

2019-01-01

# Advising as Literacy: A Cultural Capital Approach to Academic Advising in an Hispanic Serving Institution

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ADVISING AS LITERACY: A CULTURAL CAPITAL APPROACH  
TO ACADEMIC ADVISING IN AN HISPANIC  
SERVING INSTITUTION

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Doctoral Program in Rhetoric and Composition

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Dean of the Graduate School

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## **Dedication**

*So much of what is best in us is bound up in our love of family . . . it remains the  
measure of our stability because it measures our sense of loyalty.  
--Haniel Long Clark*

*To my family: my son, Decker, my sisters, Hillery and Megan, and to my parents, Maggy and Bill*

ADVISING AS LITERACY: A CULTURAL CAPITAL APPROACH  
TO ACADEMIC ADVISING IN AN HISPANIC  
SERVING INSTITUTION

by

HEATHER ANN SMITH, B.A., M.A.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2019

## Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank my dissertation committee to whom my gratitude cannot be expressed in the pages of these acknowledgements. Thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Kate Mangelsdorf whose professional dedication and rhetorical expertise—and *patience*—are nothing short of amazing. I would not have completed this dissertation without her endless encouragement, guidance and support. I owe many more acknowledgements to Dr. Mangelsdorf than these pages can hold.

Thank you to Dr. Lucia Dura who read quickly and thoroughly and asked questions that forced me to consider my work in perspectives I had not imagined. I am grateful for her contributions to my project. And thank you to Dr. Roy Mathew who agreed, against his own principles, to be a member of my committee. Dr. Mathew is one of the most genuine student-centered scholars I have ever known and his support of my academic and professional endeavors reach far beyond the pages of this dissertation. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge UTEP President Dr. Diana Natalicio, who not only gave me the professional opportunity to design the advising model on campus, but whose leadership and commitment to UTEP students provided inspiration for the theoretical design of the model and my dissertation.

Second, I owe a great deal of thanks and appreciation to the Academic Advising Center (AAC) staff who, for the past three years, have trusted my judgement, my decisions, and my leadership. Without them, the advising as literacy model at UTEP would be just an idea.

Finally, I am grateful beyond expression for the unconditional love and support my family has given me through this journey. Much love and many thanks to my son Decker, whose enormous heart and unfailing humor have kept me grounded by reminding me to stop taking myself so seriously. Much love and many thanks to my sisters, Hillery and Megan, who have endless faith in who they believe I am and for this, I work tirelessly to make them proud. And much love and many thanks to my parents, Maggy and Bill, who are the most generous, thoughtful, and supportive people I know and whose unlimited faith in me as a woman, a mother, a professional, and a scholar have made my success possible. What is best in me is bound up in the love of my family.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines academic advising through the lenses of cultural capital and sociocultural literacy. I reframe advising as a literacy practice that facilitates opportunities for students to access and acquire the navigational and cultural capital required to navigate the complex structures of higher education. I describe an advising as literacy model that was designed specifically for and has been implemented at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), a large, four-year, Research I Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) situated on the US-Mexico border, whose student demographic reflects the bi-national region from which UTEP draws the majority of its students.

The advising as literacy model was designed to provide all UTEP students personalized, seamless advising through an integrated structure of support that facilitates the development of academic, financial and social literacies from admission through graduation. I explain preliminary results of this model based on the early participation and first term retention results, discuss the limitations of the advising as literacy project, including that no single advising model is appropriate for all institutions, and then discuss broader implications and for how to potentially adjust the model at other institutions.

The findings in this dissertation emphasize the impact that an advising model can have when aligned with the values, mission, and culture of the institution and through a theoretical framework based on the characteristics of the student demographic, put into organic practice a holistic approach to facilitating the literacy students need to navigate higher education and persist to graduation.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Historical Context of Academic Advising

The history of academic advising in higher education spans centuries and the various approaches to advising have been diverse. One theme has been constant at all stages of the development of academic advising and that is, all students need, or want, some level of guidance and help during their college experience. As far back as the founding of Harvard College in 1636, faculty and administrators, beginning with the college president, were responsible for advising students “regarding their extracurricular activities, their moral life, and intellectual habits” (Cook, 18). In the early years of the American higher education system, the curriculum was prescribed and designed for white, upper-class, male students. As such, the number of students who had access to higher education was few. College presidents and faculty had the opportunity to act in *loco parentis* and manage the academic and moral need of the students. According to Brubacher and Rudy, acting in *loco parentis* meant assuming legal responsibility for the students in place of the parents and permitted college representatives to utilize “judgement to act in the best interests of the student” (331).

Susan H. Frost referred to the time between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as the “second advising era” when academic advising was a “defined and unexamined activity” (Kuhn, 5). It was during this era that the first formal system of advising was instituted in 1842 at Kenyon College (Ohio) by the President, David Bates Douglass. Each student was paired with a faculty member who became the advisor. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more and more systems of advising were established at colleges and universities but all of them utilized faculty members, deans, or “deans of women” once educational opportunities for women became available. It was

not until after World War I that advising duties were no longer solely a faculty responsibility. By the 1920's, according to Frederick Rudolph in *The American College and University*, "most colleges and universities were busy perfecting various systems of freshman counseling, freshman week, faculty advisers and [many other campus administrators] in giving organized expression to a purpose that had once been served most simply by a dedicated faculty" (460). During the 1930s and 1940s, "student support systems" emerged along with a more "student-centered philosophy" in higher education (Kuhn, 7). In 1949, the *Student Personnel Point of View (SPPOV)* articulated that education should "encompass student[s] as a whole" including paying attention to students' "well-rounded development—physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually—as well as intellectually" (Kuhn, 6). Over the next decade, academic advising continued to evolve within student personnel services, which, I would argue, has contributed to the long-held debate about whether advising is a function of student affairs or academic affairs.

Increased accessibility and enrollment in higher education between the 1960s and 1980s led to the expansion of academic advising on campuses across the United States. In what Frost called the "third advising era," the time between the 1970s and the present, academic advising became "a defined and examined activity" (Kuhn, 7) and continued to emerge as an independent field in higher education. In the early 1970s, two significant models of academic advising had been established and were evolving: prescriptive advising and developmental advising. By the late 1980s, the intrusive advising model was defined and in the late 1990s, the academic-centered model of advising was established. There are characteristics that overlap in the four prominent advising models as each one strives to achieve the same goal: to guide and assist students as they work to attain a college degree. I will address these types of advising models in more detail in chapter two.

## 1.2 Project Scope

The purpose of this project is to examine advising through the lenses of cultural capital and sociocultural literacy. Specifically, to reframe advising as a literacy practice that facilitates opportunities for students to acquire the navigational and cultural capital required to navigate the complex structures of higher education. I will describe an advising as literacy model that has been implemented at the University of Texas at El Paso, explain preliminary results of this model based on the early participation and first term retention results, discuss the limitations of the project and then make recommendations for how to potentially adjust the advising model at other institutions.

Traditional advising structures, or models, that work with students as a collective body and offer prescriptive advising have clearly not been effective for most higher education institutions over several decades. A traditional model is certainly not effective for a large, underfunded, four-year, public Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) like the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), the research site for this project. UTEP is a Research I HSI situated on the US-Mexico border and is dedicated to providing access and excellence to students in the El Paso region. UTEP's student demographic reflects the bi-national region from which it draws the majority of its students. Below is a snapshot of UTEP's student population provided by the Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning (CIERP), which is essential to understanding why the asset-based approach to the advising as literacy model is so important to students' success at UTEP:

- 25,151 students enrolled
- 50.9% first generation
- 84% from El Paso region
- 80.2% Hispanic
- 73% are Pell eligible
- 50% from lowest income quartile
- 35% from annual family income of less than \$20,000

Over four decades of research and numerous studies have demonstrated that students are not retained and do not persist to degree completion without appropriate academic advising support. According to Jayne Drake, there are three critical elements that consistently point to student persistence not the least of which is “solid academic advising, with advising positioned squarely as the vital link in [the] retention equation” (9). Advising is, of course, key to student success.

In “Academic Advisement and Student Retention,” Joe Cuseo asserts that academic advising “exerts a significant impact on student retention,” but prescriptive advising (long referred to as traditional advising) is limited. When problems arise, they are indicators of larger issues that without a student-advisor relationship built on communication and trust, have to be addressed reactively rather than proactively which leads to reduced student success and persistence (1). Similarly, in *Leaving College*, Vincent Tinto argued that “though the intentions and commitments with which individuals enter college matter, what goes on after entry matters more” (127). The advising as literacy model that I am proposing here follows this advice.

Given that advisors are among the first people students interact with on campus, advising should function as a gateway to student engagement and a sense of belonging in the higher education community. Tinto says further that “it is the daily interaction of the [student] with other members of the college in both the formal and informal academic and social domains of the college and the person’s perception or evaluation of the character of those interactions that in



large measure determine decisions as to staying or leaving” (127). Tinto also noted that “the effectiveness of advising and counseling is further enhanced when they are an integral and positive part of the educational process which all students are expected to experience” (172). Meaningful advising should be part of the fabric of every student’s college experience. In addition, the delivery of advising should align with the institutional values that define the college experience for its students. In *How College Affects Students*, Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini claim that regardless of institutional type or the make-up of the student body, solid academic advising has an important impact on student persistence.

The value of academic advising cannot be understated. Research has shown that advising is an important resource for first-year students. Research has also demonstrated that academic advising, delivered effectively, impacts student retention particularly in the first year. Advising is a key component of retention and student success and conventionally, is connected to student success theory as a retention strategy as demonstrated above. Nevertheless, I argue there is a gap between where advising and student success theory have identified *how and why* advising matters to retention and persistence, and where the theory has not focused on *how to* deliver advising that effectively impacts students at any given institution. This dissertation is not specifically about advising as a retention strategy for student success. That has been proven and demonstrated over several decades by student success scholars such as Joe Cuseo, George Kuh, and Ernest Pascarella. Retention, persistence and completion of students is the end goal of higher education.

While I agree that advising is central to this end goal, this dissertation is focused on advising as literacy practice to facilitate students’ acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to acquire the navigational and cultural capital required to improve their

social status. Utilizing an asset-based approach, advising as literacy seeks to help students cultivate an understanding of the college experience and the structure of higher education through their own, interests, aspirations, and commitments. For too long, according to Jackie Gerstein, Professor of Education at Boise State University and longtime social constructivist, “marginalized populations (e.g. some populations of people of color; students from lower economic communities) are approached with a deficit model” which in education, perceives students as lacking, deficient, defective, and “needing to be fixed.” To the contrary, the asset model perceives students from marginalized groups as possessing unique strengths, passions and interests, with much to offer both individually and collectively (user generated education blog).

In chapter two, I discuss asset-based versus deficit-based thinking and approaches to advising in greater depth; however, it is important to note, here, that advising as literacy puts asset-based theory into practice. Advising models generally still lend themselves to deficit-model thinking. Advising still operates on the assumption that students must be given the knowledge they do not have by experts who possess the knowledge. Advising as a literacy practice is an asset-based approach to advising that focuses on students’ potential and possibilities, rather than only on their needs and barriers.

The framework utilized in the advising as literacy model, which I discuss at greater length in chapter 3, is designed to facilitate personalized support from one advisor who, based on information gathered from students themselves, can quickly assess the variables that constitute the context of each student’s life and initiate proactive communication. By quickly reviewing students’ interests, aspirations and commitments, advisors can make sense of the talents and assets students’ bring with them to campus, as well as the variables that may impact students’ experience on campus. The approach is asset-based as it strives to foster hope based on students’

interests, aspirations, and commitments, rather than accepting the limitations students may experience.

The literature has clearly articulated that advising is an important component to student success—both for each individual student and for the institution as a whole. The problem is how to determine which advising model is most effective for any given institution. In “What does it Mean to be Latinx-serving,” Gina Garcia reviewed graduation and completion rates (“legitimized outcomes”) and the programs and services offered that are “culturally engaging” for “Latinx, low income, first generation” to determine what it means—beyond the federal government’s 25% enrollment definition—to be Latinx [or Hispanic] serving (121). What Garcia found led her to classify the institutions she reviewed as “Latinx-*enhancing*, Latinx-*producing*, Latinx-*enrolling*, or Latinx-*serving*” based on how the six-year institutional graduation rate compared to the national average for HSI’s and how the graduation rate contrasted for Latinx and white students, as well as what the concentration of culturally engaging programs and services was at each institution (124).

While Garcia’s study is fascinating, what I found important for this project were the outcomes and characteristics that led her to classify only one institution as Latinx [Hispanic]-*serving*. The Latinx [Hispanic]-serving institution had a six-year graduation rate below the other institutions in Garcia’s sample and below the national HSI average, but had a comparable number of completers to enrolled students who identified as Latinx. The majority of this institution’s students are “post-traditional” and the institution has a historical mission to serve Latinx students so did not necessarily have a high concentration of Latinx-specific programs and services (127). Garcia’s analysis, she says, arguably demonstrates that “an institution that appears to have a low six-year graduation rate could still be considered *Latinx-serving*” (129).

I argue the obvious, that no single advising model is appropriate for all institutions. And particularly, after reading Garcia's analysis, no single advising model is appropriate for all Hispanic-serving institutions. I would argue, further, that an advising model should align with the values, mission, and culture of the institution and through a theoretical framework (theory) based on the characteristics of the students (data), put into organic practice a holistic approach to facilitating the literacy students need to navigate higher education and persist to graduation.

### **1.3 Limitations**

The data used in this project has been gathered from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), a public four-year, Tier I, under-resourced Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) located on the US-Mexico border. The framework for the advising as literacy model was built utilizing data collected from students, themselves, in the Student Advisor Profile developed by a team of institutional researchers. The Student Advisor Profile was adapted and modified from the new student survey and the data is managed by UTEP's Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning (CIERP).

The advising model developed in this dissertation is a system designed specifically for UTEP's student population, which is 84% Hispanic, 50.9% first-generation, and primarily come from low income (73% Pell eligible) families. In the conclusion of this project, I will give suggestions for how other institutions can adapt the advising as literacy model that I am advocating for to improve the academic, financial and social literacies of their student population in ways that will both serve their students post-graduation success and their institutional outcomes.

## 1.4 Terminology

In *Bootstraps: From and American Academic of Color*, Victor Villanueva claims that “‘Hispanic’ is a convenience created by the Census Bureau. And even as we try to choose our own label, we cannot agree. Some find ‘Latino’ is too much a reference to Latin Americans, different from *mexicanos*, Mexican Americans, Chicanos” (41). While the term “Latinx” is a gender inclusive term for people who self-identify as having racial and ethnic roots in Latin America, South America, Mexico, and parts of the Caribbean, I use the term “Hispanic” in this dissertation when talking about students because UTEP’s organizational identity is that of Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). By definition, Hispanic-Serving Institutions are accredited, degree-granting, non-profit institutions that enroll 25% or more fulltime equivalent of undergraduate Latino students (*Excelencia* in Education). In addition, the term Hispanic is used regionally, as well as in all of the literature about UTEP.

## 1.5 Chapter Summary

In Chapter two, I provide a review of the literature related to the theoretical framework and background on the development of the prominent advising models over the last forty years. In addition, chapter two introduces advising as literacy practice to help students access the social and cultural capital necessary to identify as a student in the university community and navigate the higher education system.

Chapter three articulates the advising as literacy model including the historical background and research that led to the development of this advising model. The chapter reviews what the components of the model are, how advisors use the framework with students, and demonstrates how we have retrained advisors to implement an entirely new delivery system for advising. Chapter four reviews the early results and impact from the advising as literacy project

and includes preliminary data about how advisors are doing with the model. Chapter four also examines the challenges of the advising as literacy model that need to be resolved, and the work that still needs to be done.

Finally, the advising as literacy project is ongoing so definitive conclusions are not available. As such, chapter five discusses the limitations of the model and provides insight for how institutions might adjust this model to serve the advising needs of specific student demographics or budgetary constraints.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview**

There are three major areas in which literature and theory have informed the advising as literacy model: concepts of capital, literacy, and academic advising. This chapter will provide an overview of the theoretical framework that informs the practice of advising as literacy and establish why students at an under-funded, four-year, public, access institution must have access to the social, cultural and navigational capital necessary to navigate the higher education system, and how utilizing advising as a literacy practice, rather than a service or an exercise in gathering information, will provide students the opportunity to learn and develop the knowledge, behaviors and skills required to acquire this capital.

### **2.2 Theories of Capital**

The term “capital” generally refers to the economic sphere and monetary exchange; however, Pierre Bourdieu extended the concept of the term “capital” into a “wider system of exchanges” where assets other than economic or mercantile are transformed and exchanged within networks and fields” (99). Bourdieu identified “symbolic capital,” including “sub-types such as cultural capital, linguistic capital, scientific and literary capital” (100), as the “principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world” (Richardson). And while symbolic capital, Bourdieu says, is “a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible,” he makes the distinction about how forms of symbolic capital can be acquired. In contrast with economic capital, “where it is possible to become very rich very quickly with a spin of the roulette wheel,” (105) embodied cultural capital is not so easy to acquire. “Social membership in itself (membership of a particular group per se) does not

automatically translate into a habitus that confers symbolic capital in a uniform way for all members” (99).

According to Bourdieu, the “accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state . . . implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor” (Moore 107). However, the value of cultural capital within any given social structure is important. Whereas “the instrumental and self-interested nature of the [mercantile] exchange is transparent” in economic capital, Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital can exist in different forms (Moore 100). “Capital can be understood as the “energy” that drives the development of a field through time. Capital in action is the enactment of the principle of the field. It is the realization in specific forms of power in general” (102). Cultural capital can be objectified, represented in tangible, material artifacts such as artwork, museums, laboratories, and books. It can also be embodied as “principles of consciousness in predispositions and propensities and in physical features such as body language, stances, intonation and lifestyle choices” (102).

Finally, cultural capital can be institutionalized. For Bourdieu, the most important agency is education and it is here, through formal education, that capital becomes institutionalized. It is widely argued that Bourdieu developed the concepts of ‘habitus’ and cultural capital to explain the ways in which social inequality was reproduced through the education system. In reality, having come from a working class family, the actuality of being educated procured a socially mobile “distinction” for Bourdieu.

Richard Harker asserts that Bourdieu's work is one of few accounts of the key role that education plays in both changing and in reproducing social and cultural inequalities from one generation to the next. I agree. But I would argue that while the culture of the dominant group is



embodied in higher education, students who are given access to what was once only given to selected, elite groups, will “acquire, for example, a predisposition to the ‘rules of the game’” with appropriate support. According to Bourdieu, social space operates semi-autonomously--like a force field. Social space is a “human construction with its own set of beliefs . . . which rationalize the rules of field behaviour--each field has its own distinctive ‘logic of practice’” (Moore, 68). Fields are sites for the development of social phenomena and are therefore, never value-free or homogenous. Bourdieu acknowledged that the larger social world was made up of multiple fields and subfields (70) all with agents whose values, ideas, agendas may differ from the doxa—“a set of fundamental beliefs which [do] not even need to be asserted”—of the larger field (115).

Cultural capital is a “complex and compound construct” and we cannot just ask people—students—“how much cultural capital do you have” (Crossley 89)? In *Reproduction*, Bourdieu claims that children from culturally wealthy background inherit that wealth in the form of embodied dispositions, which are recognized and valued by the educational field. Such students appear “brighter and more articulate” because they “speak the same language” and they have experienced and acquired the cultural knowledge and abilities valued in higher education at home (Crossley, 93).

Pierre Bourdieu argued that the knowledges of the upper and middle classes are considered capital valuable to a hierarchal society. He further asserted that cultural, social and economic capital could be acquired for purposes of social mobility in two ways: through family whose knowledge is already deemed valuable or through formal schooling. According to Bourdieu, then, the opportunity for social mobility is available to all members of society. Students can acquire the cultural capital they do not already embody through advising literacy.

“The formation of embodied cultural capital entails the prolonged exposure to a specialized social habitus” such as an institution of higher education (107). Through advising literacy students will gain the knowledge, behaviors, and skills—the literacy—to stay and persist in college, thereby having the opportunity to acquire the cultural capital necessary to, like Bourdieu, procure a socially mobile distinction.

In “Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth,” Tara Yosso points out, Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital has long been used to reinforce deficit thinking with regard to people of color and explain the lower academic and social outcomes of underrepresented groups. Challenging the traditional interpretations of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, Yosso outlines an alternative concept of “community cultural wealth” through six forms of capital: *aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant* (70). The knowledges—the assets—students from demographics that include low-income, minoritized groups bring from their homes and communities are forms of capital, forms of cultural wealth.

Yosso argues that in the deficit model of thinking and constructing our fields, the array of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities that socially marginalized groups possess goes unnoticed. It seems near impossible to acknowledge such cultural wealth when cultural capital is always already measured along the axis of social “norm” which is situated in the white, middle-class. The assumption that people of color lack the social and cultural capital required for social mobility has long-fueled the deficit model of educating students who appear to be disadvantaged by lack of privileged knowledge, social skills, and cultural capital.

Adapting from Oliver and Shapiro, Yosso claims that “traditional Bourdieuean cultural capital . . . is narrowly defined by White, middle-class values, and is more limited than wealth—

one's accumulated assets and resources" (77). Yosso outlines six forms of cultural capital that comprise her community of cultural wealth concept that include *aspirational capital*, *linguistic capital*, *familial capital*, *social capital*, *navigational capital*, and *resistant capital* (79-80).

According to Yosso, "*aspirational capital* is the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality" (77). The culture of possibility that exists in these students represent the "creation of history that would break the link between parents' current occupational status and their children's future academic attainment". *Linguistic capital* reflects the "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language" (78). Multiple language and communication skills are an asset. Yosso points out that students who possess linguistic capital have likely engaged in storytelling and thus communicated with and for different audiences.

Yosso's *familial capital* refers to "those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that [instill] . . . a commitment to community wellbeing and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship". *Social capital* is "networks of people and community resources . . . that provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (79). Social capital is particularly important to minoritized students pursuing higher education. Engagement with peers and in campus activities is key to advising as literacy to ensure students develop supportive social networks.

*Navigational capital* are the "skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (80). UTEP students bring resilience as one of their key assets and inner resources. That is not always enough to navigate the system of higher education for someone who does not have the embodied cultural capital of the dominant group. Advising as literacy can help students understand "individual agency within institutional constraints" and guide them to acquiring navigational

capital. Finally, Yosso defines *resistant capital* as the “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (80). Acquiring *resistant capital*, Yosso says, requires consciously “engag[ing] in behaviours and maintain[ing] attitudes that challenge the status quo” (81).

Aspirational, social, and navigational capital are key, I would argue, to underrepresented students’ abilities to navigate the higher education system. Advising as a literacy practice works with students based on their interests, aspirations, and commitments and within the context of their own community of cultural wealth—within the context of the behaviors and values they have learned, shared and exhibited among their communities. Access, persistence and degree completion of underrepresented students can only be improved—changed—by working within the contemporary social realities that are constructed among their communities of cultural wealth and by facilitating acquisition of navigational and social capital through the literacy of advising.

### **2.3 Asset Based vs. Deficit Based Thinking**

John L. McKnight and John P. Kretzmann developed the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to sustainable development of communities based upon the skills, strengths, and experiences of its members. McKnight’s and Kretzmann’s approach is grounded in the belief that every individual has needs or deficiencies, and every individual has gifts, abilities, and capacities. In any circumstance—community development or education—if individual capacities are recognized and used, people—students—will feel value, agency, and connection to those around them. As such, asset-based thinking or an asset-based approach to anything focuses on the strengths of people, and views diversity in thought, culture, and characteristics as positive. Students are valued for what they bring to campus and their

communities of cultural wealth—their aspirational capital, their linguistic capital—bilingualism, and their commitments to family—are perceived as assets.

Unfortunately, deficit-based thinking has been the focus on solutions in communities and educations for decades. Deficit-based thinking focuses on students' needs, deficiencies, and problems—on what is wrong—and students are characterized by what they lack or what they need to work on (Green & Haines). The "deficit theory" of education assumes that students who differ from the norm—from those who naturally succeed in school—in a significant way are considered deficient, and the educational process must remediate the problems. Continual focus on deficiencies—on problems—lead to individuals to perceive themselves as riddled with problems, as deficit-based, and unable to achieve positive outcomes or change.

Byron P. White, Vice President for University Engagement and Chief Diversity Officer at Cleveland State University, claims that many of the recent studies and reports on student success are “dominated by discussion of student failure” (1). White also claims that the “big three deficiencies” generally focused on in these reports are minority, low income, and first generation. All characteristics used to define the UTEP student demographic. White argues that the deficit framework, on which many of our student success efforts are built, is indicative of our skepticism about their ability to actually succeed and therefore, undermines the expectation of success (2). In order for institutions of higher education to shift from deficit-based thinking to asset-based thinking, as UTEP has, students must be encourage to recognize, acknowledge, and articulate the assets they bring to campus as capital upon which they can build and extend knowledge.

Kretzmann and McKnight assert that in order to focus on the capacities of community members they had to utilize a new tool, one that did not focus on the community's lack of

resources or needs. In order for UTEP to focus on the capacities—the assets and cultural wealth—of our students, it was necessary to design a new model of advising and develop a new framework for advisors that focuses on students’ assets—on their interests, aspirations, and commitments. The advising as literacy model is an asset-based approach to advising. Advisors work within a system that frames every student’s academic, financial and social capacities, to align students’ academic and co-curricular plans with their assets. Utilizing advising as a literacy practice, rather than a service or an exercise in gathering information, students have the opportunity to extend the knowledge they already possess to further develop the knowledge, behavior and skills required to navigate higher education.

## **2.4 Sociocultural Theories of Literacy**

In “What is Literacy? – A Critical Overview of Sociocultural Perspectives,” Kristen Perry articulates literacy as a situated social practice that “underpins other theories within in the larger umbrella of sociocultural theories on literacy” (53). The theory of literacy as a social practice is the basis for my proposal that advising as a literacy practice can provide students the opportunity to acquire the literacy required to navigate the college experience and the structure of higher education.

According to Perry, the theory of literacy as a social practice has been influenced by Brian Street’s contrasting *autonomous* and *ideological* models of literacy (53). Street’s “ideological model conceptualizes literacy as a set of practices (as opposed to skills) that are grounded in specific contexts and ‘inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society’” (Perry 53). The advising as literacy model conceptualizes literacy as a set of practices that students access by bridging their academic financial, and social realities in the specific context of the college experience within the cultural and power structure of higher education.

Students can access new literacies through guided practices with advisors while situated in the very context and structure that defines the literacy practices. It is access to and movement within “the master’s house.” Through this model, advisors provide students the opportunity to work within the power structure of the dominant groups to understand the texts, the language, to acquire the set of practices to become literate.

Perry asserts that literacy, as a social practice is what people do with reading, writing, and texts in real world contexts and why they do it (54). In the simplest sense, say Barton and Hamilton, “literacy practices are what people do with literacy” (qtd. in Perry 54). Barton and Hamilton further assert that literacy practices connect to, and are shaped by, values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships. “Literacy practices are ore usefully understood as existing in the relationships between people [between advisors and students], within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals” (qtd. in Perry 54).

“The theory of literacy as social practice may not explain the process of how people learn to read and write, it can help to describe what types of knowledge are needed to engage in any given literacy practices” (55). That is what advisors need. Not necessarily to know how students have learned to read and write, but to know what types of knowledge individual students need to acquire to engage with the system of higher education in order to stay, finish a degree and ultimately succeed in improving social status. Perry points out that in the theory of literacy as a set of social practices, cognitive skills are only one part of being literate. Advisors, then, should work with students to understand the cultural and written genre knowledge of higher education. “Understanding literacy as a socially-contextualized practice helps us understand the ways in which practices may vary across diverse communities, and the ways in which they also are dynamic and malleable” (62).

According to James Paul Gee, literacy is a social force in the human experience. As such, I argue literacy as a social force can directly affect cultural capital, which in turn can influence and improve one's social status. If students can amass the knowledge, behavior, and skills—the literacy—required to navigate the college experience through advising they can develop and increase their cultural capital and their ability to move in any given field. However, students must have access to the field of higher education and understand how to move about in the field of academe to ensure movement in social status. As such, by empowering students to cultivate their assets, increase cultural capital and gain literacy to navigate the structure of higher education, institutions will yield improved retention, persistence, and completion rates. By the time students graduate from high school and enter higher education, they are talented individuals with the tools, skills and experiences—assets—necessary to pursue advanced knowledge; however, the field/habitus/community in which students have developed these capacities and talents is very different from the knowledge needed to navigate field of higher education.

People, Gee argues, have to be socialized into a practice and to be literate is to belong (13). Whether language or experience, these are elements of community—of habitus—that people share, that people have in common. In the habitus, people share an identity—social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic—that legitimizes their experience and determines the movement within the field. And how literacies are socially distributed, I would argue, determine the elements of our social status. People learn by practice and what they learn by practice are specific skills embedded in the practice. Advising as a literacy practice provides students a way to establish an identity in higher education. If literacy has the capacity for critical awareness, something beyond just literacy—just acquiring the knowledge, behaviors, and skills—must serve as the catalyst for this capacity. I would argue the catalyst for students with access to excellence



in higher education, who would not normally be afforded the opportunity by more selective criteria and institutions, is increased cultural capital and improved social status. If as Gee says, non-cognitive skills such as appreciating challenges, learning to persist past failure, and practicing regularly without immediate awards, correlate with success and educational attainment, are “malleable” and can be taught later in life, then advising as literacy is key to every student’s success and attainment of literacy in higher education (Gee 70-71).

Walter Ong argues that literacy is a powerful force for social transformation. Moreover, while Ong’s focus in *Orality and Literacy* is on the connection between orality and writing and the impact on human consciousness, his assertion that literacy is socially transforming is key. Empowering students through advising to cultivate the literacy necessary to navigate the system of higher education, will not only transform individual lives and impact individual social status, but will transform generations of others through shared literacy. And thus, transform society. If we believe that education is the key to economic, political, and social advancement, students must be literate in the practices required to attain the appropriate education.

Brian Street argues that literacy is not independent of the context in which it exists. Street proposes an ideological model of literacy that understands literacy in terms of concrete social practices and only having consequences as a part of other social and cultural factors, including political and economic conditions and the social structure and local ideologies. Abstracting literacy from its social setting is a dead end, according to Street. In this sense, advising as literacy is effective only as far as it is a social force in the field of higher education. Street draws on Harvey Graff to demonstrate that literacy as an autonomous force did more to deprive and oppress certain classes and ethnic groups (Street 40-41). In fact, greater literacy abstracted from its social setting did not correlate with increased equality and democracy but with continued

social stratification. Of course. Precisely why using Bourdieu's framework, greater literacy through advising is necessary to give students the opportunity to develop the cultural capital to improve social status.

The ideological and social power structures that have defined society for centuries are always already present. Higher education is one of the world's most treasured systems of power and status. Students need to acquire the literacy to navigate higher education and be in position to move within the dominant ideologies and power structures. With enough literacy, anyone can navigate within the privileged power structure . . . at least enough to improve social status. While literacy has served as a tool for social stratification in some cases, students who enhance their critical mindsets by acquiring navigational and social capital through advising gain access to the very systems that were previously restrictive. Literacy empowers people when it renders them active questioners of the social reality around them. And while acquiring literacy through advising will not necessarily change the social structure of the academy—it will not dismantle the master's house—it will empower students with the knowledge and tools to navigate within the unfamiliar master's house (Lorde). Audrey Lorde argued that “Define and conquer must become define and empower.” Advising as literacy can do this for previously underrepresented students at access institutions of higher education.

Paulo Freire understood that literacy is not politically neutral. “Literacy always comes with a perspective on interpretation that is ultimately political” (Freire 44). We cannot pretend that literacy is separate from politics. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argued that the “banking model” of learning does not work. Students—people—are not empty vaults into which teachers, educators, or advisors, deposit information and knowledge. Learning requires engagement with the world, with other people, and as Freire argued, with words. Literacy has no

effect, no impact, no meaning on an individual's experience apart from the social, institutional, political and cultural context in which it is used (Gee 48). As such, advising as literacy is key to students' success in higher education and in transforming—or at least impacting—social status.

Students enter institutions of higher education literate in the social, political, and cultural contexts—communities—in which they were raised. The knowledge, behaviors, and skills learned in those contexts do not necessarily translate into the knowledge, behaviors, and skills required to navigate the higher education experience. But just as Freire asserted that the “banking model” of learning does not work, I argue that a “banking model” of advising does not work. Insights that are specific to an individual student's life are fundamental to the quality and texture of that student's college experience. An advisor cannot *provide* the information and knowledge required for students to engage in and navigate through the college experience. However, advisors can facilitate students' making the connections between their academic interests and their personal values. Connecting academic work to the choices that matter to students, personally, begins the process of acquiring literacy that will translate into the capital necessary to improve/increase social status through higher education.

Ron and Suzanne Scollon argue that “learning a new type of literacy—new literacy practices—can . . . become a matter of a change of identity and culture” (qtd in Gee 48). New types of literacies must be learned in order to improve social status. While students' identities may evolve differently in the culture of higher education, acquiring new literacy does not mean trading in one identity for another. Gee makes connections among the “mind, society, language, and literacy” and argues that the “key to the connections among all these things is human experience in the world” (65). He defines emergent literacy as all the practices people's homes engage in around literacy before children can read. While Gee's discussion is specific to the

connection between oral vocabulary and reading, I believe his analysis extends to advising in higher education as literacy, particularly at UTEP.

Gee's position is that "the talk of educated parents" introduces children to "book-like words" and "teacher talk" (66) which in turn models the connection between words and experiences and increases children's vocabulary. In the same sense, if our students come from families and communities with parents or grandparents who were not formally educated and therefore, do not model the connection between educational attainment and success, there is no emergent academic literacy present in that community.

## **2.5 Theories of Academic Advising**

In *Academic Advising a Comprehensive Handbook*, Peter Hagan and Peggy Jordan argue that there is "no such thing" as one "overarching theory to explain and guide all of academic advising," that rather, "use of an array of theories [is what] lead[s] to an understanding of this broadly complicated phenomenon known as academic advising" (17). And in *Beyond Foundations: Developing as a Master Academic Advisor*, Hilleary Himes and Janet Schulenberg argue that the most significant challenge facing advising today is connecting theory to practice in a meaningful way.

## **2.6 Prescriptive Advising**

Prescriptive advising is often referred to as the traditional advising model because it defines the interaction to information exchange and limits the advising sessions to academic matters such as curricular requirements, course selection, registration processes, academic policies, and degree progress. The relationship, if any, between student and advisor in the prescriptive advising model is very much one way—top down. The advisor has the knowledge and the information that students need to know, provides it, and prescribes what is necessary for

the student to do to make successful progress toward a degree. Mark Lowenstein characterized prescriptive advising as a “top-down approach [with a] hierarchal [advisor-student] relationship [that offers a] one-directional flow of information and ideas [where] the student [is] a passive recipient” (Lowenstein). Prescriptive advising is still a commonly used practice as it is the least complex and requires the least amount of investment from either the advisor or the student. The advisor provides pertinent information and, hopes that, the student listens.

## **2.7 Developmental Advising**

Burns Crookston and Terry O’Banion were early advocates of developmental advising and in 1972 introduced the developmental academic advising model. Developmental advising promoted a relationship between the student and the advisor to facilitate a more holistic approach to the student’s advising process. Developmental advising, according to Crookston, “is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student’s rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluating skills” (5).

In addition to Crookston’s definition, O’Banion articulated five aspects of academic advising including the “exploration of life goals, exploration of vocational goals, [discussion of] program choice, [discussion of] course choice, and {the process for} scheduling classes” (10). It is evident that elements of prescriptive advising exist in the developmental model as Crookston suggested that advising operations make “decisions about limits and responsibility [for] negotiating central issues as part of the establishment of the relationship between advisor and student” (Hagen and Jordan 20). From Crookston’s perspective, developmental advising should focus on the needs of the student thereby determining how the advising interaction will evolve. As such, as Hagen and Jordan point out, “the developmental advising model does not require

advisors to discuss issues that go beyond the individual advisor's scope of knowledge or comfort.

## **2.8 Intrusive Advising**

In 1975, Glennen introduced a model for intrusive advising as an effective retention strategy. The intrusive advising model was further developed in 1987 by WR Earl who articulated that intrusive advising is about getting to the heart of where a student is having trouble, and recommending an intervention. According to Earl, "intrusive advising is an action-oriented to involving students and motivating them to seek help when they need it. Utilizing the good qualities of prescriptive advising (expertise, awareness of student needs, structured programs) and of developmental advising (relationship to a student's total needs) intrusive advising is a direct response to identified academic crisis with a specific program of action" (Earl, NACADA). In practice, intrusive advising has been shown to have a positive impact on student retention and degree attainment rates, and research indicates that students prefer this approach to advising over strictly prescriptive advising.

During the 1970's and 1980's, numerous definitions of developmental advising were established. In an effort to align the characteristics of developmental advising, Winston, Enders, and Miller published an operational definition that articulated advising as a "process concerned with human growth [that is] goal related [and] based on the establishment of a caring human relationship; offered by adult role models and mentors [and should be] the cornerstone of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs" (Cook).

Throughout the 1980's, scholars synthesized the characteristics of advising models to align definitions of and activities associated with advising. They renamed and re-categorized the

models to accommodate institutional characteristics such as size, culture, and institutional mission. Nevertheless, despite decades of discussion and research, advising remained an ineffective system on most campuses.

## **2.9 Academic-Centered Advising**

In 1999, Hemwall and Trachte introduced a new organizing principle for academic advising centered in student learning. The idea asserted that advisors should engage in dialogue with students about their “intellectual passions” and through this assist students with decisions about academic majors and course selections. As a result, Lowenstein articulated an alternative paradigm to developmental advising—the academic-centered model—where the advisor would facilitate academic success through mutual communication with the student about major, course selection, career goals, and engagement. According to Lowenstein, the key difference between developmental and academic-centered advising is that developmental advising focuses on the student’s personal growth while academic-centered advising focuses on the student’s academic learning (2). Lowenstein also acknowledges that there are differences in the paradigms but both still have a collaborative approach to student advising. Advising as teaching means, according to Lowenstein, that advisors teach the curriculum itself. Its relevance to the life of the mind. Lowenstein advocated for advisors to teach the “logic” of the curriculum because “learning transpires when a student makes sense of his or her overall curriculum just as it does when a person understands an individual course (69).

Through the lens of student learning, Hemwall and Trachte articulated the ideas of “a curriculum (“what students should learn through advising”) and a pedagogy (“how might the learning take place”) [for] academic advising” (qtd in Hagen and Jordan 28). The widely endorsed “advising is teaching” metaphor and approach adopted Hemwall’s and Trachte’s

“basic curriculum of academic advising [that] that should facilitate student learning about the mission of the college, of both lower- and higher-order thinking skills, and about how to achieve the goals imbedded in the mission statement of the college” (Hagen and Jordan, 28). In addition, Hemwall and Trachte established seven principles for the pedagogy of advising-as-teaching that included what should be considered about students—advisees—and what advisors should incorporate into their approach. In 2006, NACADA endorsed “advising is teaching” and many institutions adopted this model including creating advising syllabi to identify goals for advisees learning through advising.

The academic-centered model of advising, according to Lowenstein, “facilitates the goals of liberal learning . . . [and] lays out a role for advising that is uniquely necessary in a higher education setting” (3). Lowenstein argues for advising being “about something that is unique to college” (3). I agree. However, something that is “unique to college” goes far beyond the curriculum and classroom. Navigating the system of higher education, to obtain a degree and improve one’s social status, is a unique challenge that requires advising that is designed to facilitate and integrate broad-based learning—literacy—of the entire college experience. The advising as literacy model strives for this ideal by incorporating characteristics of both the developmental and academic or learning-centered paradigms and relying heavily on Lowenstein’s learning-centered paradigm. I would argue that advising as a literacy practice strives to go further than the traditional metaphor of advising as teaching and learning.

## **2.10 Identity**

Identity theory is not one of the main tenets of my theoretical framework, but it goes without say that people have to identify with the communities in which they are part to feel as though they “belong.” When people do not identify with the values and customs of any given



community, they do not stay. It is no different for students entering higher education. Students assume multiple identities in order to navigate within the community they are becoming part of—the college experience—in order to feel as though they “belong” or they do not stay. And this is not an easy adjustment. All of the complications of identity formation, evolution, and navigation are evident in our students’ experiences on campus. UTEP is a large Hispanic-serving institution whose student population is predominantly Hispanic.

In *Bootstraps: From An American Academic of Color*, Victor Villanueva states “biculturalism does not mean . . . an equal ease with two cultures. That is an ideal” (39). Villanueva accuses Richard Rodriguez of “ideological resignation” because in his autobiography, Rodriguez claims he has assimilated and emerged as American and can no longer be Mexican. Villanueva rejects this position and claims, “biculturalism is as imposed as assimilation” (39). Villanueva argues that assimilation into the dominant ideology is a sort of trading one identity for another but at the same time he confesses that as a Latino, Hispanic, Mexican American academic he occasionally falls back on “that painful, confusing strategy that people of color who succeed employ . . . racelessness . . . remaining the other while espousing the same” (39). In addition, racelessness, Villanueva says, “is most clearly marked linguistically . . . and choosing to speak the language of the dominant, choosing racelessness, bears a price” (40).

I would argue that this is the additional texturizing of identities our Hispanic students, who come to campus with aspirational, linguistic, and familial capital acquired through the “pedagogies of the home” (Yosso 79), feel compelled to do in order to integrate into the structure of higher education. These students, who have lived their entire lives in a “binational, bicultural” situation, do not recognize their bilingualism as an asset—as linguistic capital. Is it any wonder?

Villanueva points out that even if a “non-English-speaking group had sufficient power to undermine America’s English primacy, what profit would there be in it? English is the global *lingua franca*” (47).

“We are us, and we are them” (Villanueva 61). Advising as literacy can facilitate the acquisition of navigational capital for our students to maneuver as “us” through the system built by “them.” Even Pierre Bourdieu and his father experienced some crisis of culture and identity by becoming educated and improving social status. Although both Bourdieu and his father were labeled as “transfuges—apostate[s], deserter[s], or betrayer[s] of [their] class origins” (Robbins 27)—the actuality of being educated procured a socially mobile “distinction” for both of them. While Bourdieu and his father shared the ideal that “education was the means to achieve an inclusive society,” it was also experienced “as a mechanism for consolidating social separation,” (Robbins 28). According to Derek Robbins, Bourdieu’s father struggled with the social separation.

A gap exists between connecting advising theories to the day-to-day practice of advising. In the interest of students’ retention, persistence, and success in higher education, it is essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice in a meaningful way. Beyond retention and simply bridging the gap between theory and practice, advisors have the ability to facilitate opportunities for students to develop the social and cultural capital necessary to navigate the system of higher education through the assets students bring to campus.

### Chapter 3 - Designing a Model of Advising as Literacy

Despite the belief that earning a college degree is as common as earning a high school diploma, only 31% of Americans have a four-year college degree (Lumina Foundation, 2016). Advising is a key element—one that has been researched and scrutinized for decades—in a student’s college experience and in ensuring that students have the support and assistance, necessary to achieve a college degree.

In *Developmental Academic Advising*, Grites and associates assert that advising programs that “emphasize registration and record-keeping, while neglecting attention to students’ educational and personal experiences in the institution, are missing an excellent opportunity to influence, directly and immediately, the quality of students’ education and are also highly inefficient, since they are most likely employing highly educated personnel who are performing essentially clerical tasks” (542). Approaches to advising have continued to evolve and in 2006, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), which is also the Global Community for Academic Advising, articulated that academic advising should be “based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, [it] is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes.”

Scholars and research have demonstrated why quality academic advising is key to student success, but how to define quality academic advising and put theory into practice on campus is a challenge. Joe Cuseo argues that a definition of advising “must be guided by a clear vision of what ‘good’ or ‘quality’ advising actually is—because if we cannot define it, we cannot

recognize it when we see it, nor can we assess it or improve it” (13). In an environment of continued budget constraints and changing demographics, how do institutions put theory into practice? How do institutions define and provide good, quality advising that can be measured and assessed?

### **3.1 History of Academic Advising at UTEP**

Traditional academic advising models do not adequately address many non-academic factors that ultimately impact academic and post-graduation success. UTEP students are predominantly first- generation (51%) and low income (73% Pell eligible) yet the institution has continued to rely on a traditional advising framework that does not address the specific needs of the student population. The Academic Advising Center (AAC) has historically assisted students as a collective body in a generally prescriptive model. Advisors have provided services to students about curricular requirements, course selection, registration processes, and academic policies. Students visited the advising center two or three times during designated timeframes—prior to registration for any given semester or summer session—in the academic year. The advising was not complex and did not require any significant investment from either the advisor or the student.

Advisors were trained in policy and process for specific populations of students and trained to provide prescriptive information to students. A primary function of the advising center was to deliver information and advising about college-ready benchmarks students are required to meet by the state of Texas. The Texas Success Initiative (TSI) requires students to meet specific numeric benchmarks in order to be assessed as college-ready for reading, writing, and math. Students who do not meet the TSI benchmarks in reading, writing, or math are required to participate in developmental math and English education. The advising center provided TSI

advising to students for developmental math and English placement and course selection. But, advising was extremely limited. In the structure that had existed for three decades, advisors delivered prescriptive information to students in specific populations and had no opportunity to facilitate interpersonal relationships. Advisors rarely met with the same student twice as there was no deliberate organization of advisor-student interaction.

### **3.2 Institutional Efforts Shift from Groups to Individuals**

During the 1990s, UTEP developed a variety of student-centered programs designed to enhance student success. By 2003, UTEP's innovative programs, which were mindful of the needs of students from the El Paso region and the realities of their complex lives, received recognition from George D. Kuh, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) as one of 20 exemplary institutions that had created the conditions to foster student success.

By 2005, the team in UTEP's Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning (CIERP) began to build an analytics infrastructure and engage in research to better understand the factors that explain student success as measured by retention rates, timely graduation, and the number of degrees awarded to UTEP students. A series of student success studies developed by CIERP and funded by the Lumina Foundation, provided valuable insights into three different student "risk" groups. Institutional interventions based on these studies led to dramatic increases in student outcomes, including the number of degrees awarded (which increased by nearly 85% between 2004 and 2014, while enrollment only grew by 30% during the same period).

In 2015, UTEP's student success models shifted from a primary focus on "risk" groups to explaining and predicting success for *individual students*. Again, grounded in and

developed through CIERP's research discoveries, the student-based approach focuses on understanding each student's situation and providing the right conditions for his/her individual success. Considering the context of each student's life, we fundamentally changed how we think about student success and UTEP's role in creating the conditions for every single student's success. CIERP determined that student outcomes must extend beyond traditional measures of success, such as retention and graduation, and include more holistic outcomes. In addition, CIERP determined that the institution could do much more to ensure that each student has equal access to opportunities that enhance learning and professional development.

During the time when CIERP was conducting research and developing a model for student success based upon UTEP's historic data, there were a number of efforts dedicated to improving academic advising at UTEP. Between 2006, and 2015, there were five major task forces, reviews, and assessments of academic advising at UTEP, none of which changed the way advising was delivered on campus. Recommendations from a Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), from three various advising task forces, and from an external review by Teresa Farnum & Associates (TFA) were compiled over a decade and included commonalities such as, appointing a senior level administrator to lead change efforts, designing a cohesive centralized cross-campus model, developing a comprehensive assessment and evaluation plan, and providing professional development and training related to academic advising for advisors. None of the recommendations to improve advising were put into practice.

It must be said that five evaluations for improvement over a decade does not leave much room and time for design, implementation, and assessment of an advising model. In addition, to

redesign a long-standing advising structure requires a cross-campus culture change and significant institutional commitment and support. Campus change of this magnitude requires nothing short of a *kairotic* moment—a point in time when the circumstances of a situation align perfectly. A concept developed by classical Greek rhetoricians, *kairos* is a “window of time in which action is most advantageous” (Crowley and Hawhee 38). In 2015, both the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the University of Texas (UT) System released strategic plans to improve higher education levels of Texas residents through comprehensive student success agendas. In addition, in UTEP’s 2016 SACSCOC Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), there was a renewed cross-campus institutional commitment to student success. There was, finally, a kairotic moment at UTEP that leveraged the necessary campus-wide culture change to redesign advising.

### **3.3 The Advising as Literacy Model**

The vision of the advising redesign is to provide all UTEP students personalized, seamless advising through an integrated meaningful structure of support that facilitates academic, financial and social literacies from admission through graduation. The new integrated model engages students up front, through advising as literacy, and focuses on providing academic support for all students, facilitating engagement opportunities that align with students’ interests, aspirations, and commitments, and empowering students to cultivate individual agency through their talents and assets and develop the cultural capital required to persist and complete a degree. As Kretzmann and McKnight assert that every community boasts a unique combination of assets to build upon, I argue that every student boasts a unique combination of assets upon which they should—and can—build the social and cultural capital necessary to navigate higher education (25).

The redesign of the delivery of advising into a literacy practice that initiates proactive, individualized support to UTEP students who are predominantly first-generation (51%) and low income (73% Pell eligible, 37% from households with an annual income of less than \$20,000), and is grounded in the capacities, skills, and assets of the very students we serve. Kretzmann and McKnight claim that the basic truth about the “giftedness” of every individual is particularly important to apply to persons who often find themselves marginalized by communities. That it is essential to recognize the capacities of those who have been labeled or are marginalized (25). Through the advising as literacy model, advisors recognize the capacities—the assets—of every student they work with. The overall objective of the advising as literacy model is to ensure that every student has equal opportunity for a holistic college experience—framed through their interests, aspirations, and commitments, through the assets and cultural wealth they bring to campus—that will give them a competitive edge in the classroom, workplace, and global community. The advising as literacy model is providing the conditions for UTEP’s student demographic to recognize and apply their “giftedness”—their assets—and cultivate the cultural capital necessary to negotiate all aspects of higher education and be successful.

In order to facilitate advising as literacy for every student, advising had to be redesigned and transformed to provide seamless, personalized support from admissions through graduation by aligning students’ academic, social, and financial realities. All significant aspects of students’ lives that are defined by diverse value systems and varying levels of capital are potential risk areas for students’ engagement in the college experience. Holistic and integrated advising initiated in the first 45 hours of a student’s academic experience provides students the opportunity to develop necessary literacies and facilitates a smooth transition to discipline-specific advising in the colleges for degree completion.



Transforming advising from a structure that historically assisted students as a collective body, to a framework that works with every individual student based on their unique assets and characteristics, allows advisors to explore issues traditionally not considered in advising. Students' everyday realities, life challenges and commitments are a risk to students' retention, persistence, and degree completion. Personalizing the experience for each individual student creates the interpersonal connection necessary for advisors to have an impact through advocacy, engagement and empowerment.

The fundamental idea behind advising as literacy is to individualize and personalize the college experience, for all students, upon enrollment. And to empower students through advising as literacy to cultivate the social and cultural capital necessary to navigate the system of higher education. Accessing new literacies through advising has the potential to not only transform individual lives and impact individual social status, but also can transform generations of others through shared literacy.

As such advising as literacy is delivered to students in their first 45 hours of enrollment as follows:

- Advisors *integrate students' academic, financial and social realities* through a framework based on students' unique assets and characteristics
- Advisors provide personalized advising through a *cohort-model* where every student is assigned their own advisor
- Advisors engage students—immediately—in *developing academic and co-curricular pathways to degrees* based on each student's interests, aspirations and commitments.

With appropriate training and resources, advisors can use information provided by students and data collected by institutional research to elevate the quality and enhance the depth of

conversations with students, manage proactive, targeted outreach to students, and manage the cohort size to adequately facilitate building and improving students' academic, financial and social literacies.

### **3.4 The Advising as Literacy Framework**

It is not for lack of talent or academic ability that prevent students from persisting and completing college. Quite simply, it is for lack of social and navigational capital that often prevent students from persisting. Much like Kretzmann's and McKnight's alternative community development path, advising as literacy is asset-based, internally focused on student's assets, and driven by relationships between advisors and students. Helping students focus on their assets, however, does not mean they do not need additional assistance or resources. The assets our students' acquire and develop within their communities of cultural wealth are necessary to their success in higher education but are usually not sufficient to meet the huge challenges of navigating the structure of higher education (26). Students must have the opportunity to acquire the literacy necessary for understanding the non-cognitive skills that correlate with navigation, success and educational attainment. Beyond academic advising, the goal is to bridge students' academic, financial and social realities in order to provide meaningful holistic advising and improve students' literacies.

To do this, an individualized framework was created based on dimensions of students' lives that are known to undermine retention and success in the first term and first year. Based on information collected from students themselves in UTEP's *Student Advisor Profile*, four key dimensions are integrated into a framework for advisors that creates a context for each individual student's reality. The four dimensions of UTEP's Advising as Literacy framework are student aspirations, student engagement, student commitments, and student unique needs. Advisors are trained to work with students through this framework to develop academic, co-curricular, and

financial aid satisfactory academic progress plans, upon enrollment, based on the dimensions and demands of their own lives.

It is important to note that UTEP is not using the information from students to develop predictive analytics. The information collected cannot predict whether a student will or will not succeed if an advisor imposes specific interventions. Rather advisors are using the information as a framework—a place to quickly make sense of a number of variables and dimensions that impact students' lives—to begin a conversation and help build the capacity for academic, financial and social literacies. Advisors cannot change the circumstances or complexities of students' lives with this information. However, advisors can assist students in analyzing and managing the circumstances and complexities of their lives, think through their aspirations and commitments and identify where they may need to adjust to achieve balance.

### **3.5 Advocacy: Academic and Financial Literacies**

In order to provide students the opportunities to acquire literacy through advising, a cohort model was designed to ensure all incoming students from 0-45 hours work with an assigned advisor. Providing students an advisor who works with them to create a personalized academic and co-curricular plan upon enrollment is essential. Students need to develop an academic and co-curricular plan—immediately—to feel and establish a sense of ownership for their college experience. This is important as it connects students' interests and aspirations to the curriculum in meaningful ways. Students can then begin to articulate how the academic plan aligns with them personally. In addition, it becomes a plan for progress that students and advisors can monitor and review regularly.

Additionally, research has demonstrated that income is strongly related to education level. UTEP has provided access to first-generation college students—many of whom come from low-income families—for decades. Nevertheless, even UTEP's generous financial aid packaging

is not always enough to prevent students from stopping out due to financial challenges. Beyond financial aid packages and financial challenges, students often lack the financial literacy to make informed decisions about the value of persisting in college versus dropping out to manage an immediate financial crisis. Increasing students' financial literacy and helping them cultivate the skills to understand short and long-term financial decisions is key to students' cultivating the social and cultural capital needed to maneuver the higher education experience. As a component of advising as literacy, and using financial social work theory in collaboration with the department of Social Work, a program that bridges students' academic and financial realities in new ways was integrated into the advising as literacy model.

The Financial and Social Services Program (FSSP) is housed in the Academic Advising Center and staffed by four Master of Social Work (MSW) interns. The MSW interns work alongside advisors to assist students in establishing broader knowledge and perspective about financial decision-making, and identifying potential resources and alternative options to dropping out for resolving financial challenges. The MSW interns are educated and trained to assist students in recognizing the impact a snap decision, based on financial challenges (choosing between vehicle repairs and purchasing textbooks, for example), can have on the bigger pictures of their lives.

### **3.6 Engagement: Social Literacies**

Bridging students' academic, financial and social realities is essential to providing meaningful, personalized advising and providing appropriate opportunities for student engagement. Using our framework that creates a context for each individual student's reality, advisors are working with students to develop academic and co-curricular plans, upon enrollment, that are based on the dimensions and demands of their own lives

Advisors have been trained in the value and benefit of high-impact practices on a student's college experience and work to align engagement opportunities with the reality of students' lives. For example, study abroad may not be the ideal engagement opportunity for a first-generation student who lives with an extended family and whose *familial capital* has instilled the commitment to caring—physically, emotionally, or financially—for members of the family. The focus in advising at UTEP, now, is to assist students in identifying and capitalizing on their assets—the capital they bring to campus—and talents through development of individualized plans that become their own clear pathways to degree completion. By focusing on advising as literacy, advisors are able to assist students in cultivating the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary—and do so within the parameters of each student's academic, social, cultural, and financial context—to navigate the appropriate processes/systems to realize which choices are most appropriate and significant to their success.

### **3.7 Empowerment: Acquisition of Capital**

Ultimately, we want students to stay enrolled on campus, to finish a degree that aligns with their interests and aspirations, and to succeed in life with a college degree. UTEP's advising as literacy model allows advisors to explore issues not traditionally considered in advising but are known to be a risk to students' retention, persistence, and degree completion. By utilizing the individualized framework based on the four dimensions of students' lives, advisors can assess how to assist students and facilitate improved literacy in striking the right balance between their academic, financial and social realities to attain the social and cultural capital to *stay, to finish, and to succeed*.

Advising as literacy empowers students with meaningful decision-making skills with respect to their academic, financial, and social realities. By elevating advising to a culture of personalized literacy for each individual student through the assets they bring to campus—where

every interaction is deliberate and meaningful—advisors can impact students’ overall sense of belonging and empower them to cultivate the social and cultural capital required to navigate higher education. Through the advising as literacy model, students can acquire the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to engage in high impact practices, create clear pathways to degree completion and graduate with a competitive edge for lifelong success.

### **3.8 Advising as Literacy in Practice**

The integrated advising as literacy model is focused on developing a personalized educational plan for each student based on his or her interests, aspirations, and commitments. Through prudently researched analysis, CIERP examined departure, return, and graduation using a multi-spell, competing risk model to identify primary indicators and elements of students’ lives that can impact decision-making about whether to stay in college, or stop out. Advisors use the framework to identify and advocate for academic interventions, financial solutions, and high-impact engagement. Advisors are thus able to empower students with meaningful literacy skills with respect to their academic, financial, and social realities.

By understanding the unique characteristics and dimensions of UTEP students’ lives, preliminary research suggests that advisors now have the tools and ability to assist students with acquiring the academic, financial and social literacies to manage the circumstances and complexities of their lives. Based on information collected from students themselves, key dimensions are integrated into the framework for advising students. *The Student Advisor Profile*, managed by UTEP’s Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning (CIERP), is an expanded version of the new student survey that students complete at New Student Orientation (NSO) and prior to enrollment. The profile was expanded to collect information from students that is necessary to implementing the model of advising as literacy.

### 3.9 Four Dimensional Framework

Utilizing the information provided in the profile, four key dimensions are integrated into the framework that advisors use to deliver the advising as literacy model. The first dimension that is key to understanding students' talents and assets is *Student Aspirations*. In defining aspirational capital, Yosso points out that historically Hispanics experience the lowest educational outcomes compared to other groups in the US, despite high aspirations for children's futures by parents (78). First-generation students have parents who nurture a culture of possibility in the home. As such, our students bring those aspirations to campus and these assets—this capital—is an important dimension in the advising as literacy framework.

The Student Advisor Profile includes questions to assess student aspirations such as, what degree does a student aspire to obtain? Why has a student chosen the major they have? Is the major choice based on personal interest or some other influencing factor? The student aspirations section also asks if a student thinks will they change their major at least once. The student aspirations dimension gives advisors insight into how informed a student is regarding his/her academic choices and how those will lead to a career post-graduation.

View Student Aspirations

What is the highest academic level you plan to obtain?	Unsure
I chose my major because of my personal interest in the subject.	Disagree
I am aware of career options related to my major.	Agree
I will probably change my major at least once.	Agree
The educational level of your parents / legal guardians is:	One or both parents (or
Have any of your brothers or sisters graduated with bachelor's degrees?	No, but one or more ar

Update

Figure 3.1 Framework Dimension – Student Aspirations

The second dimension in the framework is *Student Engagement*. It is important for advisors to understand how engaged a student was in high school as generally, without meaningful intervention, the student's interest and engagement level will remain the same. In this dimension, the survey asks questions such as, does a student anticipate participating in a club, in community service, or in undergraduate research. The second dimension gathers information about students' interests in participating in a variety of high impact practices including clubs and organizations, community service, research or creative activities, study abroad, and leadership development.



View Student Engagements

Participate in a UTEP student club or organization	Probably won't
Community service activity or volunteer work on- or off-campus	Probably won't
A service learning opportunity (i.e., a course that combines instruction with meaningful community service)	Probably won't
Enroll in a learning community	Probably won't
Seek an undergraduate research opportunity or creative academic project with a faculty member	Probably won't

Figure 3.2 Framework Dimension – Student Engagements

The third dimension of the framework is *Student Commitments* and includes questions such as, how much does a student plan to work? Will the student work on campus or off-campus? Does the student anticipate enrolling less than full-time at any point during his/her academic career? The student commitments dimension provides advisors access to how committed to the higher education experience a student is at entry. For example, if a student indicates that he/she is employed for thirty hours, may need more than four years to complete a degree and may stop out while enrolled, it is a strong indicator that the student’s understanding of what the higher education experience offers and requires may not be realistic. By knowing this information, up front, the advisor can begin the advising literacy process with a student by

addressing the importance of time management, understanding a college class schedule, and what expectations he/she has of the higher education experience.

View Student Commitments

TOTAL Hours Working-- How many hours per week do you anticipate being employed on- and off-campus?	1-19 hours per week
I will need more than four years to finish my degree.	Disagree
I might have to drop out before finishing my degree.	Strongly Disagree
I will need to enroll part-time while I am pursuing my degree at UTEP.	Disagree

Update

Figure 3.3 Framework Dimension – Student Commitments

Finally, the fourth dimension of the Student Advisor Profile used in the framework is *Student Unique Needs*. This dimension assesses students’ answers to questions such as; does the student currently experience living or food insecurities? Does the student have access to technology (laptop or computer)? And does the student anticipate significant time caring for relatives and family members? Students’ unique needs are particularly prevalent and important to address with first generation, low-income students. It is in the fourth dimension, I argue that advisors learn the depth of students’ *familial capital*, the “kinship ties [from which students]

learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to [their] community . . . [their *familia*] (Yosso 79), and to what extent it may impact engagement in the college experience.

View Student Unique Needs	
I worry about where I will live in the upcoming semester.	Strongly Disagree ▼
I worry about expenses for food in the upcoming semester.	Strongly Disagree ▼
I will own or have access to a laptop computer that I can take to class.	Agree ▼
During the upcoming semester, how many hours per week do you anticipate spending on caring for children, parents, and/or other relatives?	1-9 hours per week ▼

Figure 3.4 Framework Dimension – Student Unique Needs

To understand how advisors utilize the framework, consider the information gathered in the sample of our dimensions. The answers for each dimension included here are from the same student who is a current freshman who is a third quartile high school student assessed as medium risk (an expected retention rate of 68%) and enrolled in 12 hours of standard first-term courses: First Year Writing, University Seminar, Math for Social Sciences, and a Visual and Performing Arts class. In the aspiration dimension, the student indicated that she was unsure what the highest level of academic achievement she aspired to obtain. The student also “disagreed” that her major choice was due to personal interest in the subject and that even though she “agreed” to be aware

of career options related to the major, she would likely change the major at least once. In the engagement dimension, the student indicated across the board that she “probably won’t” engage in any of the co-curricular opportunities available to her on campus even though based upon her answer in the commitments dimension, it appears she would have the time to engage. The student answered that she anticipated being only employed only 1-19 hours per week in the commitments dimension. However, she also disagreed that she would need more than four years to finish a degree. Finally, when responding to questions about her unique needs, the student indicated that she has access to technology and a laptop and had no worries about living or food securities. She did indicate committing 1-9 hours per week caring for family members.

This third quartile student would not have access to many higher education institutions across the country with highly selective admissions criteria. However, at an access institution utilizing the advising as literacy framework, an advisor can quickly assess whether the student’s interests and aspirations align, if the student is interested in engagement opportunities and which ones, and what commitments the student has outside of academic coursework. When one or more of the student’s answers in any dimension is not aligned, as in the case of this third quartile freshman, it signals to the advisor that deeper literacy is required. For example, this student claims not to have chosen her major based on personal interest, plans to change her major at least once, but does not believe she will need more than four years to finish a degree. These disconnects in the capital students bring to campus and the cultural capital required to navigate higher education are where the advisors can have significant impact in helping students build the appropriate academic, financial, and social literacies to succeed.

Based upon the answers a student provides in the Student Advisor Profile, the questions advisors think through, then, are, how do we begin to help this student understand what

behaviors and skills are required to be successful in college? What do we do to help this student be engaged and sustain academic progress? We know that if students are engaged in an academic and co-curricular plan, immediately, and through the first three semesters of enrollment (45 hours) the likelihood of retention and success quadruples. Moreover, if the student is not engaged in an academic and co-curricular plan, the likelihood of stop-out is extraordinarily high. So then, what is the role of the advisor? The complexities of advising students like this—students for whom access to high quality college education would be denied at selective institutions based on an admissions profile—are extremely challenging because the issues are not centered on ability and talent.

Advising as literacy, then, is not only crucial, but also necessary, for students to extend their own knowledge and develop the social and cultural capital to navigate the foreign community of higher education. The dimensions used to develop the advising as literacy framework provide the disconnect—the information that students do not provide, casually, but impacts the experience—where advisors can assess a student’s level of academy, financial, and social literacy and finesse a conversation to start determining where to intervene and how to help a student adjust to this new social, cultural, and political context.

Retaining students who would not otherwise have the opportunity to higher educational attainment is the difference between the students remaining in the bottom quartile of family income brackets and moving up. It is the difference between giving up on an intelligent and talented student who requires advising as literacy, and the potential for social mobility that can affect a student and their family for generations. In *Thriving in College and Beyond: Research-Based Strategies for Academic Success and Personal Development*, Mary C. Daly, the Vice President of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco states that, “it’s an irrefutable fact that

college gives you a significant and persistent advantage decade after decade.” Utilizing the holistic advising framework, with the appropriate knowledge, attention and intervention, the conditions for success will be created for every student—no matter what quartile they emerge from.

### **3.10 Advising as Literacy Training for Advisors**

One lens does not clarify the whole of advising for all time. Advising theory and practice should evolve as student characteristics and demographics evolve. As Peter Hagan and Peggy Jordan point out, academic advising is a unique field. Most institutions do not require a specific degree to practice advising and therefore, advisors’—both faculty and staff advisors—academic backgrounds are very diverse (Hagan and Jordan 18). The literature has clearly articulated that advising is an important component to student success—both for each individual student and for the institution as a whole. The problem is how to determine which advising model is most effective for any given institution. I argue that no single advising model is appropriate for all institutions. And as I have stated previously, any advising model should align with the values, mission, and culture of the institution and through a theoretical framework based on the characteristics of the students put into organic practice a holistic approach to facilitating the literacy students need to navigate higher education and persist to graduation.

In order to develop a “good” academic advising model that provides students the opportunity to develop a consistent relationship with someone in the institution who cares about them, “good” advisors have to be trained and developed. According to Joe Cuseo, a leading scholar and researcher in student learning and success, an academic advisor is the one who “helps students become more self-aware of their distinctive interests, talents, values, and priorities; who enables students to see the ‘connection’ between their present academic experience and their future life plans; who helps students discover their potential, purpose, and

passion; who broadens students' perspectives with respect to their personal life choices and sharpens their cognitive skills for making these choices" (15). It is especially pertinent for advisors who work with UTEP's student demographic to understand students holistically and deliver advising as a literacy practice to ensure students' consider how the college experience will enhance their future quality of life, holistically, not just vocationally. In short, advisors must be trained to finesse conversations that encourage students to get—and stay—academically and socially engaged in the college experience; to establish clear academic pathways to degree completion; and understand the realities of a financial aid package and satisfactory academic progress.

Whenever colleges and universities move to transform their advising models, advisors will require significant training to rethink not only how they deliver advising to students, but to rethink their own philosophies about advising. I believe change—inherent culture change—is possible. Like Victor Villanueva, I believe rhetoric is the means by which significant cultural change is possible. Villanueva asserts that “language used consciously, a matter of rhetoric, is a principal means—perhaps *the* means—by which change can begin to take place” (121). Villanueva is referring to the classroom as a site for change; however, “the rhetorical includes writing, *a means of learning, of discovery* (emphasis mine); it includes literature, the discoveries of others” (121). For Villanueva the classroom is an ideal site for using rhetoric to affect change. For me, the professional advisors are an ideal group for using rhetoric to affect change in our students' experience. By means of learning and of discovery—by means of rhetoric—advisors are trained to counter the deficit-based ideologies that limit students' abilities to navigate higher education through the asset-based lens that recognizes the talents and experiences students bring to higher education as valuable capital.

In 2017, the academic advising center prepared to simultaneously implement the holistic advising as literacy model and engage in an ongoing wrap-around training designed to cover the significant expectations of the advising as literacy model in varying stages of development. This included immediately training advisors to understand that advising is the gateway to student engagement and thus, to retention. It was important, however, to ensure that advisors understood that while advising is key to retention and student success, the advising as literacy model was not designed just to meet institutional retention and completion outcomes. The goal of the advising as literacy model is to provide every student personalized, integrated advising from admission through graduation and ensure every student has the opportunity to build the literacies to move forward through higher education while balancing all the dimensions of their own lives.

In July 2017, advisors participated in a day long High Impact Practices Training organized to provide advisors with an intensive education session about what the specific High Impact Practices are, at UTEP, and why they are a significant part of student success. Many veteran advisors were unfamiliar with the variety of high impact practices offered at UTEP such as, the first-year experience course, learning communities, on-campus employment, internships, research and creative activity, community engagement, study abroad, student leadership and the capstone experience. In addition, the high impact practice training introduced the role advisors would play in connecting students to these engagement opportunities. The High Impact Practices campus partners provided thorough information about each high impact practice—what they are, what benefits are gained by engaging in each, and how the new advising model would incorporate engagement opportunities into each student’s advising experience.

Advisors had not previously understood advising to be a conduit for facilitating student engagement. Through the advising as literacy model and working with students in the context of



their lives, advisors can direct students to appropriate engagement opportunities and create academic and engagement plans that provide students clear pathways to degree completion. In order to do this, advisors had to understand what high impact practices were available on campus and why engagement opportunities are meaningful to students' higher education experience. The goal of the initial training session was to introduce advisors to the High Impact Practice's and to facilitate a more thorough understanding of—and discussion about—creating relevant and appropriate academic and co-curricular plans with students.

In fall 2017, three significant changes were implemented that were new for advisors, some of who had years of experience in the previous model, and that each advisor had to learn and train in. The first major change was the implementation of centralized advising for all first-time students, transfers, and returning students based upon a cohort model where each advisor is assigned a cohort of students for whom they are responsible for the first 45 hours of enrollment. Each advisor has a cohort of students, at varying risk levels, and are responsible for creating academic and co-curricular plans with their assigned students.

A cohort model is crucial for an asset-based approach to advising as it individualizes the experience for every student. Rather than an assembly-line advising system where students are served as a collective, the cohort assignments ensure advisors understand the context of each student's situation through the individualized framework. Advisors became responsible not only for the actual academic advising for major choice, course selection, and degree completion; *and* for the co-curricular advising—working with students to choose engagement opportunities that align with their interests, aspirations and commitments, but for facilitating academic, financial, and social literacy-building with each of their students.

The second change implemented in fall 2017, was bridging the financial reality of students' lives with their academic and social realities through advising by integrating the financial social work model to facilitate students' basic understanding of financial literacy and aid packaging. Advisors and the Master of Social Work (MSW) interns were trained in understanding and creating Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) plans to ensure students know the expectations for keeping a financial aid package. The federal government requires that students meet satisfactory academic progress to be eligible for continued federal financial aid (PELL). SAP plans have historically been utilized at UTEP when students are on academic probation and in jeopardy of losing financial aid.

In an effort to assist students with financial literacy about the expectations and requirements for receiving federal financial aid, advisors were trained to establish SAP plans with each of their students during their first term of enrollment. In addition, advisors and the MSW interns have had to learn to identify the extraordinary circumstances that impact students' financial realities (unexpected illness, transportation issues, homelessness, etc.) and learn what additional resources are available to assist students experiencing unexpected financial hardships such as campus emergency aid programs that include a short-term, no interest loan program (Paydirt Loan Program).

Finally, the third and most significant change implemented was incorporating information and data-driven interventions into advising sessions by utilizing the advising as literacy framework through the advisors' portal. The online advisors' portal where the advising as literacy framework is housed and managed by CIERP was an entirely new tool for advisors. It was imperative that advisors understood the framework was not a predictive analytical tool designed to provide a prediction of what each student's experience, retention rate, and likelihood

of success would be. The framework is only a tool to provide a snapshot into a student's background and to accelerate the personalization of the advising interaction. By learning what assets and cultural wealth, what interests, aspirations, and commitments, students bring to campus, advisors have the ability to provide personalized attention, immediately, and eliminate delays in conversation and communication that create awkward and impersonal interaction. Advisors were trained in how to incorporate information from the portal quickly and seamlessly into advising sessions; in how to determine what information is critical to note in the portal; and in how to understand the value of the portal in our new advising as literacy philosophy.

In May 2018, UTEP hired seven new professional advisors, all of whom held a Bachelor's degree or higher, and organized a comprehensive weeklong training—the *Advisor Training Institute*—to integrate the new and existing advising staff. The goal of the weeklong training institute was to provide a broad overview of the advising as literacy model, and to introduce advisors to the cross-campus partners who are an integral part of the advising as literacy philosophy. In conjunction with a colleague in student affairs, I delivered an intensive training and education session that began with the broad historical context of UTEP including the access and excellence mission, provided overviews from each of the colleges, from Student Affairs, Enrollment Services, and Financial Aid, included a daylong training in high impact practices and ended with a workshop dedicated to exploring Gallup's Strengths Finders and creating individual advising philosophies.

The ongoing training and extensive onboarding of new advisors has been essential to the early success of the advising as literacy model. Understanding the advising as literacy framework is challenging because it does the reverse of what most models and programs based on data analytics do. The advising as literacy model does not use student data to drive how advisors

deliver advising. Rather through the advising as literacy framework, advisors process what actions or interventions are appropriate based on a student's information. The framework is refining how advisors think about advising for each individual student because it is not an artificial intelligence tool that will tell advisors what actions or interventions must be taken to predict a specific outcome. The advising as literacy framework relies on the knowledge and training of advisors to confirm hunches or perceive new approaches to mitigating students' risk factors.

Like all models, the advising as literacy model is limited. The complexities of our students' lives are too complicated to automate advising at UTEP. Advising must be personalized and individualized to serve the needs of UTEP's student demographic. The advising as literacy approach is proving, at least early on, to be quite reliable. It provides advisors the insight and opportunity to work with students in the context of their own complex lives to make adjustments in spaces that can impact each student's condition for success.

## **Chapter 4 – Early Results and Challenges**

The purpose of this project is to examine a new model of advising that was implemented at an HSI and is grounded in students' cultural capital and sociocultural literacies. Specifically, this model put theory into practice and reframed advising as a literacy practice that facilitates opportunities for students to acquire the navigational and cultural capital required to navigate the complex structures of higher education. In "The Case of a Holistic Approach to Promoting Student Success, Joe Cuseo says that "promoting student success (e.g., persistence to graduation and academic achievement requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond strictly the academic or intellectual dimension of student development to address the student in a holistic (whole-person) fashion" (1).

In 2012, first-year retention at UTEP began to decline and fell to 68% in 2014. In 2013, UTEP's Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning (CIERP) began to analyze the first year data in new ways and identified refined insights about the relationship between student finances, employment, engagement, course-taking patterns, academic success, and retention. CIERP's analysis revealed that each student had unique conditions that needed to be addressed to ensure success. As such, it was clear that a more proactive, individualized, holistic advising approach was needed to increase first-term and first-year success.

Similarly, Cuseo asserted that less than half of student attrition can be predicted by academic factors such as test scores and grade point average. In fact, Cuseo says, "student retention and persistence to degree completion are strongly influenced by factors that are not strictly cognitive or academic in nature" (1). CIERP determined this and we know it still to be

true at UTEP. As such, over years of research UTEP's research team identified the primary indicators and elements of students' lives—their interests, their aspirations, their commitments and unique needs—that significantly impact students' decision-making. Through the framework of these four dimensions of students' lives, advisors are able to identify and advocate for academic interventions, financial solutions, and high-impact engagement. By understanding the unique characteristics and dimensions of UTEP students' lives, advisors now have the tools and ability to assist students in managing the circumstances and complexities of their lives.

#### **4.1 Preliminary Project Impact**

The integrated redesign of advising at UTEP is an innovative project that has dramatically changed the culture and delivery of advising for all incoming students in their first 45 hours in just one year. The goal is to equalize the likelihood for success for middle and high-risk students to that of low risk students through advising as literacy. In the advising as literacy framework, first time full-time, part-time and transfer students are assigned a risk score based upon a statistical model that estimates student risk on multiple variables that estimates the likelihood of departure. UTEP's Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning (CIERP) has engaged in years of research analyzing student departure (drop-out, stop-out, transfer), student return, and student graduation (completion from the original institution) to identify sets of characteristics that students' would exhibit for each type of expected risk of departure. In the model, predictor variables are included to examine their impact on student departure, re-enrollment, and graduation behaviors.

The variables serve to provide a composite estimated risk-of-departure score, categorized as low risk, middle risk, and high risk, that advisors can use to make sense, initially, of a student's situation. While variables such as academic preparation and financial aid are

considered in the risk model, other variables that make up the complex fabric of students' lives also significantly impact students' complicated decision-making patterns. Students are assigned to advisors, and stratified only by their estimated risk level, to ensure each advisor's cohort has similar distribution of student risk. Through the framework, advisors are able to manage their cohorts, by risk, and assess each individual student's dimensions to ensure advising as literacy meet the conditions of each student's situation. One of the key elements of a student's estimated risk is that the variables used to determine the risk are always changing. This is where the model relies on the knowledge and training of advisors to understand a student's risk at any given moment and make adjustments in advising, accordingly.

In the first year of implementation of the advising as literacy project (2017-2018) the academic advising center organizational structure consisted of a leadership team comprised of one director, two assistant directors, two coordinators, and seven full-time professional advisors. The three-year project goal was to ensure advisor cohort sizes of no more than 275 students. During the initial year of the advising as literacy model implementation, the seven advisors had cohort sizes of approximately 400 students. The leadership team were each assigned a smaller cohort of between 75 and 100 students. The goal was to implement the new model and continue to achieve overall increases in term-to-term retention for the institution. However, beyond overall retention, the objective was to increase term-to-term retention to at least 80% among the three risk level categories: low, middle, and high.

Based on funding from the UT System Quantum Leap grant UTEP received to implement the advising redesign, we hired seven new advisors in spring 2018. In fall 2018, when we implemented year two of the advising as literacy model the academic advising center structure had grown to include the leadership team and fourteen full-time professional advisors. During

year two of the advising as literacy model the advisor cohort sizes have decreased from approximately 400 to approximately 280 students. The leadership team continue to manage cohort sizes of approximately 75 students each.

#### **4.2 Advisor Impact—First Year**

While the data is preliminary and based upon only the first term and first year of the 2017-18 academic year, and the first term of the 2018-19 academic year, the evidence of improving first-term and first year retention through advising as literacy is very promising. UTEP recorded the highest term-to-term (fall 2017 to spring 2018) retention for all students since we began tracking the metric eleven years ago: 87.7%. The chart below shows UTEP’s historical growth in term-to-term retention—approximately 2% in six years—from 2012 through 2018.

Table 4.1: UTEP First Term Retention Rates

Fall Term	Fall 2012	Fall 2103	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018
First-time FT Enrollment	2713	2691	2908	2950	3006	3084	
First Term Retention	86.2%	85.9%	86.5%	86.6%	86.4%	87.6%	88.0%

The most significant development in assessing term-to-term retention through the advising as literacy model, however, is the ability to assess the retention rates of each advisor’s cohort. In 2017-2018, which was year one of the advising as literacy project implementation, the expected first-term retention rate for high-risk students was assessed as 50%. In fall 2017, two advisors achieved 90% retention and one advisor achieved 88% retention with their cohort of high-risk students. The expected first-term retention rate for middle risk students in year one was assessed



as 58%. In fall 2017, three advisors achieved 90% retention and one advisor achieved 87% retention with their cohort of middle risk students. Finally, the expected first-term retention rate for low risk students in year one was assessed as 78%. In fall 2017, two advisors achieved 97% retention, one advisor achieved 98% retention, and one advisor actually achieved 100% retention with their cohort of low risk students.

The charts below demonstrate the impact the advising as literacy model is having on individual students in the highest risk group. The first chart includes the cohorts of the highest risk students from the original advisors who implemented the model in fall 2017. The second chart includes the cohorts of highest risk students from the new advisors who were hired for the second year of implementation in fall 2018. The model was designed to provide advisors the opportunity to have an impact with individual students, whatever their estimated risk, and the early results demonstrate this is happening.

Advisor	Risk Level	Cohort Size	First Term Expected #	First Term Expected %	First Term Actual #	First Term Actual%
Vet Advisor 1	High	12	4	26.0	11	91.7
Vet Advisor 2	High	9	3	37.9	8	88.9
Vet Advisor 3	High	26	10	41.4	23	88.5
Vet Advisor 4	High	21	8	41	18	85.7
Vet Advisor 5	High	20	7	37.7	16	80
Vet Advisor 6	High	17	7	44.7	13	76.5
Vet Advisor 7	High	25	9	39.3	19	76.0

Figure 4.1: Retention of High Risk Students by Advisor – Fall 2017

Advisor	Risk Level	Cohort Size	First Term Expected #	First Term Expected %	First Term Actual #	First Term Actual%
New Advisor 1	High	35	16	47	32	91.4
New Advisor 2	High	36	17	48.8	30	83.3
New Advisor 3	High	34	16	48.9	25	73.5
New Advisor 4	High	36	17	48.8	24	66.7
New Advisor 5	High	37	17	47.6	24	64.9
New Advisor 6	High	17	8	50.4	11	64.7
New Advisor 7	High	32	16	50.2	19	59.4

Figure 4.2: Retention of High Risk Students by Advisor – Fall 2018

The first chart below provides an overview of the leadership teams' cohorts and the overall retention results achieved by each person. The third and fourth columns provide what the actual first term retention achieved by each advisor was by actual number and percentages of students who reenrolled from fall 2017, to spring 2018. The fifth and sixth columns include what the actual first year retention achieved by each advisor was by actual number and percentages of students who reenrolled from spring 2018, to fall 2018.

Advisor	Cohort Size	FT Actual #	FT Actual %	1Y Actual #	1Y Actual %
Coordinator	84	80	95.2	69	82.1
Director	75	64	85.3	54	72
Coordinator	83	70	84.3	57	68.7
A. Director	77	64	83.1	56	72.7
A. Director	80	66	82.5	49	61.3

Figure 4.3: Retention by Advisor - Academic Year 2017-18

The second chart includes the overview of the original advisors—the veteran advisors—who were in place prior to the advising redesign and implementation. In both charts, the information is organized from the highest first term retention rate achieved by advisor to lowest first term retention rate achieved by advisor in fall 2017. Providing tangible evidence of advisors' impact on students' persistence has been educational and enlightening as advising center staff also understand new levels of assessment of their performance.

Advisor	Cohort Size	FT Actual #	FT Actual %	1Y Actual #	1Y Actual %
Vet Advisor 1	174	159	91.4	132	75.9
Vet Advisor 2	181	163	90.1	126	69.6
Vet Advisor 3	108	97	89.8	84	77.8
Vet Advisor 4	160	141	88.1	116	72.5
Vet Advisor 5	172	150	87.2	123	71.5
Vet Advisor 6	171	148	86.5	121	70.8

Figure 4.4: Retention by Advisor - Academic Year 2017-18

Similarly, we were able to assess the retention rates of each of the new advisors' cohorts from fall 2018. The charts below provide an overview of the advisors who were hired in spring 2018, trained and assigned a cohort of first-time students in fall 2018. In this case, the third and fourth columns provide what the actual first term retention achieved by each advisor was by actual number and percentages of students who reenrolled from fall 2018, to spring 2019. For the newer advisors who have not complete a full academic year with their assigned cohorts, the fifth and sixth columns include the expected first year retention by number of students and percentages estimated by the model for each advisor.

Advisor	Cohort Size	FT Actual #	FT Actual %	1Y Exp. #	1Y Exp. %
N Advisor 1	208	191	91.8	155	74.9
N Advisor 2	213	192	90.1	155	73.1
N Advisor 3	144	127	88.2	107	74.3
N Advisor 4	223	194	87	169	75.8
N Advisor 5	219	190	86.8	159	72.8
N Advisor 6	214	182	85	159	74.4
N Advisor 7	229	192	83.8	171	74.7

Figure 4.5: Retention by Advisor - Academic Year 2018-19

Again, providing tangible evidence of advisors' impact on students' persistence has been educational for everyone. The tangible evidence provided by the model also demonstrated that some advisors achieve higher outcomes with different risk groups. Although all of the advisors—veteran and newcomers—received the same training, the model provides insight into which advisors seem to exceed expectations with certain students and others do not. We are just

beginning to assess the strategies used by high-achieving advisors to utilize as part of the training for year three of the advising as literacy implementation. The data provides the opportunity for a shared learning process among the advisors where they can learn from one another what strategies and adjustments work for certain risk groups.

What we have learned in the second year of implementation is that we can provide target enrollments for advisors to work toward based on estimated retention rates produced in the model. Through the model we can determine, by risk level, the number of students each advisor needs to reenroll to reach a certain enrollment target. Beyond just meeting institutional enrollment and retention outcomes, the targets provide the advisors an additional layer of information about who is likely to reenroll from spring to fall with some proactive intervention from the advisor, and who is not so likely. By giving the advisors the targets, now, it provides them time to assess what risk factors are influencing a student's potential decision not to reenroll and help mitigate that risk. Advisors have the ability to communicate, early, and provide assistance and, hopefully, resolution to students who may be wavering on reenrollment for fall.

Cuseo points out that the first year of college “can be a very stressful stage of the college experience because it involves a major life transition, requiring not only academic adjustments, but also involves significant changes in social relationships, emotional experiences, and personal identity” (4). For over a decade UTEP has been trying to figure out how to equalize success rates for all risk groups. The first year of the advising as literacy model is the first evidence that we can create the conditions to maximize the opportunities for all students to have success. What the advising as literacy model has demonstrated is that with the right insights advisors can facilitate improved academic, financial, and social literacies to help students manage the dimensions and

the challenges of their lives and acquire the cultural capital to remain enrolled and on track to degree completion.

The advising as literacy model seems to have had a significant impact on students, thus far. The model guarantees that every student has a designated advisor who is responsible for bridging students' academic, financial and social realities, in one place. The advisors are trained to utilize the framework to make sense of the variables of each student's life and help prioritize what literacies are in most need of improving. In addition, utilizing the MSW interns as partners to deconstruct financial questions, challenges and situations has proven to be very effective. Students engage with their advisors in new ways and know, without doubt, that a member of the institution cares about their progress and success.

In *Leaving College*, Tinto asserts that, "students are more likely to become committed to the institution, and therefore stay, when they come to understand that the institution is committed to them. There is no ready programmatic substituted for this sort of commitment. Programs cannot replace the absence of high quality, caring, and concerned faculty and staff" (176). I argue that this has been one of the early impacts of the advising as literacy model. Advisors are responsible for a cohort of students through the first 45 hours of enrollment, which provides them the opportunity to invest in students' improved academic, financial, and social literacies and help them build the cultural capital to navigate the higher education system to obtain a degree.

#### **4.3 Campus-Wide Project Results**

An unexpected result discovered in the first year of the advising as literacy project was how the collective efforts of cross-campus partnerships facilitated a complete, and swift, culture change in advising and student success on campus. The integrated redesign of advising that was

implemented in fall 2017, bridges students' academic, financial, and social realities through cross-campus partnerships that include the:

- Academic Advising Center
- Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning (CIERP)
- Provost's Office
- Student Affairs
- Office of Financial Aid
- Department of Social Work

In his case for promoting student success through a holistic approach, Cuseo asserts that, “institutional efforts at promoting student retention are more effective when academic and student affairs professionals collaborate in the delivery of educational and support programs” (2). Communication and cooperation among academic and student affairs is essential to promoting student success. For more than a decade, there has been a strong commitment to fostering collaboration between the divisions of academic and student affairs from UTEP's President, Dr. Diana Natalicio. In fact, the organizational structure of each division has evolved to normalize the partnership. Tinto noted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Leaving College* that “ultimately the success of our actions on behalf of student learning and retention depends upon the daily actions of all members of the institution, not on the sporadic efforts of a few officially designated members of a retention committee” (212). The expectation at UTEP has always been that all student success efforts are led and facilitated by faculty and staff members from both academic and student affairs.

In addition to Dr. Natalicio's mission to have a transformative impact on student success—on students' lives—at UTEP, in 2015, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

(THECB) launched its 60x30TX Initiative aimed at improving education levels and positioning Texas among the highest achieving states in the US. 60x30TX was designed to be student-centered in order to affect the future income, opportunities, and resources for the state and its residents. The 60x30TX Strategic Plan articulated four goals, each with targets that each state institution would have to meet in order to achieve improved higher education attainment rates among its students:

- **The Overarching Goal:** 60x30. By 2030, 60 percent of Texans ages 25-34 will have a certificate or degree.
  - **The Second Goal:** Completion. By 2030, at least 550,000 students in that year will complete a certificate, associate, bachelors, or masters from an institution of higher education in Texas.
  - **The Third Goal:** Marketable Skills. By 2030, all graduates from Texas public institutions of higher education will have completed programs with identified marketable skills.
  - **The Fourth Goal:** Student Debt. By 2030, undergraduate student loan debt will not exceed 60 percent of first-year wages for graduates of Texas public institutions.
- (60x30TX Strategic Plan for Higher Education)

It would be impossible for any institution to achieve the targets published by the THECB without a cross-campus partnership approach to student programming and services.

As a result of the THECB 60x30TX plan, William McRaven, the UT System Chancellor from January 2015 through May 2018, rolled out a comprehensive system-wide framework of nine initiatives called “quantum leaps.” The nine quantum leaps were McRaven’s vision for “catapult[ing] the UT System into the forefront of higher education, research and health care,



benefitting the citizens of Texas, the nation and the world” (UT System). One of the nine quantum leaps was student success that would align with the THECB’s 60x30 Plan through a system-wide completion agenda grounded in three pillars of commitments to students: *finances, belonging, and advising*.

Thankfully, partnerships between academic and student affairs had been built at UTEP to promote enhanced student programming and services based on the vision of Dr. Natalicio because in 2015, the directive for student success and degree completion from the state and from the system was clear. No institution could achieve the expected state and system outcomes without strong alliances and partnerships among academic and student affairs. UTEP was experiencing a *kairotic moment*—an opportune time in higher education when significant change to improve the quality of students’ experience was possible, provided campus partnerships were aligned.

After a decade of recommendations from five different reviewing entities, that produced little change in advising, the immediate impact of the advising as literacy model implementation is the direct result of the coordination and collaboration among the academic and student affairs partnerships on campus. And from the commitment to students and institutions by the UT System. The collective efforts have facilitated a culture change and signaled across campus that student success is a philosophy, and can be a self-sustaining enterprise, not just another transitory initiative or intervention.

A second unexpected result of the advising as literacy redesign project was the immediate engagement of students and faculty in the new vision for campus-wide advising. The fundamental idea behind UTEP’s holistic advising as literacy redesign was to individualize and personalize the college experience and to facilitate opportunities for students to access the

navigational and cultural capital required to navigate the complex structures of higher education. As such, the holistic advising redesign has automatically engaged more students simply by assigning them an advisor who is charged with providing support through the first 45 hours. UTEP students are engaged with the same advisor, for multiple visits during a single semester, for the first time in decades.

Additionally, as part of our advising as literacy mission, advising has begun to engage faculty in partner with advisors to create early alerts for assistance and support with students' non-academic issues (e.g. absences, behaviors, etc.). Through the advisor framework, we are learning what matters in our students' lives and what issues impact our students' lives. The advisor framework is linked to an online portal through which faculty members can send email directly to an advisor. Advisors names and email addresses are linked to their assigned students in the faculty course roster. By accessing their course roster through the online portal, faculty members can identify a student's advisor and by simply clicking the advisor's name, send an email regarding the concerns. Engaging faculty in early alert protocols that connect them to advisors, particularly in students' first 45 hours, is showing to have a significant impact on students' acquiring the literacies necessary to cultivate the social and cultural capital to understand and maneuver higher education. Based upon an email from a faculty member, the advisors reach out to their student in an effort to assist with whatever the issue may be.

Finally, training advisors in the advising as literacy model was a daunting task. What was not anticipated was the interest from campus constituents to assist in the training. We have engaged faculty, academic administrators and student affairs staff across campus to educate and train existing and new advisors in their respective areas to produce the holistic advising as literacy approach. We hosted a daylong high impact practices training, a weeklong, cross-

campus training institute for advisors during the first week of May that included representatives from every academic college, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Enrollment Services, Financial Aid, and the President’s Office, and have partnered with numerous student affairs administrators to provide one-day focused trainings on utilizing individual strengths.

#### 4.4 Challenges to Resolve

While UTEP’s first-term retention has improved each fall to spring from fall 2012 to fall 2018, the *first year* retention rate has not. As was mentioned above, the first-year retention began to decline in 2012, and fell to 67.60% in 2013. The table below provides a snapshot of UTEP’s first year retention rates from 2012, through 2017.

Table 4.2: UTEP First Year Retention Rates

Year	Fall 2012	Fall 2103	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017
First-time FT Enrollment	2713	2691	2908	2950	3006	3084
First Year Retention	69.90%	67.60%	71.80%	74.20%	73.90%	73.00%

UTEP’s first year retention rates from 2012, through 2017, demonstrate what CIERP’s research articulated: students are more likely to drop out or stop out in the spring semester. The team in CIERP also determined that students who stop out once are more likely to stop out again and the chances of returning to the institution decreased the longer students remained out of school. Improved first year retention is the greatest challenge for advisors and is what we are targeting in year two, for fall 2019, of this project. That said, the challenge for the advising as literacy model is educating and training advisors (and students) to identify what risk has not been

mitigated, what risks have increased and what adjustments students need to make—academically, financially, socially—to remain enrolled from spring to fall.

Students' participation in the advising as literacy model is also a challenge. While many students have been engaged in the new way of advising, participation from the highest risk students, (who are the students who will benefit the most from the model) continues to be a challenge. The demographic is complex. However, if advisors can help students gain the academic, financial and social literacies to acquire the navigational capital necessary to successfully manage higher education, it will improve the lives of students and residents in the region.

Advisors protocol and delivery of the advising as literacy model is also a challenge. While training has been extensive and is ongoing, learning to internalize an entirely new philosophy and set of processes for advising is challenging for advisors. Preparing what to address and cover in each student's advising session; how many sessions to expect for each student based on risk level; and finessing the interaction to be meaningful but also efficient. The advising as literacy model has been a complete change in thinking and behavior for advisors. The advising as literacy model requires significant investment and commitment from the advisors to realize the goals and outcomes.

#### **4.5 Budgetary Investment and Commitment**

It would be negligent not to include budgetary constraints as a challenge of the advising as literacy model. The model requires significant investment in human resources to implement effectively. And not just funding to create new and more advisor positions. Determining what salary is appropriate for an entry-level advisor position, in this model, is a hurdle. Particularly, when there are existing advisors—veteran advisors—who historically have not made enormous salaries. Creating a baseline of equitable and competitive salaries for entry-level advisors, that

did not exceed existing advisors' salaries, was the first hurdle. But working to create a structure that encourages growth in position and salary is difficult in the current budget climate. Without appropriate salaries and growth opportunities, it is difficult to keep high-level thinkers and performers employed in advisor positions.

We have experienced some attrition from the first round of new advisors hired for this very reason and it is frustrating. The institution invests significant resources in onboarding and training new advisors for the advising as literacy model. The initial learning process for positions working in the model is about one year. Losing advisors after extensive training and exposure to the framework, for financial gain elsewhere, disrupts the student cohorts and the overall culture of the advising center. Developing opportunities for professional growth and sustaining the potential for financial growth is a challenge being addressed going into year three of the advising as literacy model.

#### **4.6 Putting Theory into Practice**

Advising theories have an odd history. There has been much discussion in the field of advising about what constitutes a theory and if there are actually advising theories, at all. It is not surprising as advising is very much a practitioners business. According to Don G. Creamer, there are no established theories of academic advising but numerous theories from education and the social sciences have provided a foundation for the academic advising field since it became, as Frost articulated, a defined and examined activity in the 1960s and 1970s. Creamer defines academic advising as “an educational activity that depends on valid explanations of complex student behaviors and institutional conditions to assist college students in making and executing educational and life plans” (18). Creamer argues there are three theories important to the practice

of academic advising: psychosocial theories, cognitive development theories, and typological theories (20).

There is no doubt that academic advisors have a broad range of theoretical perspectives and approaches from which to choose. Without a model that has been deliberately and meaningfully designed to put theory into practice, without focused training for advisors to facilitate the delivery of the model, and without significant institutional commitment, advising becomes a necessary transactional process. The advising as literacy model utilizes theory that aligns with the mission and values of the institution, as well as UTEP's student demographic, and through the advising framework enables advisors to identify, and quickly make sense of, the inherent talents and values students bring to campus. Through the student-centered framework, advisors assist students with applying their assets and strengths but also developing the academic, financial, and social literacies specific to managing the challenges of the university structure.

## **Chapter 5 – Broad Implications**

The advising as literacy project is ongoing so definitive conclusions are not available; however, based on the research and implementation, thus far, I argue the broader implications of this project are clear. By developing an advising model through the theoretical lenses of cultural capital and sociocultural literacy, institutions can re-envision deficit-model thinking through advising as a literacy practice. With increased personalized interactions between advisors and students, advising as a literacy practice can be the gateway to engagement in the college experience and to students' sense of belonging. In which case, advising as literacy will affect student retention and student success.

More and more students face financial and social challenges that influence their abilities to balance the complexities and circumstances of their lives. Advising should be a key component of the system—the synergy—for helping students manage these challenges and persist to completion.

### **5.1 Adjusting the Model for Other Institutions**

To realize a transformative vision of advising that will serve students individually based on their interests, aspirations, and commitments, institutions must fundamentally change their philosophy and structure of advising. I argue that an advising model should align with the values, mission, and culture of the institution and through a theoretical framework based on the characteristics of the students (data), put into organic practice a comprehensive approach to facilitating the literacy students need to navigate higher education and persist to graduation.

Advising is a key element in a student's college experience and should be unique to the culture and demographics of that institution. Redesigning the delivery of advising to provide proactive, individualized support to UTEP students who are predominantly first-generation

(51%) and low income (73% Pell eligible, 37% from households with an annual income of less than \$20,000), the advising as literacy model is providing the conditions for this student demographic to be successful. The integrated approach engages students up front through holistic advising that focuses on improving academic, financial, and social literacies and empowers students to cultivate the cultural capital necessary to move through higher education and develop a competitive edge for life after graduation. The cultural conventions and literacies of a campus matter just as the assets and literacies of the student demographic matter. An institution has to be aware of the literacies its students need in order to define what advising means for students on that campus.

## **5.2 Cross-Campus Partnerships Matter**

Based on the first year results, the advising as literacy model at UTEP shows great promise. The immediate impact of the advising redesign is a result of the collaborative organizational structure that has allowed for greater policy and process influence. What I have learned is that the organizational structure is key as advising is influenced and impacted—positively and negatively—by many factors on campus. The investment in developing cross-campus partnerships and multiple reporting structures—the President’s office, the Provost’s office, Student Affairs—has provided diverse perspectives and varying levels of authority to influence change. In addition, institutions must have strong institutional research units that also work alongside academic and student affairs and the unit that implements an advising as literacy model. Institutional research units have the key data on students’ demographics and behavioral characteristics that are necessary for developing a framework that provides advisors the context for each student’s situation.

As a result, strong collaborative campus partnerships establish shared responsibility and campus as a whole—faculty, staff, students—is more keenly aware of the importance of student



success and that not only improved, but also focused, deliberate advising as literacy increases the likelihood of retention and success. Assisting students in identifying meaning in a college education, aligning their interests, aspirations and commitments with a clear academic and co-curricular plans, and striking the right balance between their communities of influence will positively impact institutional retention and completion rates but will also significantly impact students' future social development and financial success.

### **5.3 Limitations of the Advising as Literacy Model**

Academic advising continues to evolve, professionally and programmatically on campuses across the country. Institutions are searching for and developing ideal advising models to serve their student populations, and address student success outcomes. While the advising as literacy model being implemented at UTEP shows promise, as with all models there are limitations. No one model fits all institutions, or even all HSI's. Moreover, initiating the campus-wide culture change required to transform an advising structure, requires nothing short of a kairotic moment. Institutional mission, campus partnerships, and financial resources must align under dedicated advising leadership. UTEP has utilized funds from the UT System Quantum Leap grant for strategic implementation of the holistic advising as literacy model to provide personalized support for all students, especially those from historically underserved populations.

The advising as literacy model requires significant institutional investment in human resources to implement effectively. Implementing a cohort-based advising model for a large four-year HSI requires funding to create new and more professional advisor positions with salary packages that are appropriate for the institution and competitive for the geographic area. Historically, professional advisors are not well compensated for their work. In addition, funding has to be sustainable in order to create a structure that encourages growth in position and salary.

Without appropriate salaries and growth opportunities, it is difficult to keep high-level thinkers and performers employed in advisor positions. The advising as literacy model requires significant investment and commitment from the advisors to realize the goals and outcomes.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

The advising as literacy project has demonstrated that connecting theory to advising practice in a meaningful way is necessary. A gap exists between connecting advising theories to the day-to-day practice of advising. In the interest of not just students' retention, persistence, and success in higher education, but in the interest of impacting students' social and cultural capital and thereby their social status, it is essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice in a meaningful way. The evolution of advising throughout history has offered practitioners valuable insight into theories and issues that continue to be of relevant concern to higher education. Nevertheless, professionals must understand theoretical frameworks, continue the research necessary to generate effective ways of understanding future generations of learners, and implement advising practices that are framed in the assets and community cultural wealth our students bring to campus.

With appropriate training and resources, advisors can use information provided by students and data collected by institutional research to elevate the quality of asset-based advising to work with every student based on their individual interests, aspirations, and commitments.

Utilizing advising as a literacy practice, rather than a service or an exercise in gathering information, students will learn and develop the knowledge, behavior and skills required to identify with the ideologies embedded in the social structure of higher education. Students cannot access and successfully acquire the social, cultural and navigational capital necessary to

navigate the higher education system without first understanding and engaging in the social practices and ideologies of the institution. Advising as a literacy practice serves as a social force in the field of higher education preparing and empowering students to improve their social status through acquired social and cultural capital.

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## **Curriculum Vita**

Heather Smith earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and American Literature in 1996 and her Master of Arts degree in English and American Literature in 2003, from UTEP. She joined UTEP's PhD in Rhetoric and Composition program in 2014.

Heather created and was founding Director of the Miner Athlete Academic Center (MAAC), the first academic services center for student-athletes at UTEP. She has led efforts to improve academic success and personal development for student-athletes and been dedicated to inspiring and empowering young college athletes to believe in the value of higher education. While pursuing a doctoral degree, Heather was named Associate Vice President for Academic Advising and Student Support to lead the vision for integrated, holistic advising as part of an enhanced student success philosophy at UTEP, a position she still holds.

In 2014, Heather received the UTEP Distinguished Achievement Award for Service to Students. And in 2016, she was the recipient of a UT System Student Success Quantum Leap Grant to redesign advising at UTEP. Heather can be reached via email at [hsmith@utep.edu](mailto:hsmith@utep.edu).