Community College Advising Coordinators: A Perspective from Middle Management

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This exploratory phenomenological study examines how community college advising coordinators describe their experiences influencing advising practices and policies on their campuses as middle managers. This study was conducted to address the lack of empirical research into community college advising coordinators' perceptions of the institutional and administrative challenges they face in influencing or changing institutional advising practices and policies. Thirteen advising coordinators from 13 different community colleges within two undisclosed northeastern states participated in this study. The study addressed two research questions: (a) How do community college advising coordinators describe their experiences influencing advising practices and policies on their campuses? and (b) Do community college advising coordinators feel they can meet the expectations of senior management given their level of institutional influence surrounding advising? The study found that in influencing or changing institutional advising practices and policies, administrative staff and faculty advisers often serve as barriers for community college advising coordinators. Also, advising coordinators face administrative and logistical barriers associated with institutional action that transcends the scope and direct oversight of their positions as middle managers. Most advising coordinators have mixed feelings about their ability to meet senior management expectations or felt these expectations were unrealistic given their score of responsibilities and oversight. The significance of this research lies with its emphasis on community college advising coordinators which is an under-researched topic within the advising literature.

Keywords: *academic advising, community college, advising coordinator, advising policy, advising practice*

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the fall of 2016, 5.9 million students were enrolled in two-year public institutions (NCES, 2017), amounting to almost 36% of the total undergraduate student population in the United States (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017). However, students at two-year public institutions are struggling to persist and graduate, with only 60% continuing on to their next academic year (Shapiro et al., 2016). Further, only 39% of students who start at a two-year public institution earn an educational credential within six years (Shapiro et al., 2016). Consequently, the literature has been advocating for a stronger focus on academic advising services to support students during their educational tenure (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Drake, 2011; Garing, 1993, Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005).

However, community colleges often encounter institutional and administrative challenges in providing academic advising services to students, including the institution's organizational structure, advising model, and delivery of academic advising services (Habley, 1983; Hines, Krause, & Endieveri, 1980; Vallandingham, 2008). Historically, the responsibility of this institutional coordination has been left to one person—the advising coordinator—who is often a member of middle management with limited institutional oversight (Kramer, 1981). Given the inherent complexity of coordinating advising services and the broad responsibilities of the advising coordinator, an exploration into how community college advising coordinators describe their experiences influencing advising practices and policies on their campuses is warranted

Literature Review

It is difficult to categorize a middle manager within higher education because different institutions encompass multiple positions with relative power and influence within the organization (Kraus, 1983). However, Kallenberg (2015) explained that there are two different general types of middle managers that exist within postsecondary institutions. Those middle managers are administrative and academic middle managers (Kallenberg, 2015). These academic and administrative middle managers are coordinators, directors of departments, or deans who deal most often with educational support and rarely participate in formal research (Kallenberg, 2015; Marshall, 2012; Scott, 1979b). Wayne-Young (2007) described two different middle management paths which consist of an individual transitioning into middle management from an entry-level position within the institution or someone who is transplanted into a mid-level manager role from outside the institution.

Middle managers are salaried career administrators who most often do not come from faculty ranks (Fugazzotto, 2009) but have some degree of administrative or executive authority within the institution (Fugazzotto, 2009; Kraus, 1983). Because middle managers rarely come from faculty, they can sometimes have little appreciation for the role of faculty, and this can be attributed to the limited relations that can exist between middle management and faculty (Scott, 1979a). Middle managers most often do not hold faculty status within the institution and often are the first group of administrators considered for cuts in budget shortfalls (Scott, 1975).

The advising coordinator is an administrative role that is largely responsible for coordinating advising services on a college campus (Kramer, 1981). The community college advising coordinator often supervises pro-

fessional staff in an advising center but has little authority over faculty advisers. Abel (1978) mentioned that one of the most valuable middle managers is the advising coordinator, who integrates student development concepts throughout an institution. Conversely, Kramer (1981) described the middle manager role as a "low profile position" with little authority over faculty and minimal influence within the organization. These often conflicting descriptions of middle managers, a role to which most advising coordinators are classified, are reflected in most research surrounding middle management within higher education (Ackerman, 2007; De Boer, Goedegebuure, & Meek, 2010; Franken et al., 2015; Hancock & Hellawell, 2003; Kallenburg, 2007, 2015; Kraus, 1983; Scott, 1979a, 1979b; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1996).

Role of the Advising Coordinator

The advising coordinator needs to be aware of the entire advising system within the institution, including curriculum and institutional changes that affect the quality and output of advising (Arndt, 1987; Tukey, 1996). The original responsibilities of the advising coordinator are to meet with students for advising, work with faculty on matters of advising, and attend administrative meetings as required by the institution (Kramer, 1981; Spencer, Peterson, & Kramer, 1982). However, the roles and responsibilities of the advising coordinator may be inherently different depending on the type of institution or may have evolved due to the complexity and advising needs of postsecondary institutions (Grites, 2008).

For example, the advising coordinator at a four-year public institution is often responsible for hiring staff, campus-wide training of advisers, handling advising budgets, supervising and evaluating staff, and coordinating advising technology (Borns, 2007; Davis, 2008). The advising administrator at a four-year private institution may not be responsible for overseeing advisers within an institution that has a faculty-only advising model (Christman, 2008). The advising coordinator may only be responsible for professional development of faculty and working with certain student populations, such as undecided students or students on academic probation (Borns, 2007; Christman, 2008). At a two-year public institution, the advising coordinator may have similar responsibilities to those of the advising coordinator at a four-year public institution, such as managing staff and budgets in addition to managing the complexities of serving a large student population who are often underprepared and underrepresented in postsecondary education (Vallandingham, 2008).

Faculty Interaction

The advising coordinator must have a general understanding of the institution and its faculty, including establishing personal relationships within each faculty and understanding the curriculum for each of the institution's majors (Kramer, 1981). Often, the advising coordinator serves as a "politician" within the institution, serving as a strategic coordinator and consultant for institutional advising issues while balancing the personal interests of faculty and the administration (Kramer, 1985). The advising coordinator is responsible for creating an environment within the institution that is conducive to learning about advising, involving establishing relationships across campus with faculty and other institutional representation (Kramer, 1986; Vallandingham, 2008).

Leadership

The leadership style of the advising coordinator may be fluid, as the advising coordinator interacts with different institutional stakeholders with different agendas surrounding academic advising (Kramer, 1985). The advising coordinator must have college-wide legitimacy from faculty, otherwise they may have little influence in advising on institutional policy and culture (Hines, 1981). The advising coordinator must encourage faculty to be engaged in professional development around advising since advising is a vital component and function of supporting the institutional mission (Kramer, 1985). Tuttle (2000) encouraged advising coordinators to obtain a doctoral degree to further legitimize their status among faculty since most advising coordinators directly work with faculty on a daily basis.

Challenges Faced by the Advising Coordinator

In fulfilling their roles at postsecondary institutions, the advising coordinator may encounter several administrative and institutional challenges (Christman, 2008; Davis, 2008; Hines, 1981; Kramer, 1981, 1985, 1986; Tromley & Holmes, 1981; Tukey, 1996; Vallandingham, 2008) that are unique compared with most traditional four-year public and private colleges and universities (Vallandingham, 2008). For example, the general mission of community colleges is to be an open-access public higher education institution that provides affordable educational services to a wide range of traditional and nontraditional students (Bailey & Morest, 2006; Vallandingham, 2008). Thus, community college advising coordinators must be conscious of the advising needs of nontraditional student populations (Seppanen, 1981) and be able to facilitate appropriate institutional support (i.e., trained advising personnel, institutional resource allocation,

and professional development and training for faculty advisers; Vallandingham, 2008).

In the community college setting, the administrative function of the advising coordinator usually resides in middle management, providing further challenges to the advising coordinator (Kramer, 1984; Vallandingham, 2008). Several institutional advising challenges can exist, such as fragmented advising services and oversight, an unclear single point of contact for advising within the advising center, and issues with information dissemination regarding curriculum and policy changes (Karp, 2013; Karp & Stacey, 2013). Additionally, the reporting lines for advising may be housed within academic affairs, student affairs, or shared between both academic divisions (Vallandingham, 2008). As a middle manager in higher education, the advising coordinator may be faced with institutional challenges surrounding advising, such as limited institutional authority with handling advising issues unilaterally. Thus, the role of the advising coordinator represents one that is frustrating and complicated given the need for coordinated advising (Kramer, 1981). Given the inherent complexity of coordinating advising services and the broad responsibilities of the advising coordinator, an exploration into how community college advising coordinators describe their experiences influencing advising practices and policies on their campuses is warranted. Little empirical research has focused specifically on community college advising coordinators or the direct institutional and administrative challenges they may face. This study attempted to fill that gap.

Methods

Research Design

The qualitative research approach for this study was an exploratory phenomenological design. A phenomenological design was chosen to examine the common workplace experiences of community college advising coordinators as they describe their experiences influencing advising practices and policies on their campuses. An exploratory approach was considered most appropriate since limited empirical research exists in this area.

Qualitative research is an approach for "exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups" (Creswell, 2014 p.4), and phenomenologists often believe that understanding and meaning in phenomenological research is based on the personal and life experiences of the individual (Byrne, 2001; Lester, 1999). Researchers who employ a phe-

nomenological research design attempt to understand and highlight the meaning of individuals' experiences within a common or shared setting, specifically from their individual perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lester, 1999; Moustakas, 1994; Priest, 2002). This process involves the research participants returning to their lived experiences through a guided self-reflection initiated by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). For this study, the research participants provided a comprehensive description of their lived experiences, and the researcher reduced each of these experiences to something universal that was then described using interpretative analysis (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological design was considered most appropriate for this study given the researcher's interest in understanding the shared unique workplace experiences of community college advising coordinators as they reflect upon their experiences influencing advising practices and policies on their campuses.

Research Participants

In phenomenological research, the selection of participants must share a common experience (Cresswell, 2014). Therefore, the research participants included in the study met the following criteria: (a) a currently employed advising coordinator at a public community college in one of two undisclosed northeast states, (b) an advising coordinator with middle management membership within their postsecondary institution, and (c) an individual holding the administrative title of advising coordinator or advising director. To be a member of middle management, the advising coordinator oftentimes occupies an institutional status that is below the position of dean but leads an academic or administrative department. This definition of a middle manager is consistent within the literature as adopted by Floyd (2016), Marshall (2012), Pepper and Giles (2015), and Preston and Price (2012). However, for this study, several participants recruited to this study were responsible for coordinating advising services on their campus and held the administrative title of dean. Since these participants were directly responsible for coordinating advising services, they were not excluded from the study. The researcher did not disclose the identified states to preserve the confidentiality of the research participants.

As mentioned previously, the advising coordinator is a member of middle management with broad responsibility over the coordination and quality of advising services on a college campus (Kramer, 1981). Thus, an advising coordinator responsible for a small subset of the student population, such as an urban education program, Trio Student Support Services

program, or within a subdivision of the college, did not qualify for this study.

Purposeful sampling is important in phenomenological research because it is essential to ensure that the research participants are directly associated with the researcher's interest of study (Creswell, 2013). According to Maxwell (2013), purposeful sampling enables the researcher to achieve the necessary representativeness of individuals for the study and deliberately select individuals who meet the study's criteria. The researcher used institutional websites and administrative directories to identify advising coordinators at each of the community colleges within the two undisclosed states who were directly responsible for coordinating institutional advising services. Once a potential research participant was identified by the researcher, the researcher sent a recruitment email to each research participant. As necessary, the researcher verified the research participants were members of middle management by directly inquiring about their roles at their institutions. A total of 13 participants from two northeastern states agreed to participate in this study. The two undisclosed northeastern states were intentional due to travel restrictions since the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews in person at their specific locations.

Of the total research participants (n = 13), three held the title of "dean." The remaining 10 were considered "directors," one of whom held an interim title while the remaining nine were considered permanent in their positions. Only one participant held a "dean of students" job title that was significantly different than the remaining participants, as this participant was also responsible for overseeing services beyond the traditional advising and transfer spectrum such as student activities and student conduct. Finally, one research participant held a dual role of managing both academic advising services and student counseling. Official job titles were not listed to preserve the confidentiality of research participants.

Data Collection

The data for this study included qualitative interview data gathered through a semi-structured interview process. This was considered appropriate for both phenomenological research designs (Aurini, Heath, & Howells, 2016) and for the researcher's level of interest in the essence and meaning of the research participants' lived workplace experiences—a necessary component of phenomenological research (Lichtman, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). A semi-structured interview protocol involves an open-ended interview that encourages research participants to elaborate

on the interview questions and allows for follow-up questions at the interviewer's discretion (Creswell, 2013). The semi-structured interview process allowed the researcher to alter or ask additional questions depending on the nature of the interview (Lichtman, 2013). Interviews were conducted over a three-month period at each advising coordinator's community college.

Data Analysis Procedures

After the interview data were collected, transcribed, and verified for accuracy, it was analyzed using coding to identify common themes as described by Creswell (2013). These data analysis procedures were followed as recommended by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013). The specific steps used to identify, organize, and evaluate significant statements by the research participants were similar to those presented in Creswell (2013) and Giorgi, Giogri, and Morley (2012), and are as follows:

1. The interview transcripts were first read to obtain an initial impression of the responses. The researcher took reflective notes throughout this process.
2. The researcher open coded and highlighted key statements from each transcript.
3. A list of significant statements was produced from all the interview transcripts and was organized according to the interview questions.
4. The researcher then grouped the list of significant statements into larger themes, referred to by Creswell (2013) and Giorgi, Giogri, and Morley (2012) as "meaning units."
5. The transcripts were then re-read using an established coding scheme to examine if any uncovered themes were missed by the researcher.

To capture the essence of the experience, which is associated with phenomenological research, the researcher included rich narrative statements in the findings section of the study (Moustakas, 1994).

Findings

Administrative staff and faculty advisors often serve as initial barriers for community college advising coordinators in their efforts to influence or change advising-related policies and practices on their campuses.

Overall, most participants (n = 10) described minor or clear barriers to influencing or changing advising-related policies and practices at their institutions. One major administrative and logistical barrier included

their interaction with other supervisors, faculty, and staff members. Although it is not uncommon in a workplace setting for administrators to encounter challenges when discussions arise regarding policy and practice, this specific finding is important given the historical challenges faced by advising coordinators (Christman, 2008; Davis, 2008; Hines, 1981; Kramer, 1981, 1985, 1986; Tromley & Holmes, 1981; Tukey, 1996; Vallandingham, 2008). For example, of her experience, Participant B, a director at her college, said:

> I think one of the barriers for me is that if you have administrators that do not understand the role of an advising center… They just don't understand… we can't just say, "Oh! Let's just do this or change this." If you do that, then there's a trickledown effect for students and it's my job to make them understand. If they're going to try and make changes, it may not be the right thing because they don't understand how a change of something may affect other things (discussion on curriculum). (Participant B)

Another example is from Participant F, a director at her institution, who spoke of an anticipated barrier she expected following the implementation of a new academic policy requiring all incoming students to be advised by professional advisers in the advising center:

> Yes, I do think there are going to be barriers with other staff and faculty. I don't think people (faculty and academic deans) are ready for this change. And like I said, I don't think that people believe in the expertise that we have to be able to advise students. I think that in the grand scheme, yes, this decision will impact student success because I think first-year students that go right to the faculty… their experience is just different than when you're with a professional adviser. The advising (with a professional adviser) is more hands-on. You're reaching out to students more and you're teaching them. So I do think it impacts student success. (Participant F)

A small number of participants in this study who held the administrative title of "dean" encountered fewer administrative and logistical barriers in influencing or changing advising-related policies and practices on their campuses. This may be due to their elevated status and supervisory oversight. For example, Participant J, a director at her institution, described her working relationship with the other deans on her campus and how, together, they worked to strongly influence advising practices:

> It is actually a great interaction. They (the academic deans) are very clever and they want to be helpful in any way they can. You know, I think at the end of the day, the goal for us is the same as the goal for

> them. We want to make these students successful and so, they are more than willing to work with me to try and implement new ways of getting this proactive advising approach implemented. There are six Academic Deans here that I work with on a regular basis and they are all very supportive and encouraging. (Participant J)

Participant A, a dean at her college, described a mandatory advising training program for all faculty that was a central focus of the hiring process. Due to her elevated status among the other deans on campus, she spoke of her strong initial influence in advising the practices of new advisers:

> I also have a very strong relationship with faculty on campus because part of my role is I run a 12-week orientation and training/training with faculty. Once they're here, the first semester they're with the Dean of Professional Development learning how to manage their classrooms. In the spring, they spend 12 weeks with me. Three hours a week. Their commitment through their contract is that they will do advising three hours per week. So those three hours are spent with me in lieu of them being assigned advisees the first year. So we review policies, procedures, and advising techniques. (Participant A)

However, not all deans who participated in this study experienced the same level of influence over advising practices. Participant E, a dean at her institution, described her reporting structure and organizational positioning as allowing for more effective and direct communication about advising within her institution. However, there remained limitations as described here:

> An advantage for our institution is that all of our professional staff advisers either report directly to me or report to a director or an associate dean who reports to me. So, I have easy direct communication with those groups of people as well. And because we're small it really does help. However, some of the challenges that we face are not only do I not have direct authority over evaluating and giving feedback around advising to faculty, but our academic deans, to a certain degree, don't have a formal mechanism either. I do certainly give feedback when a student is struggling with their adviser. If that doesn't work well with their adviser for whatever reason, a request is put for a new adviser. (Participant E)

These descriptions suggest that participants with the administrative title of "dean" who coordinate advising services may encounter fewer administrative or logistical issues due to their frequent interaction with

campus administrators who have the ability to influence or change institutional policies that intersect with advising, or those who have direct supervisory oversight over other institutional advising staff. This may be because the advising coordinators at the "director" level may not have the level of institutional influence to directly change the advising practices culture of a department or may not frequently interact with other mid- to high-level managers in settings in which major institutional policy changes around advising may occur. This analysis does not imply that advising coordinators who are at the director level do not interact with mid- to high-level managers, but that those interactions may not be in a formal setting to address institutional advising policy change or institutional advising practices.

The administrative and logistical barriers that community college advising coordinators face in influencing or changing institutional advising practices may be associated with institutional action that transcends the scope and direct oversight of their positions as middle managers.

Within fragmented institutions with high levels of autonomy between academic departments, advising services are often embedded within divisions or departments outside the advising coordinator's control. This can lead to challenges for the advising coordinator to ensure uniformity in advising practices across their campus (Christman, 2008; Trombley & Hines, 1981). For example, Participant D, a director at her college, described in detail her frustrating experience with working collaboratively under a Title III Grant:

> So the issue we're running into now is, so, at one point, under our Title III Grant, and there's been a lot of transition within that grant, as far as having a faculty presence with advising, which is nonexistent at this point. This means there's nobody really taking the lead on the faculty side of doing it. So right now, I know it's an issue… now it's important, because again, faculty and professional advisers do not advise the same, it's very clear. It happens completely differently. And I think our biggest issue is really getting more of a team approach … and there's not much I can specifically do in my role. (Participant D)

Most advising coordinators (n = 8) mentioned they attempted to personally communicate with other institutional supervisors who oversee advising services outside the advising coordinators' oversight to ensure that those advisers are engaging in their personal philosophical approach to academic advising. These advising coordinators used campus adviser training as their method to ensure advisers who they did not directly

supervise were engaging in their philosophical approach to advising. One interesting finding from this study was that several advising coordinators directly mentioned they had little to no communication with other advisers and supervisors regarding advising practices. Participant F shared her frustration here about other faculty members:

> I don't communicate with them honestly because right now, I don't feel like it's my fight to have. You are going to like advising or not. I think the approach that I take is that the more faculty that we can involve that are really committed to it, that can share that with other faculty, that's how we bring them in. I'm not going to be able to do it because when it comes down to it… I'm not a faculty member. Yeah… I have a title but I'm just an adviser to them… I don't think they look at my role as "authority."

Participant C, a director at her college, also shared a disheartening account regarding her lack of interaction with faculty advisers when she said:

> The faculty that are hesitant to learning new advising practices, we just don't see them. There's just no interaction. Because again, with workshops, or any interaction that I would have with them in that type of capacity, they can just choose not to come, so I just don't see them. You know what I mean… and it's frustrating because I think if everyone realized the positive impact they could have by just doing a few things it would make a huge difference in our student success. So it's frustrating… I can't make anyone attend. (Participant C)

Several advising coordinators ($n = 6$) mentioned that most advisers at their institution who they did not supervise were only somewhat open to learning about new advising practices. For example, Participant M, a director at her institution, reflected on her frustration regarding her inability to change the advising practices of some of her faculty:

> I think it's important for people to understand the benefit of adopting these practices and the disservice they do to students if they don't. It's really educating faculty about what advising is; academic advising is not scheduling. It's not just registering for classes; it's taking all factors into consideration. Its building an educational plan that's going to lead them towards their career goals whether that be when they graduate or go on to transfer and then graduate into their careers. Are there childcare issues? Is it more appropriate for day or evening courses because you work full time? Are you working two jobs? It is all those conversations built into that academic advising

> conversation and really getting to know who your advisee is and investing that time. I can't ensure this is happening. (Participant M)

In a similar account concerning her frustration over not being able to change or require advisers to engage in proactive advising practices, Participant C said:

> So if there's someone who is very resistant, I usually try to have a conversation, one-on-one. If that's not going anywhere, then I may have to have a conversation in a team environment. But, again, if the accountability is not there, there's really nothing that, you know, I can do… You know, that's not a part of my supervisory responsibilities, so I can't really do anything. (Participant C)

Participant D mentioned her lack of general supervision over advising services as a major issue in influencing institutional advising practices:

> We have a campus that has 100 advisers on it, 19 of them report to me. I don't believe that I'm in a position to be able to speak towards—effectively towards our campus-wide advising, engagement, and evaluation assessment, and data, and outcomes. I can't do that alone when 20% of the advising staff on our campus reports to me. (Participant D)

Finally, Participant F elaborated on how her office cannot solve the retention issue on their campus alone when she stated:

> I think that we're asking the same questions that we've been asking for a long time. I honestly think that we already have a lot of the answers. I think it's just coming up with the right way and if you only have a few people that get it and understand and are willing to change, but not everybody else is, to me it doesn't matter how much you do. If the whole institution isn't prepared to make the change and have a different mindset, one department, or even myself, is not going to be able to have that impact on retention overall. (Participant F)

In this study, several community college advising coordinators encountered difficulties influencing or changing institutional advising practices at their institutions in part due to the advising coordinator's lack of institutional oversight regarding advising services. This finding is consistent with previous research regarding advising coordinators but expands on the findings of previous research into community college advising coordinators.

Most advising coordinators either had mixed feelings about their ability to meet senior management expectations or felt the expectations set by senior management were unrealistic "given their score of responsibilities and oversight."

Importantly, advising coordinators who have difficulties with influencing or changing advising-related policies and practices at their institutions may feel they struggle to meet the expectations of their senior managers. This notion is evident in this study. A total of eight participants mentioned that retention is a major expectation from senior management. Some participants (n = 3) also included increasing student graduation rates as a senior management expectation and often included graduation rates alongside their responsibilities for retention in their responses. Evaluation and assessment of advising services and technology was only discussed by three participants and only three participants directly mentioned that senior management expected them to ensure consistent advising services to students. Additionally, only three participants mentioned that either onboarding new students or registering students was considered a major expectation from senior management. Finally, one participant mentioned that senior management expected them to be the voice for their students.

Only four participants explicitly mentioned that expectations set by senior management were realistic. This conclusion was associated with a number of factors. However, one major factor was leadership. For example, Participant L, an interim director, attributed her ability to meet senior leadership expectations was by listening to the needs of her department:

> So, one of the things that we did was to continuously talk about the difficulties of having an advising center that is supposed to have very specific functions. And so, in this restructuring process… we feel like the management was able to hear us and build in a second level of leadership and that's the assistant director position… I believe management was able to hear what we've been saying in terms of the way the visions for this area. (Participant L)

A total of four participants communicated neutral or mixed responses regarding their ability to meet senior management expectations, such as Participant I, a director at her college, who mentioned her experience of a past conversation with her president:

> You know we are doing the best we can. I used this analogy once to my President. I was in his office and I said, "Yeah every day it feels like I am swimming against the current" and he said, "You should never feel like that." I said, "That's what advising is here." What do I have to lose? He needs to know. I said, "I have all these great ideas

> and these plans but we can't execute them because we spend too much time, just being reactive." (Participant I)

Another mixed response was from Participant C who discussed her role with retention by leading with a lighthearted comment before moving to a more accurate depiction of the situation:

> I think they expect that I will magically get our retention to 100%… I don't think that the expectations our current administration have are unrealistic in terms of let's be working to progress and move forward and all that. I think what is unrealistic is there's a disconnect, I think, between how much I'm doing… I just can't do it all. (Participant C)

Several participants (n = 5) mentioned that expectations set by senior management were generally unrealistic and this was linked to a number of factors. For example, in managing her many responsibilities and the challenges of meeting expectations, Participant B described:

> You know I am only one person… I don't have an assistant director, so I am the only non-unit professional. The role I play here not only supporting the academic side of the house and the faculty with our divisional advisers along with our advising reimagine initiative and working with admissions and financial aid. And… It's a lot! It's a lot to be had and I don't have a person that can do the supervising. I'm working on the schedule for a full day just, you know, who's calling out and timing when open registration comes and walk-ins and people coming from testing. Sometimes it's a little overwhelming but it's the nature of the beast. (Participant B)

Participant D mentioned her different roles and lack of general supervision over advising services to being unable to generally meet the expectations of senior management:

> Those expectations, I think are, unrealistic, primarily because my role has two roles. If I was only the director of advising, it might feel more manageable, I'm not. So I can't speak to what that would feel like. But I have a sense that it would probably feel more manageable. That's the first sort of concern that I have, but secondarily, when we have a campus that has 100 advisers on it, 19 of them report to me. I don't believe that I'm in a position to be able to speak towards our campus-wide advising, engagement, evaluation, assessment, data, and outcomes. I can't do that alone when 20% of the advising staff on our campus reports to me. (Participant D)

Participant F elaborated on how her office cannot solve the retention issue on their campus alone when she said:

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Finally, Participant K, a director at his college, mentioned the scope his responsibilities and lack of support staff as playing a role in not being able to meet expectations:

> I'll be honest with you… I don't know whom else you've talked to, but I know it's (meeting senior expectations) a big factor a lot of directors of advising have transitioned out… I by far have the most thorough job description because of all the stuff I talked about earlier. The academic mapping, which is curriculum sheets, a lot of advising staffs don't do that they fold onto me, and then we got rid of the dean of advising who did advising assignments for 5500 students. It's all falling kind of on me. (Participant K)

Since middle management is often constricted by their traditional roles in their institutions, they are held increasingly accountable for outcomes and objectives over which they sometimes have little control (Gallos, 2002). Often, community college advising coordinators are tasked with increasing retention, graduation rates, and changing the advising practices of an institution with little institutional control over the mechanisms through which this could be accomplished. In this study, several community college advising coordinators encountered difficulties influencing or changing institutional advising practices at their institutions. This finding was associated with advising coordinators' lack of institutional oversight regarding advising services and is consistent with previous research regarding advising coordinators.

Limitations of the Study

There are strengths and limitations to both qualitative and qualitative research (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007), and the responsibility of the researcher is to clarify and address any limitations within their research.

There are at least two potential limitations to this qualitative research study that are addressed below.

First, the sample size for this study was small with (13) participants from (13) different community colleges. Boddy (2016) explained that what constitutes an appropriate sample size in qualitative research is dependent on the context and scientific paradigm of the research study. Sample size is often a topic of discussion in phenomenological research (Lester, 1999) and specifically what phenomenon is being examined. Englander (2012) explained that in phenomenological research, the researcher is inherently interested in the essence of the experience and not simply how many people have experienced the phenomenon. Since the researcher's focus was on the experience of participants and since the study was exploratory in nature, the main focus was not on achieving a specific sampling size but on ensuring each research participant had experienced the workplace phenomenon being studied.

A second limitation was that although all research participants voluntarily participated in the study, there was no guarantee that all participants were open about their experiences. There are many factors that contribute to the level of openness that each research participant may have with the researcher, including the sensitivity of the phenomenon being studied or the confidentiality of what is being revealed to the researcher. Unfortunately, the researcher cannot control for many factors that inhibit openness among each research participant.

Discussion

Community college advising coordinators have unique roles within higher education that are often constricted by their organizational positioning, the limitations of their institutional advising models, and the cooperation of faculty, staff, and leadership. These factors play a significant role in how community college advising coordinators address the administrative, logistical, and personal needs of the students they serve. These factors can also have a significant effect on student retention and success since advising coordinators are responsible for student services, which is so closely linked to student success.

Two major conclusions can be drawn from this research. First, given the limited scope of authority and control over advising services as middle managers, community college advising coordinators may have trouble meeting the expectations of senior management if those expectations require institutional coordination that transcends the scope and direct responsibilities of their positions. Since middle management is often con-

stricted by their traditional roles within their institutions, they are held increasingly accountable for outcomes and objectives over which they sometimes have little control (Gallos, 2002). Often, community college advising coordinators are tasked with increasing retention and graduation rates with little institutional control over the mechanisms to accomplish this. Several participants in this study described expectations set from senior management which could not be accomplished due to their restricted roles and oversight within their institutions. Although this finding is not new to the middle management literature, this conclusion adds to the advising scholarship which specifically focuses on community college advising coordinators.

Secondly, community college advising coordinators who have an elevated role within the institution's organizational structure (e.g., "dean") are likely to encounter fewer administrative and logistical issues with the coordination of advising services on their campuses due to their increased institutional status and supervisory oversight. This conclusion adds new insight to the scholarship on community college advising coordinators. Kramer (1981) described the role of an advising coordinator as a "low profile position" with little authority over faculty and minimal influence within the organization. Although that depiction does not apply to all advising coordinators today, the findings from this study suggest that elements of this condition still exist.

Conclusion

The findings from this research elaborate further on findings reported by Kramer (1985) and Vallandingham (2008), who reported that advising coordinators often must work as "politicians" within an institution, and serve as strategic coordinators, consultants, and advocates for institutional advising issues while balancing the personal interests of faculty and the administration. Additionally, this research supplements the literature regarding the administrative and institutional challenges that advising coordinators face as middle managers (Christman, 2008; Davis, 2008; Hines, 1981; Kramer, 1981, 1985, 1986; Tromley & Holmes, 1981; Tukey, 1996; Vallandingham, 2008) by specifically focusing on community college advising coordinators. The advising literature on the administrative and institutional challenges advising coordinators face is strongly focused on advising coordinators who are affiliated with four-year colleges and universities. Little research has focused specifically on community college advising coordinators or the direct institutional and administrative challenges they face. This study attempted to fill that gap in the literature.

With state and federal initiatives moving from enrollment-based priorities to retention- and completion-centered initiatives, the higher education community can no longer refuse to acknowledge the logistical and administrative issues that community college advising coordinators are facing in ensuring that students receive consistent and effective advising services. This study has attempted to highlight some of the issues facing community college advising coordinators as they attempt to influence advising practices and policies on their campuses. However, further research is required to examine the roles of community college advising coordinators and how they attempt to influence institutional advising practices and policies.

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