

Fall 11-17-2017

## Relationship Between Advisor Servant Leadership Behaviors and First-Year Students' Intent to Persist

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Jennifer Kelly

*Concordia University - Portland*

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Concordia University—Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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The Relationship Between Advisor Servant Leadership Behaviors  
and First-Year Students' Intent to Persist

Jennifer Kelly

Concordia University—Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Angela Owusu-Ansah, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Deborah Jones, Ed.D., Content Specialist

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Concordia University—Portland

2017

## Abstract

This correlational study sought to determine the relationship between advisor servant leadership behaviors and first-year students' intent to persist from fall 2016 to spring 2017 and from spring 2017 to fall 2017 with students in a private, 4-year, religiously affiliated university in the United States. The research was grounded in Tinto's (1975) persistence theory and Greenleaf's (1977) theory of servant leadership. The Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS) (Paul, 2012) and descriptive analysis were applied. Study results indicated that all four servant-leader constructs, degree awareness (DA), conceptual mapping (CM), advising environment (AE), and holistic growth (HG), were associated with advisors' influence on their students' decisions to continue from fall term to spring term; only DA and AE were associated with intent to return from spring term to the next fall term. Based on the results, in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the United States, combined servant leader behaviors (DA, CM, AE, and HG) are associated with student persistence during an academic year. DA and AE behaviors are related to student persistence into the advancing year.

*Keywords:* servant-leader behaviors, persistence, correlation, servant leadership, academic advising, higher education

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this piece of art to my wonderful, supportive, and loving husband, Anthony J. Kelly. Thank you for your heart to serve and for creating space for me to accomplish a life-long goal of completing a doctorate degree. I dedicate this to my parents and thank them for their encouragement, intelligence, and wisdom. I would also like to thank Evelyn A. Schemmel for being an example of a leader and for her mentoring throughout my higher education career. Thank you to all my friends for their patience and understanding during my educational journey. I am grateful for God's presence in my life and the spiritual gifts of discernment, wisdom, and administration, the roots from which the fruit of this dissertation developed.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

Student persistence and first-year student retention have been ongoing challenges in higher education for over 40 years (Baer & Duin, 2014; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Carter, 2006; Coleman, 2013; Earl, 1988; Ellis, 2016; Ellis, Hitchcock, & Phillips, 2014; Ferguson, 2014; Fike & Fike, 2008; Gethers, 2016; Haghamed, 2014; Herzog, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; LaRocca, 2015; Padron, 2012; Reason, 2009; Shiban, 2013; Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 2004; Tinto, 2006; Tinto, 2012; Tyson, 2014). This concern has prompted institutional leaders to identify the best methods for minimizing attrition (Arrington, 2015; Bowen & McPherson, 2016; Ellis, 2016; Tinto, 2006). Academic advising has long been thought of as a path for addressing student persistence and retention (Cueso, 2003; Crockett, 1978; Howard, 2017; Glennen, 1976; Glennen & Baxley, 1985; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Morillo, 2012; Pargett, 2011; Wilder, 1981). Several kinds of practices are at the forefront of advising literature, including developmental, prescriptive, intrusive [proactive], and integrated approaches.

Bean and Metzner (1985) reported inconsistencies with advising and persistence that extend back to the 1970s. Ishler and Upcraft (2005) observed that research on the effects of academic advising on persistence was varied. Some studies found a positive correlation with persistence (Ducksworth, 2008; Glennen & Baxley, 1985; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Poole, 2015; Swecker et al., 2013), while others reported no significant impact (Metzer, 1989; Morillo, 2012; Schwebel, Walburn, Klyce, & Jerrolds, 2012). Nevertheless, Tinto (2012) emphasized the importance of students having clear expectations, along with a roadmap, and advisor-lead guidance, when navigating academic career paths. Tinto (2004) further contended that

successful retention programs should incorporate high-quality academic advising. In the 2015-2016 Noel Levitz National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report, academic advising was noted as helpful in persuading students to persist until graduation (Noel-Levitz, 2015). The *2017 effective practices report for student success, retention, and completion* report (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017) indicated 89.5% of 4-year, private institutions ranked one-on-one academic advising by professional staff, a top-rated practice. However, studies on student satisfaction with advising approaches yielded inconsistent results (Barbuto, Story, & Fritz, 2011; Ducksworth, 2008; El Tantawi, AbdelSalam, & Al-Harbi, 2015; Metzger, 1989; Mottarella et al., 2004; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Weir, Dickman, & Fuqua, 2005; Wilder, 1981). This has stimulated an exploration of new advising paradigms that draw from leadership theories like transformational leadership (Drozd, 2010; Kelly, 2003) and servant leadership (McClellan, 2007; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Paul, Smith, & Dochney, 2012; Paul, 2012; Taner & Özkan, 2014). Paul et al. (2015) found that the servant leadership model could be a viable approach to advising.

Servant-leader advising focuses on serving students rather than applying or using skills, methods, and strategies (McClellan, 2007). McClellan (2007) asserted, "...advisors who are not motivated by genuine love for students and a desire to serve are more likely to see them as unmotivated and in need of prescriptive, directive advisement." (p. 43). Ayers (2008) noted that the type of love expressed is *agapao* or agape love, which should be at the center of a servant leader's heart. This motivation differentiates an academic advisor from a servant-leader advisor. Servant-leader advisors' behaviors expressed in the advisor-advisee interaction are central to the relationship. Paul et al. (2012) confirmed that the servant leadership model more closely paralleled developmental academic advising behaviors because of the leader's focus on students' individual growth and development. Paul (2012) validated these findings by developing and

testing the Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS), a tool for measuring servant-leader advisor behaviors.

Studies of servant-leader advising have concentrated on public universities in the South, where student populations were predominantly Black, White, and Hispanic (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Paul et al., 2012). Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) recommended advancing the theory of servant-leader advising by conducting similar studies with different demographics to generalize the findings. No studies have yet examined whether a correlation exists between servant-leader advising behaviors and intent to persist with first-year students in private religiously affiliated universities in the U.S. The relationship between servant-leader advising behaviors and student persistence has not been researched, and only limited studies could be identified that link student satisfaction to servant leader advising (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). This study sought to address the gap in knowledge by determining whether a correlation existed between servant leader advising behaviors and intent to persist with first-year students in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the U.S.

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

#### **Tinto's Theory**

Persistence research has its roots in early person-environment interactive theories like Tinto's theory of student departure or social integration model (Crawford, 1999; Long, 2012; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987). Tinto's integration theory suggested students arrive at the education environment with certain pre-existing characteristics (Reason, 2009; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987), which interact with the institution's characteristics and culture, resulting in successful or unsuccessful integration. The better the student-institutional match, the greater the persistence (Kahn & Nauta, 2001). Tinto (2002) stated that positive ongoing academic and social



experiences on campus improved student persistence. Tinto (1999) believed that effective academic advising assisted students with connecting to the institution. This study is based on Tinto's theory as it examines the effects of servant-leader advising on persistence (Tinto, 2012).

## **Persistence**

Persistence with first-year students in higher education has been an ongoing challenge for many years (Braxton et al., 2004; Carter, 2006; Coleman, 2013; Earl, 1988; Ellis, 2016; Fike & Fike, 2008; Gethers, 2016; Herzog, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; Shiban, 2013; Swecker et al., 2013; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 2004; Tinto, 2006). Research has indicated that first-year students were most susceptible to leaving school (Herzog, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Swecker et al., 2013). Tinto (2012) noted that the problem is further complicated by the various definitions of the terms "persistence" and "retention" used by higher education institutions. According to Hagedorn (2006), student retention and student persistence are terms often used interchangeably. Institutions retain students; students persist (Hagedorn, 2006; Reason, 2009). Tinto (1987; 2012) added that the intermittent discontinuity of some students' education makes it challenging to categorize them. Some students may choose not to continue their education at the same institution, while others may decide not to pursue a degree at all.

Retention and persistence research has typically focused on community colleges, state colleges, and public universities (Fike & Fike, 2008; McClean, 2009; Metzner, 1989; Nakajima, 2008; Nitecki, 2011; Pargett, 2011; Shiban, 2013; Stewert, Lim, & Kim, 2015; Wetzel, O'Toole, & Peterson, 1999; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013). Studies were conducted on student populations that were predominantly White (Matsumoto, 2010; McPherson, 2007), as well as schools with majority Black (Fleming, 2012; McClean, 2009; Strayhorn, 2016; Trippi & Cheatham, 1989) and Hispanic (Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Kurpius, & Rund, 2011; Otero,

Rivas, & Rivera, 2007; Wagner, 2011) student bodies. Institutional leaders, recognizing that finishing college is as crucial as starting (Bryant & Hornstein, 2016), must develop strategic plans to address their persistence and retention concerns (Bowen & McPherson, 2016; Donaldson, McKinney, Lee, & Pino, 2016; Ellis, 2016). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) stated, “Researchers are concerned with variables related to student persistence in college as well as identifying best practices to encourage degree attainment” (p. 10). Retaining students is more cost-effective for institutions than increasing recruitment strategies (Cueso, 2003; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005) as completing college has positive economical and societal implications (Tinto, 2004).

Studies on student success and retention in faith-based institutions are limited (Derrico, Tharp, & Schreiner, 2015). Student persistence is particularly challenging for private, non-profit, religiously affiliated institutions. Vander Schee (2009) stated, “Although student persistence is important for all institutions of higher education, student retention at small church-related colleges with limited resources is imperative for fiscal viability” (p. 208). Coley et al. (2016) emphasized that only 54% of private 4-year colleges have a solid retention plan in place. Thus, research on persistence in 4-year, private, non-profit institutions can help leaders to develop and improve retention programs.

While no single variable can be isolated as the sole factor responsible for retention (Ellis et al., 2014; Nutt, 2003), some researchers have claimed that academic advising plays a significant role in student success (Cate & Miller, as cited in Folsom, Yoder, & Joslin, 2015; Cueso, 2003; Drake, 2011; Tinto, 1987). Timely and accurate advising can be essential to timely graduation (Bowen & McPherson, 2016; Wilder, 1981). Still, the most effective approach to

advising is unclear. Thus, Davis and Cooper (2001) recommended further research on advising and persistence.

### **Academic Advising**

Approaches to academic advising can be narrowed to three major paradigms in the research literature: prescriptive advising, which places the responsibility of knowledge and power in the hands of the advisor, who tells the student what to do (Barbuto et al., 2011); developmental advising, which distributes the responsibility more evenly between the advisor and advisee (Barbuto et al., 2011), and proactive advising, which draws upon elements of both models but still places responsibility for initiating advising in the hands of the advisor (Varney, 2012). While these paradigms are widely used in higher education, Barbuto et al. (2011) argued for new approaches that take advisor behaviors into consideration. Barbuto et al. (2011) and other researchers (Kelly, 2003; McClellan, 2007; Paul et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2015) explored the possibilities of advising anchored in leadership theory.

Although research on the impact of academic advising on persistence is mixed (Ducksworth, 2008; Glennen & Baxley, 1985; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Metzger, 1989; Morillo, 2012; Swecker et al., 2013), persistence has been empirically linked to academic advising (Cate & Miller, as cited in Folsom et al., 2015; Klepfer & Hull, 2012). Higher education leaders have the ability to observe the behaviors and practices of their institutional staff and understand how these behaviors influence a student's academic journey. Advisors are some of the first individuals to establish a relationship with students, and that relationship can set the tone for a student's entire experience (Ellis et al., 2014), and are sometimes viewed as the institution's "hub of the wheel" (Habley, 1994, as cited in, Nutt, 2003). Light (2001) contended, "Academic advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college

experience” (p. 81). Paul et al. (2015) found that servant leadership was closely aligned with developmental advising behaviors.

### **Servant Leadership Theory**

The terms *servant* and *leader* form a paradox when brought together (Northhouse, 2016; Spears, 2005). Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990) pioneered the concept of servant leadership by uniting his industry experience in organizations with the reading of Herman Hesse’s 1960 novel *Journey to the East*. He used Hesse’s insight to claim that a leader must first be a servant (Greenleaf, 1977; Northhouse, 2016; Spears, 2005). Greenleaf’s standard of good servant leadership included considering how people who are served develop: if they become “healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants, as well as how the least privileged in society benefit from service (as cited in Spears, 2005, p. 2). The concept of servant leadership has since been applied in various settings (Spears, 2005).

Servant leadership has been researched in organizations (Magda, Raja, Panaccio, & Wang, 2016; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Schulkers, 2017) including rural-community hospitals, the non-profit sector, and financial organizations (McCann, Graves, & Cox, 2015; Rezaei, Salehi, Shafiei, & Sabet, 2012; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010). The application of servant leadership in higher education is relatively new, and it has been explored in various areas including student satisfaction (Arrington, 2015; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015), student leadership in social work education (Litten, 2008), administrators’ perceptions of servant leadership (McDougle, 2009), faculty as servant leaders, servant teaching (Drury, 2005; Noland & Richards, 2015; Varney, 2017), and with student success in historically black colleges (Mathis-Lawson, 2017). In this study, the elements of servant leadership (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, conceptualization, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building

community), first identified by Greenleaf (1977) and later developed by Spears (2010), were considered in relation to academic advising (McClellan, 2007; Paul et al., 2012).

This study was framed by Greenleaf's (1977) theoretical foundation of servant leadership and Tinto's (1975) persistence theory. Previous research indicated that first-year students are most susceptible to leaving school (Baer & Duin, 2014; Herzog, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Swecker et al., 2013). Tinto (1987; 1999; 2004; 2012) stated that academic advising resulted in increased persistence and retention. Servant-leader advising emerged in the literature as a new paradigm (McClellan, 2007; Paul et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2015). This approach considers the effects of advisor behaviors on student persistence in the context of the advisor-advisee relationship. Attention was given to if, and whether, servant-leader advising behaviors [of the advisor] influences student persistence.

Greenleaf (1977) argued that healthy societies are the outcome of caring persons who serve one another. Greenleaf (1977) also believed that higher education institutions have an opportunity to affect students and society. One objective of leaders in higher education is to retain first-year students into their second year and reduce the propensity for these students to become "at-risk" of dropping out of school (LaRocca, 2015). Thus, addressing student persistence leads to an increase in graduates, thereby contributing to a school's positive impact on society (National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, 2013). Wheeler (2012) recognized that academic departments were central to students' experiences and served as a point of connection for students, curricula, and academic programs. Students leave institutions for reasons both internal and external to the institution (Crosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009; Okagbare, 2017; Tinto, 2012). McClellan (2007) suggested that academic advising, like teaching, was in some ways a form of service. The advising process includes many of the traits

of servant leadership, including empathy, a commitment to growth, the ability to see student potential, and the ability to design a plan for their achievement. Paul et al. (2012) found a positive correlation between servant leadership and developmental advising. Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) proposed further research with different demographics to determine if their results were generalizable.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Persistence of first –year students is particularly challenging for private, non-profit, religiously affiliated institutions, who struggle fiscally and with the provision of social experiences. There is some research that supports academic advising’s significant role in student persistence. What is not clear are the specific behaviors of advising that are most influential in student persistence in private 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated universities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to test McClellan’s (2007) advocacy of advising as servant leadership in order to determine if a correlation existed between advisor servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist with first-year students in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the U.S. Following Paul et al. (2012) and Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015), this study specifically included the variable of persistence, and it used the Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS) (Paul, 2012). The findings of this study were intended to inform advising and retention interventions and advisor training specific to this student demographic.

### **Research Question**

This study was guided by the following research question:

RQ1: What correlation exists between advisor servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist with first-year students in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the United States?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

First-year student persistence and retention has been an ongoing challenge in higher education for over 40 years (Baer & Duin, 2014; Braxton et al., 2004; Carter, 2006; Coleman, 2013; Earl, 1988; Ellis, 2016; Ellis et al., 2014; Ferguson, 2010; Fike & Fike, 2008; Getters, 2016; Haghamed, 2014; Herzog, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; LaRocca, 2015; Padron, 2012; Reason, 2009; Shiban, 2013; Swecker et al., 2013; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 2004; Tinto, 2006; Tinto, 2012; Tyson, 2014). The National Commission on Higher Education Attainment (2013) mandated that institutional leaders consider student persistence as an urgent issue, suggesting that university leaders need to do more by focusing on retention and completion. Ishitani (2016) stressed, “Graduating more students in a timely manner is one of the ultimate goals for every institution of higher education “(p. 283). Equal attention should be given to success in admissions, recruitment, and instructional delivery. Few studies have been conducted that explore the relationship between servant leadership and academic advising in higher education (Arrington, 2015; Padron, 2012; Paul et al., 2015; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2012; McClellan, 2007). Paul et al. (2012) identified a positive correlation between servant leadership and developmental advising. An extensive search of the literature revealed an absence of studies relating servant-leader advising to student persistence.

Few studies over the last 10 years have addressed the issue of persistence with first-year students in private, religiously affiliated, non-profit, 4-year institutions (Arendt, 2008; Baird, 2015; Banks, 2012; Marra, 2006; McPherson, 2007; Sansom, 2012). Small, private, tuition-

dependent colleges struggle to increase enrollments and remain open (Selingo, 2013; Woodhouse, 2015). These colleges have also struggled with persistence and retention. Vander Schee (2009) stated, “Although student persistence is important for all institutions of higher education, student retention at small church-related colleges with limited resources is imperative for fiscal viability” (p. 208). Servant leader behaviors have been correlated with student satisfaction (Paul et al., 2012), and student satisfaction has been correlated with persistence (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2016; Tinto, 2012). Findings obtained from this study may inform future research, staff training, and the development of effective persistence programs.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Academic advising.* The process in which an advisor and advisee engage in a dynamic within an educational setting for the purposes of facilitating the advisee’s growth, development, and learning with respect to academic, social, personal, and career direction and goals within the college experience while maximizing the application of institutional and community resources (NACADA, 2003).

*First-year student.* A student who has completed less than the equivalent of 1 full year of undergraduate work (less than 30 semester hours in a 120-hour degree program) or less than 900 contact hours (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

*Persistence.* A student’s movement toward the goal of continuing enrollment in the next term (Ruffalo Noel-Levitz, 2016).

*Professional advisor.* One who advises first-years, transfers, athletes, and undeclared majors while working in collaboration with faculty advisors and the registrar’s office to assist students in their academic goals (Krush & Winn, 2010).



*Servant leadership.* A leadership style demonstrated by a desire to serve others first by sharing power, putting others' needs as a priority, and helping others develop to their fullest potential (Keith, n.d.).

*Servant-leader advising.* Student academic advising motivated by love and the desire to serve students with genuine interest in their growth and development as persons (McClellan, 2007), as demonstrated by the expression of servant leader behaviors (Paul, 2012).

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

The purpose of this study was to test McClellan's (2007) advocacy of advising as servant leadership in order to determine if servant-leader advising behaviors influenced first-year students' intent to return in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated, university in the U.S. This section highlights the study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Delimitations are the parameters or boundaries of the study set by the researcher, and which could adversely affect the study, and limitations are those components of the study and potential weaknesses that the researcher did not have control over.

#### **Assumptions**

This study contained six initial assumptions. First, it was assumed that students responded to the survey based on their experiences of professional advising. Secondly, the ASLBS (Paul, 2012) was assumed to be a reliable and valid instrument for measuring advisor servant leader behaviors. Students were assumed to have understood the questions on the survey. The students' responses to the survey were assumed to have been confidential, with no identifiable markers in the resulting data. There was no assumption that any identified relationship between the variables indicated causality. Finally, it was assumed that the selected students received academic advising from a professional advisor.

## **Delimitations**

Several delimitations were identified in this study. The first delimitation was the decision to study academic advising and servant leader behaviors in relation to persistence as opposed to other potential relationships like advisor ethnicity, advisor experience, or advisor gender and persistence. The next delimitation was the selection of servant leadership as opposed to other leadership theories. The subjective selection of a specified group (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016) was another delimitation of the study. Mortenson stated that “Persistence measurement begins with the careful identification of a clearly defined group or cohort of students at one point in time, place and with specific demographic and enrollment characteristics” (as cited in Seidman, 2012, p. 37). The researcher elected to concentrate only on intent to persist (as opposed to retention) in the fall 2016 incoming undergraduate first-year cohort. Other cohorts including online, military, and graduate students were omitted from this study because they did not receive advising from professional, on-campus advisors. Another delimitation was the selection of 1 private, non-profit, religious-affiliated university as opposed to a for-profit college or community college or public university. The geographic location of the university (Pacific region) was also a delimitation.

## **Limitations**

Several limitations were identified in this study. First, the application of correlational research methods could only determine if a relationship between the variables existed. Correlation does not imply causality, which might have been found in an experimental design. Thus, the inability to draw conclusions about what may have caused the relationship was an inherent limitation of the research design. Another limitation was the use of a survey instrument. While the selection of a Likert-type scale allowed for focused questions, respondents may have

been challenged with the range of degrees on the scale. The lack of space for students to explain answers on the survey was another limitation of this study. Other limitations included the potential for respondents to either submit incomplete surveys or respond incorrectly to the survey questions, thus potentially affecting sufficient data collection. Inauthentic and indolent responses could also skew data accuracy.

Finally, Arrington (2015) suggested studying different types of institutions like those that are religiously affiliated to determine if the research yields different results. The selection of a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated institution, as opposed to a for-profit college, community college, or public university, limited generalizability of results to differing institutions. The study also used convenience sampling, which, as a non-probability sampling method, did not allow for generalizations to other populations (Etikan et al., 2016).

### **Significance of the Study**

Despite the inability to generalize the results of the study to all types of higher education student advising and student persistence, the study provides insights on the intersection between academic advisor behaviors and student persistence. Studies tend to focus on why students leave universities as opposed to why they persisted to the next term (McPherson, 2007). The current landscape in higher education places student success at the focal point of institutional sustainability. The need for higher education leaders to reassess how institutions lead and how leadership approaches are demonstrated in daily interactions with students is critical to staff training and program development. Studying different populations like Asian-Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian is vital to building a comprehensive body of research to complement studies where the populations are predominantly White, Black, or Hispanic. The results from this

study could shed light on the advising needs of students in a private, religiously affiliated institution and adopt strategic plans as applicable.

### **Summary**

Retaining students in higher education is an ongoing challenge (Braxton et al., 2004; Carter, 2006; Coleman, 2013; Earl, 1988; Fike & Fike, 2008; Gethers, 2016; Herzog, 2005; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; Shiban, 2013; Swecker et al, 2013; Tinto, 2004; Tinto, 2006; Tinto, 2012). Research indicates that student satisfaction with academic advising is inconsistent, and there is a notable lack of research about student persistence and academic advising. New paradigms such as servant-leader advising help to take advising beyond its traditional administrative role (McClellan, 2007). This study was necessary for determining whether a relationship between servant-leader advising behaviors and persistence exists. The conclusions could be useful for future training and development of academic advisors.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction to the Literature Review**

This chapter provides an orientation to servant leadership and the current research in servant leader advising. Specifically, scholarship on (a) Tinto's Persistence Theory, (b) Servant Leadership, (c) Developmental, Prescriptive, and Intrusive Advising, (d) Advising and Persistence, and (e) Servant Leader Advising are reviewed. This chapter briefly discusses the differences between transformational leadership and servant leadership.

Persistence among first-year students has been an ongoing challenge in higher education (Baer & Duin, 2014; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Carter, 2006; Coleman, 2013; Crusoe, 2003; Earl, 1988; Ellis, Hitchcock, & Phillips, 2014; Fike & Fike, 2008; Gethers, 2016; Haghamed, 2014; Herzog, 2007; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; LaRocca, 2015; McPherson, 2016; Myers & Rankin, 2016; Okagbare, 2017; Padron, 2012; Reason, 2009; Shiban, 2013; Stewart, Lim, & Kim, 2015; Swecker et al., 2013; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 2004; Tinto, 2006; Tinto, 2012; Tyson, 2014). The concern has prompted institutional leaders to identify the best methods for minimizing attrition (Arrington, 2015; Bowen & McPherson, 2016; Tinto, 2006). Bryant (2016) stated, "Higher education has a big problem: Students aren't crossing the finish line" (para. 1). To improve student persistence, institutional leaders must deem retention a high priority, keep abreast of interventions, and make student success central to their mission (Baer & Duin, 2014; Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012). High student attrition rates result in lost revenue and the potential loss of government funding, thereby affecting the financial stability of the institution and the community at large (Bowen & McPherson, 2016; Delbanco, 2012; Fike & Fike, 2008; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Sousa, 2015). Klepfer and Hull (2012) stated, "If instead 90 percent of our current freshmen persisted to degree, we would

produce an additional 3.8 million graduates by 2020—enough to meet the labor market’s needs in this decade and nearly halfway to meeting the President’s 2020 goal’ (p. 2). Improving persistence is also important for institutional sustainability (Bowen & McPherson, 2016; Fike & Fike, 2008; LaRocca, 2015).

The importance of retention and persistence has prompted an institutional call to action (National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, 2013; Tinto, 2012). Kalsbeek (2013) noted that institutions have an opportunity to refocus retention efforts to eliminate processes that impede students’ progress toward their degrees. Academic advising has long been thought of as a path for addressing student persistence and retention (Crockett, 1978; Cueso, 2003; Glennen, 1979; Fricker, 2015; Glennen & Baxley, 1985; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; LaRocca, 2015; Morillo, 2012; Pargett, 2011; Wilder, 1981). As Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, and Hawthorne (2013) noted, first-year students required comparatively more support to succeed within the academic environment. Thus, Siegel (2011) encouraged advisors to focus on first-year students, thereby providing the institution with an opportunity to establish a good foundation for these students’ entire academic careers.

Much of the advising literature focuses on the developmental, prescriptive, and intrusive (or proactive) approaches. Developmental advising and prescriptive advising tend to be opposing models in the literature (Winston & Sandor, 1984). Developmental advising is a growth-oriented approach concerned with the total well-being of the student. The approach is based on trust and involves sharing responsibility with the student (Crookston, 1994). In contrast, the prescriptive model focuses on limitations. It is based on authority, and the relationship between advisor and advisee is based on status (Winston & Sandor, 1984). Brown and Rivas (1994) noted that the appropriate approach to advising depends on where students are

in their development. Finally, intrusive or proactive advising, was beneficial for advising first-year students (Barbuto, Story, Fritz, & Schinstock, 2011; Donaldson et al., 2016; Earl, 1988; Freeman, 2008; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Ohrt, 2016; Swecker et al., 2013; Varney, 2012). Intrusive advising is intended to build a relationship with the student, anticipate student needs, and set goals to address those needs (Davis, 2015; Gordon-Starks, 2015). Regardless of the approach, research revealed inconsistent results with the various advising models (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Davis, 2015; Glennen & Baxley, 1985; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Kot, 2014; Lorean, 2008; McFarlane, 2013; Metzner, 1989; Morillo, 2012; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Poole, 2015; Swecker et al., 2013; Schwebel, et al., 2012). Tinto (2004) contended that successful retention programs should incorporate high-quality academic advising. Tinto (2012) further advocated for providing students with a clear academic plan coupled with advisor support throughout the student's academic career.

Ruffalo Noel-Levitz (2016; 2015) noted that student satisfaction is essential to student persistence and degree completion. Findings on student satisfaction with mainstream advising approaches, such as prescriptive and developmental advising, were inconsistent (Al-Ansari, El Tantawi, AbdelSalam, & Al-Harbi, 2015; Barbuto et al., 2011; Davis, 2015; Kot, 2014; Lorean, 2008; Metzner, 1989; Padron, 2012; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Weir, Dickman, & Fuqua, 2005; Wilder, 1981). As a result, several researchers have explored new advising approaches, drawing from leadership theories like transformational leadership (Drozd, 2010; Kelly, 2003) and servant leadership (McClellan, 2007; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Paul, Smith, & Dochney, 2012; Paul, 2012). These paradigms propose a close alignment of leadership traits with advising behaviors (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015), but they are differentiated by the leader's loyalty, focus, (Parolini, 2007; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004) and philosophical orientation

(Sendaya & Sarros, 2002). McClellan (2007) and Paul et al. (2015) claimed that servant leadership was a new and viable model for academic advising (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015).

A review of the literature revealed that there was limited research on servant-leader advising. Studies on servant-leader advising and studies on servant leadership among academic support staff have concentrated on public universities in the South, where student populations are predominantly Black, White, and Hispanic (Arrington, 2015; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Paul, Smith, & Dochney, 2012). Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) recommended advancing the theory of servant-leader advising by conducting similar studies with different demographics to verify the generalization of findings, as different demographics may have different needs (Young-Jones, et al., 2013). Only one study directly linked student satisfaction to servant-leader advising (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to test McClellan's (2007) idea of advising as servant leadership in order to determine if servant-leader advising behaviors correlated with intent to persist among first-year students in a private, non-profit, religiously affiliated, 4-year university in the U.S. Following Paul et al. (2012) and Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015), this study specifically added the variable of persistence, and it used Paul's (2012) Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS) to determine the relationship between servant-leader advising behaviors and intent to persist. Data derived from the study could help inform advising and retention interventions and practices as well as advisor training and development.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study is framed by Greenleaf's (1977) theoretical foundation of servant leadership and Tinto's (1975) persistence theory. Improving first-year student persistence has been an ongoing challenge in higher education (Braxton et al., 2004; Carter, 2006; Coleman, 2013; Earl,



1988; Fike & Fike, 2008; Gethers, 2016; Herzog, 2007; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; Shiban, 2013; Swecker et al., 2013; Tinto, 2006; Tinto, 2004). Past research has shown that first-year students were most susceptible to leaving school (Baer & Duin, 2014; Herzog, 2007; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Swecker et al., 2013; Tyson, 2014). Tinto (1999, 2004, 2012) later advanced the idea that academic advising led to increased persistence and retention. Bean and Metzner (1985) reported several inconsistencies with advising and persistence, extending back to the 1970s. Trent and Medsker (1968) indicated a positive relationship between students' who received academic advising and persistence (as cited in, Bean & Metzner, 1985), while Everett (1979) indicated utilization of advising services was associated with higher dropout rates (as cited in, Bean & Metzner, 1985). Ishler and Upcraft (2005) found similar variance in research on the effects of academic advising on persistence. Some studies indicated a positive correlation with persistence (Glennen & Baxley, 1985; Lorean, 2008; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Poole, 2015; Swecker et al., 2013), while others demonstrated no significant impact (Metzer, 1989; Morillo, 2012; Schwebel et al., 2012).

Servant-leader advising has only recently appeared in the literature as an academic advising paradigm (McClellan, 2007; Paul et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2015; Taner & Oksan, 2014). The shift to servant-leader advising removes the emphasis from advising technique and refocuses attention on who the leader is being and what the leader is doing, as expressed thorough the heart of serving (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The heart of serving, or *servanthood* as explained by Sendaya & Sarros (2002), is the felt need to serve others, voluntarily reaching out to meet their needs without any personal gain. When applied to academic advising, servant leadership is not just about doing or applying a technique, as with other academic advising approaches, but about

being a servant. Based on this principle, this study considered advisor behaviors in the context of the advisor-advisee relationship and their effect on student persistence.

Higher education leaders seek to transition first-year students into their second year and reduce the propensity for these students to become “at-risk” of dropping out of school (LaRocca, 2015; Tyson, 2014). Siegel (2011) stressed the need to concentrate on first-year students so that institutions have an opportunity to establish a good foundation for the remainder of their education journey. Campbell (2002) noted that academic advising is central to student persistence and suggested that administrators consider professional development in organizational and leadership theories. McClellan (2013) similarly suggested, “Perhaps it is through the role of developmental professionals that academic advisors can most contribute to the development of students as leaders” (p. 220). Nevertheless, academic advising should be an institutional priority, and it should include faculty participation (Kelly, 2013).

While students may leave college due to personal issues, financial constraints, and other reasons beyond the scope of an advisor (Crosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009; Lau, 2003; Martin, 2017; Tinto, 2012), Vianden and Barlow (2015) noted, “[a]cademic advising founded on strong interpersonal relationships influences student self-efficacy, emotional commitment to the institution, as well as persistence and loyalty” (p. 15). Metzner (1989) found that low-quality advising negatively affected persistence. Ruffalo Noel-Levitz (2016) highlighted how much students valued academic advising: “Advising services have long been identified as a way to connect with students, build relationships, and keep students on the path to completion” (p. 8). Haley (2016) noted the need for a certain level of emotional intelligence on the part of advisors, while McClellan (2007) suggested that academic advising, like teaching, is in some ways a form of service. Servant leadership, McClellan pointed out, embraces many of the traits inherent in

the advising process: empathy, a commitment to growth, the ability to see students' potential and the ability to design a plan for their achievement. Building on this foundation, Paul (2012) coined the term "servant advising," and in a separate study, Paul et al. (2012) found a positive correlation between servant leadership and developmental advising. Paul et al. (2015) suggested that future research evaluate servant advising with different demographics and specifically explore persistence in order to determine the generalizability of their results.

### **Retention and Persistence**

Retention and persistence differs depending on the institution. Some institutions view persistence as a process, while others may view retention as an outcome (Hagedorn, 2006; Reason, 2009). Other concerns about attempting to define persistence and retention involve how these are measured and at what points they are measured. Institutions may also view persistence and retention as a student problem, outside of the institution's control (Siegel, 2011). Tinto (2012) indicated that the problem is further complicated by unclear definitions of persistence and retention, and by the intermittent discontinuity of some students "stopping out" from education. Some students may choose not to continue their education at the same institution, while others may decide not to pursue a degree at all (Tinto, 2012). Because "retention" can encompass course retention, institutional retention, and system retention, Wild and Ebbers (2002) insisted that a clear definition of retention must be established, along with its meaning in the context of the specific college under discussion (see also Hagedorn, 2006; Roberts, 2009). Campbell (2013) defined persistence as the continuous momentum of students from one semester to the next until graduation. As momentum towards the goal of graduation increases, first-year attrition is reduced. Persistence and retention in higher education can also signify fall-to-fall re-enrollment (Braxton, Brier, & Steele, 2008). While persistence is ultimately linked to retention,

this study focused on student persistence as the continuous term-to-term movement toward the goal of graduation (Hagedorn, 2005).

### **Tinto's Persistence Theory**

Theories on student persistence in higher education evolved out of Durkheim's (1897-1951) model of suicide (Caisson, 2006; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; LaRocca, 2015). Durkheim concluded that suicidal behavior was the result of one's inability to integrate socially and intellectually into society (Tinto, 1975). Spady (1971) was the first to apply Durkheim's theory to higher education. His theory focused on students' pre-college experiences, academic achievements, and rewards (LaRocca, 2015). Tinto's theory of student departure evolved out of Durkheim's and Spady's theories (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Tinto (1975) viewed withdrawal from postsecondary education as analogous to suicidal behavior, and he postulated that student attrition was due to inadequate social and academic integration into the institutional culture. Early research on persistence and retention focused on blaming the student for failing, rather than the institution. This is referred to as the "blame" model of retention (Tinto, 2006). Before the 1970s, student retention was believed to be a reflection of the individual student's effort (Astin, 1977; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). Research conducted in the 1970s changed the understanding of student retention in higher education. Institutions were not holding their programs and services accountable for low retention rates (Tinto, 2006). Student retention was now linked to students' learning environments, which influenced Tinto's concepts of social and environmental integration (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto (2006) observed that since the 1960s, student attrition was viewed through the lens of psychology, focusing on students' "attributes, skills, and motivation" (p. 2). Tinto's (1975) theory of attrition or "drop out" was instead founded upon the student integration model, which

holds that student persistence is the result of the interactions between a student's attributes, such as family background, and institutional academic and social systems. Tinto's theory postulated that students come to the education environment with certain pre-existing, pre-college characteristics (Reason, 2009), while the institution has its characteristics and culture. Goal commitment and institutional commitment both influence persistence (Tinto, 1975). The interaction between the two [student and institution] results in successful or unsuccessful student integration. Tinto suggested that the institution focus on three core areas that influence student departure: academic problems, failure to integrate socially and intellectually with the culture of the college or university, and a low level of commitment to the college or university (Long, 2012; Tinto, 1975).

In a social system like education, institutional commitment presumably leads to social interactions among students, faculty, and staff. This interaction leads to social integration (Crawford, 1999), which addresses the core issue of failure to integrate. From this perspective, dropping out of college is seen as a longitudinal process that includes dynamic interactions between the student and the system over time. According to Tinto (1975), student interaction within the system will either result in movement towards the goal of degree attainment (meaning the student will integrate) or toward leaving the institution. The better the student-institutional match, the greater the persistence (Kahn & Nauta, 2001). Conversely, the lower the individual's commitment to the goal of college completion, the more likely it becomes that the student will depart. Roufs (2015) suggested that positive student experiences, including the utilization of academic support services, increased persistence (as cited in Folsom et al., 2015).

Tinto (2002) argued that positive ongoing academic and social experiences on campus improved student persistence, and he later clarified (2012) that academic integration is a key

component in his theory of student integration. This integration process included the utilization of advice and support for college success. Tinto (2006) suggested the need to model the development of institutional policies and programs that promoted student persistence. He asserted (2012) that knowing why students left college was not the same thing as knowing why they stayed. The first year of college is especially critical: Tinto (2012) contended that students who did not receive adequate advice during their first year, including specific advice related to changing majors, were likely to depart the institution. He further stated that students needed a roadmap to navigate them through the institution and their major, especially when determining academic goals.

In addition to students' personal challenges and pre-existing traits, Tinto (1999) argued that the institutional setting in which the student learns is critical to understanding the roots of attrition. Tinto (1999) stated, "First, students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide clear and consistent information about institutional requirements. Students need to understand the roadmap to completion and know how to use it to decide upon and achieve personal goals" (p. 5). This is a large part of the function of academic advising. Tinto (1999) believed that academic advising should be an integral part of the freshman year experience; that focuses on student development; and that advisors should be knowledgeable enough to provide consistent, accurate, and readily available information for students. "It should reflect the best professional knowledge of the day. Quite simply, good advising should not be left to chance" (Tinto, 1999, p. 9). Young-Jones et al. (2013) noted the absence of empirical evidence supporting the impact of specific advising components on persistence. Understanding the processes by which academic advising influences persistence is essential to effectiveness and better outcomes in advising (Smith & Allen, 2014). Tinto (1987) contended, "Effective retention

programs are committed to the students they serve. They put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals” (p. 146). Tinto’s (1987) commitment to students’ needs over institutional needs closely aligns with the philosophy of servant leadership. His focus was on serving students first, which later resulted in increased institutional commitment.

### **Transformational Leadership and Servant Leadership**

This review focuses on transformational and servant leadership (Love, Trammell, & Cartner, 2009; Paul et al., 2012; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). While these leadership approaches share many of the foundational values, their specific applications are different (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Both leadership approaches share a concern for people and production. The focus of the servant leader is on serving others, while the focus of transformational leaders is on organizational objectives (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012). “[T]ransformational leadership and servant leadership emphasize the importance of appreciating and valuing people, listening, mentoring or teaching, and empowering followers” (Stone et al., 2004, p. 4). Sendjaya et al. (2008) contended, “servant leaders are more likely than transformational leaders to demonstrate the natural inclination to serve marginalized people” (p. 403). Schuyler (2014) notes servant leadership is concerned with the whole individual, seeking to invest in the individual knowing it will advance the common good. Understanding the differences between these styles is vital to developing student retention management programs rooted in the servant-leader philosophy. The relationship between the servant-leader and the follower is a key component of servant leadership theory. Persistence in this study was measured by student goal-attainment, as opposed to institutional goal attainment (Reason, 2009). Likewise, what motivated a student to persist was emphasized in this study, as opposed to looking at how institutions retained their students.

An effective servant leader must grasp the institutional objectives and vision while maintaining a focus on the welfare of others (Crippen, 2010). Internally, the servant leader must be empathic, persuasive, an avid listener, and a trust builder. Through encouragement, unconditional regard, and appreciation, followers are empowered to become servant leaders themselves (Stone et al., 2004). Those who make up the institution, rather than the institutional goals, are the central focus and concern of servant leaders (Stone et al., 2004). People are the institution's most significant asset, and focusing leadership and attention there, results in a positive impact on institutional success.

The paradox of servant leadership is that the leader is first a servant. This is the concept at the heart of Greenleaf's realization (Northhouse, 2016; Sendaya & Sarros, 2002; Spears & Lawrence, 2002). The servant leader therefore prioritizes others' needs and seeks out the following outcomes: promoting the growth of followers, developing followers as leaders, and benefiting the least privileged in society (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Spears and Lawrence (2002) suggested four primary roles of a servant leader: modeling, path finding, alignment, and empowerment. By modeling these four roles, leaders inspire others to find their place and also develop into servant leaders, who in turn will find their authentic selves. The issue of power and stewardship in the leader-follower dynamic is crucial to differentiating servant leadership from other leadership approaches (Northhouse, 2016; McClellan, 2007; Sendaya & Sarros, 2002). Gordon-Starks (2015) stated, "Our position of power should not be viewed lightly because we have the ability to wield great influence among our students" (para. 1). Thus, power is the central force in the advisor-advisee servant leadership dynamic and "the means by which leaders serve" (McClellan, 2007, p. 47). Although power is present in other forms of leadership, servant leadership differs in that the leader is a steward of power; instead of using power to achieve



organizational goals, the servant leader holds the power in trust while focusing on the needs of followers (Northhouse, 2016; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

## **Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf (1977) often referred to as the father of servant leadership (Wheeler, 2012), coined the term *servant leader* after recognizing that a leader must first serve followers.

Greenleaf's (1977) awareness arose as the result of reading Herman Hesse's 1960 novel, *Journey to the East*, from which Greenleaf concluded that a leader must first have a genuine desire to serve and help people (as cited in Wheeler, 2012). Spears (2004; 2005) identified 10 characteristics essential to the growth of a servant leader: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Servant leadership has also been applied to organizations (McCann, Graves, & Cox, 2015; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Rezaei, Salehi, Shafiei, & Sabet, 2012; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010; Sendaya & Sarros, 2002; Tenney, 2014) and churches (Ebener & O'Connell, 2010; Jones, 2013; Spears & Lawrence, 2002). The theory has a great deal of resonance with the Christian faith (Arrington, 2015; Keith, 2015). According to Scripture, Jesus Christ was the first to model servant leadership in His ministry with His disciples. At one point in the Gospel narrative, the disciples argued among themselves as to who among them was the greatest. In response, Jesus proclaimed, "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant" (Mark, 10:43, New Living Translation, p. 1556). Later, Jesus demonstrated this principle by washing the feet of His disciples (John 13: 1-7, New Living Translation, p. 1659). This expression of stewarding power, moving from "power over" to "power to," is the prevailing principle of servant leadership (Northhouse, 2016; Sendaya & Sarros, 2002). Servant leaders place a power higher than

themselves (God) at the center of their servitude. Through being served, people are empowered to serve others (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santorin, 2008; Van Dierdendock, 2011). Ebener and O'Connell (2010) stated, "Rather than leading for personal gain, positional power, or glorified status, the servant leader is motivated by a desire to serve others" (p. 319). In this sense, the servant leader is a vessel through which to serve others. Their power is not ego-based but is based instead on a higher source. Keith (2011) echoed Greenleaf's (1977) message that others may be in leadership for their personal gain, whether for wealth, power, or fame. With servant leadership, the leader is not the center of power but is rather a steward of power to facilitate growth in others.

Researchers generally agree on several common traits that servant leaders demonstrate.

Wheeler (2012) outlined ten servant leader principles:

- service to others;
- facilitating meeting the needs of others;
- fostering problem-solving and taking responsibility at all levels;
- promoting emotional healing;
- considering the needs of those meeting organizational goals;
- focusing on the immediate and the future;
- embracing paradoxes and dilemmas;
- leaving a legacy;
- modeling servant leadership; and
- developing more servant leaders.

Similarly, Shekari and Nikooparvar (2012) identified nine of the dimensions above, but added conceptual skills and ethical behavior to their findings. Previously, Sendjaya et al. (2008)

identified over 20 servant leadership themes across the literature, categorized into six dimensions: (a) voluntary subordination, (b) authentic self, (c) covenantal relationship, (d) responsible morality, (e) transcendental spirituality, and (f) transforming influence. While the exact number of traits may vary, most scholars agree upon the general concept of serving others first by developing the individual, with the goal of reaching others outside the organization.

Servant leadership in higher education is in its infancy (Scardino, 2012; Wheeler, 2012). Studies on the application of servant leadership are relatively new, and they have been conducted in terms of student satisfaction (Arrington, 2015; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015), academic advising (Paul et al., 2012; Paul 2012), social work education (Litten, 2008), administrator perceptions (McDougle, 2009), teaching (Drury, 2005; Noland & Richards, 2015; Varney, 2016), job satisfaction and retention (Harris, Hines, Manansingh, Rubino, & Morote, 2016), and student affairs (Reddick, 2011). A servant leader in higher education is a steward who serves faculty, staff, and students by expressing an interest in their development as individuals. Keith (2013) reminded leaders of this priority, noting that servant leaders should focus on transforming organizations on all levels with the goal of developing servant-institutions. He also emphasized youth discipleship to develop more servant leaders. Through authentic listening, empathic understanding, caring, and mindfulness, a servant leader builds relationships and promotes healing in the community. In doing so, institutional objectives are accomplished because followers are empowered and motivated (Crippen, 2010; Hayes, 2008).

Murray (2008) stated that higher education continues to use mainstream leadership approaches that focus on application. He believed student transformation occurred through the development of service-oriented knowledge. Berger (2002) highlighted that understanding the organizational nature of institutions is essential to student satisfaction and persistence because

patterns of behavior have an impact on student persistence. For institutions to succeed, leaders must collaborate across departments, use data to implement intervention programs, and have a shared vision of student success (Coley et al., 2016; Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017). For example, Martin (2017) noted that non-returning students experienced difficulty in navigating the demands of college and university bureaucracy. Although institutions cannot control students' pre-college experiences (Ishitani, 2016), they can influence the development of their own culture, behaviors, policies, and practices (Okagbare, 2017; Reason, 2009). Furthermore, leadership behaviors are not limited to those in upper management. When examining academic employee satisfaction and intent to stay in higher education, Harris et al. (2016) found a positive correlation between servant leadership practices, job satisfaction, and retention of academic staff. Whether servant-leader advising influences student persistence and ultimately retention is unknown, studies like Harris et al. (2016) may point to similar parallels within the advisor-advisee setting. Servant leadership in this capacity serves as a vehicle for personal growth and transformation in hopes that others (advisees) may then follow their example and promote a better society (Spears, 2005).

McClellan (2007) was the first to theorize the possibility of academic advisors as servant leaders, around the same time Kelly (2003) and Drozd (2010) explored the concept of advising and transformational leadership. McClellan (2013) also recommended that academic advising stem from the institution's mission. Institutional leadership models must be considered in light of student satisfaction. Considering Tinto's claims about the importance of academic advising, and McClellan's (2007) proposal of a new paradigm, the purpose of this study was to extend past research in advising by exploring advisor, servant leadership behaviors and its relationship to persistence.

## **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

The purpose of this study was to test McClellan's (2007) advocacy of advising as servant leadership in order to determine if a correlation existed between servant-leader advising behaviors and intent to persist with first-year students in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the U.S. Following Paul et al. (2012) and Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015), this study added the variable of persistence to build upon previous studies. This section provides an overview of academic advising, relevant research within the last three years on academic advising and student persistence, and an analysis of the current research on servant-leader advising.

### **Developmental, Prescriptive, and Intrusive Advising**

Many approaches to academic advising exist in higher education (Drake et al., 2013; Myers & Sterling, 2016; Vander mark, 2014). Three common advising approaches are prescriptive, developmental, and intrusive advising (Myers & Sterling, 2016). The birth of the prescriptive and developmental models officially occurred in 1972, when the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education deemed advising an important component of higher education (Cook, 2009). In 1972, Crookston (1994) and O'Banion (1994) introduced the developmental and prescriptive advising theories. Fricker (2015) and Grites (2013) characterized developmental advising as a method of advising that included the education and development of the whole student. Developmental advising considers students' education, career, and personal life. Hatch and Garcia (2017) stated, "Whereas prescriptive advising is informational, directive, and unidirectional, developmental advising—largely seen as preferable to prescriptive approaches—entails a collaborative advisor-student relationship with the goal of developing independence and decision-making skills" (p. 355). This holistic approach sets the student's

academic career within the context of the student's life instead of solely revolving around the student's academic and career goals (Crookston, 1994). Ender (1994) suggested developmental advising was the best approach for students to navigate higher education while making meaning of their college experience. Trust and openness are central to the advisor-advisee relationship, and both parties contribute to the student's development (Lowenstein, 2014; Punyanunt-Carter & Carter, 2015).

Conversely, Williams (2007) described prescriptive advising as a relationship in which the advisor holds knowledge and information and the student expects to receive that information from the advisor. The expectation is that the student will follow the directives of the advisor without directly taking part in the development process. The student does not receive guidance in a holistic manner: the student merely receives prescriptive answers to specific questions, and the advisor's responsibility is limited to providing those answers.

Another advising model is intrusive or proactive advising (Drake et al., 2013; Myers & Sterling, 2016; Schwebel et al., 2012; Varney, 2012; Varney, 2007). Intrusive advising draws from prescriptive and developmental advising theories (Earl, 1988), and it is especially common for advisement of at-risk students (Rodgers, Blunt, & Tribble, 2014; Schwebel et al., 2012; Varney, as cited in Drake et al., 2013). Varney (2007) stated, "Intrusive advising differs from the more traditional prescriptive and developmental models of advising because advisors are not only helpful and encouraging of students, but they proactively make the initial contact with students... a pre-emptive strike, of sorts" (p. 11). Through intrusive advising, the advisor plays a significant part in caring about the student while fostering student independence (Thomas & Minton, 2004). The key to this approach is to make a genuine connection with students, so students feel their institution cares about them (Varney, 2007). Today, academic advising theory

has evolved to embrace the complexity of interactions between advisors and advisees. It now considers academic, developmental, social, personal, and institutional issues in relation to advising (Musser & Yoder, in Drake et al., 2013).

According to ACT (2010), advising interventions and early warning systems ranked among the top three practices related to retention at private, 4-year colleges. So significant that in 2013, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2017) added an advising module to assess frequency, accessibility, and types of information provided by advisors. Young-Jones et al. (2013) noted that academic advising is one point of interaction between the institution and the student in which the advisor has an opportunity to promote student engagement. Academic advisors are vital to facilitating persistence throughout a student's academic career (Paul et al., 2012). Fosnacht et al. (2015) pointed out, *how* academic advising influenced student persistence was uncertain, as researchers identified direct and indirect effects of advising on students' persistence decisions (Kot, 2014; Metzner, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swecker et al., 2013). Anderson, Motto, and Bourdeaux (2014) indicated that developmental and prescriptive advising may not always be the best model for students, stating, "The alignment or misalignment between advisor behaviors and student expectations is closely linked to student satisfaction with advising" (p. 29). For example, Smith (2002) found first-year students preferred prescriptive advising, likening advising to high school guidance counseling. Likewise, some advisors may feel pressured to provide immediate answers for students and forgo the developmental process (Ohrablo, 2010). Thus, universities should caution against defaulting to a particular model and instead tailor advising to meet the needs and expectations of their specific student population (Anderson et al., 2014; Sithole et al., 2017). Regardless of advising style, further research was needed to determine what mechanisms of academic advising influenced student persistence, as

some advising approaches did not work for different institutions and demographics (McFarlane, 2013; Mu & Fosnacht, 2016).

### **Centralized, Decentralized, and Dual Advising Models**

The personnel and setting of academic advising vary from one institution to another (Fricker, 2015) and advisor roles and methods are determined by the institution size, organizational dynamic, and the philosophy the institution embraces (Self, 2011). One institution may use centralized advising, where the students meet with non-faculty staff advisors at a centralized advising center, while others may rely on a decentralized model, where faculty advising is designated in specific departments (Barron & Powell, 2014 as cited in Miller & Irons, 2015; Kot, 2014; Kuhlmann, 2004). Other institutions may adopt an advising model where the student receives initial advising services from professional advisors in a centralized location, and then meets with a faculty advisor for major-related guidance. Habley and McCauley (1987) and Allen and Smith (2008) referred to this model as *dual advising*. Barron and Powell (2014) believe the location where advising occurs has no bearing on who does the advising, i.e., some professional advisors may be housed institutionally, while others may function as part of a department (as cited in Miller & Irons, 2014). Conversely, a study conducted by McFarlane (2013) found that location of advising mattered. Students who received advisement from a centralized advising department were more satisfied than those who received advising from a decentralized office.

### **Academic Advising and Student Persistence**

Relevant scholarly research on academic advising and its influence on student persistence yielded uneven results. Overall findings suggested some relationship between advising and student persistence (Baird, 2015; Carter & Carter, 2015; Davis, 2015; Haghamed, 2014;



Richardson, Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016; Myers & Sterling, 2016; Ruckert, & Marion, 2015; Ryan, 2013; Smith & Allen, 2014; Sterling, 2016; Swecker et al., 2013; Turner & Thompson, 2014; Vianden & Barlow, 2015; Wood, 2014). The quality of advisement services students received, the frequency with which students and advisors interacted, and interpersonal relationships between the advisor and advisee were all pertinent factors associated with persistence or intent to persist (Drake, 2011; Myers & Sterling, 2016; Nutt, 2003; Vianden & Barlow, 2015).

### **Advising Meetings**

To build an advisor-advisee relationship, a meeting with an advisor must take place and satisfaction with advising should be positive. Smith and Allen (2014) validated the premise that meeting with students for academic advising influenced persistence and retention. The study found that students who reportedly met with an advisor scored high on eight cognitive outcomes and three affective outcomes than for those who did not meet with an advisor. These results pointed to students' intentions to persist at their current institution. Wood (2014) confirmed that students who met with academic advisors concerning academic matters were 87% more likely to persist or attain than students who did not. Sansom (2012) conducted a study in a religiously affiliated institution using logistic regression, in which the researcher sought to determine whether satisfaction with academic advising was a predictor of intent to persist. The results indicated an odd ratio of 1.23 indicating that students who were more satisfied with advising were more likely to persist than those who were not. The sense of belonging was the greatest predictor overall with students' intent to persist i.e., those who felt a sense of belonging were 3.29 times likely to persist. Sansom (2012) concluded students who are satisfied with academic advising and have quality contact with faculty were more likely to persist.

Research on the frequency of required advising meetings about persistence varied. For example, Schwebel et al. (2012) conducted a longitudinal study using a case-control experimental design and intrusive advising at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, where 501 students were tracked for four years. Students were randomly assigned to two groups; students who received outreach and those who did not. The researchers sought to measure retention, academic progress and achievement, and frequency of advising contacts. The results indicated “advising outreach effectively increased students’ number of professional advising appointments, but was not associated with student retention or academic progress and achievement at a statistically significant level” (Schwebel et al., p. 41). The number of times a student met with an advisor had no effect on student persistence. Conversely, Swecker et al. (2013) found the number of meetings was a significant indicator of student persistence (i.e., a 13% increase in the odds of retaining a student for every additional advisor meeting). Ryan (2013) found first-time students performed better academically in the first term, and were more apt to continue into the next term when advisors and students developed a relationship and met regularly during the first term.

What transpires during the advising session(s) should be valuable to the student. Richardson, Ruckert, and Marion (2015) found the use of degree mapping resulted in advisors defaulting to a prescriptive approach, which led to greater persistence. In a qualitative study by Turner and Thompson (2014), 80% of continuing freshman students and 50% of non-returning freshmen indicated receiving inadequate academic advisement services. Although some in academia may revolt against the idea of students as customers (Vianden & Barlow, 2015), these results indicated a need for academic advisor training in customer service, and for better consistency in advisor availability.

## **Advising Relationships**

Gordon-Starks (2015) and Vianden and Barlow (2015) contended advising was about building relationships. Sustainability of the advising relationship hinged upon many skills such as listening and rapport building (Habley, 1987) and knowing the student as an individual or “mattering” (Allen & Smith, 2008). Likewise, McClellan (2014) believed trust was essential to building advisor-advisee relationships. In qualitative studies of three faith-based institutions, Baird (2015), Haghamed (2014), and Vandermark (2014) found that personal relationships between faculty advisors and advisees, and professional advisors and advisees, resulted in student success and persistence. These findings were consistent with Schreiner’s (2009) findings that advisor availability and approachability were significant factors for first-year student persistence, as well as with Mottarella, Fritzsche, and Cerabino’s (2004) finding that students valued relationships and interpersonal skills regardless of advising approach. Likewise, Vianden (2016) pointed out the importance of caring in advising. Qualitative responses from 29 students indicated that satisfaction with advising impacted the student’s feelings about their connections to the institution.

The advising relationship is important. Haghamed (2014) suggested that relationship building functioned as a vehicle for facilitating student self-assessment and subsequently assisting with course scheduling fundamentals. Though the study’s respondents, indicated job conflicts, as opposed to academic advising, were the primary reasons for student departure (Haghamed, 2014). Similarly, LaRocca (2015) found that students had challenges building relationships with [professional] academic advisors because students were reassigned to a college advisor after achieving 30 or more credits. The advising sessions were not developmental but rather, focused on student academic plans and academic decisions. Students also reported

feeling confused about the advising process, only recalling aspects of the advising experience as related to course scheduling. LaRocca (2015) found students who received success coaching felt more cared for and experienced a genuine relationship with their coach as students claimed, “they were looking for someone to understand them” (p. 94). Success coaching allowed for more time spent developing a relationship with the students and students perceived their coach as an on-campus advocate. Vianden and Barlow (2015) reinforced the claim by validating the relationship between student loyalty to an institution and academic advising. The results indicated respondents who reported high on academic advising quality simultaneously reported high on student-university relationship. The implication can be made that a genuine connection with a caring advisor may influence continuing enrollment with the same institution.

Who delivers the advising matters. McFarlane (2013) noted students were more satisfied with academic advising delivery from professional advisors rather than faculty advisors. In this study, professional advisors spent time with students akin to developmental advising sessions about careers, academics, and life goals. There were no differences with student retention between students advised by professional advisors versus faculty advisors. The variable measured did not account for content, duration, or intensity of the advising session. Ryan (2013) conducted a quantitative study in which student persistence increased term-to-term when students were taught and advised by their instructor. Students strongly agreed their advisors expressed concern and friendliness and were available, thus validating, advisor behaviors were essential to student persistence. The relationship between students’ and advisors’ consistency of meetings were beneficial for reducing attrition with first-time students.

Impediments to effective advising were delineated by time spent in the advising session and concern expressed by advisors. Baird (2015) found that faculty workloads hindered effective

advising service because time spent with students was compromised. Suvedi, Ghimire, Millenbah, and Shrestha (2015) noted that while overall freshman students were satisfied with advising, advisors were viewed as lacking communication skills and the time to build relationships with their advisees. Hurtienne (2015) stated, students felt that academic advisors showed little or no concern for online and face-to-face students, while Mertes and Jankoviak (2016) reported professional advisors delivered inconsistent information and appeared not to have standard answers.

### **Servant-Leader Advising**

Servant-leader advising is defined as advising practices and behaviors governed by a focus on serving students (Greenleaf, 1970; McClellan, 2007; Paul, 2012; Paul et al., 2015; Sendaya & Sarros, 2002; Spears, 2004). Adopting a leadership framework for advising, though deficient in the literature, is a recent concept (Barbuto, Story, Fritz, & Schinstock, 2011; Campbell, 2002; McClellan, 2013; McClellan, 2007; Paul, 2015, 2012; Paul et al., 2012). Scholarly research on the application of servant leadership to academic advising in higher education is in its early stages (Arrington, 2015; Keith, 2010; Murray, 2008; Padron, 2012; Wheeler, 2012). The relationship between servant-leader advising behaviors and persistence has not been previously researched.

McClellan (2007) indicated that academic advising mirrored servant leadership characteristics where the focus of the advisor is on student growth and development. The ten characteristics of servant leadership that were identified by Greenleaf (1977) include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, conceptualization, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. He postulated that these characteristics closely mirrored those of academic advising behaviors (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Servant Leadership and Academic Advising Connection*

Servant Leadership Characteristics	Advising Behaviors
Listening	Advisors listen to students' issues, needs, concerns, and goals on their academic journey (McClellan, 2007; Paul 2012).
Empathy	Advisors express concern for students' personal and academic challenges (Paul, 2012) via interpersonal acceptance (Van Dierendonck, 2011).
Healing	Making those who were once broken, whole (Greenleaf, 1977), advisors ensure their healing (emotional, spiritual, physical) is restored, so students are lead to their wholeness through the relationship.
Awareness	Advisors can maintain openness to all information through self-awareness and self-acceptance, so one becomes a vessel to serve the needs of students (McClellan, 2007).
Persuasion	Advisors have the ability to encourage others to take action and to encourage student self-development and growth. They also encourage students to take pertinent courses and utilize campus resources as needed (Paul, 2012).
Foresight	Advisors help students map out their future academic and career goals and can visualize student potential in the context of advising and future goals (McClellan, 2007). Advisors also help students map out their schedules based on their academic performance (Paul, 2012).
Conceptualization	Advisors can see beyond the immediate goal and conceptualize a plan for achieving student potential (McClellan, 2007) and help them plan for their future (Paul, 2012).
Stewardship	Advisors devote time to students in the advising sessions, placing students' needs first (Paul, 2012) as entrusted vessels of power in the advisor-advisee dynamic (McClellan, 2007).
Commitment to the Growth of People	Advisors facilitate growth and encourage autonomy in students (Paul, 2012).
Building Community	The community is built in the advisor-advisee milieu by expressing caring in the advising relationship (McClellan, 2007) through partnering (Paul, 2012).

According to McClellan (2007), the motivation of the advisor is crucial: “[t]o the extent that advisors desire to serve students, as a result of a deep and abiding will to serve others and a love for students, they naturally seek to develop and express the characteristics of servant-leaders” (p. 43). McClellan (2013; 2007) argued that academic advising emerged from an advisor’s core motivation, thereby resulting in external actions or behaviors. When advisors expressed servant leadership characteristics, such as caring, empathy, foresight, and conceptualization, the advisor was said to operate with the heart of a servant leader. Still, servant leadership is as an approach to advising that requires more research.

Subsequent studies with servant leadership examined academic advising and student success (Arrington, 2015; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Paul et al., 2012, Paul, 2012; Taner & Ozkan, 2014). To test McClellan’s theory, Paul et al. (2012) conducted empirical research on the relationship between developmental advising and servant leadership. The researchers hypothesized that developmental advising behavior scores and servant leadership traits were positively correlated. In a mid-sized southeastern university, 223 undergraduates were surveyed, using the Academic Advising Inventory (AAI) and the Servant Leader Questionnaire (SLQ). The primary demographic was 48.4% White and 39% Black. Paul et al. (2012) confirmed a significant relationship between servant leadership traits and developmental advising and analyzed which factor of servant leadership was the best predictor of developmental academic advising practice. Wisdom (WIS), the ability to maintain environmental awareness of changes that could affect students, was identified to be the best predictor of advising behaviors ( $p < 0.01 = 0.61$ ). The researchers concluded that servant leadership was a viable framework for academic advising (Paul et al., 2012) but required more research to generalize the findings.

Taner and Ozkan (2014) later recommended testing a similar model for graduate students to determine if academic advising and servant leadership contributed to graduates' growth and development during and after graduation. Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) followed up with research investigating student satisfaction within servant leader advising. A quantitative study was conducted using the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006) and the Academic Advising Inventory (AAI) (Winston & Sandor, 1984) to investigate student satisfaction with servant-leader advising, and to determine whether servant leadership practices could predict student satisfaction with advising. The results indicated that servant leadership was positively correlated with student satisfaction and developmental advising practices. Altruistic Calling (AC) was identified as the best predictor of student satisfaction with advising, meaning students valued the advisors' desire to place the needs of students above their own.

These results prompted Paul (2012) to develop an instrument called the Advisor Servant Leader Behavior Scale (ASLBS) to assess servant-leader advising behaviors. The objective was to create a valid and reliable survey using the SLQ and AAI in the context of the advising environment. Seven subject-matter experts confirmed content validity with the survey questions. The ALSBS was found to be reliable with Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values. The servant-leader construct clusters included concept mapping (CM = .94), holistic growth (HG = .89), Degree Awareness (DA = .88), and advising environment (AE = .87). Paul (2012) piloted the survey with 428 undergraduate students. The survey was found to be a predictor of developmental prescriptive advising and student satisfaction with advising (Paul, 2012).

Arrington (2015) examined servant leadership and student satisfaction among academic support staff. Students rated academic support staff high on servant leadership characteristics. A statistically significant relationship was also found between institution size and student ethnicity.



Smaller institutions were identified as having more servant leaders while larger ones were not. Ethnic minorities (Blacks and Asian and Pacific Islanders) also tended to rate academic support staff higher on servant leadership than White (non-Hispanic) respondents. Since a larger percentage of ethnic minorities were found in smaller institutions compared to larger ones, institution size was found to be a predictor of student satisfaction.

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

McClellan (2007) provided an important theoretical and philosophical perspective about servant leadership as advising. McClellan (2007) argued that academic advising, like teaching, could be a form of service as servant leadership embraced many of the features inherent in the advising process, including empathy, a commitment to growth, and the ability to see students' potential and design a plan for their achievement. McClellan (2007) believed that many academic advising behaviors reflected the concept of servant leadership. He conceived of advisors as stewards of power in the advisor-advisee relationship and concluded that servant leadership's relationship to advising was understudied.

Paul et al. (2012) considered McClellan's (2007) recommendation and explored the ten servant-leader constructs and their relationship to advising. Their study included 223 students in a large southeastern public university, in which the participants consisted of 48.4% Whites, 39.0% Blacks, and 1.3% Asians. No Pacific Islander participants were sampled, although they reportedly made up 0.2% of the total student population. Tuckman and Harper (2012) stated that multiple regression can be used when the researcher wishes to investigate the relationship between multiple predictor variables and the criterion variable. This method helps to determine how each of the predictor variables affects changes in the criterion variable. Predictor variables in the Paul et al. (2012) study included emotional healing (EH), altruistic calling (AC), wisdom

(WIS), persuasive mapping (PM) and organizational stewardship (OS). A significant positive correlation was identified between developmental advising and servant-leader behaviors, specifically, WIS and PM.

Arrington (2015) reported a correlation between Asian Pacific Islanders and observed servant leadership behaviors with academic support staff. In this study, Asian and Pacific Islander students scored .386 point higher than White-non-Hispanics on academic support staff servant leadership characteristics. In Paul et al. (2012), the predominantly Black and White respondent rate limited generalization of the results. Students from all class levels were given the survey, thus it may have been unclear to students about whether ratings were for servant leadership among professional advisors or faculty advisors, as academic advising was not defined in the study. If students received academic advising from faculty advisors, the faculty who declined to participate may have influenced the outcome. The study also applied purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique (Allibang, 2016). One of the drawbacks of using purposive sampling techniques is the potential for researcher bias, given the lack of random sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). In this study, Paul et al. (2012) also distributed the survey to select classes and gave extra credit to students who took the survey. Distributing extra credit may have influenced respondents' motivation for survey participation (Cole, Sarraf & Wang, 2015). The occurrence of response bias and non-response bias were unknown. Students took the survey home to complete, which did not allow for clarification on how to answer the questions (Paul et al., 2012).

Measuring various elements of the advisor-advisee dynamic is challenging, especially if the assessment is not administered immediately prior to and after advising interactions. Student perceptions may change depending on the circumstances, time elapsed, and incentives offered.

The SLQ used in this study was also an instrument designed to assess servant leadership in organizations (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006), and it had not been previously applied to research on student perceptions of advising and servant leadership. Accordingly, Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) and Paul et al. (2012) recommended developing an assessment designed specifically for evaluating servant leadership behaviors with advisors. Taner and Ozkan (2014) also proposed a model for academic advising with graduate students. Their model suggested exploring servant-leader advisor behaviors in relation to the impact they might have on graduate student goals and the outcomes on society. This recommendation resonated with Greenleaf's (1977) notion that servant-leader development in higher education benefits society. No studies to date have followed Taner and Okzan's (2014) proposal.

Paul and Fitzpatrick's (2015) research on student satisfaction with servant leader advising utilized the same basic SLQ assessment, but it used a slightly adapted version to align more accurately with the academic advising milieu. Although the survey was slightly modified, the questions were still designed to assess organizational leadership, e.g., "This person believes the organization needs to play a moral role in society" (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015, p. 31). Students can easily misinterpret such statements when attempting to apply them to the advisor-advisee relationship. Paul (2012) stated, "The content validity of the SLQ is not the same when applied in the advising setting" (p. 67). Purposive sampling (Allibang, 2016) was used to select 12 different classes across campus to administer the survey. The researchers chose students with similar demographics (in terms of race, class standing, and gender), which could bias the research results, as the sample may not have been representative of the entire student population. Altruistic calling (AC) was identified as having the greatest impact on student satisfaction.

Paul (2012) created the Advisor Servant Leader Behavior Scale (ASLBS) in response to published recommendations (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Paul et al., 2012) for future research on servant-leader advising. The scale provided a measurement for servant leadership-advisor behaviors. According to the authors, the data for Paul and Fitzpatrick's (2015) study was collected in 2012, so the ASLBS was not used to determine student satisfaction with servant leader advising. The researchers also used convenience sampling instead of random sampling due to time constraints, limiting the generalizability of the results. The survey was also administered to a population at a public university in the south, limiting the demographic to predominantly Black and White respondents. In light of these methodological shortcomings, the current study utilized the ASLBS (Paul, 2012) and the survey was administered in a private, religiously affiliated university with a different demographic.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

Some studies indicated that advising had a positive correlation with persistence (Glennen & Baxley, 1985; Lorean, 2008; Museus & Ravello, 2010; Poole, 2015; Swecker et al., 2013). Others resulted in no significant impact (Metzer, 1989; Morillo, 2012; Schwebel et al., 2012). Similarly, recent results, though still mixed, suggested that caring, communication, time spent with advisees, relationship building, and competency all related to student satisfaction and persistence (Baird, 2015; Carter & Carter, 2015; Haghamed, 2014; Hurtienne, 2015; Richardson, Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016; Ruckert, & Marion, 2015; Smith & Allen, 2014; Sterling, 2016; Swecker et al., 2013; Turner & Thompson, 2014; Wood, 2014).

Servant-leader advising has recently emerged in the scholarly literature as a new academic advising paradigm (McClellan, 2007; Paul et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2015). Servant leadership removes the focus from advising technique and refocuses attention on who the leader

is and what the leader does as expressed through the desire to serve others (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). When applied to academic advising, servant leadership is not about doing (as with other academic advising approaches), but about being a servant. The principle considers advisor behaviors in the context of the advisor-advisee relationship and effects on student persistence. Research on servant leadership and advising as applied to student persistence appeared to be largely absent from the literature. While individual studies have been conducted on each variable, studies incorporating both variables were not discovered.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

Previous research on servant leadership and academic advising was limited. McClellan (2007) first combined the theory of servant leadership with academic advising, but the first empirical studies did not appear until five years later. These studies yielded helpful outcomes, but all of them required further research before the results could be generalized to other populations and established as a new approach. For example, Paul et al. (2012) and Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) conducted research in public universities in the southern part of the U.S. Both of these studies had demographic limitations: studies in which the students are predominantly either Black or White, or in which the sample is 90% female, are difficult to generalize to the rest of the population (Paul et al., 2012; Smith, 2007). More studies were therefore needed in different types of institutions with different demographics. Paul et al. (2012) noted the need for a servant-leader behaviors instrument specific to higher education because the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006) was typically used for organizational environments (Melchar & Bosco, 2010; Rezaei et al., 2012), which differ from advising environments (Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). To fill this gap, Paul (2012) created the Advisor Servant Leader Behaviors Survey (ASLBS) to measure servant-leader behaviors in advisors.

The survey was not available to Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015), and it had not yet been applied to scholarly research. Taner and Ozkan (2014) proposed investigating servant-leader advising with graduate students. However, no scholarly research followed their recommendation.

Empirical research with servant-leader advising should include studies in which random sampling was used to reduce researcher bias and allow for a wider variety of students from the institution being studied. Repeating research by Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) and Paul et al. (2012) with other types of institutions (private, for-profit, religiously affiliated) and using the ASLBS would provide more data to determine servant-leader advising's position in scholarly research. Previous studies by Paul et al. (2012) and Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) did not specify if advisors practiced servant-leader advising. Research with higher education institutions that knowingly practice or do not practice servant leadership behaviors in advising sessions would assist researchers with understanding the needs of specific institutions.

Quantitative approaches have proven valuable in past studies of advising and servant leadership. For instance, quantitative assessments yielded answers to specific inquiries like focusing on a particular servant leader trait (Paul et al., 2012). Extending the research to include servant-leader advising behaviors is valuable for advisor training as well as for persistence and retention program development. Likewise, the creation of a literature matrix that tracks the types of studies and their results would allow scholars to observe trends with various populations and approaches.

### **Summary**

Researchers have attempted to align leadership concepts like transformational leadership with advising by exploring parallels between the leader-follower and the advisor-student relationships (Barbuto et al., 2011). Over an 8-year period, only four studies on servant

leadership and advising have been conducted (Mathis-Lawson, 2017; Paul et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2015; Paul, 2012). Servant-leadership approaches are typically applied organizationally, where the interest is the leadership of employees (Shekari & Nikooparvar, 2012). Continued studies of servant leader traits within the interpersonal relationships between academic advisors and students are needed to promote the development of future student leaders (McClellan, 2013) and improve student persistence. Studies on academic advising and persistence revealed similar themes: students equated customer service to availability of advisors (Donaldson et al., 2016; Turner & Thompson, 2014; Vianden, 2016), customer service and relationship building were valued by students and advisors (Sterling, 2016), students valued communication and accurate information (Vianden, 2016), relationships between advisors and advisees occurred over time (LaRocca, 2015), and the quality of advising encounters was governed by the amount of time spent in the advising sessions and the expression of concern for students (Schreiner, 2009, as cited in McFarlane, 2013). These studies lend themselves to exploring servant-leader advising as an approach for addressing key concerns of students receiving academic advising. Yarbrough (2010) found that students focused more on advisor behaviors rather than advising style (prescriptive, developmental, etc.). Introducing research that considers servant leadership traits in the advising relationship is valuable. Discovering the associations between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist may help determine whether some institutions should shift the focus of their first-year advising practices.

Based on the documented challenges of increasing student persistence, the mixed reviews on academic advising's effects on persistence, and the lack of research on persistence in private, non-profit, religiously affiliated institutions, more research addressing this complexity was warranted. The results of this study could help campus leaders determine how servant leadership

might be introduced to view higher education problems at levels beyond organizational leadership. Taken together, exploring advising models grounded in leadership, and refocusing advisors from professional advisors to advisor-leaders, i.e., stewards of advisees, may prove beneficial for some institutions (Sendaya & Sarros, 2002).

This study sought to extend the research in servant-leader advising. This question guided the research: What is the relationship between advisor servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist with first-year students at a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the United States? The results of this study can help to guide advisor training and development, and it may shed more light on the advising needs of students in a religiously affiliated institution.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 3 presents the methods and procedures used to determine the relationship between servant-leader advising and student persistence. The chapter includes a description of the selected population and the chosen quantitative research method. The chapter also provides information about the design, subject selection, and statistical tools used to collect and analyze the data.

This study was framed by Greenleaf's (1977) theoretical foundation of servant leadership and Tinto's (1975) persistence theory. Tinto's (1987) advocacy of institutions serving students mirrors the concept of servant leadership. This study was centered upon the problem of student persistence in higher education, and it considered the role of academic advising through the lens of that challenge. Previous studies had conflicting results about the relationship between persistence and academic advising, so researchers have looked to advising grounded in theories beyond the familiar prescriptive, developmental, and proactive models. Leadership theories like servant leadership emerged as a potential foundation for academic advising (McClellan, 2007). While Paul et al. (2012) identified a relationship between servant leadership and developmental advising, and Paul et al. (2015) found a correlation between servant-leader advising and student satisfaction, it was not known whether that correlation would exist in other institutional atmospheres, such as among first-year students in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the U.S. An exploration of servant-leader advising behaviors and its relationship to persistence could inform future discussions and research on increasing persistence, program development, and staff training.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to extend the testing of McClellan's (2007) advocacy of advising as servant leadership. The study was also designed to carry out research similar to Paul et al. (2012) and Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) in order to determine if a relationship exists between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist with first-year students in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the U.S. This study used the Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS), adding the variable of persistence (Paul, 2012) with the school's demographic. Data derived from this study may help to inform advising and retention practices along with advisor training and development.

Paul et al. (2015) recommended that, "future studies explore the relationships between servant leadership behaviors, student advising satisfaction, and retention to graduation" (p. 33). The selection of a student demographic in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated institution in the U.S. was warranted because the results might aid administrators with increasing student satisfaction through servant-leader advising with a specific population. Student satisfaction was measured in previous studies on servant advising (Paul, 2012), but this study added persistence as a variable to further understand servant-leader advising behaviors. This was the only identified study that attempted to measure the relationship between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and persistence. Future studies will need to be conducted that measure persistence with other institutions before the results can be generalized.

Paul (2012) identified limitations with the original survey (Servant Leadership Questionnaire) used in his study, and he created a survey to measure servant-leader advising. This study was the first to use the ASLBS. Results will contribute to the development of servant-leader advising in the literature. This study was not a longitudinal study, but a snapshot

in time that could become the impetus for future studies with larger populations over an extended period.

### **Research Question**

This study was guided by the following research question:

RQ1: What correlation exists between advisor servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist with first-year students in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the United States?

### **Research Design**

Creswell (2014) indicated that quantitative methods are warranted when examining relationships among variables. Creswell (2014) and Scotland (2012) noted that, as a scientific paradigm, correlational studies aim to understand possible causal interpretations or relationships among variables. For this study, a non-experimental, correlational research method was chosen because the purpose of conducting the study was to mathematically determine the presence or absence of a relationship between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and students' intent to persist using the ASLBS (Paul, 2012). Abbott (2011) and Tuckman and Harper (2012) suggested that correlational research was useful for providing insight to motivation, studying two or more sets of data to determine a relationship, predicting future behavior, or explaining phenomena. A correlational design was also selected because servant-leader advising is still a new approach, and determining relationships between it and other variables like persistence may provide a foundation and rationale for future research.

### **Variables**

Two variables were identified for this study: advisor servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist. The study was not causal-comparative, and it did not contain independent and

dependent variables (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). The focus of this study was to determine the relationship between the two selected variables. The researcher's [original] intent was to apply Pearson's correlation to produce a correlation coefficient (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). Pearson's correlation coefficient (symbolized by  $r$ ) is a measure of two interval variables; the closer  $r$  is to -1 or +1, the stronger the relationship (Abbott, 2011; Lowry, 2014). "Stronger relationships between variables suggest the need for more research" (Tuckman & Harper, 2012, p. 189). After the researcher reviewed the data, the researcher determined that Spearman's rho ( $r_s$ ), a non-parametric test, was applicable to the data set.

This study builds on Paul and Fitzpatrick (2012), who tested McClellan's (2007) theory of servant-advising by correlating servant-leader behaviors with developmental advising. They found positive associations between servant leadership-based advising and student satisfaction with advising. Although Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) found servant leader behaviors, specifically altruistic behaviors, have been associated with student satisfaction, the researcher in this study examined a different unknown variable: whether a correlation exists between the variables of advisor, servant leadership behaviors and student persistence.

### **Instrumentation**

Vogt, Gardner, and Haeffle (2012) noted that surveys are beneficial for data collection when the researcher expects that the answers can be obtained directly from the respondents via brief, structured questions; when the answers are considered reliable; when the researcher knows how the answers will be used; and when the researcher can expect a sufficient response rate. Coughlan, Cronin, and Ryan (2009) confirmed that survey research is a non-experimental approach best used when the researcher is interested in obtaining information about relationships between variables. Thus, the use of a survey instrument was applicable for this study. The

Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS) (Paul, 2012) used to collect data on a set of 21 questions. Vogt et al. (2012) suggested using Likert-type scales for conducting surveys when the researcher wished to gauge perceived agreement or the impact of beliefs, policies, practices, or attitudes (as cited in Habib, Pathik, & Maryam, 2014).

**Cronbach's alpha.** The researcher analyzed if a correlation existed between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and students' intent to persist. Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) was validated by Paul (2012) to determine internal consistency and reliability of the ASLBS. According to Gliem & Gliem (2003) noted, "Cronbach's alpha is the average value of the reliability coefficients one would obtain for all possible combinations of items when split into two half-tests" (p. 84). Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) ranges from .00 to 1.0, with .00 being no consistency in measurement (Ayiro, 2012; Gliem & Gliem, 2003) and .70 considered reliable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The ASLBS was found to be a reliable instrument with corresponding ( $\alpha$ ) values for CM, HG, DA, and AE being .94, .89 .88, and .87 (Paul, 2012).

Survey items were combined into four subscales. The average of each ASLBS construct (AE, HG, CM, and DA) was determined and a subscale was developed for each construct. The following options were included in the demographic breakdown:

- Male
- Female
- Major
- Black or African American
- White
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Other

The final survey did not include a category for Hispanic/Latino, Biracial/Multiracial, or two or more races. In uploading survey items into Qualtrics, the researcher inadvertently did not enter the item on the category for Hispanic/Latino, Biracial/Multiracial, or two or more races. Fortunately, the study was not concerned with the impact of differences in race, and as such, it would not have been data applied or pertinent to the study. In this study, advisor, servant leadership behaviors were assessed using the ASLBS. The survey was administered to students via Qualtrics software, and data were collected via The Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences 24 (SPSS) software. The survey was administered via a public link from Qualtrics, which reduced the ability to track identifying information. Students were notified at the start of the survey that exiting the questionnaire or skipping questions was permitted at any time during the process. A statement of confidentiality was included at the beginning of the survey and Qualtrics's option to anonymize the data was activated, thus bypassing the collection of participants' Internet Protocol (IP) addresses. The questionnaire took no longer than three to five minutes to complete.

### **Target Population, Sampling Method (power) and Related Procedures**

The target population for this study included all students of the undergraduate, first-year cohort in fall 2017 at a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the U.S. This study used a convenience sample of 230 first-year, full-time, on-campus, undergraduate students, at a private, 4-year, religiously affiliated, university in the U.S. The institution has a total enrollment of 2,530 students and a day undergraduate enrollment of 1,183 students. 71% of these students are female and 29% are male. Sixty-nine percent reside in Hawaii, 22% are from

the U.S. mainland, 8% are from the Pacific Islands, and 1% are international students. In terms of race/ethnicity, 38% of students are Asian, 3% are African-American, 5% are Hispanic, 0.5% are Native American, 21% are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 14% are White, 1.5% are non-resident alien, 13% have two or more ethnicities, and 4% are unknown (Chaminade University, n.d.).

This study employed convenience sampling, which according to Suen, Huang, and Lee (2014), is a non-probabilistic sampling technique applicable to qualitative or quantitative studies, although it is most frequently used in quantitative studies. In convenience samples, subjects more readily accessible to the researcher are more likely to be included (Etikan et al., 2016).

Consequently, in quantitative studies, opportunity to participate is not equal for all qualified individuals in the target population and study results are not necessarily generalizable to this population (Polit & Beck, 2010). As in all quantitative studies, increasing the sample size increases the statistical power of the convenience sample. In contrast, purposive sampling is typically used in qualitative studies (Etikan et al., 2016). Researchers who use this technique carefully select subjects based on study purpose with the expectation that each participant will provide unique and rich information of value to the study. As a result, members of the accessible population are not interchangeable and sample size is determined by data saturation not by statistical power analysis (Polit & Beck, 2010).

At the beginning of the survey participants self-reported gender, major, and race. The categories were identified in a Microsoft Excel report and extracted by the Director of Institutional Research at the study site. Collecting information on gender, major, and race provided data to observe patterns and trends and to compare the findings with research from Paul et al. (2012) and Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015). In this study, the fall 2016 cohort, compared to

spring term cohorts, was the university's largest entering cohort allowing for a greater population size. The selection of a fall-term, full-time, undergraduate cohort also allowed for continuous tracking of fall-to-fall persistence. The sample population received the ASLBS in an electronic format with a seven-point Likert-type scale: 7-Strongly Agree, 6-Agree, 5-Slightly Agree, 4-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 3-Slightly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 1-Strongly Disagree (Paul, 2012). Persistence was measured by retrieving enrollment status data from Colleague, the institution's enrollment documentation system, which provided the number of students returning in the spring 2017 term.

### **Instrumentation**

Green, Rodriguez, Wheeler, and Baggerly-Hinojosa (2015) noted that there were six instruments available for measuring servant leadership, most of which were used in organizations. One instrument, the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006), was used to study servant leadership in three high-performing automobile companies (Melchar & Bosco, 2010), as well as student satisfaction with advising in higher education (Paul et al., 2012). However, when applied to academic advising, Paul et al. (2012) noted the instrument's limitations in his study, leading to the development of the ASLBS. The Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS) (Paul, 2012) was used to collect data about whether advisors' servant-leader behaviors influenced student persistence.

The Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS) was designed to measure advisors' servant leadership behaviors (Paul, 2012). The four-factor, seven-point Likert-type scale includes a total of 21 questions (see Table 2) corresponding to conceptual mapping (CM), degree awareness (DA), advising environment (AE), and holistic growth (HG) (Paul, 2012). Conceptual mapping (CM) addresses advisors providing students with guidance about academic



and career goals. Degree awareness (DA) addresses advisor's competence about degree requirements. Advising environment (AE) addresses the advising milieu or atmosphere. Holistic growth (HG) addresses advisors' ability to include the big picture outside of advising, including resources and opportunities that support student growth (Paul, 2012).

Reliability refers to the internal consistency of scores on an instrument across each construct (Creswell, 2014). Scale reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values. The alpha values for each factor "CM, HG, DA, and AE were .94, .89, .88, and .87 respectively" (Paul, 2012, p. 84). Instrument validity refers to whether inferences can be made from scores derived from an instrument (Creswell, 2014). The validity of the ASLBS was determined by the ability to measure advisor servant leadership behaviors (Paul, 2012). Validity was attained through correlations between the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006) and the Academic Advisor Inventory (AAI) (Winston & Sandor, 2002). Validity and reliability of the instrument supported their use in research about advising (Paul, 2012). To date, there were no known studies utilizing ASLBS with academic advising. This was significant because the ASLBS was found to be reliable and suited for assessing servant-leader advising behaviors.

Table 2

*Servant Leader Advising Constructs*

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Statement
Conceptual Mapping	( $a = .94$ )	<p>My advisor tries to understand how my past personal experiences affect my academic performance.</p> <p>My advisor listens to my ideas about my career interests.</p> <p>My advisor tries to understand how my past academic experiences affect my academic performance</p> <p>My advisor uses my academic and/or career interests to help me create my schedule.</p> <p>My advisor considers my career interests when recommending classes.</p> <p>My advisor and I discuss how my past academic performance will affect my future academic plans.</p> <p>My advisor and I discuss how my academic performance will affect my career plans.</p>
Holistic Growth	( $a = .89$ )	<p>My advisor refers me to campus resources, such as the Student Success Center, when I face academic difficulties.</p> <p>My advisor provides me with accurate information about campus resources.</p> <p>My advisor demonstrates knowledge about campus resources such as the Student Success Center and Financial Aid.</p> <p>My advisor encourages me to take responsibility for planning my schedule.</p> <p>My advisor encourages me to participate in off-campus community service and/or volunteering activities such as Habitat for Humanity and Relay for Life.</p> <p>My advisor listens to my questions about campus resources such as the Student Success Center, Financial Aid, and Registrar.</p>
Degree Awareness	( $a = .88$ )	<p>My advisor listens to my questions about my degree requirements.</p> <p>My advisor uses his/her knowledge about my degree requirements to keep me on track for graduation.</p> <p>My advisor encourages me to take classes that are appropriate for my major.</p> <p>My advisor helps me plan my schedule to fulfill my degree requirements.</p> <p>My advisor provides me with accurate information about my</p>

Advising Environment (a = .87) major requirements.  
My advisor provides an adequate amount of time during my advising session.  
My advisor gives me his/her undivided attention during my advising session.  
My advisor provides an open and/or friendly atmosphere during my advising session.

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## Data Collection

Berben, Sereika, and Engberg (2012), noting the importance of obtaining an effect size in correlation studies, stated, “The advantage of effect size estimates is that they are independent of sample size and measure the extent of a treatment effect or an association between variables” (p. 1040). An a priori power analysis was determined using G\* Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). Coughlan et al. (2009) recommended that power be set at .80 to reduce the chance of committing Type-II errors. Statistical power was set at .80 with a 20% chance of accepting the null hypothesis. A two-tailed hypothesis was used to determine a relationship in both directions. The minimum total sample size required for a  $p$  value of .05 with a moderate effect size of 0.30 is 82.

The research was conducted via online administration of the ASLBS survey. Two hundred and thirty ( $n = 230$ ) students of the fall 2016 freshman cohort who persisted in the spring 2017 term were invited to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. The survey, administered through Qualtrics survey software was sent to students’ emails over a 1-week period prior to the end of the spring 2017 term. A report was extracted by the Director of Institutional Research from Colleague, the institution’s student management system that reflected the total number of students who returned for the spring 2017 term. That report was imported into Microsoft Excel and all student identifiable information, except students’ [institution] email addresses were removed from the spreadsheet. Emails sent to students included the purpose and intent of the study noting that the study was purely voluntary. Emails included researcher contact information, Institution Review Board (IRB) contact information, and a hyperlink to the online survey. Student consent to participate in the survey was verified by a click box at the beginning of the survey. Those who consented were given 1 week to respond to

the survey. In this study, students were identified as persistent if they started in the fall 2016 term, continued through the spring 2017 term, and intended to return in the fall 2017 semester. Data were collected at the end of the spring 2017 term and transferred into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences-24 (SPSS). The researcher did not have face-to-face contact with the participants. Participant compensation was not given in any form. No class time was used to collect data and students had the opportunity to decline participation in the research.

Data were stored for three years in aggregate so that individual responses could not be matched to individual respondents. After the study closed, the data was encrypted using *7-zip*, an open-source encryption tool (Pavlov, 2016). The electronic data was then archived and confidentially stored in a password-protected, encrypted file in the Google Drive. Access to the data was restricted to the researcher only, and no paper documents were physically stored. Any verbal presentation of the data was in aggregate and would only reference numeric information related to gender, major, and race. There were no pre–or post-tests associated with this study. The student email address was the only information maintained in Qualtrics as students were reminded by email to complete the survey. This study did not involve any atypical populations.

### **Operationalization of Variables**

#### **Servant Leader Advising**

Servant-leader advising was defined as academic advising that placed serving students first, through demonstrating the servant-leader traits of wisdom, altruistic calling, emotional healing, persuasive mapping, and organizational leadership, expressed through behaviors such as listening and encouraging (McClellan, 2007; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Paul et al., 2012; Paul, 2012). In this study, advisor servant leadership behaviors were measured with averaged scores on four constructs (CM, HG, DA, & AE) on the ASLBS (Paul, 2012). Evidence of CM was

validated when an advisee indicated their advisor demonstrated the following behaviors: *understood, listened, used, and discussed* in relation to past academic performance and career plans. Evidence of HG was validated when an advisee indicated their advisor demonstrated the following behaviors: *referred, listened provided, encouraged* in relation to on-and off-campus resources and taking responsibility for planning their schedule. Evidence of DA was validated when an advisee indicated their advisor demonstrated the following behaviors: *used* [knowledge], *helped, encouraged, listened, and provided* in relation to academic major and degree requirements. Evidence of AE was validated when an advisee indicated their advisor demonstrated the following behaviors: *provided and gave* in relation to time, undivided attention, and a friendly environment.

### **Persistence**

Persistence was defined as a student's movement toward a goal of continuing enrollment in the next term (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2016). In this study, students were considered persistent if they started in the fall 2016 term, continued through the spring 2017 term, and indicated they intended to return in the fall 2017 semester. Evidence of persistence was authenticated when students responded, *Agree or Strongly Agree* to the seven-point Likert-Type questions, "*My advising experience influenced my decision to continue in spring 2017*" and "*I intend to return in the fall 2017 term*".

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Results from this study were analyzed using IBM SPSS-24 software. The instrument used was a Likert-type scale survey. Results from each respondent were tabulated by variable to observe the frequency distribution and identify patterns. The researcher had originally intended to analyze the data using regression methods, but determined that descriptive statistics were

better suited to describe the nature and pattern of students' preferences for servant leader advising. Demographic data included gender, major, and race. A description of the dataset was provided to identify the mean, mode, and median. Data was disaggregated to identify over- and under-represented respondents and response distributions. The Pearson-product-moment correlation coefficient (within SPSS), which measures the strength of association between two or more variables, was attempted. However, skewed response distributions resulted in the application of Spearman's rho ( $r$ ) a more appropriate, non-parametric test for identifying the relationship between servant-leader advising and persistence. A visual representation of the relationship between the two variables was provided using bar charts (See Appendix G).

Mortenson noted that measuring persistence from freshman to sophomore year allowed for early intervention, since the first-to-second-year transition is identified as a critical period for students (as cited in Seidman, 2012). In this study, the persistence rate was measured by comparing the headcount of the fall 2016 entering cohort for continuance in spring 2017 with day 1 of the spring 2017 term as the census day and completion of spring 2017. Persistence could also be determined by the scores related to questions on the conceptual mapping (CM) construct on the ASLBS (Paul et al., 2012), since conceptual mapping was future-focused and indicated a student's intent to continue at the same institution. Other indications of student persistence included a student's self-reported intent to continue in the fall 2017 term or registration for courses for the fall 2017 term.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

#### **Limitations**

The application of correlational research methods can only determine if a relationship between the variables exist. Correlation does not imply causality as it would in an experimental

design. Thus, the inability to draw conclusions about what may cause the relationship is an inherent limitation of the study's research design. Another limitation was the use of a survey instrument. While the selection of a Likert-type scale allowed for focused questions, respondents may have difficulty with the range of degrees on the scale. The lack of space for students to explain answers on the survey was another limitation of this study. The potential for respondents to either submit incomplete surveys or respond incorrectly to the demographic or survey questions, perhaps due to survey fatigue, may have also affected data collection. Inauthentic and indolent responses may have contributed to skewed data accuracy.

Finally, Arrington (2015) suggested studying different types of institutions like those that are religiously affiliated to determine if the research yields different results. The selection of a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated institution as opposed to a for-profit college, community college, or public university, limited the generalizability of results to differing institutions. This study also used convenience sampling, and as a non-probability sampling method, did not allow for generalizations to other populations (Etikan et al., 2016; Polit & Beck, 2010).

### **Delimitations**

The first delimitation in this study was the selection of servant leadership as opposed to other leadership theories. Servant leadership was applicable to this study because the emphasis was on advisor servant-leader behaviors (Paul, 2012). Mortenson stated, "Persistence measurement begins with the careful identification of a clearly defined group or cohort of students at one point in time, place and with specific demographic and enrollment characteristics" (as cited in Seidman, 2012, p. 37), and this study was limited to one group of students in one 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university. The subjective selection of a



specified group (Etikan et al., 2016) was a delimitation of the study as the researcher elected to concentrate on intent to persist of the full-time undergraduate, incoming, freshman cohort in fall 2016. Other term cohorts as well as online, military, and graduate students were omitted from this study because these students did not receive advising from on-campus, professional advisors.

### **Internal and External Validity**

In this study, convenience, non-probability sampling (Etikan et al., 2016) was applied using a clearly defined population (full-time, undergraduate, incoming freshman students who persisted from the fall 2016 cohort to the spring 2017 term). One pitfall of using convenience sampling techniques is the potential for researcher bias, given the lack of random sampling and the subjective judgment of the researcher (Etikan et al., 2016). Likewise, respondents self-selected--a form of non-probability bias that poses an internal threat to validity. Correlation design was also used which limited the ability to determine causality. Additionally, Lodico et al. (2010) noted that sample size and heterogeneity could also affect the results of correlational studies. Another potential internal threat to validity was the possibility of confounding variables or extraneous variables (outside influences). Students might not persist due to reasons outside of advising such as personal problems, work, and family obligations. Conversely, students may persist due to a new relationship developed on-campus, or on-campus employment.

Polit and Beck (2010) stated, "Generalizability or applicability is an issue of great importance in all forms of health and social research and this is particularly true in the current environment in which *evidence* is held in high esteem" (p. 1457). In this study, potential threats to external validity included the generalizability of the results to other demographics and locations, particularly if the sample size was limited or certain characteristics of the demographic were dominant. Polit and Beck (2010) contend, "Small convenience samples of participants who

are not selected for any theoretical reasons are all too common in quantitative studies, and yet it is precisely this type of design that poses the most severe threats to the conventional model of generalizability” (p. 1454). This study focused on a private, religiously affiliated, higher education institution limited to the Pacific region. It did not include for-profit, community colleges, or public institutions, thus limiting generalizability. The lack of random sampling also impacts the generalizability of results. The interaction of selection and treatment may influence external validity in that the sample size may be too small to generalize to another population (Creswell, 2014). The interaction of setting and treatment is also an external threat. Findings of day undergraduate students who received servant-leader advising may not be generalizable to online, graduate, and military students.

### **Expected Findings**

The researcher expected the results to verify a positive correlation between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and student intent to persist. These findings would validate Tinto’s (2004, 2012) theory that effective academic advising was associated with increased persistence. As a missing link in the case for advising as servant leadership (McClellan, 2007), the results from this study would add to results from previous studies by Paul et al. (2012) and Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015), thus contributing to the research continuum. Paul (2012) stated that listening was an important component of servant leadership. Paul (2012) found the ASLBS to be a predictor of student satisfaction related to advising, with Advising Environment (AE) being the greatest predictor. The researcher also expected to find that students would highly value the AE construct on the ASLBS.

## **Ethical Issues in the Study**

Collecting data from human subjects often prompts concerns about ethical issues (Creswell, 2014). This study observed the Belmont Principle (1978), which promotes respect for participants, beneficence, and justice and involves minimal risk to participants. Students were informed at the beginning of the survey that the survey was optional and the objective was to determine the relationship between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and student persistence. The wording in the survey was an invitation and not a requirement to participate. Informed consent was clearly stated at the beginning of the survey and students knew beforehand of the lack of implications for survey participation. All students of the fall 2016 entering class who persisted into the spring 2017 term received the same questionnaire. This eliminated the issue of standardization and fairness. Permission to conduct the research was granted from the researcher's educational institution and from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the institution where the research was conducted. To ensure anonymity, the names of participants, the institution, and the location were omitted throughout the study.

In this study, the researcher was the director of the institution's advising department. To abate any potential ethical concerns of researcher bias, the researcher clearly defined the purpose of the study in the consent form participants were given before taking the survey. The researcher selected a non-experimental, correlational design over the qualitative design to eliminate face-to-face contact with participants in the study. Reports were retrieved via the research department director at the study site, and only relevant student information was provided to the researcher.

## **Summary**

Student retention is an ongoing challenge in higher education. Implementing effective practices, training, and development is contingent upon having evidence to verify such needs.

Academic advising has been linked to increased retention (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012) and increased persistence (Braxton et al., 2014). Academic advising is within an institution's control, and it has been shown to be helpful in increasing persistence. Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) found a correlation between servant leadership and developmental advising, and they recommended further research with servant leadership and advising to generalize the results with other institution demographics. Their recommendation, along with other recommendations to perform research with persistence in private institutions (Astin & Oseguera, as cited in Gansemer-Topf et al., 2015), points to a gap in the literature.

To address the gap in the literature, the researcher studied undergraduate students in the fall 2016 freshman cohort at a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the U.S. The purpose of this study was to extend the testing of McClellan's (2007) advocacy of advising as servant leadership. The study also serves as an extension of Paul et al. (2012) and Paul and Fitzpatrick (2015) studies on servant leader advising. The ASLBS was used in the study and correlations were discovered between the constructs and persistence. Descriptive statistics served as the foundation for future statistical methods.

The results of the study could assist institution administrators with identifying the advising needs of students in a private, 4-year, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the U.S. The results could yield data that inform the professional development of academic advisors and may also determine whether further training and development in a particular construct is beneficial for advisors.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this correlational study was to determine if a relationship existed between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and first-year students' intent to persist. Persistence in this study was defined as continuous enrollment from term-to-term (fall-to-spring-to-fall) (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017). Exploring the relationship between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist was an extension of Paul et al.'s (2015) study on servant-leader advising, in which the authors recommended future research adding persistence as a variable. Correlation analysis and descriptive statistics were used to address the following research question:

RQ1: What correlation exists between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist with first-year students in a private, 4-year, nonprofit, religiously affiliated university in the United States?

Chapter 4 includes the demographics of the study, as well as the correlational analysis and the descriptive results between student persistence and servant-leader advising questions on the Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS) (Paul, 2012). The researcher administered the ASLBS Likert-type scale to a total of 230 undergraduate students from the fall 2016 freshman cohort via Qualtrics.

### **Research Site**

The study was conducted at a private, non-profit, religiously affiliated 4-year liberal arts institution in the Pacific region of the U.S. The school is one of three U.S. universities identified by its Roman Catholic Marianist heritage. The university is designated as a Native-Hawaiian serving institution and has a first-year student retention rate of 72% (Chaminade University, n.d.).

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Survey Distribution**

Survey data were collected via Qualtrics over the final week of the spring 2017 term. Appendix E contains a copy of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. 230 surveys were distributed. 82 surveys were started, 66 were completed, and three were omitted due to distribution error. A total of 63 surveys (23% response rate) were usable for this study; 19 surveys were removed from the data set due to non-completion and distribution error.

### **Academic Advising**

The institution in this study delivered advising via a dual-advising model. The school had a centralized professional advising center with five academic advisors and also had faculty advisors in each division along with a pre-health advising office staffed by one full time advisor for students interested in post-graduate, health care professions. The institution used a proactive academic advising approach that required all first-year students and sophomores with undecided majors to receive advising through the Office of Retention, Advising, and Career Preparation.

### **Correlational Analysis**

Data were analyzed using SPSS 24.0; bivariate analysis and descriptive statistics were used. Bivariate analysis examined how two variables related to each other (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Descriptive statistics described what the data revealed by summarizing the data (Trochim, 2006) including means, medians, and standard deviations. Non-parametric tests were used to circumvent non-normal data. Spearman's rho ( $r_s$ ), was used to explore the relationship between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist. Spearman's rho ( $r_s$ ) was used to assess the relationship between two ordinal or continuous variables because one or both variables were not normally distributed. Geary and Higgs (2015) noted, "Spearman's rho is an appropriate

nonparametric measure of association if one or both variables is an ordinal-scale measurement” (p. 10). Like Pearson’s  $r$ , Spearman’s rho ( $r_s$ ) produces a correlation coefficient between -1.0 and +1.0 (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). Effect sizes of .1 are indicated as weak, .3 as moderate, and .5 and higher as strong (Ferguson, 2009). Correlations were run between two persistence survey items, *My advising experience influenced my decision to return in the spring 2017 term* and, *I intend to return in the Fall 2017 term*, and four ASLBS survey constructs: Advising Environment (AE), Holistic Growth (HG), Conceptual mapping (CM), and Degree Awareness (DA).

**ASLBS subscales.** Likert-type scales are commonly used to measure attitudes providing a range of responses to a given question or statement (Subedi, 2016). In this study, the ASLBS was used to determine the relationship between advisor, servant leadership behaviors advising and intent to persist by measuring four factors of leadership behavior. All items were measured with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from: 7 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree).

***Conceptual mapping.*** Conceptual Mapping (CM) included advisors’ skill in helping students to plan for academic and career goals (Paul, 2012). CM was measured with 7 items, such as *My advisor tries to understand how my past personal experiences affect my academic performance* and *My advisor and I discuss how my past academic performance will affect my future academic plans*. Items were averaged, and reliability was excellent (Cronbach’s Alpha = .919).

***Holistic growth.*** Holistic Growth (HG) included advisors’ skill in demonstrating knowledge of on and off-campus opportunities for students to develop personally. HG also included helping students to assume responsibility for making their own academic schedules navigating students through a variety of campus resources. This was measured with 6 items,

such as *My advisor refers me to campus resources, such as the Student Success Center, when I face academic difficulties* and *My advisor encourages me to take responsibility for planning my schedule*. Items were averaged, and reliability was good (Cronbach's Alpha = .841).

***Degree awareness.*** Degree Awareness (DA) measured advisors' knowledge of degree requirements. This included providing accurate information about degree requirements, listening to students' questions about degree requirements, and keeping students on track for graduation. This was typically measured with 5 items, such as *My advisor listens to my questions about my degree requirements* and *My advisor encourages me to take classes that are appropriate for my major*. However, one item, *My advisor uses his/her knowledge about my degree requirements to keep me on track for graduation*, was left out due to a programming error. The remaining four items were averaged, and reliability was good (Cronbach's Alpha = .872).

***Advising environment.*** Advising Environment (AE) was an advisor's ability to create a welcoming advising environment and providing students with ample advising time and attention during each session (Paul, 2012). This is measured with 3 items, such as *My advisor provides an adequate amount of time during my advising session* and *My advisor provides an open and/or friendly atmosphere during my advising session*. Items were averaged, and reliability was good (Cronbach's Alpha = .878).

## **Statistical Analyses**

The statistical analyses conducted in this study examined whether each of the ASLBS subscales were associated with students' intent to return and students' perceptions of their advisors' influence on their intent to return. The researcher ran a test for *skewness*, which describes the symmetry (Ho & Yu, 2014) or lopsidedness (Ayiro, 2012) of a distribution. The researcher found that all of the subscales, as well as the intent to return and perceptions of



advisors' influence were negatively skewed (CM = -.626, HG = -.568, DA = -1.250, AE = -1.311, advisors' influence = -.885, intent to return = -2.217). Because the data were negatively skewed, Spearman's rho ( $r_s$ ) was used instead of Pearson's  $r$  to assess associations between the ASLBS and intent to return and perceptions of advisors' influence. Spearman's rho ( $r_s$ ) assesses the relationship between two ordinal or continuous variables when one or both variables are not normally distributed.

### **Description of the Sample**

The ASLBS was administered to 230 first-year students from the fall 2016 freshman cohort at a private, non-profit, 4-year, religiously affiliated university in the U.S. Convenience sampling was used because the intent was not to generalize the findings but rather to explore any associations between persistence and advisor, servant leadership behaviors within a specific cohort. A correlation study requires a minimum sample of 30 participants to ensure relationship accuracy (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). The study sample size was  $n = 63$ . Descriptive analysis was conducted for all demographic and biographic information. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions for the nominal values of gender, race, and major follow.

Of the 63 students who completed the survey, 50 respondents (79.4%) were female and 13 respondents (20.6%) were male (Table 3). In terms of race/ethnicity, 47.6% of the 63 respondents identified as Asian; 22.2% as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 17.5% as White, 1.5% as Black, 1.6% as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 9.5% identified as Other (Table 4). The sample includes respondents from all of the school's five academic divisions, with more students from the Natural Sciences division participating. (see Table 5)

Table 3

*Participants by Gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	13	20.6	20.6	20.6
Female	50	79.4	79.4	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 4

*Participants by Race*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1.6	1.6	1.6
Asian	30	47.6	47.6	49.2
Black or African American	1	1.6	1.6	50.8
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	14	22.2	22.2	73.0
Other	6	9.5	9.5	82.5
White	11	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 5

*Participants by Major*

	Majors	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unknown	1	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Accounting	3	4.8	4.8	6.3
	Behavioral Sciences	2	3.2	3.2	9.5
	Biochemistry	5	7.9	7.9	17.5
	Biology	8	12.7	12.7	30.2
	Business Administration	7	11.1	11.1	41.3
	Elementary Education	2	3.2	3.2	44.4
	English	1	1.6	1.6	46.0
	Environmental & Interior Design	3	4.8	4.8	50.8
	Environmental Studies	5	7.9	7.9	58.7
	Forensic Sciences	11	17.5	17.5	76.2
	Historical & Political Studies	1	1.6	1.6	77.8
	International Trade	1	1.6	1.6	79.4
	Nursing	3	4.8	4.8	84.1
	Psychology	4	6.3	6.3	90.5
	Undecided	6	9.5	9.5	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

The researcher had initially intended to generalize these findings to larger student populations and to infer the relationship between servant-leader advising behaviors and intent to persist among students in higher education. However, after collecting the data and carefully considering the sample, the researcher determined that exploring emergent associations and using descriptive statistics would be a more appropriate approach because the study was limited to students' perceptions of five professional academic advisors. Descriptive statistics were determined to be more applicable than inferential statistics, which aim to infer what the data could mean to the general population (Trochim, 2006).

## Summary of the Results

Spearman's rank-order correlations indicated significant positive associations between all four of the ASLBS subscales. Each of the subscales was significantly and positively associated with participants' reports that their advising experience influenced their decision to continue in the spring 2017 term (Table 4). In this study, participants were more likely to report that their advising experience influenced their decision to continue if they reported higher CM ( $r_s = .479, p < .001$ ), HG ( $r_s = .457, p < .001$ ), DA ( $r_s = .473, p < .001$ ), and AE ( $r_s = .424, p < .001$ ). Participants were also more likely to report that they intended to return if they reported higher DA ( $r_s = .349, p < .01$ ) and AE ( $r_s = .326, p < .01$ ). However, intent to return was not associated with CM ( $r_s = .217, p = .088$ ) or HG ( $r_s = .161, p = .206$ ).

Table 7

*Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients between four ASLBS subscales, academic advisors' influence on decision to continue in Spring, and intent to return in Fall.*

	CM	HG	DA	AE	Advisor's influence	Intent to return
CM	1.000	-	-	-	-	-
HG	.777***	1.000	-	-	-	-
DA	.771***	.682***	1.000	-	-	-
AE	.777***	.708***	.844***	1.000	-	-
Advisor's influence	.479***	.457***	.473***	.424***	1.000	-
Intent to return	.217	.161	.349**	.326**	.409**	1.000

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . CM: Conceptual Mapping. HG: Holistic Growth. DA: Degree Awareness. AE: Advising Environment.

## Detailed Analysis

Female students made up a large portion (79.4%) of this sample, which is consistent with the institution's demographics as a whole, which is comprised of 71% female and 29% male

students. While the racial makeup of the sample was closely representative of the overall student population in most categories, the survey did not identify any respondents as Hispanic or non-resident alien (categories used by the university). In this study, students received professional academic advising, faculty advising, or a combination of both. A sample size of 82 respondents was needed for the study, and 63 respondents (23%) were recorded. Student response rates by major revealed a greater percentage of respondents for the Natural Sciences and Business majors. On the whole, students who experienced greater degree awareness (DA) and a sense of friendly and welcoming advising environment (AE) were more likely to express intent to return. Respondents' intent to return was positively correlated with DA ( $r_s = .349, p < .01$ ) and AE ( $r_s = .326, p < .01$ ) suggesting that degree awareness, time spent during the advising session, and a friendly atmosphere were associated with intent to return. For the purposes of actualizing the data, the researcher ran a statistical analysis for each individual item score that made up the constructs (Appendix B). The analysis is described in Chapter 5.

### **Summary**

The purpose of the study was to determine if a relationship existed between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and intent to persist. The findings were drawn from the results of 63 responses from first-year, higher education students on the ASLBS, a scale created to measure servant-leader behaviors in advisors. The survey return-rate was 23%. Within the sample, 79% of the respondents were female and 21% male. Results were analyzed using bivariate, correlational analysis, and descriptive statistics. The results indicated a moderate, positive correlation with students who intended to persist in the fall 2017 term with DA ( $r_s = .349, p < .01$ ) and AE ( $r_s = .326, p < .01$ ) and moderate, positive associations CM ( $r_s = .479, p < .001$ ), HG ( $r_s = .457, p < .001$ ), DA ( $r_s = .473, p < .001$ ), and AE ( $r_s = .424, p < .001$ ) were found with

students who indicated their advising experience influenced their decision to persist from fall 2016 to spring 2017 term. The study's conclusion and recommendations are found in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

Student persistence in higher education has been a continuous problem for many years (Tinto, 2006; Wilson, 2016). Student persistence involves both individual and institutional variables (Okagbare, 2017; Tinto, 2006). Understanding the variables that influence student persistence is central to moving toward larger numbers of students completing their education. However, there is very little research on the empirical link between advising and persistence, and what research does exist has typically focused on measures of participation, student perceptions of quality, or frequency of advising sessions (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Ruffalo Noel-Levitz (2016) noted that student satisfaction with academic advising is one area related to persistence that institutions have control over (Okagbare, 2017). According to Fosnacht, McCormick, Nailos, and Ribera (2017), “advising is presumed to have value because it helps students persist, informs students of and facilitates access to valuable educational opportunities, such as internships, that promote student learning and development, and helps students make informed decisions while in college” (p. 75). Dominant schools of thought in academic advising include prescriptive, developmental, and proactive advising. The mixed results from studies of advising satisfaction in the literature have prompted researchers to explore other approaches grounded in leadership theory (Kelly, 2003), such as servant leadership (McClellan, 2007).

Servant-leader advising is a relatively new concept in higher education. Recent studies with servant leadership in higher education have focused on employee satisfaction and retention (Magda et al., 2016), perceptions of servant leadership (Burch, Sails, & Mills, 2015), and adjunct faculty engagement in online learning (Varney, 2017), among others. Very few studies examine servant leadership and academic advising. McClellan (2007) was the first to theorize the idea of

advising as servant leadership. Paul et al. (2012) found a significant positive relationship between servant leadership and academic advising. Paul (2012) found the ASLBS to be a predictor of student satisfaction related to advising, with Advising Environment (AE) being the greatest predictor.

First-year student retention is important for both higher education and the workforce (Martin, 2017; Tinto, 2004). Small, private colleges, with enrollments below 1,000 continue to struggle to sustain (Seltzer, 2017). Research on persistence in private colleges is essential because keeping students enrolled is as important as recruitment (National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, 2013). Academic advising is one recommended pathway to improving student persistence, largely due to its connection between student goal attainment and institutional support (Cueso, 2003; Fricker; 2015; Nutt, 2003; Tinto, 1975). Despite advising reform efforts (Driving Toward a Degree, 2016), advising quality and student satisfaction with advising has fluctuated (Allen & Smith, 2008; Ducksworth, 2008; Paul, 2012; Paul, Smith, & Dochney, 2012; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). Fosnacht et al. (2015; 2017) found it troubling that about one in ten full-time, first-year students (9%) never met with an advisor, and about one-quarter (24%) did so only once. Hossler, Ziskin, Moore III, and Wakhungu (2008) recommended that researchers understand persistence within the context of individual institutions. Reason (2009) added, “research must be dynamic, responsive to change, and useful to practitioners in higher education settings” (p. 486). Each institution is unique and must respond to the needs of its particular population (Hossler et al., 2008). This is particularly true of mission-based colleges. Reason (2009) also recommended that persistence research include different demographics because students engage differently according to their environment.



Studying other demographics is significant as “every institution is different and education leaders must also guard against one-size-fits-all solutions” (National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, 2013, p. 11). Arrington (2015) noted the scarcity of research about leadership style and its impact on student success, persistence, and graduation. There was a gap in the literature about advisor, servant leadership behaviors and persistence among first-year students in private, religious-based institutions. The purpose of this study was to address the gap and contribute to the body of scholarship on advising and student persistence.

This study was grounded in Greenleaf’s (1977) servant leadership theory and Tinto’s (1975) theory of student departure. In this study, the researcher sought to determine whether a relationship existed between advisor, servant leadership behaviors and first-year student intent to persist in higher education. Three benefits for research with servant-leader advising were proposed. First, hiring practices could be created to screen potential advisors for servant-advising behaviors. Second, training programs could be designed to foster servant-leader behaviors in advisors. Finally, a matrix of advising practices for different student populations could be developed as a reference for advisors.

### **Summary of the Results**

The research for this study was based on responses from first time, freshman students at a private, non-profit, religiously affiliated institution. These students had continued from the fall 2016 term to the spring 2017 term, and it was unknown if they intended to return in the fall 2017 term. The researcher’s intent was to explore professional advisor servant leadership behaviors in relation to student persistence. The findings reflected a moderate, positive correlation between DA and student intent to persist ( $r_s = .349, p < .01$ ), and AE and student intent to persist ( $r_s = .326, p < .01$ ). All four servant-leader advising constructs, CM ( $r_s = .479, p < .001$ ), HG ( $r_s =$

.457,  $p < .001$ ), DA ( $r_s = .473$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and AE ( $r_s = .424$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were moderately, positively correlated with *My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the spring 2017 term*. The researcher expected to find a positive association with CM and intent to return, as CM implied a future focus on career interests as related to the selected academic major. While CM had a moderate, positive association with advisor influence and students' decision to continue in spring 2017, intent to return in fall 2017 (sophomore year) showed a smaller, non-significant association with both CM ( $r_s = .217$ ,  $p = .088$ ) and HG ( $r_s = .161$ s,  $p = .206$ ).

Correlations of the individual items on the ASLBS with intent to return in the fall 2017 term (Appendix D) were examined. While the CM construct average was the highest with *My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the spring 2017 term* ( $r_s = .479$ ,  $p < .001$ ), of all four construct averages, the CM average was next to last with respect to *student intent to return in Fall 2017 term* ( $r_s = 0.217$ ). Examination of individual CM survey items and intent to return in fall 2017 indicated a moderate, positive correlation for two specific CM items: *My advisor listens to my ideas about my career interests* ( $r_s = 0.347$ ) and *My advisor considers my career interests when recommending classes* ( $r_s = 0.377$ ). Smaller, positive CM correlations existed for *My advisor tries to understand how my past personal experiences affect my academic performance* ( $r_s = 0.149$ ) and *My advisor and I discuss how my past academic performance will affect my career plans* ( $r_s = 0.180$ ). Smaller, positive CM correlations with individual survey items and *intent to return in fall 2017* compared to *My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the spring 2017 term* were significant.

Individual CM item correlations were greater when students responded to, *My advisor considers*

*my career interests when recommending classes* ( $r_s = 0.526$ ) and advising influence, as compared to intent to return ( $r_s = 0.377$ ).

Next, while the HG construct average ( $r_s = 0.457, p < .001$ ) showed a significant, moderate, positive correlation with the variable *My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the spring 2017 term*, the HG construct average for the variable, *intent to return in fall 2017 term* ( $r_s = 0.161$ ) was the lowest of all the averages. Individual survey items like, *My advisor encourages me to participate in off-campus community service and/or volunteering activities such as Habitat for Humanity and Relay for Life* had a statistically significant, weak, positive correlation ( $r_s = 0.003$ ) with *intent to return* in the fall 2017 term, as did *My advisor listens to my questions about campus resources such as Student Success Center, Financial Aid, and Registrar* ( $r_s = 0.145$ ), while the individual HG item that had a moderate, positive correlation with *intent to return* was, *My advisor provides me with accurate information about my major requirements* ( $r_s = 0.405, p < .001$ ).

Descriptive statistics for three demographic, nominal variables, gender, ethnicity, and major were analyzed. *Mode*, or the most common value, is the measure of central tendency used to describe these data (Creswell, 2014). Data indicated that the mode for gender was female ( $n = 50$ ), for ethnicity, Asian ( $n = 30$ ), and for major, Forensic Sciences ( $n = 11$ ). Descriptive statistics for individual survey items revealed that advisor, servant leadership behaviors related to degree awareness (DA) and advising environment (AE) were important to students. Results for the HG survey item, *My advisor encourages me to participate in off-campus community service and/or volunteering activities such as Habitat for Humanity and Relay for Life* had a low Median of 5.0, while the (AE) survey item, *My advisor gives me his/her undivided attention during my*

*advising session* had a high *Median* of 7.0. All other individual survey items resulted in a *Median* of 6.0.

### **Discussion of the Results**

According to J. Pratapas (personal communication, August 20, 2017) academic advisors in this institution employed a proactive advising (Glennen & Baxley, 1985), model in which all freshmen were required to schedule an appointment with an academic advisor specific to their intended major, during their first term. Varney (2007) stated, “Intrusive advising differs from the more traditional prescriptive and developmental models of advising because advisors are not only helpful and encouraging of students, but they proactively make the initial contact with students...a pre-emptive strike, of sorts” (p. 11). With intrusive advising, the advisor plays a significant part in caring about the student while fostering student independence (Thomas & Minton, 2004). The key to this approach is to make a genuine connection with students so that they feel that their college or university cares about them (Varney, 2007).

Intrusive advising is not new to the scholarly literature. Glennen and Baxley (1985) conducted one of the earliest studies of intrusive advising programs, examining entering freshmen at Western New Mexico University. The students did not voluntarily seek advising so an advising program was designed as part of the school’s advising efforts, hence the term “intrusive advisement” (Glennen & Baxley, 1985). The program yielded a reduction in attrition from 66% to 48% during 1981-1982 and a further decrease in attrition from 48% to 25% during 1982-1983 (Glennen & Baxley, 1985).

According to J. Pratapas (personal communication, August 20, 2017) in the latter part of the fall 2016 term, the advising office transitioned from having five academic advisors to four academic advisors and one career specialist. The institution in this study used a proactive,

academic advising process that was guided by three advising checklists with content that included developmental components ranging from inquiry into the student's dorm experience, to reviewing the student's progress in the first term. Students in the fall 2016 term were required to meet with a professional advisor, three times during the term in the Office of Retention, Advising, and Career Preparation. Once in week three, week eight, and week fifteen. All incoming freshman students received a Comprehensive Advising Packet (CAP) in the freshman seminar course, which included a career exploration mapping form, a campus resource guide, information about campus clubs, a degree mapping template, biographical information about each advisor, information on Study Abroad, and a sample 4-year degree plan.

Moderate, significant correlations for items related to how academic performance affected career plans or how past academic performance affected career plans (CM) and advising influence on students' decision to continue from fall 2016 to spring 2017. These outcomes corroborated with results from the 2017 National Freshman Motivation to Complete College report in which 70.1% of incoming freshman from 4-year private institutions requested career counseling to assist with selecting an educational plan that would help them obtain a good job (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017a). Likewise, 64.7% of respondents in that report indicated an interest in knowing the qualifications for specific careers (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017a). Non-significant correlations with the aforementioned construct (CM) and intent to persist into fall 2017 suggested students did not desire career-related guidance or may have already covered such topics in previous advising sessions. It is also conceivable that academic advisors may not have discussed students' past performance in their initial advising sessions with this cohort. Thus, career interests (CM) in the first year were associated with student persistence during the freshmen year, and not associated with intent to continue into the sophomore year.

## Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

The results of this study were consistent with Ruffalo Noel-Levitz 2013-2016, Priorities Data, which noted that 62% of first-time community college students believed their advisor was knowledgeable about the students' major. Descriptive results of the findings in this study suggested that a significant portion (87%) of the population sampled in this study intended to persist in the fall 2017 term. The proportions of respondents by gender and race were representative of the overall student population. In this study, 90.5% of the sample ( $n = 63$ ) declared a major in the first-year. This corroborated the claim that declaration of major within the first year has been positively associated with student persistence (Sparks & Nunez, 2014). Ishitani (2016) stated, "being female was associated with decreasing the probability of departure by 29.2%" (p. 275) with Asians being 43.4% less likely to drop out during the first-year. In this study, female respondents (87%) intended to return at a proportionality higher rate than males. Asians (47.6%) and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (22.2%) were the most frequent respondents.

According to Paul (2012), DA was advisors' knowledge of academic degree requirements and their ability to keep students on track to graduate. AE measured the advisor's ability to set aside enough time to focus on the student during the advising session and listen attentively while creating a friendly environment. AE findings in this study were consistent with Colgan's (2016) recommendation of listening to students and focusing the advising session on the student's feeling of being valued for who they are (Higgins, 2017). These findings also substantiated Wyatt's (2016) study of faith-based institutions, in which students expressed a preference for more time spent with advisors. This study also aligned with Paul and Fitzpatrick's (2015) study in which wisdom (WIS), characterized as knowledge of [academic] degrees and altruistic calling

(AC), which was depicted as advisors' providing an open and caring environment, were found to be predictors of student satisfaction with advising. The 2015-2016 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report also reported congruent findings, indicating that 89% of students in private, 4-year, institutions rated knowledge of degree/major requirements as important. The results in this study were slightly higher than public 4-year (88%) and two-year institutions (85%). Hatch and Garcia (2017) similarly found that students who received academic advising around developing a clear academic plan, which included having accessible advisors, assistance with course and program selection, creating a plan, and discussing outside commitments, were less likely to drop out. The study findings for CM were consistent with the findings of Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2017), which indicated that 70% of 100,000 students who took an early-alert survey specified that they would like assistance with selecting an educational pathway that would result in employment.

The researcher intended to focus the study on advisor, servant leadership behaviors of professional advisors. However, Easterday (2013) noted that both faculty and professional advisors could potentially have a positive impact on students. In this study, first-year students in this institution were advised by either or both a professional or faculty advisor. Only students who indicated they were undecided [about a major] saw a professional advisor, and later in the term they may have received advising from a faculty advisor. Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2017) found that 73.1% of 4-year private institutions identified one-on-one advising by a professional advisor to be an effective general strategy and tactic for student success, retention, and completion. In this study, it was possible that students received advising from a faculty advisor, a professional advisor, or a combination of both, depending on when and whether a major was declared.

Overall, degree knowledge or competence (DA) and focused attention, caring, and listening (AE) had a moderate, positive correlation with intent to return in fall 2017, whereas future career goals (CM), connecting to resources, and interest in volunteer opportunities (HG) beyond the advising milieu had a non-significant, small, positive correlation. It was not evident whether these effects were the result of advisor, servant leadership behaviors. Two possible explanations for these findings were generated. First, it was possible that academic advisors focused more on academic advising as it related to students' immediate first-year needs like course scheduling and identifying major areas of interest, and less on career and volunteer-related topics during the second semester of the first year (spring 2017). Second, it was possible that students did value advising content other than immediate information about their degree (DA) and the advising environment (AE) but did not perceive that their advisor focused on these areas.

Weak significance scores with CM and intent to persist in fall 2017 do not correspond with findings from Morrow and Ackermann (2012) in which students who reported having career goals like getting a good job and succeeding in society reported they were more likely to intend to persist into the second year. Moderate, significant correlations with DA and AE supported earlier research by Noel-Levitz (2010), Mottarella et al. (2004), and Holmes (2004). Noel-Levitz (2010) found that advisors' knowledge of degree requirements and approachability were the best predictors of students' satisfaction with advising. Mottarella et al. (2004) and Holmes (2004) both found advising environment, approachableness, and caring nature the most significant predictors of student satisfaction with advising. The intent of the study was to measure servant leadership behaviors in professional academic advisors. However, it was



possible that students from the cohort may have met with a faculty advisor in either term and answered the survey based on that experience.

### **Limitations**

The study was conducted at a single, private, religiously affiliated university in the Pacific region of the U.S. Random sampling at the beginning of the term and a larger population would have increased the validity of the ASLBS results. The ASLBS was limited to questions pertaining directly to the academic advisor behaviors and the advising milieu. The survey did not include other questions that may be associated with student persistence. This was the first study conducted using the ASLBS, so the efficacy and generalizability of the scale was largely unknown.

Swecker et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between the number of meetings with an academic advisor and the retention rates of first-generation students through a multiple logistic regression study. They found the number of meetings with an advisor increased the likelihood of student retention by 13%. The frequency of meetings with an advisor may have also influenced responses in this study that related to the advising process provided by the institution. Freshmen at this institution were required to meet with their advisors up to three times in the first term (J. Pratapas, personal communication, August 20, 2017). Students who met only once with an advisor and declared a major did not receive the remaining advising experiences, and advisors therefore did not have the opportunity to develop a close advisor-advisee relationship and participate in the holistic development of the student. The entering freshman cohort first received advising from a professional academic advisor. Students who received advising from a professional advisor in the centralized advising office might have also received advising from their faculty advisor in their respective divisions or the pre-health

advisor, and thus may have responded based on their experiences with these individuals. Some students may have considered a faculty advising session as equal to a professional advising session and responded accordingly.

Another limitation of the study was the timing of the survey distribution. Survey fatigue may have influenced the response rate, as students may have received other types of end-of-term institutional surveys. For example, students who received the ASLBS also received the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), an end-of-term Proactive Advising survey, and the required freshman seminar survey. Depending on when the surveys were administered, students may have ignored the immediate study survey since they had already responded to the freshman seminar survey and possibly the NSSE survey.

Next, using *intent to persist* as a variable is disputable. Caution should be used when drawing inferences without actually measuring persistence behavior in the following term (Ziskin & Hossler, 2006). Student intent to persist may be due to several factors including financial—the hope of getting a good paying job upon graduation or the intrinsic reward of attaining a degree (McPherson, 2007). Intent to persist may also be closely associated with being motivated to complete a degree or [individual] goal commitment (Tinto, 1975). It is also plausible that the student success outcome, *thriving*, may also contribute to student persistence. According to Derrico et al. (2015) thriving, which is the combination of positive psychology and higher education, is largely associated with the Christian faith (such as life's work and faith in God), as it considers holistic student success. Thus, a student's faith may influence intent to persist. The selection of a specific cohort using convenience sampling limited the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the sample was taken from a private, religiously affiliated institution in the U.S. The timing of survey data collection may have also been a

limitation as data were collected during the week of final exams and students were leaving for summer break.

## **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

### **Implications**

Studies in the area of advisor servant leadership behaviors and student persistence were lacking in the research literature. This study was built upon the existing literature, and it paved the way for more extensive research about servant-leader advising behaviors and its association with student persistence. In this study, the overall findings revealed a moderately, positive association between all four, servant-leader advising constructs (AE, DA, CM, & HG) and advisor influence on students' decision to continue from fall 2016 to spring 2017, and with two constructs (AE & DA) and intent to persist in fall 2017. These findings pointed to the value of advisor competence around degree knowledge (DA) as well as having a friendly, caring, and welcoming advisor who listens and gives undivided attention to students during advising sessions (AE). Consequently, there was an association between advisor behaviors and advisees with respect to influencing movement from the first-term to the second term in the freshmen year, and a moderate, positive association between DA and AE with intent to persist in the sophomore year.

**Practice.** The results of this study pointed to the need for academic advising models that specifically addressed the needs of freshman students in small, private, religious universities with predominantly Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations. Previous published research on servant-leader advising tended to focus on predominantly White and Black institutions in the South (Paul et al., 2012; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). Advising practices in the first year should include behaviors of all four constructs (AE, DA, CM, & DG). As students

move into their second year, CM and HG practices by advisors should be reduced and increased energy should be given to DA and AE practices. Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2017) indicated 76.9% of respondents from 4-year private institutions found that helping students see the connection between coursework and careers was an effective tactic and strategy while the same strategy was slightly lower when applied in the first-year (72.9%). Thus, specific attention should be given to advisor knowledge of the relationship between academic advising and career objectives and how these connect. King and Kerr noted it is advantageous for faculty advisors to advise student because of their knowledge of career fields (as cited in Upcraft et al., 2004). Thus, consideration should also be given to the best time for implementing academic-career development and the role of faculty advisors in the process.

The weak correlations in this study may be the result of students not valuing career and developmental components as they entered the second year. Alternatively, it may be that academic advisors did not demonstrate these behaviors during the advising sessions. Nevertheless, non-significant findings with CM and HG and intent to return suggested that this institution review practices that integrate career and developmental components in the sophomore year to determine the best time to introduce career goals, volunteer opportunities, and campus resources. The institution should consider reviewing whether the model and practice of integrating academic and career advising as a function of all academic advisor roles is beneficial to new students, or whether the current integrative efforts of academic advisors and a career specialist housed in the same location but with different roles, is the best practice for the given demographic and institution.

Finally, student persistence or attrition cannot be limited to the practices of the academic advising team. Arrington stressed, "Studies of higher education personnel as servant leaders

would provide insight to the influence of leaders at alternative levels of leadership and, as a result, further inform the practice of servant leadership in higher education” (p. 14). As an institution-wide problem, campus leaders should consider the practices of all departments and whether the application of servant leadership practices is beneficial when working with students.

**Policy.** Internal, institutional, and external governmental and federal policies can influence campus attrition in different ways. Students at 4-year private institutions have higher expectations when it comes to the campus experience. A good campus climate—feeling welcomed, being shown concern, and having caring and helpful staff, and not getting the “run around”—all contribute to the students’ sense of satisfaction (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2016). Policymakers can benefit from exploring ways of considering the persistence needs of first-year students who are predominantly female, and largely identify as Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Longitudinal data can prove valuable to see if servant-leader advising behaviors with faculty advisors are a significant predictor of retention with this demographic. In this study, the institution’s policy was for students in their first term to have their initial schedules created by an Enrollment Specialist in the Records Office, as opposed to an academic advisor. Perhaps by having students meet with an academic advisor for initial course scheduling, advisors will have a primary opportunity to discuss academic performance in high school and how their degree maps to a potential career, prior to the start of the academic term. Advisors may also have an opportunity to develop students’ level of responsibility for constructing their course schedule for subsequent terms; an element of the CM construct.

Next, the institution’s policy of requiring students declare a major by the time the student attains 45 units is valuable for the goals of servant-leader advising. By the third term, many of these respondents would have declared a major and been assigned to a faculty advisor. Students

who declare a major sooner may miss out on the opportunity to experience servant-leader advising unless their faculty advisor engages in it. Ledwith (2014) emphasized, clarifying roles is the key to successful collaboration. If faculty advisors provided advising in the spring 2017 term, the collaboration between professional advisors and faculty advisors appeared to be associated with influencing students' return in the spring 2017 term.

**Theory.** The aforementioned benefits have implications for the theory of servant leadership at an organizational level and how theory interfaces with student persistence at the advising level. As Frey (2017) noted, the theory of servant leadership is about the love of others through praxis. Academic advisors who place students first, practice servant-leader advising behaviors (McClellan, 2007; Paul et al., 2012). The results in this study indicated academic advisors demonstrated servant-leader advising behaviors, which was associated with students' advising experiences and their decision to continue in spring 2017 term. Advisors also exhibited servant-leader advising behaviors when students reported high scores on AE and DA constructs and intent to persist in fall 2017. In order for servant-leader advising to be grounded in the literature, more research across different institutions and demographics is needed to determine how advisor servant leadership behaviors influence persistence.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship existed between servant-leader advising behaviors and intent to persist. Based on the findings, a number of opportunities for future research emerged. First, this study was limited to a single, private, religious-based institution in the Pacific region of the U.S. The study can be extended to other religiously affiliated institutions to generalize findings. Second, the sample population was limited to one specific cohort of students. Further research can include a sample of the entire institution's

population to determine servant leader advising behaviors experiences by different classes including the sophomore, junior, and senior classes. Third, the centralized advising office was redesigned in 2015 to form a one-stop shop for advising. Formal advising practices were not instituted in the new office until fall 2016 and new, professional advisors in this unit worked with the general student population less than a year. Future research is recommended to determine if number of years of advising (advisor experience) within a specific institution, and servant leadership behaviors correlates with students' intent to persist.

Fourth, Ishitani (2016) recommended that research focus on retention between the first and second years in order to design long-term retention programs. This study focused on intent to persist with first-year students. Extending the research by measuring servant-leader advising behaviors and persistence behavior, as opposed to intent to persist, would add to the existing literature. Finding the difference between intending to come back and actually returning would require future measurement of the same cohort after the start of the fall 2017 term. Data could be collected from the respondents in the fall 2017 term (after the add/drop period) and measured and compared to see how many of them did return to school. Those who did not return could be given a survey to determine whether and what role servant leader advising behaviors influenced their decision to discontinue. As a future study, a longitudinal study with this same cohort could measure if and how servant-leader advisor behaviors are associated with degree completion. Longitudinal data could also prove valuable in determining whether servant-leader advising behaviors among faculty advisors are a significant predictor of retention. Regression analysis could be applied to determine which servant-leader behaviors are significant to retention.

Yeh (2005) contended that research in the area of student persistence among Asian and Pacific Islander students is lacking in the literature. Future research, which examines advisor,

servant leadership behaviors in relation to Asian and Native Hawaiian students and persistence can help further generalize results to fulfill the cultural gap. Finally, Hatch and Garcia (2017) noted that community colleges face challenges with persistence and retention due to the variation in intake processes and procedures. According to Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2017), students in two-year public institutions had the lowest rates of retention, and attrition in the second-year was three-times (42.0%) higher than 4-year, private and public institutions. This study could be replicated in community colleges to determine whether servant-leader advising behaviors are applicable. Sparks and Nuñez (2014) noted that geographic context matters; there are large differences in racial/ethnic distributions in relation to institution type and location (rural, urban, sub-urban) and persistence. Future studies with servant-leader advising in different regions, together with a larger sample from five to 10 religious-based institutions could increase the generalizability of this study's results to faith-based institutions.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a correlation existed between servant-leader advising behaviors and the intent to persist among students in a 4-year, private, non-profit, religiously affiliated university in the U.S. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Tinto's theory of student departure and Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership. The data in this study was collected over a one-week period, using the ASLBS (Paul, 2012) which was a 21-point Likert-type scale that measure servant-leader advisor behaviors. The survey was administered to all students in the fall 2016 term cohort who continued into the spring 2017 term. The researcher used a correlational methodology and descriptive statistics were used to describe the quality and pattern of students' preferences for servant leader advising



The results indicated an overall moderate, positive correlation with all construct averages (CM, HG, AE, and DA) and advisors' influence on students' decision to return in the spring 2017 term. A moderate, positive correlation was also found with AE and DA and students' intent to persist in the fall 2017 term and a weak, non-significant, positive correlation with CM and HG and students' intent to persist in the fall 2017 term. It is important to note that this correlation does not imply causality. Burch, Sails, and Mills (2015) noted that students might not return due to reasons outside the institution or other non-advising related reasons such as meeting a significant-other on-campus. Non-persistence can be linked to other personal/life competing demands in the student's life. Therefore, it is important not to attribute a student's failure to continue to a lack of intent. Conversely, students who indicated intent to persist may do so for reasons un-related to servant-leader advising behaviors.

These findings rest firmly upon Tinto's theory of student persistence and Greenleaf's theory of Servant Leadership. Greenleaf (1977) believed more graduates helps better society because once they graduate they could assist communities through serving. This study also supports Tinto's theory of persistence. His focus was on serving students first, which later resulted in increased institutional commitment. Finally, significant, positive associations in the first-year, with all four constructs, AE, DA, CM, and HG were associated with intent to persist while only AE and DA were associated with intent to persist into the sophomore year. Thus, practices by advisors in the first-year should include servant-leader behaviors of all four constructs, and advisors should focus on AE and DA as students move into the second year. Future research is needed to determine consistency among specific constructs and intent to persist, and persistence behaviors that result in retention.

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ZiskinGrossHossler\_ASHE06.pdf

## Appendix A: Statement of Original Work

### Appendix A: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

#### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

#### **Explanations:**

##### *What does “fraudulent” mean?*

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

##### *What is “unauthorized” assistance?*

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

### Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

  
Digital Signature

Jennifer Kelly  
Name (Typed)

October 4, 2017  
Date

## Appendix B: Permission to Use ASLBS

to Kohle ▾

Hello Kohle,

I'm requesting permission to use the Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS) for my research/dissertation, *Impact of Servant Leader Advising on Persistence of First-year Students in Higher Education*. The survey will be administered to first-year students in a private university, via Qualtrics. No alterations to the survey questions/statements will be made. I will add the following fields at the beginning of the survey:

\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian

\_\_\_ I am scheduled to return in the spring 2017 term

\_\_\_ I did not receive advising in the fall 2016 term

Thanks,

Jennifer Kelly

 **Kohle Paul** <kohlepaul@gmail.com>

12/8/16 ☆



to me ▾

I am glad you are embarking on such a needed study. Yes, you have my permission to use the ASLBS.

Kohle

Sent from my iPhone



## Appendix C: Approval to Use Tinto's Integration Model

Hello Dr. Tinto,

I am defending my dissertation proposal on advising and student persistence, and I would like to include your student integration model from the 1987 text, *Leaving College*. Please advise if this is approved. Thank you~

Jennifer Kelly

Jennifer Kelly

---

**Vincent Tinto** <vtinto@syr.edu>

Apr 22 ☆



to me ▾

Dear Jennifer:

Please feel free to my model in your dissertation.

Sincerely

...

vincent tinto

## Appendix D: The Advisor Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (ASLBS)

Adapted from Paul, 2012

Major:	I intend to return in the fall 2017 term
Race:	
Gender: (1) Male (2) Female	My advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the spring 2017 term

Race: (1) African American/Black	(2) White/Caucasian (3) Hispanic/Latino/a
(4) Asian/Pacific Islander	(5) Native American (6) Biracial/multiracial
(7) Native Hawaiian	(8) Decline to respond (9) Other

1. My advisor tries to understand how my past personal experiences affect my academic performance.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. My advisor refers me to campus resources, such as the Student Success Center, when I face academic difficulties.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. My advisor listens to my questions about my degree requirements.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. My advisor provides an adequate amount of time during my advising session.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. My advisor listens to my ideas about my career interests.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. My advisor provides me with accurate information about campus resources.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. My advisor uses his/her knowledge about my degree requirements to keep me on track for graduation.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. My advisor gives me his/her undivided attention during my advising session.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. My advisor tries to understand how my past academic experiences affect my academic performance.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

10. My advisor demonstrates knowledge about campus resources such as the Student Success Center and Financial Aid.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree



11. My advisor uses my academic and/or career interests to help me create my schedule.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

12. My advisor encourages me to take responsibility for planning my schedule.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

13. My advisor encourages me to take classes that are appropriate for my major.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

14. My advisor provides an open and/or friendly atmosphere during my advising session.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

15. My advisor and I discuss how my past academic performance will affect my future academic plans.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

16. My advisor encourages me to participate in off-campus community service and/or volunteering activities such as Habitat for Humanity and Relay for Life.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

17. My advisor helps me plan my schedule to fulfill my degree requirements.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

18. My advisor considers my career interests when recommending classes.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

19. My advisor listens to my questions about campus resources such as the Student Success Center, Financial Aid, and Registrar.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

20. My advisor provides me with accurate information about my major requirements.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

21. My advisor and I discuss how my academic performance will affect my career plans.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

## Appendix E: Correlations

			Average of 7 CM items	Average of 6 HG items	Average of 4 DA items	Average of 3 AE items
Spearman's rho	My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the Spring 2017 term	Correlation Coefficient	.479**	.457**	.473**	.424**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.001
		N	63	63	63	63
I intend to return in the Fall 2017 semester		Correlation Coefficient	.217	.161	.349**	.326**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.088	.206	.005	.009
		N	63	63	63	63

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

			My advisor tries to understand how my past personal experiences affect my academic performance	My advisor listens to my ideas about my career interests	My advisor tries to understand how my past academic experiences affect my academic performance	My advisor uses my academic and/or career interests to help me create my schedule	My advisor and I discuss how my past academic performance will affect my future academic plans	My advisor and I discuss how my academic performance will affect my career plans	
Spearman's rho	My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the Spring 2017 term	Correlation Coefficient	.434**	.494**	.359**	.375**	.526**	.346**	.274*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.005	.003	.000	.006	.033
		N	61	60	60	62	62	61	61
I intend to return in		Correlation Coefficient	.149	.347**	.030	.220	.377**	.201	.180

the Fall 2017 semester	Sig. (2-tailed)	.252	.007	.821	.086	.003	.121	.165
	N	61	60	60	62	62	61	61

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

			My advisor refers me to campus resources, such as the Student Success Center, when I face academic difficulties	My advisor provides me with accurate information about campus resources	My advisor demonstrates knowledge about campus resources such as the Student Success Center and Financial Aid	My advisor encourages me to take responsibility for planning my schedule.	My advisor encourages me to participate in off-campus community service and/or volunteering activities such as Habitat for Humanity and Relay for Life
Spearman's rho	My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the Spring 2017 term	Correlation Coefficient	.509**	.346**	.242	.455**	.310*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.006	.058	.000	.021
		N	62	62	62	62	55
	I intend to return in the Fall 2017 semester	Correlation Coefficient	.245	.231	.119	.265*	.003
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.055	.071	.356	.037	.982
		N	62	62	62	62	55

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

		My advisor listens to my questions about campus resources such as the Student Success Center, Financial Aid, and Registrar	My advisor encourages me to take classes that are appropriate for my major	My advisor helps me plan my schedule to fulfill my degree requirements	My advisor provides me with accurate information about my major requirements	My advisor provides an adequate amount of time during my advising session.	My advisor gives me his/her undivided attention during my advising session.	My advisor provides an open and/or friendly atmosphere during my advising session.		
Spearman' rho	My academic advising influenced my decision to continue in the Spring 2017 term	Correlation Coefficient	.428**	.481**	.519**	.409**	.394**	.484**	.352**	.415**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.001	.001	.000	.005	.001
		N	61	63	63	63	63	62	63	63
	I intend to return in the Fall 2017 semester	Correlation Coefficient	.145	.326**	.302*	.246	.405**	.272*	.281*	.349**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.266	.009	.016	.052	.001	.033	.026	.005
		N	61	63	63	63	63	62	63	63

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## Appendix F: IRB Approval Letters



DATE: May 8, 2017

TO: Jennifer Kelly, Ed.D.  
FROM: Concordia University - Portland IRB (CU IRB)

PROJECT TITLE: **[1058074-1]** Correlation Between Servant Leader Advising and Term-to-Term Persistence of Higher Education Students

REFERENCE #: **Modification of IRBNet# [983390-1]**  
EDD-20161117-Greiner-Kelly

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: May 8, 2017, initial approval ongoing since December 19, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: December 19, 2017

REVIEW TYPE: Facilitated Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 1

Thank you for your submission of RDF materials for this project. The CU IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT from the rules and regulations that are described in the US Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 (<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/ohrpreulations.pdf>).

Your research has been approved by the CU IRB as Exemption Category #1 research.

The researcher is responsible to conduct research, even if it is exempt, with integrity and care. You are encouraged to continue to work with the CU IRB Office and involve others at Concordia University as necessary and prudent in your research.

**\* Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 Exemption Category #1: Educational Research. Below is a summary, created by the CU IRB, to describe this type of research.** Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices such as:

- (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies; or
- (ii) research on the effectiveness of, or the comparison among, instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods. As noted above, research must be conducted in "established or commonly accepted educational settings" and involve "normal educational practices" to be exempt under this category. The study must not contrast one group with and the other without the instructional strategy, and must not divide into subpopulations based upon race, gender, or other protected class. In the United States, the exemption for procedures involving survey, interview or observation does not apply to research with children under the age of 18, except for when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed.

March 30, 2017

Protocol Number: CUH055-2017

Protocol Title: Impact of Servant Leader Advising on Term-to-Term Persistence of First-Year Students in Higher Education

Type of Review: Determination, Expedited, Exempt

Dear Ms. Kelly,

The CUH IRB IRB00007927 **APPROVED** the above referenced research.

The Board was able to determine under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) that the research does constitute human subjects research.

The Board was able to determine under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) that the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for exemption, as indicated below.

Two Board members were able to provide expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

<b>Date of IRB Approval:</b>	<b>March 30 2017</b>
<b>Date of IRB Approval Expiration:</b>	<b>March 30 2018</b>
<b>Determination Category:</b>	<b>Human Subjects Research</b>
<b>Exemption Category (1-6):</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Expedited Review Category (1-8):</b>	<b>7</b>

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

Future approval will be valid for **one year** from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

## Appendix G: Individual Survey Item Correlations

### Frequencies

*Statistics*

		My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the Spring 2017 term	I intend to return in the Fall 2017 semester	My advisor tries to understand how my past personal experiences affect my academic performance	My advisor listens to my ideas about my career interests	My advisor tries to understand how my past academic experiences affect my academic performance	My advisor uses my academic and/or career interests to help me create my schedule
N	Valid	63	63	61	60	60	62
	Missing	0	0	2	3	3	1
Mean		5.51	6.14	5.61	6.10	5.73	5.95
Median		6.00	7.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Std. Deviation		1.343	1.533	1.320	.986	1.177	1.151

*Statistics*

		My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the Spring 2017 term	I intend to return in the Fall 2017 semester	My advisor tries to understand how my past personal experiences affect my academic performance	My advisor listens to my ideas about my career interests	My advisor tries to understand how my past academic experiences affect my academic performance	My advisor uses my academic and/or career interests to help me create my schedule
N	Valid	63	63	61	60	60	62
	Missing	0	0	2	3	3	1
Mean		5.51	6.14	5.61	6.10	5.73	5.95
Median		6.00	7.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Std. Deviation		1.343	1.533	1.320	.986	1.177	1.151



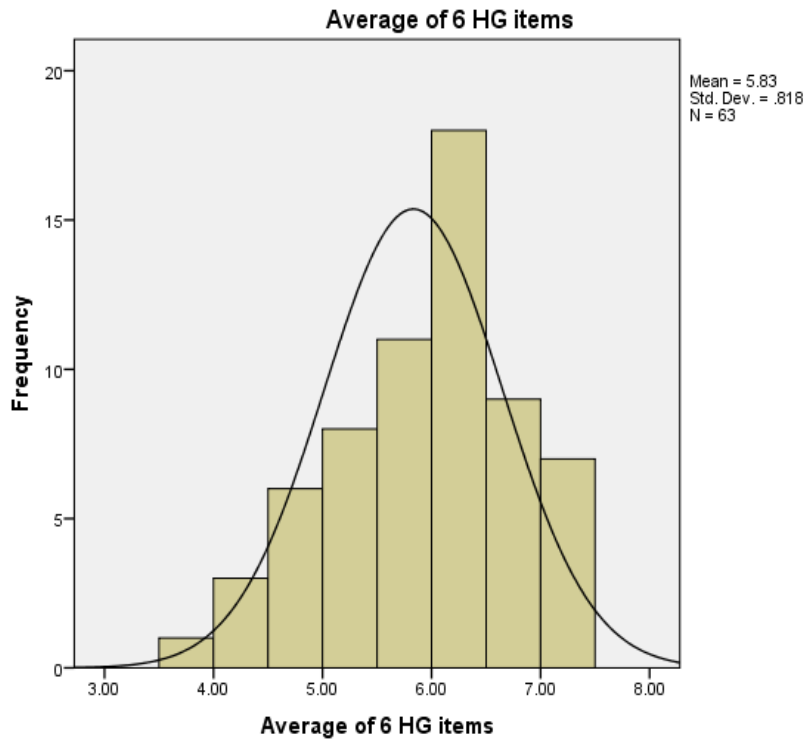
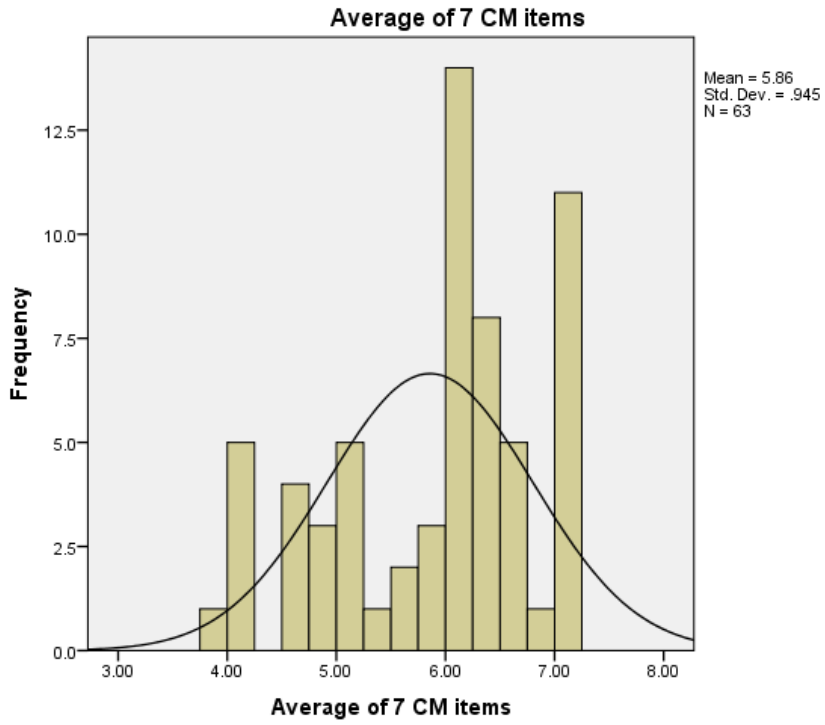
*Statistics*

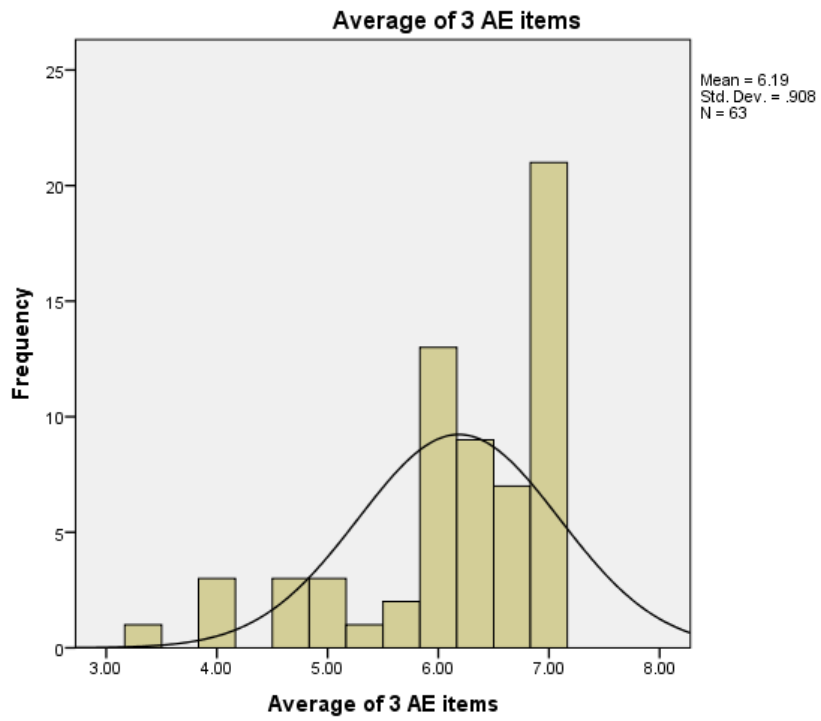
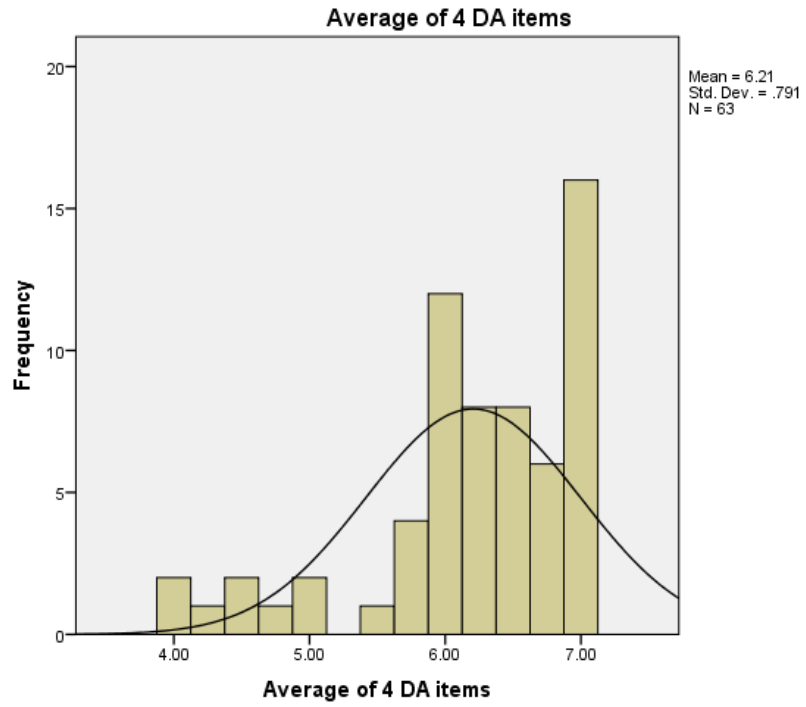
		My advisor encourages me to participate in off-campus community service and/or volunteering activities such as Habitat for Humanity and Relay for Life	My advisor listens to my questions about campus resources such as the Student Success Center, Financial Aid, and Registrar	My advisor listens to my questions about my degree requirements	My advisor encourages me to take classes that are appropriate for my major	My advisor helps me plan my schedule to fulfill my degree requirement
N	Valid	62	55	61	63	63
	Missing	1	8	2	0	0
Mean		6.06	4.82	5.93	6.17	6.22
Median		6.00	5.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Std. Deviation		.921	1.576	1.031	.943	.941

*Statistics*

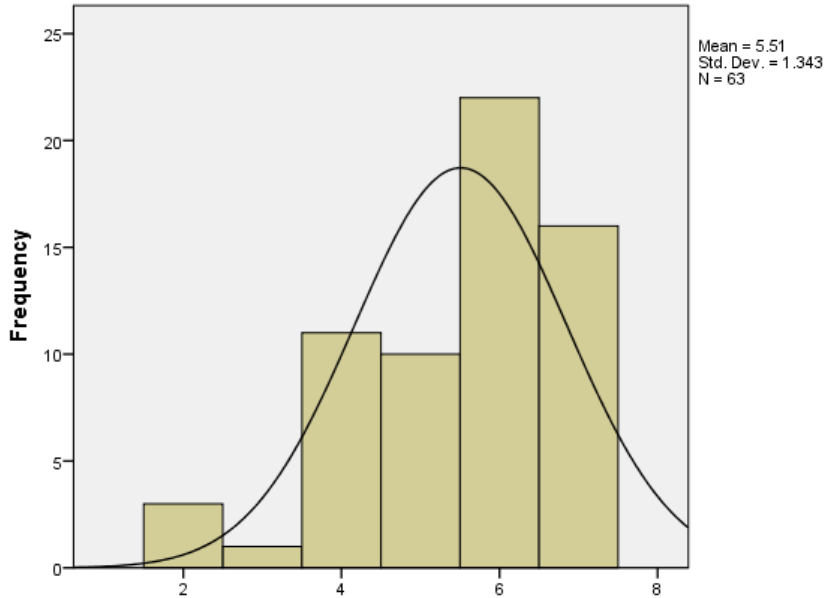
		My advisor provides me with accurate information about my major requirements.	My advisor provides an adequate amount of time during my advising session.	My advisor gives me his/her undivided attention during my advising session.	My advisor provides an open and/or friendly atmosphere during my advising session.
N	Valid	63	62	63	63
	Missing	0	1	0	0
Mean		6.25	6.11	6.24	6.19
Median		6.00	6.00	7.00	6.00
Std. Deviation		.897	1.010	1.027	.998

## Appendix H: Averages



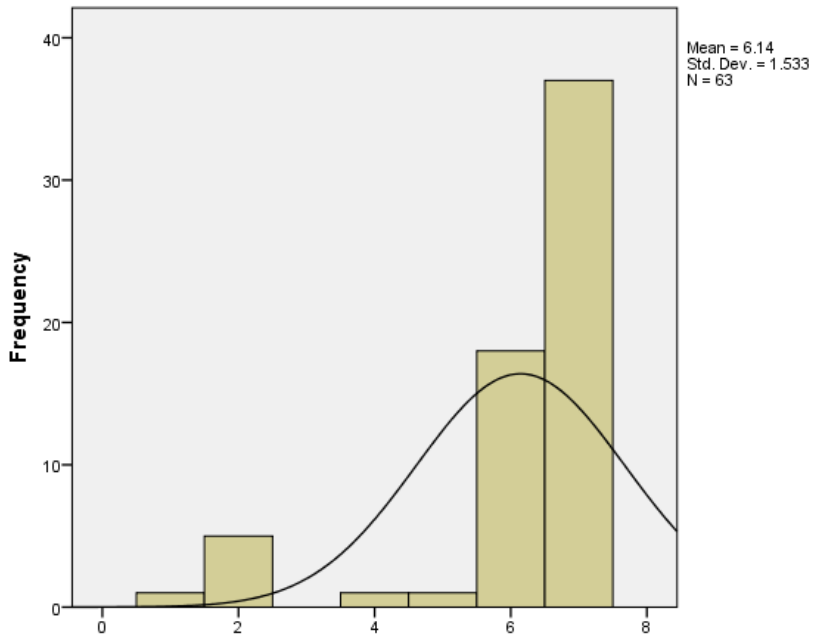


**My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the Spring 2017 term**



**My academic advising experience influenced my decision to continue in the Spring 2017 term**

**I intend to return in the Fall 2017 semester**



**I intend to return in the Fall 2017 semester**