

## Differences in Student Satisfaction with Academic Advising by Ethnicity/Race and GPA at Community Colleges

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which differences were present between male and female community college students in their satisfaction with academic advising as a function of their ethnicity/race and GPA. Participants in this study were students enrolled in randomly selected credit-bearing courses in community colleges during the 2005 to the 2016 academic years who had completed the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. Inferential statistical analyses of four survey items revealed that the majority of students surveyed were not satisfied with the advising services provided by their community colleges. Black students most frequently reported that they were not satisfied. Students who were academically successful, as well as students who were not academically successful, most frequently reported that they were very satisfied with academic advising services. Students who were moderately academically successful most frequently reported that they were not at all satisfied with academic advising services. Implications for advising administrators and directions for further research are addressed.*

**Keywords:** *academic advising, community college students, satisfaction, achievement, persistence, retention*

### INTRODUCTION

By 2020, 65% of all jobs will require applicants to possess some form of higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). However, students enrolled in 2-year institutions, who represented 40% of total national enrollment as of fall of 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), might be less likely to obtain a postsecondary degree than students enrolled in 4-year institutions. Between the 2012-13 and the 2013-14 academic years, 6-year graduation rates remained largely stagnant for students enrolled in 4-year institutions whereas 3-year graduation rates actually decreased for students enrolled in 2-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Many factors, including the value of academic advising services, related to the success of students in all types of institutions have been examined to varying degrees. Concerning such services, evidence exists regarding the ways in which academic advising is provided can promote student satisfaction (Allen, Smith, & Muehleck, 2014; Barbuto, Story, Fritz, & Schinstock, 2011; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Vianden & Barlow, 2015; Workman, 2015),

achievement (Erlach & Russ-Eft, 2013; Kot, 2014; Ryan, 2013; Tovar, 2015), persistence (Ellis, 2014; Kot, 2014; Ryan, 2013; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013; Tovar, 2015), and retention to graduation (Price & Tovar, 2014; Schwebel, Walburn, Klyce, & Jerrolds, 2012).

In addition, although the credentials and approaches of academic advisors can vary greatly (Self, 2008), student engagement represents a common purpose for all advisors (Aiken-Wisniewski, Johnson, Larson, & Barkemeyer, 2015). Regarding literature specific to the provision of academic advising to community college students, student access to supportive and trustworthy advisors with whom they can connect seems to matter.

Although Martin, Galentino, and Townsend (2014) reported that the community college graduates in their study infrequently took advantage of academic support services (including advising), the use of such services by community college students has been associated with increased student engagement (Price & Tovar, 2014; Saenz et al., 2011). More specifically, Orozco, Alvarez, and Gutkin (2010) noted that their study participants consistently reported the desire for institutional

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staff (including advisors) who encouraged them to achieve, and the students interviewed by Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, and Pino (2016) confirmed that intrusive advising support was beneficial to them and that such support should be mandated for all new college students. Museus and Ravello (2010) determined that students of color attending predominantly White institutions particularly appreciated contact with advisors who demonstrated dedication to their academic success and addressed their issues holistically (i.e., assisted with matters beyond academic by providing referrals to appropriate resources). Tovar (2015) discovered that contact with academic counselors had a positive influence on Latino/a students' academic achievement and resolve to persist in college. In addition, Packard and Jeffers (2013) confirmed that the benefits of supportive academic advisors extended to students interested in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields and to students who intended to transfer to 4-year institutions.

A specific way advisors supported community college students was by demonstrating their trustworthiness with regard to supplying accurate information. Students in STEM fields and intending to transfer emphasized that the degree of accuracy of the information they received greatly affected their progress toward their goal, with inaccurate information received from advisors during their first semester being particularly detrimental to timely progress (Packard & Jeffers, 2013). Allen, Smith, and Muehleck (2013) also discovered that students who intended to transfer to 4-year institutions valued having access to knowledgeable advisors to help them select appropriate coursework. Moreover, Allen et al. (2014) noted that lack of access to accurate information decreased students' satisfaction with academic advising. In a related manner, Zhang (2016) determined that obtaining accurate information from advisors was crucial to the success of international students, for whom inaccurate information can lead to issues with their legal status.

Orozco et al. (2010) highlighted the link between trust and relationships, discovering that community college students appreciated having advisors with whom they could establish a connection, which in turn led to increased trust on the part of students. In addition, Allen et al. (2013) and Packard and Jeffers (2013) confirmed that advisors' establishment of

personal connections with community college students was important to their satisfaction. Students intending to transfer to 4-year institutions valued interactions that demonstrated advisors' personal knowledge of students' characteristics (Allen et al., 2013) and experienced negative emotions (e.g., discouragement) in the absence of a personal connection (Packard & Jeffers, 2013).

Although evidence exists to support the value of academic advising, the effects of advising services remain underanalyzed in general, particularly what is known about their influence on diverse populations of community college students. Community college students value supportive and trustworthy academic advisors with whom they can form personal connections, but not all students access advising services, voice their perceptions, or enjoy similar benefits. White and Asian students were more likely to use advising services and to critique them than were Latino/a, African American, and Native American students (Orozco et al., 2010). In addition, female students tended to be more engaged in participating in support services than male students (Saenz et al., 2011), and female students who engaged in academic support services were more likely to persist from semester to semester (Windham, Rehfuss, Williams, Pugh, & Tincher-Ladner, 2014). Therefore, differences in student characteristics are important to consider; however, relatively few researchers have examined the relationship of ethnicity/race, gender, and GPA with student satisfaction with academic advising.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Job market predictions necessitate the importance of not only enrolling students in postsecondary institutions but also ensuring that they graduate. Although graduation rates have remained largely stagnant for students enrolled in 4-year institutions, graduation rates for students enrolled in 2-year institutions have declined (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Therefore, the economic futures of community college students have become more vulnerable than the economic futures of students enrolled in 4-year institutions.

### Significance of the Study

Among the research studies cited in reference to the broad benefits provided by academic advising services (i.e., satisfaction, achievement,

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persistence, and retention to graduation), only a few studies were specifically related to community college students. Among the researchers who analyzed data on community college students, few considered the effects of ethnicity/race, gender, and GPA on the satisfaction of this study population with academic advising services. Researchers who account for these factors and who use a large dataset representing many students could produce results that would add to the existing empirical literature. The results of such a study could inform administrators of community college advising programs, as well as other higher education leaders interested in factors that contribute to community college student success.

### Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study were twofold. The first purpose was to determine the extent to which differences were present between male and female community college students' satisfaction with academic advising as a function of their ethnicity/race. A second purpose was to determine the degree to which differences were present between male and female community college students' satisfaction with academic advising as a function of their GPA.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) For male community college students, what is the effect of their ethnicity/race on their reported satisfaction with academic advising at their college?; (b) For female community college students, what is the effect of their ethnicity/race on their reported satisfaction with academic advising at their college?; (c) For male community college students, what is the difference in their reported satisfaction with academic advising at their college as a function of their GPA?; and (d) For female community college students, what is the difference in their reported satisfaction with academic advising at their college as a function of their GPA?

## METHOD

### Research Design

A causal comparative research design (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) was used for this study. Causal comparative research is a type of nonexperimental research in which the

researcher examines the relationships between independent and dependent variables (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Because the researcher is unable to manipulate the independent variable(s) or to apply extensive controls for extraneous variables, researchers employing this design can establish only associations between variables and not causal relationships (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

### Participants

Participants in this study were students enrolled in randomly selected credit-bearing courses in community colleges. All students attended CCSSE member institutions, which ranged in number from 193 (in 2006) to 435 (in 2011; Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2017c). Sample sizes varied with institutional size and ranged from 600 to 1,200 students (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2017d).

### Instrument

The CCSSE was created in 2001, and the 38-item version administered from 2005 to 2016 was validated by CCSSE the Center in a study in which researchers investigated the relationship between community college student engagement and outcomes (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2017b). The CCSSE data are managed within the Higher Education Leadership program at The University of Texas, Austin (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2017a). Data corresponding to four survey items (i.e., gender, ethnicity/race, GPA range, and satisfaction with academic advising) were converted into an SPSS data file, and relevant variables were labeled. The independent variables were gender, ethnicity/race, and GPA range, and the dependent variable was student satisfaction with academic advising.

### Definition of Terms

The focus of this study was community college students' satisfaction with academic advising. However, many types of individuals (e.g., faculty) can fulfill the role of academic advisor in an institution of higher education (Self, 2008), and different institutions follow different advising models (King, 2008). Therefore, no standard definition of academic advisor exists.

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), created in 2001, was designed to assess student engagement with

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regard to community colleges (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2017a). Student responses to the item concerning satisfaction with academic advising/planning were used to answer the research questions, and the response choices available were not at all, somewhat, or very. Student responses to the item concerning GPA were also used to answer the research questions, and response choices available were highly successful, successful, moderately successful, and not successful, which corresponded to cumulative institutional GPAs in the A, A- to B, B- to C, and C- and below ranges, respectively. Although seven ethnicity/race choices were available to students, ethnicity/race as reported in the data for this study were Black, White, or Hispanic.

## RESULTS

Regarding the first research question, in which the focus was placed on the effect of ethnicity/race on student satisfaction with academic advising for males, the result was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(4) = 109.34$ ,  $p < .001$ . The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was below small, .05 (Cohen, 1988).

As revealed in Table 1, the vast majority of male students surveyed were not at all satisfied with academic advising services. However, Black males reported most frequently that they were not at all satisfied with the academic advising provided, and the greatest disparity was noted between Black males and White males. Among Black males, 71.4% declared that they were not at all satisfied with academic advising, compared to only 63.2% of White males.

**Table 1.** Frequencies and Percentages of Student Satisfaction with Academic Advising by Race/Ethnicity for Males

Race/Ethnicity	Very Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total	Somewhat Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total	Not at All Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total
Black	( <i>n</i> = 537) 17.7%	( <i>n</i> = 330) 10.9%	( <i>n</i> = 2,169) 71.4%
White	( <i>n</i> = 4,181) 23.0%	( <i>n</i> = 2,503) 13.8%	( <i>n</i> = 11,480) 63.2%
Hispanic	( <i>n</i> = 873) 18.8%	( <i>n</i> = 705) 15.2%	( <i>n</i> = 3,065) 66.0%

Concerning the second research question, in which the focus was placed on the effect of ethnicity/race on student satisfaction with academic advising for females, the result was again statistically significant,  $\chi^2(4) = 74.46$ ,  $p < .001$ . The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was below small, .03 (Cohen, 1988). As delineated in Table 2, most of the female students surveyed were not at all satisfied with

academic advising services. Black females reported most frequently that they were not at all satisfied with the academic advising provided, followed by Hispanic females. The largest disparity was noted between Black females and White females. Among Black females, 68.7% declared that they were not at all satisfied with academic advising, compared to 64.2% of White females.

**Table 2.** Frequencies and Percentages of Student Satisfaction with Academic Advising by Race/Ethnicity for Females

Race/Ethnicity	Very Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total	Somewhat Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total	Not at All Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total
Black	( <i>n</i> = 827) 19.2%	( <i>n</i> = 520) 12.1%	( <i>n</i> = 2,954) 68.7%
White	( <i>n</i> = 4,458) 20.3%	( <i>n</i> = 3,429) 15.6%	( <i>n</i> = 14,125) 64.2%
Hispanic	( <i>n</i> = 988) 16.8%	( <i>n</i> = 919) 15.7%	( <i>n</i> = 3,963) 67.5%

For the third research question, in which the focus was placed on the effect of GPA on student satisfaction with academic advising for males, the result was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(6) = 102.47$ ,  $p < .001$ . The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was below small, .04 (Cohen, 1988). As presented in Table 3, males who were highly successful and males who were not successful most frequently reported that they were very satisfied with academic advising

services. Males who were successful and moderately successful most frequently reported that they were not at all satisfied with academic advising services. The greatest disparity was noted between males who were moderately successful and males who were not successful. Among males who were moderately successful, 66.0% declared that they were not at all satisfied with academic advising, compared to 58.6% of males who were not successful.

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**Table3.** *Frequencies and Percentages of Student Satisfaction with Academic Advising by GPA for Males*

GPA	Very Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total	Somewhat Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total	Not at All Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total
Highly Successful	( <i>n</i> = 1,066) 26.4%	( <i>n</i> = 567) 14.1%	( <i>n</i> = 2,401) 59.5%
Successful	( <i>n</i> = 3,263) 20.4%	( <i>n</i> = 2,181) 13.7%	( <i>n</i> = 10,521) 65.9%
Moderately Successful	( <i>n</i> = 1,717) 19.8%	( <i>n</i> = 1,229) 14.2%	( <i>n</i> = 5,726) 66.0%
Not Successful	( <i>n</i> = 194) 24.2%	( <i>n</i> = 138) 17.2%	( <i>n</i> = 469) 58.6%

Regarding the fourth research question, in which the focus was placed on the effect of GPA on student satisfaction with academic advising for females, the result was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(6) = 166.38, p < .001$ . The effect size for this finding, Cramer's *V*, was below small, .05 (Cohen, 1988). As revealed in Table 4, females who were highly successful, as well as females who were not successful, most frequently reported that they were very satisfied with academic advising services. Females who were

successful and moderately successful most frequently reported that they were not at all satisfied with academic advising services. The greatest disparity was noted between females who were moderately successful and females who were highly successful. Among females who were moderately successful, 67.2% declared that they were not at all satisfied with academic advising, compared to 60.9% of females who were highly successful.

**Table4.** *Frequencies and Percentages of Student Satisfaction with Academic Advising by GPA for Females*

GPA	Very Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total	Somewhat Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total	Not at All Satisfied <i>n</i> and %age of Total
Highly Successful	( <i>n</i> = 1,442) 24.6%	( <i>n</i> = 852) 14.5%	( <i>n</i> = 3,571) 60.9%
Successful	( <i>n</i> = 3,660) 18.1%	( <i>n</i> = 3,045) 15.1%	( <i>n</i> = 13,489) 66.8%
Moderately Successful	( <i>n</i> = 1,563) 16.9%	( <i>n</i> = 1,466) 15.9%	( <i>n</i> = 6,216) 67.2%
Not Successful	( <i>n</i> = 174) 22.1%	( <i>n</i> = 133) 16.9%	( <i>n</i> = 480) 61.0%

## DISCUSSION

Given the potential benefits to be derived from academic advising services (i.e., satisfaction, achievement, persistence, and retention to graduation), of concern is the finding that the majority of students surveyed, regardless of gender, were not at all satisfied with the advising services provided by their community colleges. Possibly more concerning were the discoveries that Black students, both male and female, most frequently reported that they were not at all satisfied with the academic advising provided and that the largest disparity for both groups was noted between Black students and White students. Perhaps Black students, similar to the participants in the study conducted by Orozco et al. (2010), were less likely than White students to use advising services at all. Another possibility is that their academic advisors were not demonstrating the commitment important to students of color in predominantly White institutions (Museus & Ravello, 2010).

The fact that males and females who were highly successful and male and female students who were not successful most frequently reported that they were very satisfied with academic advising services lends credence to the notion that GPA might not be predictive of

student satisfaction with academic advising. This finding might also strengthen confidence in the findings of researchers (Ryan, 2013; Tovar, 2015) who discovered that advising is associated with community college students' academic achievement (i.e., use of and satisfaction with advising services is not limited to students who are already classified as high achieving).

Most of interest is the finding that males and females who were moderately successful students most frequently reported that they were not at all satisfied with academic advising services, especially because administrators of advising and academic support programs have tended to focus on the most academically vulnerable populations.

Advising administrators and other individuals responsible for the provision of advising services at community colleges should consider ways to help their advisors demonstrate to all students that they are supportive of student success. In addition, they should assess advising outreach to ensure that students of all ethnic/racial groups are taking advantage of academic advising, perhaps mandating advising for all beginning students as recommended by the participants in the study conducted by

Donaldson et al. (2016). Related to outreach, advising administrators should also consider the ways in which they provide services to students with GPAs in the lower “B” to “C” range. The fact that these students were most frequently not at all satisfied with academic advising might indicate that they have advising and/or academic support needs that are not being met, despite their good academic standing.

Readers should be cautious in the degree to which they might generalize results from this study. Several caveats are in order. First, limitations of this study include the fact that participants were limited to students enrolled in CCSSE member colleges. Although the data are representative of many students’ perceptions, additional researchers might choose to conduct studies with students from other community colleges. Second, the fact that frequency of use of advising services was not analyzed is also a limitation. Such an analysis would have strengthened the study and is a suggestion for future researchers.

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