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The Impact of the Online Learner Advising Model on Retention and Grade Point Average

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The Impact of the Online Learner Advising Model on Retention and Grade Point Average

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Abstract

As more students experience online learning environments, the academic community must invest more energy into improving retention of these learners. The purpose of this research was to study the impact of an advising model designed to support online learners, the Online learner advising model (OLAM). This study examined new student retention in the first 3 terms and GPA outcomes to measure the impact of the advising approach. OLAM was designed to address the specific needs of online learners through bringing together elements of proactive advising, shame resilience theory, and appreciative advising.

The sample was selected from Concordia University, St. Paul students who entered an MBA online program during the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters with Concordia University, St. Paul. To determine the impact of the OLAM approach, quantitative measures were used. First, an advisor was trained to use OLAM. Next, the advisor began using the OLAM approach with students starting their online MBA program in the Fall of 2020. Finally, student retention and grade point average data were collected and analyzed to measure the impact of OLAM on student success.

The quantitative analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship of GPA outcomes between the OLAM and Non-OLAM groups; while there was no statistically significant relationship for the retention outcomes between OLAM compared to a Non-OLAM cohort. The OLAM approach has the potential to influence the outcomes for online learners and should be studied further to determine the full potential impact. Additional research is recommended with a larger sample size, across multiple cohorts, with a variety of programs of study, and over a longer period.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Why An Advising Model for Online Learners?

Online learning continues to be one of the fastest-growing segments of higher education (“Facts distance learning,” 2019; Musu-Gillette, 2015; “Online enrollment data 2020,” 2020). Online learning has become ubiquitous across most learning institutions. Even though there is new student growth in online learning, there remain significant concerns as online students do not tend to persist and retain as well as campus students (Haynie, 2015; Markle, 2015; Tello, 2007; Yang, et al., 2017).

Online learners have often been overlooked in data collection since there have been varied definitions of online, e-learning, and distance learning (Miller, et al., 2017). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) collects data from institutions participating in federal financial aid as per the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965. Part of this data includes the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) survey which expanded its data collection to include part-time and transfer students in the 2015-16 data collection cycle capturing more online learners as a result (Jones, 2017). Examination of the data revealed “... students enrolled at institutions where a very high proportion of the instruction is delivered fully online were significantly less likely than students at other types of colleges to earn a credential from the same institution within eight years” (Lederman, 2018, para. 21). Online students are less likely to complete their degrees and therefore retention efforts are critical to help these learners complete their academic goals.

The issue of retaining online learners in higher education is a pressing concern for the United States' higher education community as the needs of learners' shift, learners have increased choices to meet their needs, and government funding is moving towards performance-

based funding allocation (Heyman, 2010; Lang, 2001; Sousa, 2020). While there are resources to support some best practices for advising online students, prior to the introduction of OLAM, there were no established academic advising models designed specifically for online or distance learners (Kuhn & Garcia, 2020; Ohrablo, 2016; Steele, 2012). This dissertation addressed this issue by examining how having an advising model geared towards the needs of the online learner could support stronger retention and completion rates. Having commenced this dissertation with a brief discussion on the issue of online student retention, I next provide a short discussion on the problem and the purpose of the study before moving into a commentary on previous research on this topic. Then, I expand on the research questions and specifics of the site studied. From there, I share important terminology and definitions for this study. Finally, I provide limitations of the study and a brief conclusion of this chapter.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose Statement

As more students experience online learning environments, the academic community must invest more energy into improving retention of these learners. With increased online options, competition continues to escalate. In response, institutions have increased investments in attracting and recruiting new students (Sousa, 2020). Now, schools are also recognizing the value of retaining students through calculating the financial impact on the institution in helping students persist in their studies. One example of a financial impact measurement from retaining more students comes from Sousa (2020), who stated,

In order to determine just how much money can be saved by improving student retention, consider a sample scenario of an institution with 15,000 students. If this sample school were to improve their retention rate by even just one percent, they would save about 1.4 million dollars per year (para. 9).

Increased financial stability for institutions will support investments back into academic programming. Institutions of higher education are also experiencing urgency around the need to better retain their students during a time of COVID-19 instability and financial pressure (Polikoff, et al., 2020).

Students learning online need proactive support as they often report struggling with a lack of connection to the institution, isolation from their peers, and decreased motivation (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003; Yang, et al., 2017). Despite these struggles, few academic advising models exist to meet the specific social and emotional needs of online learners. Instead, most models have looked at identifying risk factors to discover students less likely to succeed. I assert being able to identify the students who are at risk is a reactive strategy, and likely comes too late. In contrast, I endeavored to take a preventive strategy through the development of an advising model not based on risk but rather based on bolstering the resources of the learners, allowing learners to connect with their institution, connect with peers, and increase their motivation to learn online. This study contributes a tested and operationalized advising model designed specifically for the needs of online learners. The knowledge from this research contributes a foundation for future study. It also created a starting point for future iterations and adjustments to this advising model. The purpose of this research was to study the impact of an advising model designed to support online learners. To do this, this study examined new student retention rates in their first 3 terms and GPA outcomes to measure the impact of the advising approach.

Paradigms and Previous Research

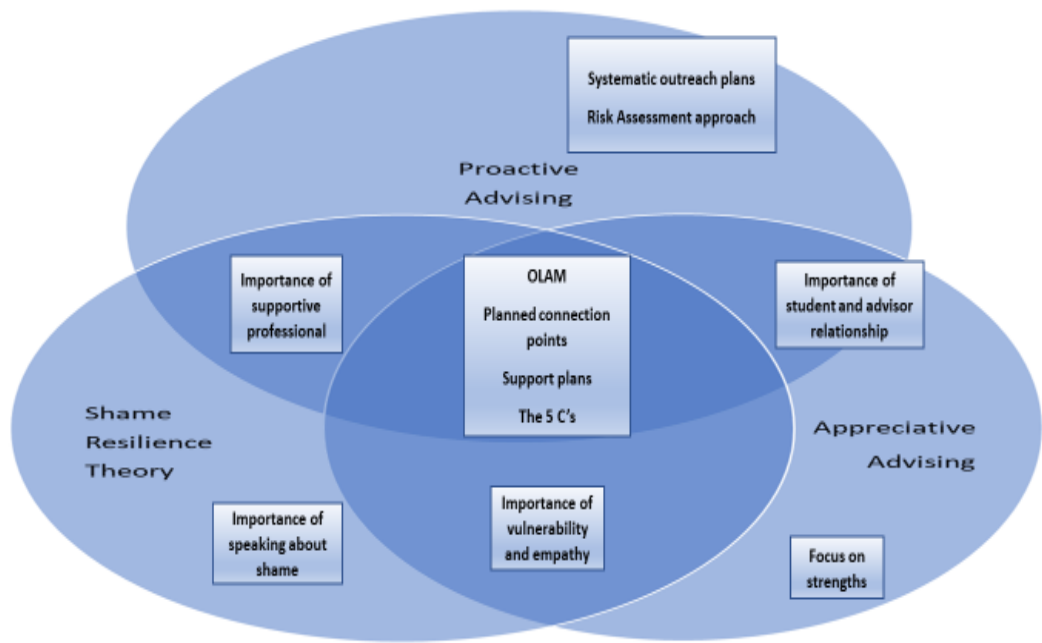
Academic advising practices have typically focused on administrative support such as degree planning and course registration. When advising strategies exist, they are mostly

reactive, focused on the students’ satisfaction with the advising experience, and are more theoretical than practical (Braxton et al., 1997; Kai et al., 2017; Young-Jones, et al., 2012). Furthermore, most advising strategies have taken the perspective of the University and not of the student (Tinto, 2017). The online learner advising model (OLAM) is a model for advising online learners with the intention of supporting their social and emotional needs. OLAM focuses on the advisor collaborating with the student to co-create a proactive approach with measurable outcomes for the student.

OLAM is designed based on concepts from three research perspectives as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Influences on the Design of the Online Learner Advising Model



First, proactive advising guided a systematic outreach strategy to reach learners before problems happen (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). Students experiencing proactive advising not only value their advisors, but also express increased confidence knowing a supportive professional is available (Miller, 2010). Second, shame resilience theory informed a recognition of the role of shame when students experience perceived failures on their learning journey (Brown, 2006; Shushok Jr, 2016; Teimouri, 2019; Walker, 2017; Whitney, 2018). A focus on shame is a unique perspective to bring to academic advising. It developed out of my interest in understanding why so many online students drop-out without notice or explanation. There is a large gap in the research around why students drop-out without providing an explanation. Students' known reasons for exiting an online program are complex and are not predictable with demographic data (Willging & Johnson, n.d.). While many other perspectives such as self-esteem, grit, or trauma resilience could have been selected, I chose an emphasis on shame resilience as shame can be a driving force behind low self-esteem, helplessness, and reactions to trauma. Shame is a foundation behind many painful emotions and is one of the most basic human emotions, though not often discussed in research and in advising students (Brown, 2006). Finally, the last advising approach to inform OLAM was appreciative advising, which is a positive psychology-based approach to support students' focus on deploying their strengths (Bloom, et al., 2013). Appreciative advising moved the focus from risk assessment to strength deployment and focuses heavily on the importance of the relationship between the advisor and the student.

The online learner advising model was designed to address the specific needs of online learners through bringing together elements of proactive advising, shame resilience theory, and appreciative advising, as seen in Figure 1. The three key features of OLAM shown in Figure 1: planned connection points between the student and the advisor, structured support plans, and use

of the 5 C's (connect, create, challenge, collaborate, and commit) are explored further in Chapter 4. My interest in supporting students through the online academic journey led me to consider the impact of this advising approach on retention rates and student grade outcomes. I next discuss the specific research questions and site selected for this dissertation.

Research Questions

This study examined the following questions:

1. How does the online learner advising model (OLAM) impact new student retention during the first three terms for online Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at Concordia University, St. Paul who received the OLAM approach (Fall 2020) compared to students who started the program prior to the OLAM approach (Spring 2020)?
2. How does the online learner advising model impact new students' GPA for online MBA students at Concordia University, St. Paul who received the OLAM approach (Fall 2020) compared to students who started the program prior to the OLAM approach (Spring 2020)?

Research Site Specifics

I elected to situate this study with students attending Concordia University, St Paul's (CSP) MBA program online. The OLAM advising model was implemented within CSP's MBA online program in the Fall 2020 term. This implementation plan made the MBA at CSP an ideal site for study. CSP offers a fully online MBA program made up of 36 required graduate credit hours. The courses were seven weeks in length and were taken one at a time. The program was designed for and attracts busy adult learners interested in practical and theoretical knowledge

(“Concordia University, St Paul Master of Business Administration,” n.d.). There were no curriculum adjustments made to the program in response to COVID-19. As a current online student with this institution, I have detailed knowledge on the learning management system and administrative processes. As the vice president of retention for an online program management company partnering with Concordia University, St Paul, I have a meaningful understanding of the current advising practices and retention outcomes.

Definitions

Academic Advising

Academic advising is the practice of supporting students to take advantage of all the opportunities and benefits available to them during their educational career (Crockett, 1978). It can include working with students to identify their goals, personal development, and educational plans. Academic advising also can include supporting students while they navigate policies and procedures of the academic institution. Finally, academic advising can include degree planning, course planning, and monitoring outcomes to encourage students to complete their educational goals.

Appreciative Advising

The origins of this advising model are rooted in positive psychology principles and appreciative inquiry research. According to Bloom; et al. (2008), there are 6 D’s or stages in appreciative advising which include: disarm, discover, dream, design, deliver, and don’t settle. This advising approach directs the academic advisor to focus on the strengths each student brings to their educational career.

Online Education

For the purposes of this research, I define online education to include the following criteria:

- the student and the instructor are not face to face
- an educational institution is responsible for the curriculum
- the course work is completed on a computer or digital device
- the students, instructors, and educational staff communicate through a computer or digital device. (Paulson, 2002, p. 1).

Online Learner Advising Model

A model of academic advising practice designed specifically for the needs of online students at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Influences on the model include proactive advising, shame resilience theory, and appreciative advising. The 5 C's of the approach include connect, create, challenge, collaborate, and commit.

Persistence

Persistence is a measure of students demonstrating progression towards their educational goals (Hagedorn, n.d.).

Proactive/Intrusive Advising

Proactive or intrusive advising is "... intentional contact with students with the goal of developing a caring and beneficial relationship that leads to increased academic motivation and persistence" (Varney, 2007, para. 3).

Retention

Retention is a term educational institutions use to measure students' progression in an academic program (Hagedorn, n.d.).

Shame Resilience Theory

A grounded theory study on experiencing shame resulted in the shame resilience theory (SRT; Brown, 2006). The study revealed the primary concerns of the participants as well as ways to be resilient to shame. Subjects reported a combination of feeling a lack of power over their situation, feelings of isolation, and a sense of being trapped during moments of shame (Brown, 2006). In contrast, participants who were resilient to shame indicated high levels of “... empathy, connection, power, and freedom” (Brown, 2006, p. 47).

Term

A term is the seven week online course structure at Concordia University, St. Paul. Two terms equate to one academic semester.

Limitations

This study took place at an unprecedented time in our history as we faced the global pandemic of COVID-19. There were possible variables influencing student success online which may not have been present in previous studies. Students may have been dealing with personal health concerns or health concerns of their family members related to COVID-19. There was likely an increased general worry or anxiety around becoming ill and the stability of employment. Additionally, many students saw their employment end or move to a remote setting. Unemployment could have impacted their ability to fund their education. Unemployment could have also impacted their decision to enroll in a program while they might have more time to focus on school. Virtual work could have caused a desire to get away from a screen and cause negative impacts on a student’s willingness to learn online after working online all day. To attend to these variables, I included a one question text message survey to all learners who dropped their courses asking how COVID-19 impacted their decision to drop. The findings

from this question are included in the results to measure the impact of COVID-19 on the results. The advisor also documented any comments from students related to concerns around COVID-19. Future research with a qualitative focus could inquire more broadly around why students persist to understand the impact COVID-19 may have had on their decision making. Additionally, historical retention rates are included to compare whether the overall magnitude of students dropping their courses increased during COVID-19.

To avoid ethical concerns around depriving students of a possible advantage, no true control group was utilized. Instead, historical data served as a comparison to measure the effect of the online learner advising model (OLAM). The participants were selected for the study based on when they began their online MBA program at Concordia University, St Paul (CSP). Twelve students who began their studies in the Spring semester of 2020 did not receive OLAM advising were selected to be in the control group. Twelve students who began their online MBA at CSP in the Fall semester of 2020 did receive OLAM advising were selected to be in the experimental group. Students were selected using a random number generator and the third digit of the students' CSP ID number.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to study the impact of the online learner advising model designed to support the social and emotional needs of online learners. The outcomes of this study may benefit other academic advisors as they strive to support the students they work with. It also has the potential to benefit students through providing more resources and support towards accomplishing their academic goals.

Chapter 2 includes a literature review of key historical retention research as well as expanding on bodies of literature which informed approaches to support online learners. Then

Chapter 3 reviews the research design selected for this research. Chapter 4 follows with a description of the results from the exploration of the above-mentioned research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the findings from the study and includes recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to place this research historically and theoretically within the scholarly community which influenced the development of an advising model designed to meet the unique needs of online learning. A preventative advising model is needed to address the social and emotional needs of online learners to boost outcomes since an online specific advising approach does not currently exist. First, this chapter explores the history of research on factors of successful student retention programs and key elements of advising for distance learners. The historical review sets the stage for key advising factors. Second, most of this chapter reviews the theoretical models and research which could support online learners. The chapter explores proactive advising, shame resilience theory, and appreciative advising.

Proactive advising encourages outreach to students before problems begin. Proactive advising was selected for its systematic outreach strategies. Shame resilience theory encourages watching out for warning signs of shame and working to encourage a reduction in shame related reactions. Shame is a foundational painful experience which has been largely ignored in most research and practice (Brown, 2006). Shame has been identified as a factor in a wide variety of social and emotional challenges from self-esteem to mental health, and other areas (Brown, 2006). Helping students develop shame resilience is a missing piece in building student persistence skills. Appreciative advising emphasizes student strengths and is a collaborative approach to advising. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion on how this study fills a gap in the current research and fits within the field of current literature. To begin, this chapter opens with an examination of the historical background of successful advising programs in higher education and advising for distance learners.

Elements of Successful Student Retention Programs and Distance Learning Advising

Vincent Tinto's (1993) career of research on student retention is foundational to any discussion on student attrition. In his work, Tinto defined three principles shared across institutions with effective retention practices. First, institutions committed to their students' success have more effective retention outcomes (Tinto, 1993). While this seems obvious, it is not always common practice for higher education institutions to make policy and procedure decisions based primarily on the welfare of their students. Online learners need advisors to put their unique needs at the center of the advisor's focus. Next, education communities committed to the success of all learners at the institution have more positive retention results (Tinto, 1993). In online advising, the emphasis of supporting each student needs to take a strength-oriented approach centered on the belief that every learner deserves an opportunity to succeed. Finally, high "... retention programs are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members" (Tinto, 1993, p. 147). In an online environment, students become a part of the community through engagement in virtual discussions as well as interactions with their instructors and peers.

Critics of Tinto's early work, including Tinto himself, highlighted his limited exploration of non-traditional-aged students, community college learners, students with a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and students of color (Braxton, et al., 1997; Metz, 2004 -2005; Sherman, & Tinto, 1975). Tinto (2007) responded to the criticism with an additional exploration and encouragement to other researchers on areas missing from the initial theory work. As part of the expanded theory, he acknowledged the importance of considering the impact of income on retention. Tinto (2007) recognized the challenging need for higher education institutions to adjust their practices, particularly for students coping with lower income levels. He stated,

“(T)hat work requires us to leave our retention fiefdoms and join forces with larger educational movements that seek to restructure the way we go about the task of educating all not just some of our students” (Tinto, 2007, p. 13). In doing this, Tinto’s most recent work pushed the higher education community to consider the view of the student when developing methods to help the students who want to persist in their studies (Tinto, 2017). No additional work from Tinto has emerged on this topic at the time of this writing.

Work has continued in the field of translating research into actionable steps to support students persisting in college (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). While many of the established recommendations are based on the needs of students attending a traditional campus, it is still a valuable starting point for discussion. Seven guidelines for advising practices emerged from a review of research (Braxton, et al., 2007,2008). Since the guidelines are based on a campus-based learning experience, not all seven areas apply to the needs of online learners. Aligned with the first guideline of focusing on the career development of students, online advisors have the need to approach every student as an individual through the development of personalized support plans. An online student would benefit from their advisor designing an individualized support plan in order to customize recommendations based on the specific needs of the student. While the second guideline suggested viewing all students as “at risk” to meet their unique needs, online advisers could approach every learner from a vantage point of building on the success of the student (Braxton et al., 2007,2008). This paradigm shift is a key element in creating a culture of success for all learners as the third guideline recommended (Braxton et al., 2007,2008). The fourth, fifth, and sixth guidelines are geared more towards engaging faculty, aligning with institutional values, and helping students connect with each other, not with advising methods (Braxton et al., 2007,2008). Finally, the seventh guideline emphasized building on established

and researched methods (Braxton et al., 2007,2008). The seven guidelines of successful advising provided a foundation for online student advising in order to design a model that would result in student success. Much of the rest of this chapter elaborates on the additional research which builds a foundation for meeting the needs of online students. The next section delves into the research on advising for distance education and virtual learners.

Until recently, the research on successful retention programs has been focused on students attending a campus. The research continued to evolve regarding the best practices in academic advising, leaving a subset of growing students behind. Little investigation has occurred in the field of distance learner advising (Rimbau-Gilabert, et al., 2011). The limited studies demonstrate how retention rates for online learners are low and advising for this population is often an afterthought if it is an area of focus at all (Morris & Miller, 2007; Muljana & Luo, 2019). Results of a survey to private universities revealed how most online learners received registration and degree planning support to progress in their courses yet received limited support for developmental learning (Morris & Miller, 2007). Students and advisors, however, do recognize the importance of advising to student success for distance learners (Arhin, et al., 2017).

While higher education has moved to provide more online resources for course scheduling, book ordering, financial aid information, library access, curriculum guides, and requirements for programs; these resources do not provide opportunities for social or emotional learning (Rimbau-Gilabert et al., 2011; Wagner, 2001). The limited studies of undergraduate and graduate online learners have shown students are more satisfied with individual advisors and students prefer to have more than advising on the educational process alone (Fiore, et al., 2019; Gordon, 2020). Elements of successful advising methods and research on the needs of distance

learners are a starting point in the development of a method for advising online students, but there were still gaps in order to fully address the social and emotional needs of online learners. Next, I explore the bodies of literature which directly inform ways to fill these gaps, beginning with proactive advising.

Proactive Advising

Turning now from a discussion on advising in general to a specific model of advising, proactive advising fills the need to help online students avoid falling behind in their courses. This body of literature is important to understanding an outreach strategy an advisor can use. Proactive advising can be defined as "... intentional contact with students with the goal of developing a caring and beneficial relationship that leads to increased academic motivation and persistence" (Varney, 2007, para. 3). A key element in proactive advising is the advisor reaching out to the student with planned connection points during the student's academic journey. The advisor takes an active role in communication and does not wait for the student to come forward with questions or concerns. Advisors using proactive advising can monitor student behaviors, reach out at regular planned intervals, develop a comprehensive degree plan, and focus on establishing a strong connection with students early in their academic journey.

Proactive advising encourages advisors to monitor student grade outcomes and look for warning signs of attrition risk (Varney, 2007). Many studies have looked at student satisfaction with advising, whereas few have explored student outcomes and expectations of the advising experience (Young-Jones, et al., 2012). When research has examined outcomes, there are clear links between advising interactions and student results. According to Young-Jones et al. (2012), "(t)he levels to which advisors are available to students, actually meet with them, and provide them with assistance and support are clearly linked to factors demonstrated to predict student

success” (p. 15). These links to predicting success make proactive advisor assistance a key part of any model designed to support student persistence. Another study found increased student success and retention with proactive advising interventions for students flagged as high risk from faculty through an early alert system (Poole, 2015). Knowing advisor behaviors influence student results makes a planned advising approach even more impactful.

Students not only demonstrate improved outcomes with proactive advising, but they also report valuing the advising experience. According to Del Rosario (2017), “... students had a desire for a deeper connection with their advisors, wanted more engagement, and felt that accountability was a positive outcome of the proactive advising experience” (p. 76). The study further recommended the use of an academic map or degree plan to support the students in planning their academic journey (Del Rosario, 2017). Another study revealed similar results with students expressing appreciation for the proactive advising degree plan experience to help them avoid procrastinating on their academic plan (Donaldson, et al., 2016). Students experiencing proactive advising also reported having more confidence in their degree plan and course planning (Donaldson et al., 2016). A communication regarding the degree plan is clearly an important need for online learners.

Another critically important element of proactive advising is supporting the students through their initial orientation and first course(s). Students in one study commented on “... needing help understanding teaching methods, classrooms, and expectations of professors; adjusting socially; and achieving a work-school balance” (Donaldson et al., 2016, p. 35). As a result of these needs, advisors can provide a positive impact on college students at the beginning of their program of study and throughout their academic journey to graduation (Young-Jones et

al., 2012). Students have gone so far as to report the advising experience in their first year was a “... valuable part of the overall college experience” (Miller, 2010, pp. 116 117).

Proactive advising provides a foundation for the importance of tracking student behaviors, active outreach to connect with students, degree planning, and early interventions to create a meaningful connection. Some of the noted drawbacks with proactive advising are the sense of a required intervention as well as a focus on poor performance or at-risk behaviors (Donaldson et al., 2016; Poole, 2015). The at-risk focus does help identify the social and emotional needs of online learners and while the outcomes might be positive, emphasis on problems can lead to a shame-inducing experience for students. The following body of literature provides a strategy to help mitigate the impact of shame on learners. Next, this chapter continues with an exploration of the literature on shame resilience theory and its impact on students.

Shame Resilience Theory

This next body of research addresses the impact of shame in the learning journey and how to help advisors learn to guide students towards shame resilience. Shame is a foundation of many negative emotional states (Brown, 2006). Shame has been demonstrated to have an important influence on learning as learners can attach their self-worth to their academic results (Shane, 1980; Shushok Jr, 2016; Teimouri, 2019; Walker, 2017; Whitney, 2018). During the learning process, students can experience shame after they receive a lower than expected grade. Shame can also happen during a discussion when a student draws a conclusion that other students are more knowledgeable or capable. Students can also experience shameful thoughts when they fall behind in class and are not meeting their own expectations or the perceived expectations of those in their support network. While shame happens during the learning process, it is not often openly discussed during advising conversations. Shame reduction training

could include teaching advisors to recognize shame and encourage shame resilience behaviors including "... empathy, connection, power, and freedom" (Brown, 2006, p. 47). Having an emphasis on learning about shame would provide advisors with tools to support learners when they navigate shame filled moments. Shame resilience fills a missing piece from proactive advising alone.

There is a particular type of shame when one recognizes the limits of their own knowledge and the need for learning known as cognitive shame (Shane, 1980). Our higher education system does not allow much space for students to openly express their own failures and lack of knowledge. The current system is designed for the students to share their learning and praise comes in the form of successful assignments and exams. Very few classrooms are designed to celebrate learning from failures and admission of a lack of knowledge (Shane, 1980). Teachers and student advisors are poised to provide a place of psychological safety through sharing their own experiences with failure and strategies they employed to learn from those struggles (Shane, 1980).

Another view of shame is related to whether an individual is prone to shame and experiencing shame can be a dispositional characteristic or trait (Leeming & Boyle, 2004). Even though there is a recent increased interest in researching shame, most of the work has centered on shame inducing incidents not considering how to best manage shame or factors which indicate a susceptibility to shame (Cavicchia, 2010; Leeming & Boyle, 2004; Shane, 1980). In contrast to the bulk of research, shame can also be viewed as an experience related to social and societal norms (Robbins, 2018). One study exploring social factors was related to social cognitive shame theory (Robbins, 2018). Robbins (2018) identified how heterosexual norms induced shame for non-heterosexual participants. These experiences of internalized

heterosexualism were correlated with increased anxiety and depression as well as decreased sense of personal efficacy and outcomes related to the participants' careers (Robbins, 2018).

While norms related to sexuality are different from norms in education, some parallels can be drawn. First, the outcome of the shame experienced in Robbins' research reduced personal efficacy (Robbins, 2018). Shame related to the learning journey could also play a role in a reduced belief in a learner's ability to persist in their education. Second, Robbins (2018) found decreased career outcomes related to shame. Improving career possibilities could be motivating a student to pursue a higher education degree. If shame is linked to poor career outcomes, there could be a link with poor educational outcomes. Finally, norms in education are typically related to the campus-based student experiences. Being an online college student as an adult can be an opportunity ripe for experiencing shame if the learner does not live up to their own expectations or expectations of academic success from the people in their social world. This gap in the research is addressed with this dissertation as I address the importance of identifying shame triggers before they occur in online learning experiences.

A grounded theory study on experiencing shame resulted in the shame resilience theory (SRT; Brown, 2006). Brown (2006) interviewed 215 women asking questions about their understanding of shame, the impact of shame, and ways women overcome shame. The study revealed the primary concerns of the participants as well as ways to be resilient to shame. Participants reported a combination of feeling a lack of power over their situation, feelings of isolation, and a sense of being trapped during moments of shame (Brown, 2006). In contrast, participants who were resilient to shame indicated high levels of "... empathy, connection, power, and freedom" (Brown, 2006, p. 47). It is important to learn ways to openly speak about shame as a protective factor from the damage shame can cause (Brown, 2006). A

model of advising online students can incorporate an understanding and speaking about shame as a central principle in the framework.

Brown (2006) made a point of expanding the number of interviews and participants in order to handle the many nuances of defining shame versus guilt versus embarrassment and to include more men voices in the body of research. The expansion of the sample size added credibility to the findings of the study. Shame resilience theory offers an approach pulling from multiple disciplines including “... sociological, psychological, educational, and cultural approaches to shame” (Brown, 2006, p. 49). An unanswered question for future research is how to apply SRT in practice.

In an interview of Brown, the founder of SRT, Brown expanded on SRT and shared the important role educators play in redefining student failures as a part of the learning process (Shushok Jr, 2016). Further, Brown’s work emphasizes the tendency of students to create shame filled stories in their minds when something goes wrong at school (Shushok Jr, 2016). In an online learning situation, the student is alone with their shame stories hidden behind a computer screen. The observations align with Brown’s (2006) work on the complex web of shame related thoughts happening when people have unrealistic expectations.

Another academic area ripe for shame experiences is in the field of writing. Many student writers equate their self-worth to their writing. As a result, the nature of a professor’s criticism of their writing can induce shameful feelings (Whitney, 2018). In order to support students in their learning process, it is important for professors and advisors to consider the impact of their feedback and adjust their comments to reduce shaming reactions. In the Shushok Jr (2016) interview, Brown recommended higher education institutions view the learning experience as a true partnership between students and the university.

Another grounded theory study explored the way adults recover from shaming events and experiences. The data evolved through interviewing adults who believe they have recovered from intense shame. The developed theory from the data indicated the following elements impact shame recovery: connecting, refocusing, accepting, understanding, and resisting (Van Vliet, 2008). Recommendations for therapists to support clients dealing with shame involve building supportive social networks, supporting a refocus on self-improvement activities, working through the feelings associated with the shame event, exploring a meaningful understanding of the event, and enhancing awareness of personal choices moving forward (Van Vliet, 2008). The research mentioned the role cognitive-behavioral strategies play in supporting clients as they reclaim their power after a shameful experience (Van Vliet, 2008). Student advisors can support their students through implementing the same recommendations.

Shame also plays a role in the outcomes of leadership coaches working with their clients which is similar to the way advisors interact with the students they support (Cavicchia, 2010). Using several examples from the author's own professional experiences, Cavicchia (2010) explored observations of the impact of shame on professional performance as well as on his own relationship with clients. Common triggers for shame included negative beliefs about the self, breaks in important relationships, and a failure to live up to our ideal self-image (Cavicchia, 2010). "Given the relational nature of shame, understanding the effect of shame on individuals and interactions is an indispensable perspective for coaches and consultants wishing to act as agents of change" (Cavicchia, 2010, p. 881). As a result, one antidote for shame included co-creating a partnership between the person in the coach role and the person receiving the coaching (Cavicchia, 2010). Other importance strategies included being fully present to the conversations and monitoring the fluctuations of the relationship often (Cavicchia,

2010). Finally, being authentic and normalizing shame experiences allowed for a more meaningful coaching experience (Cavicchia, 2010). Similarly, shame resilience theory proposed empathy and connection as antidotes to shame (Brown, 2006). Other shame mitigation strategies included having secure attachments, self-compassion, and emotional regulation skills (Beduna, 2018). There are many parallels between leadership, coaching, and advising with the emphasis on codesigning a partnership. An advisor and student partnership allow for a focus on the social and emotional needs of the student beyond their academic needs alone.

The role of shame in education and student outcomes is a gap in the research. There is also a missing body of work around implementing shame resilience theory. This dissertation aimed to address shame triggers and suggests training advisors to appropriately address shame. The results of this work contributes to the understanding of shame resilience theory in action.

Education on SRT could encourage advisors to acknowledge the role of shame in a student's educational experiences, teach students shame resilience strategies, and support students when they experience shame. One of the ways to encourage shame resilience is through a meaningful relationship between the advisor and the student. Proactive advising and SRT ideals would encourage the student and the advisor to stay connected, yet the emphasis of the relationship thus far is around risk factors. A gap remains around building a partnership based on a student's strengths using an appreciative advising framework. Next, I expand on the appreciative advising model and its move from a risk focus to a strength-based orientation.

Appreciative Advising

While proactive advising encourages a relationship between the advisor and the student, it is a problem and risk-based approach. Shame resilience theory expands the student advisor relationship to include a support focused approach, but still has an emphasis on risks and

problems. Appreciative advising (AA), the topic of the final body of literature in this chapter, fills in the remaining gaps to round out supporting the social and emotional needs of the students. AA emphasizes advising to the student's strengths and partnering with the student to co-create the advising experience.

The origins of appreciative advising are rooted in positive psychology principles. "The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present)" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Applying these principles to learning and education, the educator shifts from deficit-based thinking to a strengths-based orientation.

Appreciative advising also pulls from work on appreciative inquiry, a system of encouraging an investigation of what is working versus looking at problems (Cooperrider, 1986). Appreciative inquiry (AI) developed into a system of communication anchored in four stages, also known as the 4D's.

"The 4-D model of AI is a process for positive change. Based on the assumption the change occurs through thoughtful inquiry and dialogue into affirmative life giving forces, the four phases of the process are: discovery, dream, design and delivery." (Whitney, 1998, p. 314). These 4D's guide an AI practitioner's interactions and choice of questions. While initially designed for organizational change, the AI methods are also effective in educational settings.

While appreciative inquiry is grounded in the 4 D's, appreciative advising built on those foundations and is guided by 6 D's, adding the phases disarm and don't settle (Bloom, et al., 2013). According to Bloom et al. (2008), there are 6 D's or stages in appreciative advising which include: disarm, discover, dream, design, deliver, and don't settle (p. 11). This advising

approach directs the academic advisor to focus on the strengths each student brings to their educational career.

Each of the six phases, as seen in Figure 2, guides the advisor's conversations with their students. The disarm phase of interacting with students goes beyond rapport building and expands to creating psychological safety for meaningful dialogue (Bloom et al., 2013). In the discover phase, the advisor aims to concentrate on "... the importance of using positive, open-ended questions focused on learning other people's perceptions of their own personal strengths and the strengths of the organization of which they are a member" (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 8). Moving into the dream focus, the advisor encourages the student to consider a vision for their own future, expanding beyond goals into the realm of a bigger personal picture (Bloom et al., 2013). Next, the design part of the framework evolves the dream into action steps to move towards the desired future state (Truschel, 2008). "The Deliver phase entails thoughtful actions taken not only to carry out the individual and organizational plans created during the Design phase; it emphasizes the importance of personal and organizational resilience as obstacles and challenges arise" (Bloom et al., 2013, p. 9). Finally, don't settle is an emphasis on continuous improvement and evaluation of progress for the student (Bloom et al., 2013). ("What is appreciative advising," n.d., graphic 1, permission to use granted by image owner)

In the disarm phase of AA, recommendations include extensive guidance on creating a warm physical environment and open body language (Bloom et al., 2008). Online learners may not have the advantage of nonverbal cues and therefore need quick connection through other communication methods. AA needs to be adapted to meet the needs of online students.

Figure 2

What is Appreciative Advising?



Source. ("What is appreciative advising," n.d., graphic 1, permission granted by image owner)

Knowing the importance of the connection between an advisor and a student's success, understanding the experience of the advisor provides relevant context for the impact of the advising experience (Harrell, 2008). Advisors practicing AA have attributed a multitude of benefits to the use of this framework. First, advisors reported an increased sense of certainty and confidence in their advising skills after implementing AA (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016). Second, advisors noted an increased efficacy of their interactions with students as well as increased empathy towards the students (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016; Howell, 2010). Another noted outcome for advisors was a sense of being able to better deploy their own talents as an advisor (Howell, 2010). Finally, advisors revealed not only a deeper sense of connection with their students; they also felt more connected with their peers in the advising department (Damrose-Mahlmann, 2016). All these uplifting changes are likely to improve job satisfaction, create better personal relationships outside of work, and overall result in better student experiences and are foundational needs of online learners (Howell, 2010).

Like shame resilience theory, an appreciative advisors' use of language and word choices can influence students. According to AA, it is important to use phrases and statements which imply the student will succeed (Pulcini, 2016). An advisors' emphasis on strengths and not deficiencies is equally important (Pulcini, 2016). As a result of AA, students have reported feeling a sense of empowerment to succeed in their courses (Shirley, 2012). Transfer students in an RN-BSN program noted feeling less anxious when receiving AA (Shirley, 2012). Faculty advisors and students have also expressed seeing value in the way AA supports early identification of students' needs (Nursing Education, 2019). Students clearly experience benefits through AA, advisors have also indicated positive experiences through delivering the AA methodology.

Appreciative advising could heavily influence the design of a new method of supporting online students with an emphasis on discovering and maximizing student strengths as well as a cooperative advising relationship. Proactive advising, shame resilience, and appreciative advising come together to round out the foundation needed to fill the social and emotional needs of online students. In order to bring all these concepts together, I have designed a new model of advising called the online learner advising model (OLAM). As this is a new model of advising, there is no current research on the online learner advising model. This dissertation provides a study of that framework. It lays a foundation for potential expansion to future study.

Conclusion

Research has maximized an understanding of the online students' needs through meaningful surveys and interviews but has failed to design and measure the success of an advising model designed specifically for online learners (Fiore et al., 2019; Gordon, 2020; Rimbau-Gilabert et al., 2011). The needs of the online student population warrant their

own advising model. A model designed to meet the needs of this student population may increase student persistence in a group of students neglected in the current research.

In Chapter 2, I provided an overview of successful retention programs and distance advising as a foundation of retention practices. Next, proactive advising, shame resilience theory, and appreciative advising were reviewed to set the stage for the online learner advising model design. Proactive advising contributed the planned proactive outreach strategy, degree planning, and the importance of establishing a connection with students early in their academic journey. Shame resilience theory supplied an awareness of acknowledging the impact of shame on learning, creating a psychologically safe place to discuss shame, and connecting with students to challenge unrealistic expectations. Appreciative advising laid the groundwork for a focus on the strength's students bring to their education and a collaborative approach to the advising relationship. The next chapter adds to the research community by measuring the impact of the online learner advising model designed for online MBA learners.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

This chapter elaborates on how the study was designed and how it was implemented to understand the impact of the online learner advising model on online MBA students. In addition to the research design, this chapter also covers the participants and how they were selected, my role as the researcher, and ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion on the protocols, procedures, and limitations of the study.

Research Design

The research design was a post-positivist quantitative design. The following research questions guided the research design development:

Research question 1: How does the Online learner advising model (OLAM) impact new student retention during the first three terms for online Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at Concordia St. Paul who received the OLAM approach (Fall 2020) compared to students who started the program prior to the OLAM approach (Spring 2020)?

Research question 2: How does the Online learner advising model impact new students' GPA for online MBA students at Concordia St. Paul who received the OLAM approach (Fall 2020) compared to students who started the program prior to the OLAM approach (Spring 2020)?

The research hypotheses for this study focused on the impact of OLAM on new online student persistence as measured by retention rates and GPA outcomes.

Hypothesis 1: There will be a statistically significant higher retention for the first 3 terms for students who received the OLAM approach to advising compared to students who did not receive the OLAM approach.

Null Hypothesis 1: The retention in the first 3 terms for students who received the OLAM approach to advising compared to students who did not receive the OLAM approach are similar.

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant higher GPA for new students who received the OLAM approach to advising compared to students who did not receive the OLAM advising approach.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no measurable positive change in the GPA for new students who received the OLAM approach to advising compared to students who did not receive the OLAM advising approach.

The research questions required taking a systematic empirical approach to describe the impact of the advising model being measured (Black, 1999). The research design was quasi-experimental using a non-equivalent control group with pre-tests measurements (Black, 1999). Experimental designs, such as this one, take a post-positivist approach through the meticulous measurement of variables “... to answer theory-guided research questions and hypotheses” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 147). This study could also be considered a natural experiment as the change in process and policy created a historical control group (Craig, et al., 2017).

In this quantitative study, the data were collected through a leader in the retention department supporting Concordia University, St. Paul online students. The retention and GPA data were retrieved from the school’s student information system. I answered the first research

question using the chi-square analysis to test for differences in new student retention frequencies. I answered the second research question using a Mann-Whitney U test to measure differences in GPAs for MBA students who did receive advising using OLAM and MBA students who did not receive OLAM. I collected demographic data such as age and gender and presented descriptive statistics followed with a narrative explanatory analysis to compare the control and experimental groups. The retention and GPA outcomes were measured so inferential analysis was possible.

The advisor for students in this study advised both the OLAM and the non-OLAM groups. The advisor participated in a 3-module interactive training program to learn how to implement OLAM. A certification process completed the training to ensure the training program met the objectives and advisors were competent in using OLAM. The training on the OLAM approach was developed with my direction and oversight. The students participating in the research were attending the institution I attended personally in addition to being one of the universities I worked with to provide online program management support.

Participants

In the 2017-2018 academic year, there were 192,184 master's degrees in business awarded in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). This popular degree program has been expanding online. As of 2019, there were 390 fully online MBA programs available, and the growth trend appears to be continuing (Gee, 2019). Since online MBA students are a large and growing group, this is a relevant group to study for information about retention of online students. Online MBA students at Concordia University, St. Paul were the population of interest for this research. The sample was selected from students who entered an MBA online program during Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters with Concordia University, St. Paul. Twelve Spring 2020 students were considered the control group as they did not receive

advising using the OLAM approach since, they enrolled prior to the development of OLAM. Additionally, twelve Fall 2020 students were the experimental group as they received advising using the OLAM approach. Both groups completed the same application process and met the same admissions criteria. This sample was a group I have access to through my employment. A leader in the retention department randomly selected participants. Once selected, I compared group demographics to determine whether the groups were equivalent. I relied on my personal knowledge of the field and judgment to compare the participants based on their demographic similarities, course start dates and field of study, thus making this a purposive sample (Fraenkel, et al., 2019). It is also missing true random assignment to the experimental and control groups. Both groups were followed over three terms to record their retention and changes to their GPA.

Role of the Researcher

My career began in mental health in 1998. I began working with college students in 2003 as an adjunct faculty member in a community college setting. In 2006, I began teaching online courses for a large primarily online institution. Later that same year, I began a career in college admissions lasting through 2018. Student retention became part of my role in 2014. Now student retention is my primary focus as the vice president of retention for a large online program manager affording me the unique ability to work with more than 60 universities across the United States.

These experiences converged in my desire to build a model of advising to promote strong persistence for students studying online. I designed the online learner advising model to pull together approaches to student success combining strategies for social and emotional needs as

well as academic needs. Having personally interacted with thousands of learners, I saw a need for an approach focused on strengths and strategic intervention points.

My position as the designer of the online learner advising model and my role as a leader of the team implementing the model impacted the study. This close knowledge of OLAM and my interest in improving retention rates influenced my desire to further research the advising model. As my professional experience is involved with retention outcomes, I was drawn to quantitative measures of retention. Since my experience is also primarily with online learners, I was interested in research questions involving an online student population.

Next, I explore ethical considerations for this research, in part related to my role as the researcher.

Research Ethics

I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training and certification as part of the Concordia University, St Paul (CSP) dissertation process to enhance my knowledge of ethically working with human subjects. Next, I completed the Institutional Review Board Process at CSP and received approval to proceed with the research. The process included a committee review of my research design plans to ensure ethical treatment of participants in the study. The participants in this study remained anonymous and no personally identifiable information was used. As a result, there was limited risk to the participants. When considering the research design, I decided not to use a control group during the same time frame to avoid the ethical concern of depriving students of an advising model that may be advantageous to the students' outcomes. Instead, I reviewed historical data from before the advising model was designed as a control group.

I was deeply invested in this research topic as the designer of OLAM. This passion can be a positive attribute to sustain a commitment to the work. The possible ethical concern is my bias in my desire to see the methodology succeed. Having an awareness of this possible bias was an important step to ensuring I challenged my findings and rigorously questioned my procedures and results. In order, to reduce bias, several of my colleagues in higher education, but outside of student retention, reviewed the procedures and data. Having professionals outside of my current field review the work with a critical eye promoted additional input to reduce my potential bias. I also made the decision to focus on a replicable procedure to encourage further testing of the OLAM design in future research.

Research Protocols

The control group experienced a prescribed advising approach detailed in the standard operating procedure in Appendix A. The control group approach emphasized a risk assessment. The advisor reviewed the students' risk factors every other week and the contact strategy was determined by the level of risk. For example, when a student was labeled as at-risk, the advisor contacted the student a minimum of every seven days. The experimental group had an OLAM approach detailed in the standard operating procedure in Appendix B. The experimental group had a strength based and personalized approach to advising. There were no set contact amounts as the advisor co-created a support plan with the student to determine the specific needs of the student. For example, if a student was nervous about an upcoming course, the advisor would create a support plan with resources to prepare the student and agree on how often the advisor would check in on the student for additional encouragement.

To determine the impact of the advising model, new student retention rates and overall GPA results were measured. New student retention was calculated by dividing the number of

active matriculated students from the third term by the number of matriculated students in the original cohort start term. The GPA was calculated using Concordia St Paul's calculation process. In order to address the possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, all students who dropped out of the program received a text message from a retention assistant inquiring as to whether factors related to COVID-19 caused the student to drop out of the program. The text read: "We hope you and your loved ones are safe and well. We were wondering, how did COVID-19 impact your decision to stop your studies at CSP? Thank you." The advisor also documented the reason for stopping the program based on self-reporting from the students. Commentary around these observations is provided in Chapter 4.

Threats to Reliability

To combat the threat of delivering unreliable measures of student success as measured by new student retention and GPA outcomes, historical new student retention and GPA outcomes were used as part of the analysis.

There were many factors to consider on the reliability of a grade point average as a research data point. When considering the internal consistency of GPA outcomes, a student's GPA is considered a reliable scale (Bacon & Bean, 2006). While students' GPA outcomes do shift over time, the year-to-year results are the most consistent and reliable (Bacon & Bean, 2006). Additionally, an overall GPA is more reliable compared to the GPA of courses only in the student's major course of study (Bacon & Bean, 2006).

Threats to Validity

A possible threat to validity was the fact that another factor could better explain changes to retention and GPA improvements. I collected demographic data such as age and gender and

reviewed participants for the study to attempt to ensure they shared similar demographic characteristics. I used a random number generator and the third digit of the students CSP ID, to select the participants. The participant selection helped reduce the internal validity threat that other factors influenced the changes in retention and grade outcomes. The gender and age distributions were not the same despite the effort to randomize the selected participants which will be further discussed in the Chapter 4.

An important possible threat to validity was the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The earliest news around the COVID-19 outbreak began near the end of 2019, though the first confirmed case in the United States was not until January 21, 2020 (“2020 COVID-19 Timeline,” 2020). The impact of COVID-19 was a real threat to the validity of this research as it could have been a key factor in students’ decisions to drop out of their program or a factor in poor grade outcomes. Students in both the control and experimental groups took courses during the global pandemic which should reduce the threat, but not eliminate it. The advisor attempted to determine if a student’s reason for dropping out of classes was related to COVID-19 through directly asking students whenever possible. An additional text message outreach asking the students if COVID-19 was a factor in their decision to stop their courses helped collect data on the impact of COVID-19. The number of MBA students reporting dropping out for COVID-19 related reasons is documented in this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was focused on students matriculated into an MBA program during the Spring of 2020 through the Spring of 2021 at Concordia University, St Paul. Generalizations beyond this population must be limited and further research conducted to confirm the generalizability of the results. Another limitation was the small sample, which was limited by the number of

students entering the MBA during the selected terms for this study. A decision was made to ensure the homogeneity of the subjects and focus on the MBA cohorts rather than adding additional majors to the study. While the statistical power was limited with the small sample size, the homogeneity of the sample ensured a clear replicable design. As OLAM expands and more advisors use this approach, more research will be required to enhance the understanding of the impact of the advising model. This study serves as a design to be replicated with other populations including additional programs and institutions.

Conclusion

Online MBA students have specific needs that must be addressed through the advising approach student advisors deliver. Too often advising is not measured in a consistent way to determine the impact of the advising work. It was my intention through this research to provide recommendations for best practices and suggested metrics to advise online learners. The next chapter elaborates on the results from this study in order to build the case for advising best practices.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the online learner advising model which was designed to support the social and emotional needs of online learners. The two research questions investigated were:

1. How does the online learner advising model (OLAM) impact new student retention during the first 3 terms for online MBA students at Concordia University, St. Paul who received the OLAM approach (Fall 2020) compared to students who started the program prior to the OLAM approach (Spring 2020)?
2. How does the online learner advising model impact new students' GPA for online MBA students at Concordia University, St. Paul who received the OLAM approach (Fall 2020) compared to students who started the program prior to the OLAM approach (Spring 2020)?

The move to OLAM was a department wide advising process change. First, the advising team was trained to use the new OLAM approach. Next, the advisors began using the OLAM approach with students starting their online MBA program in the Fall of 2020. Finally, student retention and grade point average data were collected and analyzed to measure the impact of OLAM on student success. To determine the impact of the OLAM approach, quantitative measures were used. One qualitative question was asked to the students who stopped their classes, but no responses were received.

I begin this chapter by providing details of the demographics of the participants. Second, the chapter highlights the development of the online learner advising model (OLAM) as well as the three key elements of the model which included planned connection points between the advisor and the student, structured support plans, and use of the 5 C's (connect, create, challenge,

collaborate, and commit). Third, I provide a description of the advisor training process to learn OLAM. Next, the results of the study related to student retention and grade point average are expressed. Finally, this chapter ends with a conclusion based on the results which demonstrated a statistically significant change in the average GPA for the experimental group and no statistically significant changes in retention outcomes.

Demographics of Participants

There were two groups of online MBA students as participants in this study. Both groups were entering their first year of their MBA studies. The groups were a mix of traditional- and non-traditional aged students. The first group began courses in the Spring term of 2020 (January, 2020). Twelve students were randomly selected from the 16 total students using a random number generator and the third digit of the students' CSP ID number. The second group began their classes in the Fall term of 2020 (September, 2020). Again, 12 students were randomly selected from the original cohort of 36 students using the same random number generation process. Cohorts starting in the Fall tend to be the largest groups as students are accustomed to beginning academic programs during the traditional back to school time. The participants included 15 men and 9 women (see Table 1). The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 61 years of age. The Spring 2020 cohort had age ranges from 25 to 61. The Fall 2020 cohort had age ranges from 21 to 51 (see Table 2).

While most research on demographic risk factors for students stopping their higher education has focused on undergraduate on campus programs, some data are available for online graduate programs. One such study revealed a slightly higher risk of stopping a graduate program for men than women (Shefsky, 2014). There was no statistically significant correlation

between age and stop-out rates (Shefsky, 2014). Cohort 2, which received the OLAM advising, had a higher percentage of men compared to women. Cohort 2 also had a different age distribution than cohort 1. Another study on graduate online retention found no links between demographic data and retention rates and instead reported the reasons for stopping courses were varied and unique to each individual student (Willging & Johnson, n.d.). While the research does not support concerns around the gender or age variances, future studies could investigate whether age and gender do play a role with OLAM outcomes.

Table 1

Gender Frequencies

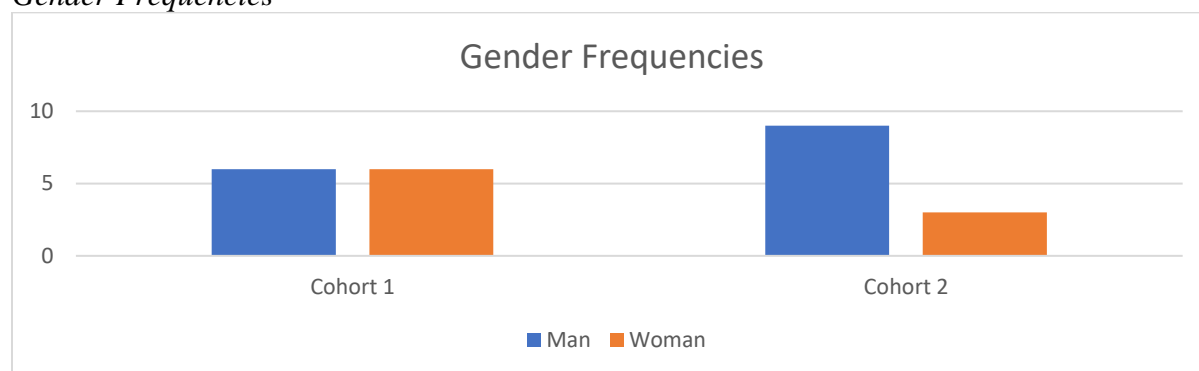
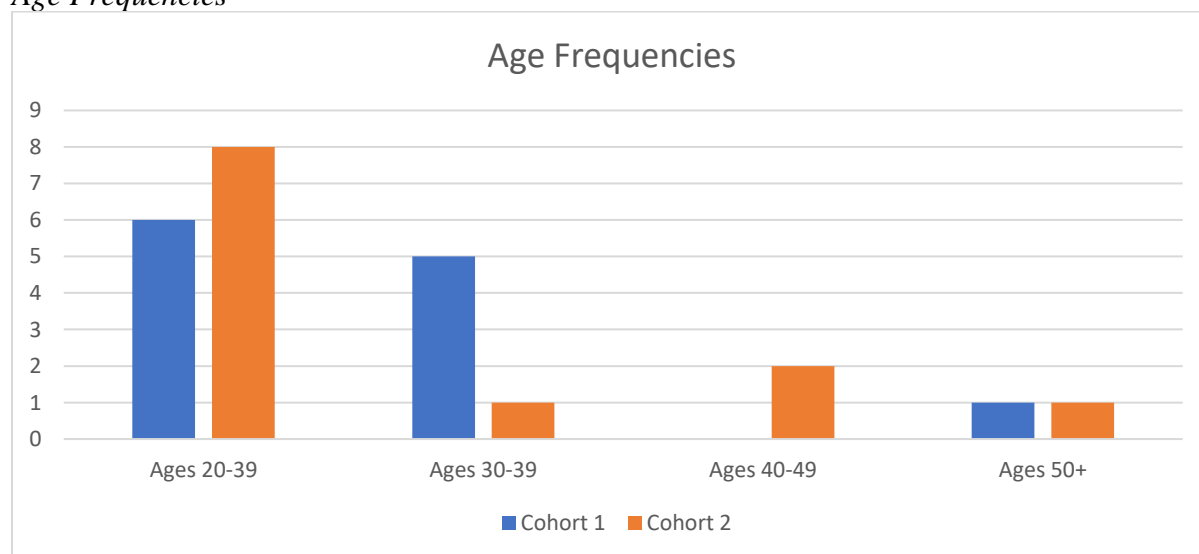


Table 2

Age Frequencies



The Online learner advising model (OLAM)

The online learner advising model was designed to create a better outcome for both online students and advisors through an emphasis on the students' social and emotional needs. The advising model was designed through a review of guidelines for advising models and by bringing together elements of proactive advising, shame resilience theory, and appreciative advising. OLAM was designed to support online students at all levels of their academic journey including undergraduate and graduate level students. While Chapter 2 covered the existing research influencing the design of OLAM, the next section of this chapter explores the way those influences were combined to create OLAM.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are three key elements to OLAM: planned connection points between the student and the advisor, structured support plans, and use of the 5 C's (connect, create, challenge, collaborate, and commit). The planned connection points include five proactive outreach efforts: the welcome interview, the degree plan discussion, strategic engagement questions asked during terms two and three, a mid-point check in, and a preparation for graduation conversation. The welcome interview ideally occurs prior to the first day of online classes and is a one-on-one conversation to begin the connection between the student and the advisor. All the participants in the OLAM cohort did receive a welcome interview prior to the start of their first course. The next planned connection point is the degree plan discussion. During this conversation with a student, the advisor reviews the requirements for the student to complete their selected program of study. Next, the advisor sends a SMS text message to the student during the second and the third term or semester. The first question asks about when in the current week's discussion did the student feel most engaged with the class. The second question inquiries about what the student found most surprising about the current week's

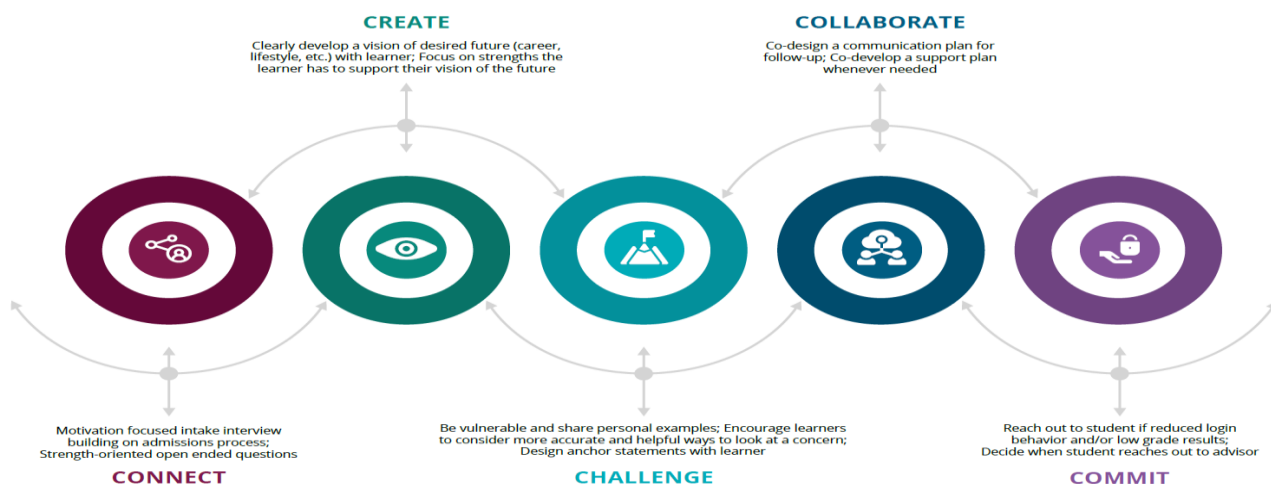
discussion and/or class (Phelam, 2012). Phelam's (2012) questions were added to the OLAM process to encourage the student to engage with the advisor and share reflections on the student's learning during the course. All the students in the experimental group received a degree plan conversation as well as the second and third term text messages. The mid-point check in connection is an outreach effort to congratulate the student on their progress thus far in the program and to elicit any questions or concerns from the student. Finally, the preparation for graduation discussion provides a final touch base to ensure the student is aware of all the steps to complete their program. The experimental group did not receive the mid-point check in connection or the graduation discussion as they did not reach those stages of their program during the study.

The next element of OLAM is the structured support plans. The structured support plans are a method of documenting the intended student outcomes, timelines to reach the outcome, next action items for the student and the advisor, and resources to support the student. The advisor designs the support plan in collaboration with the student. Not every student requires a support plan, and the advisor uses their discretion on when to develop a support plan. Students can have more than one support plan as needed. OLAM advisors also monitor student activity in the classroom with faculty and peers to proactively look for signs of disengagement to determine which student might need a support plan. A common action item on a student's support plan in the OLAM framework is for the student to reach out to faculty or peers depending on the nature of the student's needs. All the Fall 2020 cohort students were able to receive a support plan. The Fall 2020 cohort had one student who did receive a support plan related to financial concerns. This student persisted throughout the study and did not stop-out of their courses.

Research on appreciative advising (AA) contributed to the development of the OLAM approach to attempt to meet the social and emotional needs of online students. The key phases of AA strongly influenced the 5 C's, the final key element of the OLAM design. These overlapping features expand on and supplement the proactive advising and shame resilience elements of OLAM. The 6 D's (disarm, discover, dream, deliver, design, and don't settle) of AA provided an exceptional toolkit and structure for face-to-face advisors. There were several adjustments needed to adapt the model to online and distance learning settings. Like the 6 D's of AA, the OLAM model uses the 5 C's (connect, create, challenge, collaborate, and commit) to tailor the guidance for advisors of online students, pictured in Figure 3. The Fall 2020 Cohort received advising using the 5 C's approach.

Figure 3

The 5 C's of OLAM



The connect phase combines the rapport-building of disarm with open-ended, strength-oriented questions of discover (Bloom et al., 2008). The create phase can be brief with some online learners as many of them are adults with clear plans for their future and often occurs

primarily during the degree plan conversations. Tools like guided imaging are used in the dream phase of AA (Bloom et al., 2008). The OLAM advisor seeks to understand the student's vision for the future, documents their motivations, and prepares a support plan as needed. The challenge phase of OLAM highlights the importance of exploring and adjusting any distorted thinking the students might express. It is also the time when advisors typically look for signals of shame and ways to enhance shame resilience in students. The advisors ask open-ended questions to explore when a student shares a comment which includes self-doubt or a derogatory comment about themselves. When those student comments happen, the advisor questions the accuracy and helpfulness of the thoughts and supports the student in developing a new more accurate and more helpful view. This is most like the design and don't settle phases of AA, though the emphasis in OLAM is on shame and shame triggers. The collaborate phase in OLAM centers on working with the online learners to construct a mutually agreed-upon communication plan in line with proactive advising principles. This is like deliver in AA but is again focused on phone interactions versus in-person guidelines. Finally, the commit phase leans on the importance of monitoring student behaviors and creating support plans as appropriate.

If a student in the Fall 2020 OLAM cohort indicated a desire to withdraw from courses, the advisors were trained to ask multiple questions to deeply understand the student's challenges and barriers to persistence. The advisors were trained to build off the interpersonal relationship with the student to identify the student's strengths and look to build a support plan to maximize those strengths to persist. If the student still wished to withdraw, the advisor was trained to support the student through the withdrawal process while designing a detailed support plan to help the student re-enter courses in the future.

In contrast to the Fall 2020 OLAM cohort, the Spring 2020 Non-OLAM cohort did not have the same planned connection outreach. While all the students in the Spring 2020 group did receive a welcome call and a degree plan discussion, they did not receive the strategic engagement questions asked during terms two and three. The Spring 2020 cohort also did not receive structured support plans or the use of the 5 C's. Instead, the Spring 2020 cohort received reactive advising and the advisor responded if the students reached out for support. If a student indicated a desire to withdraw from courses during the Spring 2020 cohort, the advisors inquired about the reasons, encouraged the student to persist, and helped the student withdraw if they did not wish to persist. There was no identification of strengths, or support plan designed to help the student persist, nor a support plan for their return.

The OLAM Training Process

OLAM training for advisors included a three module approach delivered by the associate director of training and development and the director of change management at Wiley Education Services. As the designer of OLAM, I supervised, guided, and approved the development and deployment of the training materials. Each module was 4.5 hours of interactive training through synchronous trainer led virtual sessions. The modules were once per week over three weeks with advisor self-study activities in between live sessions. The training was completed in groups of 20 advisors or less to provide for high levels of personal engagement. Each module included small group activities and experiential exercises to practice OLAM skills. Module 1 focused on the establishment of the relationship between the student and the advisor. Module 2 emphasized the proactive outreach strategies of OLAM. Module 3 was primarily geared towards the development of and use of support plans.

Throughout the training, the advisors were taught to recognize shame and encourage shame resilience behaviors including "... empathy, connection, power, and freedom" (Brown, 2006, p. 47). Advisors were encouraged to create a psychologically safe space to examine perceived failures as learning opportunities. Additionally, OLAM advisors were trained to explore their own experiences with shame related to education and monitor their reactions to avoid unintentional shaming comments to students. OLAM advisors listened for students to share comments about themselves or comments related to self-doubt. They also paid attention for comments with generalizations using terms like always or never. Once those comments surfaced, the advisor used skills developed from the training on the challenge phase of the 5 C's. The advisor asked questions to explore whether the student comment was accurate and based on facts. The advisor also asked questions to challenge the helpfulness of the student's comments. Next, the advisor worked with the student to craft a new more accurate and more helpful view of the situation.

OLAM advisors meet weekly with their managers to discuss their progress on delivering OLAM and any personal shame experiences are reviewed during these one-on-one meetings. The advisor in this study did not note recognizing any shame specific opportunities in the Fall 2020 OLAM cohort. The advisor was not trained to look for shame specific influences for the Spring 2020 Non-OLAM cohort. See Appendix C for an overview of the topics covered in the OLAM training program.

At the conclusion of the training, the advisors are typically expected to seek OLAM certification. The certification process included submitting five artifacts to demonstrate use of the OLAM model. The artifacts included at least two recorded phone calls with students, as well as emails, or text messages of communications with students. The artifacts were reviewed by the

OLAM trainers to determine if each artifact is a representation of OLAM skills. If the OLAM trainers approved the artifacts, the advisor became OLAM certified through Wiley Education Services. The advisor in this study was OLAM certified prior to the Fall 2020 cohort starting courses.

Prior to the OLAM certification process, the advisors received a two-week training program focused mainly on school specific policies and procedures. There were also opportunities to observe other advisors and learn from observation. The pre-OLAM training was centered on following the standard operating procedure outlined in Appendix A. There was no certification process to demonstrate proficiency prior to the change to OLAM.

Student Retention

To determine if the OLAM approach had an impact on student retention, a Fisher's Exact test was conducted investigating students who were retained in the first three terms of their MBA for the Spring 2020 cohort who did not receive OLAM advising and the Fall 2020 cohort who did receive OLAM (see Table 3). Retention data were retrieved from the CSP online student advising team.

At the end of three seven-week terms, 10 of the 12 Spring 2020 students were retained and continued their courses. Two students stopped their courses, which was considered not retaining for the purposes of this study. One of the students indicated they wished to take a summer break and planned to return. The other student shared they were having health concerns and withdrew completely from the university. From the Fall 2020 cohort, which did receive OLAM, 11 students were retained and persisting towards their degree at the end of three seven-week terms. One student did not continue their courses and was considered not retained. That student indicated they wanted to take a break from classes to pursue a new employment

opportunity and planned to return after they became settled in their new role. None of the reasons for stopping their courses fell outside the scope of what OLAM is designed to address. All three students who did not retain were sent a text to inquire how COVID-19 impacted their decision to stop courses. None of the students responded to the text. Fortunately, there was still evidence from conversations between the advisor and the students indicating the above-mentioned reasons the students stopped their courses. None of the students reported academic reasons as part of their decision to stop their courses.

Table 3

Non-OLAM and OLAM Student Retention Counts

Advising Approach	Retention		Total
	Retained	Not Retained	
Non-OLAM Count	10 (83%)	2 (17%)	12
OLAM Count	11 (92%)	1 (8%)	12
Total Count	21	3	24

To identify if there was a statistically significant relationship between OLAM and student retention, a Fisher's Exact test was conducted using SPSS. If the student was a part of the Spring 2020 cohort, they were labeled as one. If the student was a part of the Fall 2020 cohort, they were coded as two. When a student was retained in the first three terms, they were labeled as one. When the student did not retain in the first three terms, they were labeled with a two. The Fisher's Exact analysis was used to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the OLAM advising model and student retention. According to the Fisher's Exact significance for a 2-sided test, there was not a statistically significant relationship between

OLAM and student retention (Fisher's Exact Sig. 2-sided = 1.0). As shown in Table 4, there was no statistically significant difference between cohort one and cohort two for retention.

Table 4

Fisher's Exact Test Data

			Retained thru 3rd term		
			Retained	Not retained	Total
Start Cohort	Spring 2020	Count	10	2	12
	Fall 2020	Count	11	1	12
Total		Count	21	3	24
Value		df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square		.381 ^a	1	0.537	
Continuity Correction ^b		0.000	1	1.000	
Likelihood Ratio		0.387	1	0.534	
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	0.500
Linear-by-Linear Association		0.365	1	0.546	
N of Valid Cases		24			

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.50.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Grade Point Average

In addition to retention, another measure of academic success is the student's grade point average (GPA). To determine the impact of the advising model, the overall GPA averages were compared. The GPA included the grades from the first three terms of the online MBA program. The students in both cohorts took the same first three courses. The median GPA for the Non-

OLAM cohort was 3.83 with a range of scores from 0 - 4.0. The median GPA for the OLAM cohort was 4.0 with a range of 3.0 - 4.0. To determine if a statistically significant difference existed between the OLAM and Non-OLAM cohorts, a Mann-Whitney U test was performed. The Mann-Whitney U test was selected as the Levene's test demonstrated the variances between the groups was not equal during a review of the independent t-test approach. Since the Asymptotic Significance level (2-tailed) is less than .05, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference between the OLAM and the Non-OLAM GPA results, $p = 0.037$. See Table 5 for the Mann-Whitney U test results.

Table 5

Mann-Whitney U Test

Test Statistics ^a	
	GPA
Mann-Whitney U	43.000
Wilcoxon W	121.000
Z	-2.087
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.037
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.101 ^b

a. Grouping Variable: Start Cohort

b. Not corrected for ties.

Conclusion

While the quantitative analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship for the retention outcomes between OLAM compared to a Non-OLAM cohort; there was a statistically significant relationship of GPA outcomes between the OLAM and Non-OLAM groups. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected for the retention rates analysis. The retention rates for the first

three terms for students who received the OLAM approach to advising compared to students who did not receive the OLAM approach are similar. The null hypothesis was rejected for the second hypothesis. There was a statistically significant higher GPA for new students who received the OLAM approach to advising compared to students who did not receive the OLAM advising approach.

The next chapter provides a discussion of the results. The discussion includes implications for the practice of advising online students, suggested policies to support online learners, and suggestions for continued scholarship in this line of study. Limitations of the research are reviewed followed by recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The online learner advising model is a new methodology of advising geared towards online students. No research currently exists on the model prior to this study. This chapter includes a discussion on the results of this research with retention and GPA outcomes. The discussion contains implications for advising online learners and suggested processes to support these students. The chapter then expands on limitations from this study leading to recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with a final summary of the research.

Students learning online have specific social and emotional needs. Being disconnected from their peers, feeling disconnected from their school, and experiencing a decreased sense of motivation are all reported experiences of online learners (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003; Yang, et al., 2017). I designed a model of academic advising to boost resources for online students to increase connection to the institution, connection to their peers, and motivation to learn in the online modality. The purpose of this research was to study the impact of an advising model designed to support the social and emotional needs of online learners. To do this, this study examined new student retention rates in their first three terms and GPA outcomes to measure the impact of this new advising approach, the online learner advising model (OLAM).

The participants of this study were randomly selected students from the online MBA cohorts beginning in the Spring 2020 and the Fall 2020 terms. The 12 students in the control group were from the Spring 2020 cohort and did not receive the OLAM advising as it was not yet implemented. The 12 Fall 2020 students were in the experimental group and received OLAM advising. The random selection did not prevent age and gender differences between the cohorts. Cohort two, which received the OLAM advising, had a higher percentage of men

compared to women. Cohort two also had a different age distribution than cohort one. While the research does not support concerns around demographic variances, future studies would be beneficial to investigate whether age and gender do play a role with OLAM outcomes. Further research could determine if gender or age differences were confounding variables.

Retention Rates after Three Terms

The retention of students during the first three terms was used to determine if OLAM had an impact on online MBA students' persistence. The findings demonstrated OLAM did not have a statistically significant improvement on retention of online MBA students. The retention data confirmed a similar number of students stopped their courses during the first three terms whether they received OLAM advising or not.

It is important to note the small sample size limited the ability to determine the impact of OLAM in this study. Another important factor to consider is the high baseline with which the retention rates started. The overall retention of online students at Concordia University, St. Paul in 2020 was 88%. This rate included all the online programs at the institution. The advisor who participated in this research had a baseline retention of 79% for the five programs they supported. The retention goal of Wiley Education Services was to achieve 94% retention. The control group demonstrated an 83% retention rate, which is 4% higher than the advisors average (79%) so the results of the Fisher's Exact analysis should be viewed with caution. The experimental group achieved a 92% retention result, a 13% increase from the advisors pre-OLAM training average. While not statistically significantly different from each other, the experimental group did come closer to the overall retention goal of the institution (goal of 94%). While only one additional student was retained in the experimental group, a single student can

make a difference in a decision to continue to run a cohort of classes, provide additional revenue to support the university costs to run a program, and improve retention rates for the program. A potential reason for the lack of statistically significant change could be related to the skill of the advisor. While not yet trained in OLAM, the advisor could have demonstrated strong relationship development skills which produced a higher baseline retention for the control group.

Grade Point Average

The grade point averages during the first three terms were used to determine if OLAM had an impact on online MBA students at CSP. The findings revealed OLAM did have a statistically significant relationship to an improvement on the GPA outcomes compared to students in the Non-OLAM group. The grade data did confirm higher grades for students in the OLAM group. This outcome demonstrated the strategies used to promote social and emotional support through OLAM are related to supporting the students in achieving better academic outcomes. A higher GPA outcome could help insulate students from experiencing shame triggers related to poor academic performance. Students with a higher GPA are less likely to experience cognitive shame and a sense of failure (Shane, 1980). Students with stronger GPA outcomes may be more likely to experience positive interactions with faculty. OLAM allows advisors to shift from policy sharing and reactive advising to a focus on academic achievement. This finding is valuable as OLAM demonstrates a way for advisors to support students in improved academic outcomes through social engagement and emotionally supportive connections. Again, it is important to observe the small sample size as a caution and limitation for determining a conclusive outcome.

Implications for Advising Online Students

In the research on the importance of the first year in higher education, the highest risk of students stopping courses and achieving poor grade outcomes happens in the beginning stages of a program (Bowman & Holmes, 2018; Box, et al., 2012). OLAM was designed to provide targeted social and emotional support throughout the learning journey, but with heavy outreach during the beginning of a program. OLAM advising provided structured outreach, support plans, and the use of the 5 C's (connect, create, challenge, collaborate, and commit) to students. Three of the five planned connections points of OLAM happen during the first three terms: the welcome conversation, the degree plan discussion, and the terms two and three engagement messages. The results of this study indicated the positive relationship of OLAM to student grade outcomes. In the practice of advising, it would benefit students to have a similar emphasis on the first three terms for supporting online learners.

In addition to the structured outreach during the first three terms, the individualized support plans were a key element of the advising process. Students benefited from having an advisor consider their needs as a unique individual. One student in the Fall 2020 cohort had a support plan related to their concerns about financial matters. The students' needs were also viewed from a vantage point of support and not risk. This positive approach to engaging with students likely contributed to the positive grade outcomes for the OLAM cohort and is recommended as an approach in advising practices. Additionally, the high level of advisor engagement early in the program likely contributed to the students being better prepared and therefore better able to achieve strong grade outcomes.

The use of the 5 C's (connect, create, challenge, collaborate, and commit) was another key element of the OLAM design and is recommended for advising practices geared towards

supporting academic success for students. This approach to advising provided a way for advisors to enhance their supportive approach to students. The 5 C's are integrated into the structured outreach steps and are a part of the welcome conversation and the degree planning discussion.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations in this research to consider that could have impacted validity and generalizability of the results. First is the occurrence of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The earliest news around the COVID-19 outbreak began near the end of 2019, though the first confirmed case in the United States was not until January 21, 2020 ("2020 COVID-19 Timeline," 2020). The cohorts studied during this research both took courses during the pandemic. To determine the impact of COVID-19, students who stopped courses were sent a text to ask about the impact of COVID-19 on their decision to stop classes. None of those students responded to the text. The advisor did ask each student to share their reasons for stopping courses and none of the students indicated the influence of the pandemic on that decision. In the control group, one of the students indicated they wished to take a summer break and planned to return. The other student shared they were having health concerns and withdrew completely from the university. In the OLAM experimental group, one student indicated they wanted to take a break from classes to pursue a new employment opportunity and planned to return after they got settled in their new role.

Another limitation was the small sample size. Having only 12 students in the control group and 12 students in the experimental group limited the generalizability of the results. While the statistical power of the study is limited, the design can be replicated for future research with

larger sample sizes across more online programs. The small sample size was also not matched on gender and age. This study can serve as a model for future research as the OLAM approach expands with some additional adjustments to expand the sample size and ensure demographic similarities between the control and experimental groups.

A third limitation was the emphasis on retention and GPA as the measures of impact of the OLAM model. Further research can be completed considering other measures of impact including student and advisor input from their experiences with OLAM. Qualitative studies would add value in determining a more complete picture on the possible impact of OLAM.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is important to note, this is the first study of the impact of OLAM. Many additional studies will be required to fully understand the ways students and advisors interact with OLAM. While significant results were discovered for GPA outcomes, further research is recommended with larger sample sizes, with a longer duration of study, and with consistent demographics to determine the generalizability of those results. It is also possible positive results with larger samples may yield significant retention findings.

A recommendation for future study is to view the results over longer periods of time and with additional cohorts. While the OLAM model is designed to target the early part of the learning journey, it is also designed to support graduation outcomes. The longer time frame would also allow for an investigation of the higher GPA results remaining consistent throughout the degree program. Having a longer duration would allow for adding graduation rates as a dependent variable. This research could include collecting themes for students who do persist in

their programs as well as students who do not. Ideally, following students and measuring their satisfaction with their career outcomes would generate a powerful research study.

In addition to a larger sample size, OLAM could be studied with a focus on the impact on different student populations. A study focused on the outcomes from OLAM with students of varied cultural backgrounds. This would examine how shame is viewed differently based on cultural influences and how that might impact the advisors' approach to OLAM and student advising. Another population to consider would be the impact of OLAM on students with lower socio-economic situations as well as first-generation college students. The individualized support plans might play a role in supporting students towards persistence who might have limited support resources in their family or community.

Another option for further study is to study the voice of the advisors and their experiences of OLAM. The advisor experience will lead to a rich understanding of how to improve the training experience and possibly identify areas of improvement in the OLAM model. Through asking open-ended question to OLAM advisors, a meaningful understanding of themes would allow for an enhanced understanding of how advisors engage with students using the OLAM model. The advisors could provide helpful insights into how they are identifying shame behaviors and how the challenge phase of the 5 C's supports shame resilience.

This study emphasized the role of the academic advisor. Other options to research, would be looking at the student and the faculty perspectives using both qualitative and quantitative research designs. From a qualitative perspective, the input from the student and the faculty on the OLAM approach would provide more information about the impact of the advising approach. Quantitative designs could involve training faculty in OLAM and then measuring the impact of providing another intervention source and additional support for

students. It would also be a more practical approach with smaller institutions who may not have the ability to provide professional academic advisors to their students.

Finally, it would be valuable to reproduce the study outside of a global health pandemic. Students who would have typically selected a campus-based learning environment might have been influenced by COVID-19 to take courses online. Once the pandemic reduces or concludes, this study can be replicated with students who clearly selected learning online as their modality of choice.

Conclusion

This quantitative study set out to measure the impact of a new advising model designed specifically for online students (OLAM). The findings revealed OLAM did have a statistically significant positive impact on GPA outcomes, but not on retention outcomes. This study provided a model for future research with a larger sample size and replication with other populations to generalize the results.

While advising might be an underestimated part of the college experience, advisors and students know the impact of their relationships (Light, 2001). Academic advising can provide a link between students and their higher education institution. “Academic advising is a key element for learning success in virtual environments that has received little attention from researchers” (Rimbau-Gilbert et al., 2011, p. 124). In the interest of helping more students succeed, the higher education community must continue to press for rigorous retention efforts and measure the outcomes. Advisors are poised to make the difference.

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Appendix A

Standard Operating Procedure for the Spring 2020 Non-OLAM Cohort

Contact Strategy

The following are contact guidelines for use by Online Advisor (OA). These guidelines function as a general template but may require adjustment per term (or for different student populations). Course mapping and planning occurs year-round but is more frequent around registration times. A strong focus on relationship building also carries throughout the term. The goal is to develop a long-term relationship with the student, which will assist in proactively addressing individual retention challenges.

The OA performs a retention trait check on each student that assists in determining their attrition risk. The retention trait check is performed by evaluating ten categories: (1) Communication with OA; (2) Course Attendance; (3) Course Performance; (4) Education History; (5) Goal; (6) Environmental Personal; (7) Environmental Technical; (8) Institutional Satisfaction; (9) Degree Completion;) and (10) Next Term Registration Status.

These ten categories are utilized to create the attrition risk status for every student. The attrition risk status determines the contact strategy used to guide and retain a continuing student. A standard contact strategy with more frequent contact exists for all new students during their first 16 weeks, regardless of their attrition risk status.

Do Not Contact Student Group

- Accounting students in South Central partnership program, and Business students in Ridgewater and Anoka Ramsey partnership programs
 - o Advised by on campus CSP advisor
 - o Retention traits are completed for these students and students are included on the biweekly At-risk report.

Students - New

- Week 1: The goal is to gauge student readiness (access to necessary class resources, syllabus review, etc. ensuring an understanding of responsibilities for week 1) and begin relationship building.
 - OA will ensure the student has logged into courses.
 - OA will send a Welcome Email to the students' personal email account on the first day of the term. The Welcome Email will introduce the OA and explain the role of Retention team. It will also include details on
 - o Drop/Add/Withdraw Deadlines
 - o Participation Guidelines
 - o Minimum Number of Credits Required for Financial Aid
 - If student is a military student, they will be directed towards the appropriate FA contact.
 - o Information regarding the OA's role and point of contact information.
 - o Information about the tutoring resource, Brainfuse.
 - o Notification of final email correspondence to personal email account.

- OA will send a second Welcome Email to the student's school email account. The Welcome Email will introduce the OA and explain the role of Retention team; additionally, OA will request a phone call to schedule an intake (ideally during week 1-3).

- o Drop/Add/Withdraw Deadlines
 - o Participation Guidelines

- o Minimum Number of Credits Required for Financial Aid

- o Information regarding the OA's role and point of contact information.

- o Request to complete an intake interview.
 - o Information about the tutoring resource, Brainfuse.

- OA will remind students to review the following policies/procedures and answer questions students may have regarding these policies:

- o Timelines for adding/dropping courses for the current term.

- o Attendance Policies
 - o Student Handbook
 - o Academic Catalog

- If a student is having trouble logging in, the OA will refer the student to the CSP Help Desk: I.T. Help Desk Office: 651-641-8866 E-mail: helpdesk@csp.edu

- If a student indicates within the first week or first 7 days of the subterm, that they would like to defer their start date or discontinue enrollment, OA will forward that communication to the student's Enrollment Counselor to discuss implications.
- o If student confirms desire to defer or discontinue, the EC will work with CSP Registrar to remove the student from classes.

- Week 1 and 2- Synchronous Component Checks
- o OA will complete an attendance check for new matriculated students for all courses with a synchronous component.

- OA will reach out to instructors of cohort courses that do not have a recorded synchronous session to confirm attendance.

- Office of Continuing Studies will reach out to instructors of General Education courses.
- Any student that does not attend is subject to the Administrative Drop/ Withdraw Policy
- OA will make a note in Banner for student absences
- OA will contact all students who miss the first one or two synchronous sessions and warn them of the Administrative Drop/Withdraw Policy

Students - All

- Subsequent weeks: The goal is to identify any attrition risks and proactively reach out to students to address any challenges that may arise.
- OA will request student ID number before revealing any protected information in a phone conversation.
 - o If student does not know ID number, OA will request 3 additional forms of identification. Acceptable forms of ID are current course, phone number, or address, birthdate.
- Email communication should be through the student's CSP email account. o Any email sent by the student from the school email account will count as a form signature.
- OA will update attrition risk status based on relationship management and LMS activity.
 - o OA will check "course status" in Blackboard A4L reports. This process includes checking login activity to ensure consistent access and reviewing overall activity in course(s).
 - o OA will enforce the Administrative Withdraw Policy as applicable.

- OA will develop plans and goals (related to study schedules, time management, degree plans, etc.) for upcoming weeks.
- OA will direct students toward institutional resources as necessary.

Students – Undergraduate

- First semester (16 weeks) – weekly contact (every other contact attempt must be by synchronous methods).
- At the start of the 2nd semester, OA contact frequency will depend on a student's attrition risk status:
 - o Distinctive – at start of the term, midpoint of the term and end of the term or every 3 – 4 weeks (whichever comes first)
 - o Neutral – period between contacts not to exceed 14 calendar days
 - o Borderline At-Risk - period between contacts not to exceed 7 - 14 calendar days
 - o At-Risk – period between contacts not to exceed 7 calendar days
 - o Severely At-Risk - period between contacts not to exceed 7 calendar days, every other contact must be via a synchronous format if the student's schedule permits.

Students – Graduate

- First semester (16 weeks) – bi-weekly contact (every other contact attempt must be by synchronous methods).

- At the start of the 2nd semester, OA contact frequency will depend on attrition risk status:

- o Distinctive – at start of the term, midpoint of the term and end of the term or every 3 – 4 weeks (whichever comes first)

- o Neutral – period between contacts not to exceed 21 calendar days.

- o Borderline At-Risk - period between contacts not to exceed 14 calendar days.

- o At-Risk – period between contacts not to exceed 7 calendar days.

- o Severely At-Risk - period between contacts not to exceed 7 calendar days; every other contact must be via a synchronous format if the student's schedule permits.

Students – Leave of Absence

- During Week 1-2, OA will check enrollment status, ensure the student is not registered for current term, and reach out by email offering support.

- During Week 4-5, OA will check to see if the student has registered for upcoming term, remind the student of next term responsibilities (book, payment concerns, etc.), and update enrollment and retention statuses if needed.

Appendix B

Standard Operating Procedure for the Fall 2020 OLAM Cohort

Contact Strategy

To best serve students, the Retention team devised a data driven process that allows advisors to communicate effectively with students. By operating under Wiley's advising model, Online learner advising model, Student Advisors are proactively reaching out to ensure students succeed. Advisors also provide reactive support for any issues, questions and concerns that arise during the term. A strong focus on relationship building carries throughout the term. The goal is to develop a long-term relationship with the student, which will assist in proactively addressing individual retention challenges.

Weekly, advisors monitor students' performance and assess their likelihood to persist in the course and the program. Their performance determines the contact strategy, with high performers receiving less contact, and students in need of additional support receiving more frequent contact.

To develop targeted communication strategies, advisors will monitor academic activity, as well as student and instructor reported concerns.

Conversations with the student are driven by what the student shares with the advisor. We strive to be a one-stop-shop for students so they may be well informed about their higher education experience.

Students - New

Advisors will begin engaging with students at the point of Registration during their admissions process. Once a student has been accepted into the program of their choice, and registered for their first course(s), the Retention team will start reaching out to the student to schedule and complete an initial Welcome Call.

The goal of the Welcome Call is to gauge the student's readiness and begin building a relationship with the student. Advisors will cover the following material during the Welcome Call:

- Program overview
- What to expect in the online format
- Communication expectations
- Access to school email account and necessary systems

Following the Welcome Call, students will receive regular communication leading up to the start of their first course. One month prior to the start of their first course, students will receive specific communication, to include:

- New class orientation
- Reminders to purchase textbooks
- Overall readiness to start their online program

Once the course has begun, all students will receive targeted communication based on risk assessment.

Students – Conditionally/Provisionally Admitted

Advisors and Retention Assistants will provide additional support and outreach to students admitted conditionally or provisionally to ensure fully admitted status.

Advisors will follow up on any outstanding documents required for full acceptance. Any documents collected will be sent to the institution via secure file transmission.

Students – Continuing and Attending

Advisors will proactively email students during each start and midterm to remind students about important dates, policies and procedures. Advisors will also proactively reach out to students during multiple milestones within a student's program. In addition to the Welcome call, advisors will reach out via phone, at a minimum, during the following milestones:

- Second term in attendance
- Third term in attendance
- Halfway through the completion of their program
- Two terms prior to program completion

In addition to regularly scheduled communication, advisors will develop targeted communication plans to students in need of additional support. Students will be identified as “Support Plan Needed” by the following criteria:

- Self-identified – student requests additional support
- Instructor identified – instructor requests the advising team provide additional support
- Minimal course access
- Unsuccessful course performance and completion
- Academic Standing, GPA, and Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

Individual and targeted communication plans will vary based on the student's situation and need. The goal of the outreach is to help the student overcome the specific obstacle impacting their success in the program. Communication with students will be in the form of emails, phone calls, and text messages.

Students – Sitting Out

The Retention team will regularly reach out to students that are not attending to encourage students to return. Registration outreach will be completed by the Retention Assistants, as well as the Student Advisors, in the form of phone calls, emails and text messages.

Appendix C

Main Topics Within OLAM Training

1. Psychology of Being a Student – Why OLAM is needed.
2. The 5 C's - Connect, Create, Collaborate, Challenge, Commit
 - a. What are they?
 - b. Identify them in calls.
 - c. Apply them in your own calls.
3. Core Skills
 - a. Active Listening
 - b. Call Control
 - c. Call to Action
 - d. Grounding Statements
4. Strength's Based
 - a. Identify the Advisor's own strengths.
 - b. What questions to ask to help student awareness and confidence in their own strengths.
 - i. (Green and Red Dot Video)
 - ii. Case Study? -->Compare Strengths based to root problem analysis
5. Planned Connection Points
 - a. The Welcome Call
 - b. Degree Planning Call
 - c. T2 and T3 Check In
 - d. Midpoint Check In
 - e. Graduation Outreach

6. Support Factors

- a. Picklist
- b. When to apply

7. Support Plans

- a. Types of Support Plans
- b. When do use them?
- c. How often?
- d. Scheduled Outreach

8. OLAM Certification

- a. What does OLAM Mean to you – Synthesis
- b. Rubric
 - i. 5 artifacts
 - 1. At least 2 Calls
 - 2. Others can be texts or emails.
 - ii. Explanation
 - iii. Attending Training
 - iv. Either an EC or SA for at least 6 months