and workshops for academic advisors may become more interesting or useful to advisors and their participation will reflect this perception.

The recommendations discussed above provide specific ways in which the findings of this study can be utilized by advising practitioners, supporting the overall value and contribution of this study. Clearly, research related to how advisors learn their craft has implications for the structure of their training, as well as for the design and content of their professional development opportunities. As demonstrated, however, workplace learning is also strongly impacted by the everyday experiences of being an academic advisor. As such, other aspects of the day-to-day working lives of advisors,
such as the demands of their workloads and the opportunity to interact with one another, should also be reconsidered in light of these findings.

Limitations

This chapter began with an overview of the study, which included a rationale for conducting the study, a rationale for the methodology utilized, and a rationale for the theoretical framework applied. By including a discussion of the logic that shaped the design of this study, the researcher intended to demonstrate that the decisions made with regard to the purpose, scope, and design of the study were sound. Nonetheless, every empirical investigation must also be examined and discussed in terms of its limitations. Recognizing that a study has limitations, however, does not diminish from its overall value. Rather, defining a study’s limitations allows the researcher the opportunity to ensure that the findings of the study are interpreted and applied appropriately, and provides important considerations for the design of future related research. A discussion of this study’s limitations follows below.

Readers who are more familiar or comfortable with quantitative research design may cite this study’s inability to be generalized and applied to the advising profession as a whole to be a significant limitation. However, a basic qualitative study such as this was not intended to be generalizable given the use of a purposeful sample selection strategy. Similarly, the perspectives of the advisors who served as research participants were not intended to be viewed as representative of the entire professional academic advising population. The participant sampling strategy aimed to ensure diversity amongst the participants rather than create a sample that was representative in terms of metrics such as race and gender. As a result, the participant pool of this study included a larger
proportion of White advisors as well as a larger proportion of male advisors than what is noted in the NACADA 2012 membership profile.

However, as discussed previously, the demographics reported by NACADA include only those who are members of the organization. In addition, the demographics include faculty advisors, advising retirees, and students who aspire to become advisors. Moreover, the method utilized by the current study for participant solicitation did not allow for the researcher to determine demographic information at the onset. Public email directories available through the institutions’ websites were used to recruit participants; therefore, the researcher did not know the demographics of the population targeted for inclusion in the study. Demographic information was gathered only once participants responded with an interest in participation. However, by providing thick, rich descriptions of the research sites, the participants, and their workplace learning experiences, the reader should be able to determine the applicability of the information presented to other types of advisors or other types of institutions of higher education. As discussed by Merriam (2009), “it is the reader, not the researcher, who determines what can apply to his or her context” (p. 51).

In addition, the use of self-reported data may be considered a limitation of this study. Specifically, the use of critical incidents in gathering information regarding the participants’ workplace learning experiences relied upon each participant’s recollection and therefore produced subjective accounts of the participant’s experience. Therefore, the findings reported within this study are based upon the participants’ perceptions of their learning as opposed to direct measures of their learning. Moreover, these reports of learning could not be substantiated through observation by the researcher. However, as
discussed above, the findings were consistently presented as the perceptions of the participants, with no attempts being made to assume that the experiences of the participants represented the experiences of all advisors. In addition, in this case, self-reported data was preferable given that direct observation and fieldwork was not feasible within the context of this research. This study was focused on learning experiences in the workplace, a context which, unlike a classroom or training program, does not have learning as a primary goal. Therefore, it would have been difficult to predict the occurrence of learning and coordinate an observation of that learning. Furthermore, learning is often the result of self-reflection (Mezirow, 1998), which cannot be readily observed and does not necessarily occur within the work environment or during the specified work day. For these reasons, direct observation and fieldwork was not a viable option, whereas the use of self-report allowed for the collection of relevant data.

The use of self-reported data may also be considered problematic given the participants’ difficulty in identifying and discussing specific instances of workplace learning. Although each participant was able to provide several workplace learning experiences, it was clear during the interview process that it was not commonplace for the participants to be asked to identify discrete learning events. The research design attempted to correct for this by providing the questions regarding each critical workplace learning incident well in advance of the interview, so that the participants had ample time to reflect on their experiences and select learning experiences that seemed particularly salient. Once a workplace learning event had been identified, it appeared difficult for the participants to articulate specifically how their learning occurred, or to identify the process they undertook or the resources they utilized. Again, the research design
attempted to correct for this by providing specific questions to guide the participants’ reflection on their selected critical workplace learning incidents. Participants’ difficulty in discussing their workplace learning experiences was not unexpected, as the adult learning literature acknowledges that adults may encounter difficulty in identifying and discussing learning, especially that which occurs informally (Merriam et al, 2007).

A final limitation may be found with regard to the participants themselves. This study employed a complex research design, which required multiple interviews and multiple contacts with the researcher. As such, there may have been some degree of self-selection on the part of the participants who chose to volunteer. For instance, advisors who were particularly invested in the idea of training and professional development may have been more likely to volunteer to participate in such a lengthy research project. The participants selection process, therefore, may have attracted advisors who had particularly good experiences with workplace learning that they wished to share, or, conversely, may have attracted advisors who suffered particularly bad experiences. Given the responses received by the participants, however, it did not appear that any of the participants had a particular agenda to promote with regard to advisor training and professional development, as each typically shared examples of both positive and negative workplace learning experiences. The idea of participant self-selection may also tie into one of the emergent sub-themes of the study: the finding that the participants were internally motivated to participate in learning. This finding may also have been unduly influenced by the participant selection process. Specifically, the type of advisor who is interested in participating in a research project regarding workplace learning is likely the type that personally values workplace learning and professional growth.
As stated previously, the recognition of these limitations does not negate the findings of this study or weaken its contribution to the current literature. Rather, a comprehensive discussion of the limitations prevents the research from being misinterpreted in any way, and also allows the researcher the opportunity to discuss what strategies were put in place to minimize any potential problems within the research design. The following section of the chapter will build upon this critical analysis of the current study, by proposing future directions for research.

**Future Research**

Given its exploratory nature, this research study represents the beginning of a new vein of research in academic advising. This is especially true given the originality of this study’s approach in utilizing the theories and concepts of the field of adult learning to investigate the workplace learning experiences of academic advisors. As the first study of its kind, there are modifications that can be made to the design of this study in order to yield additional knowledge on the subject of advisor training and professional development and develop a more comprehensive picture of how academic advisors learn to perform their roles.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that additional research focused upon the confluence of the fields of academic advising and adult learning is warranted. Additional research seeking to extend the frameworks and models of adult learning would assist in making these concepts more accessible to the average academic advisor, as it would expose them to new perspectives and new terms. Greater accessibility of these concepts would allow for more informed discussions amongst advising practitioners regarding the means by which they learn to perform their roles and maintain their professional skills.
For instance, expanding the definition of training and professional development to include hands-on or self-directed learning would allow advisors to discuss their workplace learning activities in a more comprehensive fashion, and would likely allow them to take more credit for participation in workplace learning than what is being granted to them through the current literature. In addition, continued investigation into the intersection between adult learning theory and advisor workplace learning would provide rich resources to adult learning researchers interested in examining the practical applications of the field’s theories.

In order to further examine the findings in this study, additional qualitative studies, in particular, of workplace learning for academic advisors using the framework of adult learning are needed. One of the most basic research design modifications that should be made for future research is to expand the sample size. In this exploratory study, a sample size of six professional academic advisors was sufficient. However, this study has identified primary themes which can now be pursued further through additional research. By expanding the sample size, future researchers will have additional context-rich information which highlights the perspective of professional academic advisors, and can be used to confirm or negate the themes found within this study.

Along the same lines, the participant sample and scope of the study should be expanded to include other types of advisors or other types of institutions. This study focused specifically on professional academic advisors, due in large part to their absence in the current literature (Aiken-Wisniewski et al, 2010). In addition, this study focused upon urban universities, given the unique challenges that advisors at urban institutions face (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, additional research is needed which investigates the
workplace learning experiences of faculty advisors and peer advisors to determine if a reliance on informal learning strategies is as prevalent for these other types of advising practitioners as it is for professional academic advisors. Similarly, additional research on the workplace learning experiences of advisors employed by other types of institutions such as small, private colleges, community colleges, or more traditional residential campuses will add to the current literature.

As an exploratory study, this study made use of the entire adult learning literature in an attempt to gain understanding of the training and professional development experiences of advisors. The themes which emerged from this study, therefore, were aligned with a variety of adult learning concepts and theories, allowing the researcher to paint a broad picture of advisors’ workplace learning experiences. While useful, this approach did not allow for in-depth investigation or application of particular concepts or theories. Future research, therefore, should select one of the theories or concepts within the adult learning literature, such as mentoring or self-directed learning, and explore that framework in-depth. In this way, the current study could originate several additional related studies, each of which examine a specific mode of informal learning.

Using a qualitative approach to an investigation of academic advising was undoubtedly a strength of the current study. In general, the advising literature heavily relies upon quantitative methods, and this reliance has been criticized by advising scholars (Cuseo, 2003; Metzner, 1989; Saving & Keim, 1998; Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008; Smith, 2004). Moreover, reliance upon quantitative methods has relegated research on advisor training and professional development to surveys that ask advisors to indicate, from a pre-determined list typically comprised of nonformal learning activities,
the activities in which they have recently participated. If quantitative surveys regarding training and professional development are to persist, the findings of this study advocate strongly for the significant expansion of survey responses to include informal modes of learning. However, the need for a paradigm shift in advising research toward qualitative research is evident, especially in the case of research which focuses upon workplace learning. For instance, the findings of this study indicate that workplace learning for advisors is embedded within their everyday lives and is quite often socially constructed; concepts which are far more aligned with qualitative research.

That is not to say, however, that there is no place in the literature for a new breed of quantitative studies. The current study defined itself as a basic interpretive study, and as such did not seek to make claims regarding application to practice, nor did it seek to evaluate the effectiveness of workplace learning for advisors. However, using this study as a foundation, additional research could focus upon correlating modes of learning with outcomes. For instance, advisors’ self-efficacy could be measured and correlated with the frequency with which they engage in different forms of informal workplace learning. In this way, future research can determine if participation in certain modes of workplace learning, such as communities of practice, is positively correlated with an advisor’s perception of their effectiveness or confidence in their professional abilities. A study such as this would have clear and direct implications for advising practice. Similarly, future research should look to pilot specific workplace learning strategies, and investigate their effect on advising practitioners or practice. For example, future research could implement formal mentoring programs or communities of practice within the advising community and report upon the effects. Studies such as these could also make use of a
mixed methodology, pulling from both qualitative and quantitative research design in order to further the understanding of workplace learning practices for advisors.

This study also produced two unique findings, both of which are deserving of additional research. First, the idea that there are certain personal characteristics which advisors must inherently possess has not been highlighted in the advising literature previously and therefore makes for an interesting premise for future research. Additional research should examine the advertisements for advising positions, for instance, or the hiring process for advisors to determine if and how these qualities are evaluated prior to employment. The notion of personal characteristics is also important in relation to faculty advisors, for whom the advising role is secondary. Because advising is not widely viewed as a central function of their role, the presence of these qualities may not be considered as important by faculty advisors. The second unique finding of this study is the effect that poor or inadequate training had upon the advisors who experienced it. The current study did not specifically seek out advisors who had poor experiences. However, future research should explore the experiences of this group more comprehensively, especially given the suggestion that poor experiences lead to the creation of more effective training and professional development as well as the creation of veteran advisors who are committed to serving as a resource for their newer colleagues. Whether exploring one of these new areas, or extending the application of the adult learning framework, there are ample opportunities for additional research into advisor workplace learning informed by the study at-hand.
Conclusion

This research study was, at its heart, an investigation into learning. In this case, the learners under investigation were professional academic advisors, and the context for learning was their workplace. Ultimately, the goal of this study was to add to the understanding of how it is that professional academic advisors learn how to perform their professional roles. The study itself can be best summarized by discussing specifically what the findings of the research indicate and how the findings reframe the conversation about workplace learning for academic advisors.

The findings of the research indicate that workplace learning for advisors occurs in a variety of forms. Most notably, the participants highlighted informal means of learning, such as learning through hands-on experience, as the means that they perceived to be the most valuable to their initial acquisition and maintenance of professional knowledge and skills. The participants also highlighted the value of the context-based learning that is derived from participation in mentorships or communities of practice. All in all, the findings indicate that advisors learn how to be advisors primarily by doing, or by interacting with advisors who are more knowledgeable.

The findings indicate that formal and nonformal learning has minimal impact on advisor training and professional development. For instance, in terms of initial training, the participants did not find the theories of student development and academic advising learned through formal pre-employment education or as part of a structured training to be as useful as their hands-on experience. In terms of professional development, the participants rejected the idea that learning activities such as workshops or conferences play a key role in their workplace learning.
Participants also specifically discussed the role of poor initial training upon entering the profession. Interestingly, the participants who experienced inadequate training revealed that this experience instilled within them a dedication to the training of new colleagues. An additional interesting finding emerged from the participants’ discussion of the qualities that they perceived to be important for advisors. According to the participants, good advisors must possess certain interpersonal skills. These skills, however, are considered to be inherent within advisors and therefore cannot be learned.

Finally, the findings indicated that three particular models of adult learning were highly evident within the workplace learning experiences of advisors. Experiential learning, in particular, was ubiquitous within the participants’ experiences. In addition, self-directed learning surfaced repeatedly as a strategy used by the participants to enhance their professional knowledge or skills. Finally, the principles of andragogy proved applicable to the workplace learning experiences of the advisors, as their experiences provided evidence supporting each of the characteristics of adult learning posited by andragogy.

The findings of this study make a significant contribution to the current literature of the field of academic advising. First, the findings of this study support previous research in academic advising. In particular, current research within academic advising suggests that the reliance on conferences and workshops as the primary modes of professional development is problematic. The findings of this study support the notion that these nonformal modes of learning are ineffective, given that the participants cited a variety of ways in which their participation in these types of activities were hindered by a
lack of resources, time or support. Moreover, the participants indicated that the design and content of conference and workshop sessions are not conducive to learning.

The findings also provide new information not currently found in the literature. Specifically, information regarding the training and professional development of professional academic advisors in particular was lacking in the current literature. Not only did this study contribute information regarding this category of practitioner, this study utilized a qualitative approach which allowed for the perspective of the participants to remain at the forefront of the findings. More importantly, however, the findings of this study provide information regarding how it is that professional academic advisors learn how to perform their roles, thereby filling a large hole in the existing literature.

Finally, the findings of this study challenge some of the current notions that have persisted within the literature of academic advising. For instance, the findings indicate that advisors regularly participate in learning activities that add to their professional knowledge and skills, although the bulk of those activities are informal in nature. Previously, research on advisor training and professional development reported only a lack of advisor participation in nonformal activities, carrying the implication that advisors did not participate in learning activities of any sort. Clearly this is a damaging conclusion to draw regarding a profession. Thus, the contrary findings of this study play an important role in upholding the reputation and status of the advising profession.

Most importantly, this study expands the definition of training and professional development for academic advisors to include informal learning activities. Through the application of theories and concepts from the field of adult learning, a clearer picture of workplace learning for advisors emerges. The question of how advisors learn their craft
is no longer unanswered, and future researchers of advising have a rich basis upon which to build. This foundation may, in turn, generate additional theories for advising practice. With an improved understanding of the profession and an improved research base comes the potential for positive implications for advising practice and, thus, the potential for positive implications for all of higher education.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Pilot Study Questionnaire

Demographics:

1. Your age:

2. Your race:

3. Your gender:

4. How many years have you been a professional academic advisor:

5. How many years have you been a professional academic advisor at this institution (if different than above):

6. Please list any previous colleges/universities at which you have been employed as a professional academic advisor (listed chronologically with years of employment):

7. Please list all degrees that you have attained (including the specific area(s) of study):

8. Finally, to protect your identity, your real first name will not be used in the final write-up. Please choose an alternate name/pseudonym:
APPENDIX B

Pilot Study Interview Questions

Please answer the following questions in as much detail as you feel comfortable:

1. How do you define the term “training”? What kinds of activities are included/inherent in your definition?

2. How do you define the term “professional development”? What kinds of activities are included/inherent in your definition?

3. Describe your training experiences upon becoming a professional academic advisor.

How was your training structured/In what sort of activities did you engage/What sort of topics were included/Who was involved in your training and in what ways were they involved? (please use general descriptors rather than the names of individuals)

4. When you first became a professional academic advisor at this institution, how did you initially learn about the student population (common student characteristics, demographics, etc.)? If the student population has changed, how did you learn about the changes and how to incorporate them into your daily practice?

5. When you first became a professional academic advisor at this institution, how did you initially learn about the institutional policies? If the policies have changed, how did you learn about the policy changes and how to incorporate them into your daily practice?

6. When you first became a professional academic advisor, how did you learn about the academic disciplines on which you advise (i.e. the curriculum, related career paths, etc.)? If the disciplines on which you advise have changed, how did you learn about the additional disciplines and how to advise students on them?

7. How important is continued learning and growth to you in your role as an advisor? What activities/experiences assist you in continued learning and growth?
APPENDIX C

Questionnaire

Employment

1. In your current advising position, what type of unit are you associated with (a college/department advising office, centralized advising center, specialized student program, etc.)?

2. Is your current advising position dedicated to a specific type or category of student (first-year students, transfers, upperclassmen, honors, athletes, etc.)?

3. Total # of years as a professional academic advisor:

4. Total # of years as a professional academic advisor at your current institution (if different than above):

5. Total # of years working in higher education (if different than above):

6. Please list all colleges/universities at which you have been employed (chronologically with years of employment). Please also indicate the job titles held.

Education History

7. Please list all degrees that you have attained (including the specific area(s) of study):

Miscellaneous

8. To protect your identity, your real first name will not be used in the final report. Please choose an alternate name/pseudonym:
APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

1. Please describe (in detail) the structure of academic advising on your campus (administrative structure, oversight, etc.)

2. What comes to mind when you think about the terms “training” and “professional development”? What sort of activities and/or feelings do you associate with these terms?

3. Please describe (in detail) your training experiences upon becoming a professional academic advisor.
   a. How was your training structured/in what sort of activities did you engage?
   b. What topics/concepts/skills did you learn through your training?
   c. Who was involved in your training (names of specific individuals are not necessary) and in what ways were they involved?

4. How did you initially learn about the student population at your institution (common student characteristics, demographics, etc.)? As the student profile changes, how do you learn about the changes and how to incorporate them into your daily practice?

5. How did you initially learn about your institution’s policies? As policies change, how do you learn about the policy changes and how to incorporate them into your daily practice?

6. How did you learn about the academic disciplines on which you advise (i.e. the curriculum, related career paths, etc.)? As the disciplines and curriculum on which you advise changes, how do you learn about the changes?

7. How/in what ways has your formal education prepared you for a career as a professional academic advisor?

8. How did you develop your “style” of advising? What activities/experiences have been the most influential in building your competence/confidence as a professional academic advisor?

9. If you feel comfortable doing so, please state:
   a. Your age
   b. The race/ethnicity with which you most closely identify

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APPENDIX E

Critical Incident Questions

Critical Incident #1

I’d like you to think of the time when you first became an academic advisor, and started working independently with students. As with any new professional-in-training, there must have been at least one instance in which you felt that you didn’t have all of the information or all of the skills that you needed in order to be successful. For example, the situation may have included a policy/requirement that was unclear to you, a curriculum or major that was unfamiliar to you, or a particular student issue with which you had never been confronted. I’d like to discuss a critical time such as this.

- What were the details of the situation/what was it that you needed to learn?
- How did you react; what did you do?
- Describe the learning process.
- Did you do anything that was especially effective or ineffective in order to remedy the situation?
- What was the outcome or result of your action/what did you learn?

Critical Incident #2

I’d like you to reflect on your entire career as an academic advisor. In the course of your career you’ve no doubt acquired new skills and grown as a professional. For example, perhaps you became more adept at a software program or developed a greater confidence with a particular student population. I’d like to discuss such a learning experience.

- What were the details of this learning experience/what it is that you needed or wanted to learn?
- How did the learning come about/how did you realize the need/what motivated you?
- What did the learning experience look like, who was involved, etc.
- What was the outcome or result/what did you learn?
Dear Academic Advisor:

My name is Kristy Tokarczyk and I am an academic advisor at Cleveland State University and a doctoral student in Cleveland State’s College of Education and Human Services. I am inviting you to participate in a study regarding your training and professional development as a professional academic advisor. The study will include questions about your training activities upon becoming an advisor, as well as your professional development experiences throughout your career. It is my hope that information from this study will contribute to a better understanding of how advisors learn to perform their professional roles. This is NOT an evaluation of your preparation.

Participation in the study includes multiple activities. First, participants will be asked to complete an initial questionnaire, which should take no longer than 3 to 5 minutes to complete. Second, participants will be asked to select a date, time, and location for an in-person interview, which is expected to last approximately one hour. Third, participants will be asked to select a date and time for a follow-up telephone interview, which is expected to last approximately one half-hour and take place several weeks after the in-person interview. In both the in-person and telephone interviews, participants will be asked to provide details of a specific critical incident in either their training or professional development.

Your participation in these activities over the course of several weeks is an important part of the research design as it will allow you (as the participant) to develop a trusting relationship with me (as the researcher), and will allow you the necessary time to reflect on your professional experiences and to carefully consider your responses. Moreover, as a busy professional, you may not be able to dedicate a large amount of time to participation in this study; therefore, the tasks have been spread out over time to prevent your participation from becoming a significant distraction from your work.

As a participant in this study, your responses will be held confidential. Neither your name nor your institution will appear anywhere in the final written dissertation, and complete privacy will be guaranteed. Potential risks you may encounter by participating in this study may include potential psychological or emotional discomfort in disclosing your professional experiences, but no risk greater than the risks of daily living.

There are no guaranteed direct benefits for participation. However, indirect benefits for participation may include the opportunity to reflect upon professional experiences and future development opportunities. In addition, the results of this study may be useful in
generally improving the training and development activities of professional academic advisors.

Participants will be given the opportunity to review the initial findings and provide feedback prior to submission of the final report. The final results of the study will be submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Education - Leadership and Lifelong Learning at Cleveland State University. Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. As a participant, you may also decline to respond to particular interview questions. There is no reward for participating or consequence for not participating.

For further information regarding this research please contact Kristy Tokarczyk at (216) 875-9810/k.tokarczyk@csuohio.edu, or Dr. Catherine Hansman at (216) 523-7134/c.hansman@csuohio.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630.

Please print two copies of this letter. After signing each, keep one copy for your records and return the other one to the researcher as indicated below. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Please indicate your agreement to participate by signing below.

I am 18 years or older and have read and understood this consent form and agree to participate.

Signature: ___________________________________________

Name: ______________________________________________ (Please Print)

Date: _______________________________________________

Email: ______________________________________________

Return electronically to: k.tokarczyk@csuohio.edu

Or by mail to: Kristy Tokarczyk
2121 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland State University
COSHP Advising Center MC 218B
Cleveland, OH 44115-2214
APPENDIX G

IRB Approval/Renewal Memorandum

Cleveland State University

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 16, 2012
To: Catherine Havens, CASAI
From: Barbara A. Bryant, IRB Coordinator
Re: Renewal Notice of IRB Approval to Use Human Subjects

According to our records, the IRB approvals for the protocol listed below will expire as below:

Transaction No. 29359-HAN-MS Approval Expiration: June 2, 2012
Title: Workforce learning of professional academic advisors at Urban University: A basic quantitative investigation
Co-PI/Student: Krzysztof Pokorski

As such, the following issues must be completed, and this form returned to Office of Sponsored Programs & Research (OSP), Pulsar Haunstine Hall, 3rd floor, 10 days before the date of this memo, or no later than the due date. If the renewal is not received by this time, your office will consider the protocol closed and remove it from our active files.

1. This project is ( ) Active and research will continue under this protocol. ( ) Inactive or Complete

2. Has there been any change of investigators conducting this study?
   ( ) Yes ( ) No

   If yes, please indicate the additional or deleted investigator(s) below:

3. Has there been any change in procedure, design, tools, methodology, or subjects since the last review of your protocol? ( ) Yes ( ) No

4. Have any unexpected or adverse developments or problems occurred during the course of this research?
   ( ) Yes ( ) No

   If yes, please give details on reverse side or attach a separate sheet.

Signature of Principal Investigator/Faculty Supervisor: Catherine Havens

Date: 5/23/2012

Renewal Approved By: John Kasowski, Chair, IRB

Date: 5/30/12
APPENDIX H

Sample Transcript

Statements coded as examples of “Need for Hands-On Experience”

(excerpt from Weft QDA output)

Frances @ Gamma Transcript [116-350]
People coming out with their degree tend to think that they know it all, and that there’s nothing to learn in a sense. They want to use the theory that they learned in college, and there’s nothing wrong with the theory that you learn.

Frances @ Gamma Transcript [4941-5287]
To realize that anything that you read in the books, it’s nice but you know what, nothing that you read in the books is real life. You can read about how you should work with a student that maybe has some kind of issue with finances. But you know then you have to take a look at that student.

Frances @ Gamma Transcript [6893-7377]
But you know, what you read in the textbooks is not exactly how it is. It’s nice, to say oh I wish that would work that way, but it doesn’t. You really do kind of have to experience it. And someone that has been around and has seen all kinds of different things, they are not so taken with oh, the student said that my grandmother died. Okay, well maybe your grandmother did die, but I remember someone who had about four or five grandparents and every semester one of them died!

Frances @ Gamma Transcript [36549-36998]
My undergraduate did not prepare me at all, and my graduate program…I would say that in terms of coursework, I don’t necessarily think that it totally prepared me except for the counseling labs that I had where you were asking questions and kind of developing those types of skills. And then I did two internships which actually put me into the mix of doing those types of things, and I had a graduate assistantship, which put me into a third area.

Frances @ Gamma Transcript [28674-29524]
But I also think that I am flexible enough and I catch on rather quickly, and again if you are going to ask questions, you’re going to do those things. Because until you actually start advising or sitting in with students, you can watch and you can read, but that’s not going to be able to do the job. There are a variety of people that would say that they want some kind of book, but just because you read something in a book that doesn’t make you a good advisor. You’re only a good advisor once you start doing it. But I’ve always been happy with that kind.

Jillian @ Beta Transcript [42751-43362]
We bring it up in training, but until you are in that situation you don’t know. Because the most innocuous appointment can go really bad, really fast so we train it on a more general level than specific. That one’s never gonna leave. It probably changed me at that time, and it was probably a permanent change. Up to that point, all that I had had was book learning on
that kind of thing because in my Master’s program we had three practicums, we had to run groups, we had individual clients, we were videotaped, but we were always working on someone else’s license. And they never gave us the juicy ones.

Jillian @ Beta Transcript [73088-73595]  
Now, my whole point in all of this is very simple; I don’t think you train for 85 hours and then it’s all over and these people are somehow experienced experts at advising. I think that lots of what we train is trained in a vacuum. There’s no practice for it, other than simple exercises I’ve come up with, but again it’s not a real person sitting in front of you. We do role playing, but again that person playing the student is an advisor, so there’s something very artificial about a lot of all of this.

Jillian @ Beta Transcript [19365-19476]  
so again this isn’t something that you get trained on so much as you get experience with and you have to learn.

Lucy @ Gamma Transcript [37251-37458]  
And I think even if, a lot of times you have that training, even if you’ve taken a book class in that, I still think that when it presents itself, you are still uncomfortable dealing with it, you really are.

Richard @ Alpha Transcript [13772-14072]  
Um, I don’t think…the student development theory class that I took I think did help, um, but has my formal education really greatly impacted or really prepared me to be an effective advisor? No, I don’t think so. I don’t think so at all.

Richard @ Alpha Transcript [37654-37842]  
So the formal academic training can take you so far, but eventually I end up learning a lot more from my classmates, people who work here in the office and in different offices around Alpha.

Robert @ Alpha Transcript [9930-10886]  
In my masters and doctorate programs, they were in higher ed, so you studied demographics, we also studied adult students, their tendencies. It was interesting because a lot of my colleagues in grad school were interested and they wanted to work with adult students and transfer students and I wasn’t interested at all. Transfer students, they go to ten colleges, they got all kinds of issues, they don’t tell you about half the colleges, you find out later and then you see their grades and you know why they didn’t tell you about them. They’re nothing but problems. I’d rather work with high school students, directly out of high school, motivated, don’t have all of these issues they just need to grow up. And I get to a college and that’s all I’m working with is adult students almost. So yeah my education really prepared me and because I knew theoretically how students were, and then I learned practically how it applied and how factual it was.