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“So, What Do You Do?” Transformative Advising: Reconceptualizing the Role of Student
Government Advisors in Higher Education

by

Clyde Barnett III

Dissertation

Submitted to the College of Education
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Educational Leadership

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October 1, 2019
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Dedication

Ronn Griffith, my grandfather, is the first transformative advisor I have encountered in my life. I dedicate this project to him as he was an example of moral courage, truth, and radical love for others.

As I continue discovering more and more of what I do not know as a scholar, activist, and practitioner, I will always hold your blueprint and example close. Know that I am safe, and I am staying in good company.

Thank you for everything. Always. I love you and I will talk to you later.

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For anyone that I may have missed, charge it to my head and eyes, not my heart. I could write endlessly about those who have poured into me. I am grateful for each of you more than you know.

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how student government advisors and members of campus communities where they work, understand and conceptualize their critical duties and responsibilities, and reconceptualize this role as one critical in supporting campus advocacy and activism giving changes within the higher education landscape. Through the application of a 360-degree analysis approach, this study focused on the experiences of advisors serving in full-time, part-time, or voluntary capacities to student government organizations at three institutions in the Midwest. This study also introduces transformative advising as a viable model to be implemented by student government advisors and potentially others who support student organizations involved in advocacy and activism on campus.

Data collection procedures in this study included qualitative interviewing and document analysis procedures. Student government organizational constitutions, operating procedures (rule and protocols for day-to-day operation), and handbooks were collected and analyzed from each of the three institutions. The data analysis process took a pragmatic thematic analysis approach that collected data from transcribed conversations using quotes and common ideas, identified data patterns, and combined patterns into themes.

Completing and analyzing data collected from the semi-structured qualitative interviews illuminated the challenging nature of serving as the student government advisor by participants situated throughout each organization. Interpretation of the findings through the lens of challenges translated into role marginalization, tension, and power. Determining ways to support student activism on college and university campuses is a pressing matter and both supporting and challenging individuals that sit at the front lines of this work—the student government advisor—is critical. However, as illuminated by the findings, there is little focus on the role of the advisor

and ensuring there are structural supports from the institution to carry out their work in inclusive, transformative, and productive ways that benefit all members of the campus community.

Keywords: transformative advising, transformative leadership, student government, higher education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“We won’t be dealing with those issues again, will we?” A trustee asked following a public meeting, as the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement occurring across U.S. colleges and universities (Alterman, 2016) had rippled to our campus community and students wanted answers from university administration.

I did not know. I could not answer that question. Further, the students activated because of a major decision made by the board that did not include their voices and perspectives. While I felt that I should have an answer for a trustee, the reality was whether or not the students would bring “those issues” again was actually up to the trustee and their peers.

Campus Climate, Student Activism, and Student Government

Following the 2016 elections, college campuses have seen an increase in both race-based incidents and subsequent campus activism, even in places that are or have been historically quiet in this regard (Bauman, 2018). This has positioned or caused colleges and universities to consider how to navigate campus activism.

In 2017, the Education Advisory Board (EAB) issued a briefing on this matter for institutional leaders, noting colleges and universities are mostly reactionary to these occurrences. Changing demographics are noted as a reason for student activism to intensify, coupled with “increasingly high expectations from students” (p. 3). The report concludes with a recommendation for colleges and universities to develop a comprehensive response strategy and provides discussion questions for leadership teams.

Strategies that often comes from these teams have led to more activism, as students become enraged by the decisions of institutions, an example can be found in University of

Michigan's bias response team (Kozlowski, 2019). Coupled with these activism efforts, students turn to student governments as the voices of the student body to advocate on their behalf among administrators and faculty (Cuyjet, 1994). Student government advisors are often a hidden voice behind the scenes coaching and developing student leaders and tending to relationships with campus administrators (Cuyjet, 1994). Considering recent news, including budgetary challenges within in the University of Alaska (Brown & Mangan, 2019), and involvement of the student government organizations in voicing concerns and advocating for the student body occurs broadly.

A recent example of student government organizations and their advisors being in the throes of climate issues can be found at the University of Massachusetts, where the student government endorsed a letter calling upon the university to implement racial justice action across campus (Costache, 2018). The graduate student senate (graduate student government) endorsed this letter as well, calling upon the university to address racial incidents with clear procedures (Costache, 2018). It is often through the student government that administration and faculty understand the needs of the student body that represents student voice (Cuyjet, 1994). Maintaining freedom of speech and managing public scrutiny coupled with challenges of opposing views exacerbate campus climate issues. Some issues, however, should focus strictly on students—their needs, and their experiences on campuses generated by policy, practice, and ideology. As student government organizations, and their advisors, have roles in addressing campus activism, using some existing campus structures and making them tenable stands to propel higher education institutions.

Understanding Student Government Organizations

Student government organizations are often required to serve as the official student voice to campus administration and provider of some student services (Rath, 2005). Modern college student governments range in complexity from simple campus representative bodies to multifaceted entities providing a wide variety of purposes, interests, and services (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998). Often seen in their historical genesis as being “austere” in their purposes, student government organizations have become responsible for dealing with many important student concerns, including but not limited to student organization funding, and student programming and activities (Keppler & Robinson, 1993). Cuyjet (1994) stated the three main purposes of modern student governments are (a) governance as acceded by higher education institutions, (b) to be a provider of leadership experiences to all involved in the student government organization, and (c) to provide valuable co-curricular services to the student body.

Advising Student Government Leaders

Student leader success requires shared participation, ongoing leadership training, and constructive feedback, facilitated by skilled and dynamic role models (Rhatigan & Schuh, 1993). These role models must fully understand the student populations they serve and demonstrate proficiency in maximizing educational and developmental opportunities for their students (Cross, 1983). Consequently, the student government advisor has an important role in the success of student government organizations and in the leadership development of student government members, particularly as evidenced in the quality of their extracurricular learning (Kuh, Schuh, & Witt, 1991; McKaig & Polciello, 1987). While there are no set qualifications for faculty and staff who work with student organizations, Whipple and Murphy (2004) emphasized several preferred characteristics of this individual, including (a) an active undergraduate experience in

extracurricular activities, including leadership positions; (b) credentials from a graduate preparation program; and (c) organizational, verbal, and written communication skills coupled with abilities to relate to a variety of populations across the institution.

The student government advisor influences the potential success of student government leadership (Rath, 2005), and requires a multifaceted approach. Chavez's (1985) delineated responsibilities of student government advisors, including teaching a leadership course, serving as a consultant, attending mandatory meetings and events, and supervising clubs and organizations. Furthermore, Chavez viewed the role of advisors as being particularly demanding and complex with both formal and informal functions. Student government advisors must help students monitor correspondence, assure quality work, serve as an informational resource, assist in budgeting, facilitate ongoing functions, and arbitrate differences between campus constituencies.

If the assertions of Chavez (1985, as cited in Rath, 2005) and Rath (2005) inform an advisor's approach, then Northouse's (2007) definition of leadership as a "process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 6) is key in the discussion of the role of student government advisors and their professional preparation (Gutierrez, 2012). In student government advisor interviews, Boatman (1998) identified several key practices in effective advising including (a) sharing and making available information, (b) accessing resources, (c) encouraging mutual respect among community members, and (d) having the ability to make institutional impact. Miles and Miller (1997) reported the perceived needs of student government leaders included administrators' and advisors' respect of student government decisions and the need to create facilitative structures.

Although advisors of all types of student organizations share similar responsibilities, it has been stated that given the unique institutional charge of student government organizations, a highly effective student government advisor must possess several unique qualities, especially in their interactions with institutional authorities (Boatman, 1988). The student government advisor is viewed as a campus source for student leadership, training, and development, making the role a critical part of student success (Rath, 2005). Student government advisors are also dedicated leadership educators.

Student leaders need supervision and consultation as this allows students the opportunity to be involved in institutional governance and student-life activities on campus (Fortune, 2000). Student government advisors own a large share of the responsibility in developing students, preparing them for the future, and helping them identify their social role (Luckow & Turner, 1998). Kuh and Lund (1994) examined the benefits of what students gained from participating in student government organizations and found students who were involved with their student government association had a better affinity for their institution of higher education. Golden and Schwartz (1994) stated student government organizations are essential to the campus community. Replicating our nation's representative government process, student government organizations provide students with opportunities to view a political governing body in action and realize the importance of voting and participation. Golden and Schwartz also cited the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1990) in their stance that an active student government is vital to the preservation of the campus community.

Student Inclusion in Institutional Governance

The substantial training and preparation that student government advisors deliver assists student leaders in becoming equipped to participate in institutional governance. Advisors

involvement helps students understand institutional operations, community relationships, and government relationships (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). The rationale of this involvement is that such facilitation fulfills a moral obligation to operate as a community in which every member has a stake in the outcomes and health of the institution (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Student representatives sit on nearly all formal decision-making bodies, at every level, contributing to policymaking, and the administration of institutional affairs, including student affairs (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999).

Students contribute to the decisions of university committees by presenting information and perspectives, sharing knowledge, and arguing strongly for student interests (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Traditionally, the responsibility for governance has been assumed mainly by faculty and staff. However, the variety and complexity of tasks performed by universities require interdependence among students, staff, and faculty (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Students are directly impacted by institutional decision-making and have become actively involved in university governance to ensure that their voices are included in these decisions (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999).

Advantages, limitations, and issues associated with student participation in university decision-making have also been articulated. Factors inhibiting student involvement have included disrespect of administrators and faculty members for students participating in the process, student apathy, student transience, student immaturity, frequent absence of students from committee meetings, faculty and staff possessing limited knowledge and understanding of student experiences, the requirement of confidentiality, and the exclusion of students from sensitive issues (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Additionally, these disadvantages are perceived as preventing students from being effective participants in the decision-making process (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). The concepts and theories underlying participative decision-making, along with the writings on student rights and the legitimacy of student involvement, provide a convincing

rationale for student participation in governance (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Both faculty and student associations play a role in influencing policy, and their representatives often sit on major committees (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). As clients of their universities, and as individuals directly impacted by decision-making outcomes, students must be involved in decision-making processes. Faculty and staff need student input to make choices which are well-informed, and adequately responsive to the needs of the student body (Skolnik & Jones, 1997). The challenge, then, is to develop means of educating faculty and staff on the student role in governance and its criticality. This will assist in challenging and shifting negative attitudes toward student involvement and creating greater respect for the presence of student members on committees (Skolnik & Jones, 1997).

Regardless of positioning, working with and developing student leaders requires engagement with tailored training and support, and, active participation in promoting an understanding of the need for nuanced implementations of institutional policies and operational practices (Lowery, 1998). When contentious issues arise on campus, like campus climate challenges and student activism, a calculated response from the student government organization is often required. Student government advisors play an integral role in both formal and informal student responses amidst contention, providing much-needed guidance, training, and support. However, throughout all of these contributions, the efforts of the student government advisor remain unnoticed, misunderstood, or often even a mystery to members of the organization. Advisors playing an integral role raises several questions for consideration: (a) How are student government advisors selected, trained, and evaluated effectively if their roles are unclear? (b) How can student government advisors be considered primary sources for student leadership who cultivate environments for continual development if their work is unnoticed or undervalued? (c)

How does the lack of clarity around the role impact student learning and experiences in student government and working across the campus community?

Setting the Stage–Personal Narrative

Serving as a student government advisor at a large research institution presented lots of challenges. In many instances, I was met with situations I had never encountered before, including responding to national media network requests for statements, being named in potential lawsuits, and managing large scale student demonstration, much of which centered around navigating campus climate issues and activism. Literature on student government advisors has included specific characteristics of advisors, including service in student government during their undergraduate years (Whipple & Murphy, 2004). I was involved in student government in various capacities during undergrad; however, I was unprepared.

The extent to my activism as an undergraduate member of student government involved disrupting state representative meetings to protest higher education budget cuts at the state capital. Leaders of the student government organization organized demonstrations for student voices to be heard at the state level. State representative shared with the room that they welcomed meeting with each of us—we were altogether a group of 35—individually. What I thought might be a hostile situation was actually much more pleasant than I anticipated. Considering support from our institution, our student government advisor was involved in organizing and supporting the protest and went as far as standing with us in the meeting room.

Later, serving as advisor, student activism and institutional responses were drastically different, particularly after the 2016 election and the following uptick in racist campus incidents and other climate issues (Bauman, 2018). I was met with challenges I had never encountered before, and that I certainly did not know how to navigate as a student affairs professional. My

graduate preparation program did not prepare me for to advise through activism, and my professional organizations had seemingly only just begun to understand how to assist professionals across the country whose responsibilities often landed at “managing” campus activism. While my undergraduate and graduate school experiences were not exempt from racist and other campus incidents (i.e., racial slurs on walls, bullying, and social media challenges), things changed following the 2016 election. To attempt to address this, support students, be accountable to my colleagues, and act with any integrity, I had to change, too.

I suddenly was thrust into work that was largely assumed I knew how to do, which is why the trustee asked if I knew if these challenges would persist. I did not. Many in the division presumed my work involved keeping student leaders in control. It was quite the opposite, and most critical were the steps I took to build relationships with students, listen to their perspectives, and elevate student voices in my sphere of influence. I figured, if it were presumed that I had answers to solving challenges around navigating activism, I must possess the power to initiate the change that students wanted to see, and be brave enough to challenge perspectives that I, too, held against student leaders and activists.

I have focused my dissertation project on this topic because of both my personal and professional backgrounds as a Black researcher and practitioner in student affairs. As a Black practitioner, I am concerned about the steps taken in higher education to truly garner and consider student voices. I have sat in spaces across levels of the hierarchy, complicit, enraged, incensed, in agreeance, and argumentative over the ways that faculty and staff think about students. This thinking is often from a space that does not see students as co-constructors in their higher education experiences. Further, being Black in the midst of racist campus incidents that I

am often required to advise *through* presents additional levels of racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004).

As a Black researcher, I am concerned about the lack of attention dedicated to this area because much of the literature refers to surface-level steps to advising student groups and organizations. Some of our highly cited works do not mention how societal pressures impact campus experiences, nor do they discuss how these experiences are raced, classed, and gendered. I have also found campus activities offices are held responsible for delivering student leadership training and development activities but report weak or non-existent relationships with student government organizations themselves.

The goal of this research was to elevate the role of advisors, especially for advocacy and activism based groups, expose the high expectations (and often low-commitment) of advisors or those working around them, and to present a new advising model that critically *supports* student government in campus advocacy and activism by challenging ourselves to unpack and interrogate our biases, policy, and practice. The use of this model has the potential to better position institutions to understand the challenges that students face that often necessitates activism and push advisors beyond traditional methods of student and student group advising relationships.

This is not a model designed with preventing activism in mind. In many ways, this model encourages more advocacy and activism not only on behalf of students, but on behalf of the advisor, faculty, and staff as well. Further, I want to add an additional lens to what has been written on student government advisors that sees them as critical in achieving equitable practice for all students.

The Turning Point–Personal Narrative

As mentioned, I, too, have sat in spaces with peers, colleagues, superiors, and even student leaders biased in understanding and addressing challenges on campus. Unfortunately, it was not until challenges on campus impacted my own identity and experiences that I was propelled to fully adopt an activist approach to my work. Following the 2016 presidential election, my campus experienced an uptick in race-based incidents, subsequent activism, demands for the student government organization to act, and requests for the student government to remain “neutral.” One incident in particular was particularly impactful, as it involved an email sent to students in a particular college. The email targeted Black students on campus, threatening to kill them and praising the newly elected president. I felt impacted. I felt disheartened. I was angry. I wanted to do something.

Consulting with administrators and faculty and being one of a very few numbers of Black staff in my division at the time resulted in more directives and notions of *advising through* this issue. Further, communities that had been historically marginalized on campus had been expressing concerns with institutional responses to racist acts for some time. It seemed that while I was impacted by this experience in particular, it was not until then that I started to care. I had to change.

Problem

The role of student government advisors is crucial because they are viewed as the primary, or sole, point of contact for student leadership, training, and development (Rath, 2005) on many college and university campuses. This qualitative study proposes to understand how advisors, superiors, peers, student leaders, and colleagues conceptualize the role of advisors at universities in the Midwest.

As campus environments are experiencing increased levels of student activism in response to current events (Bauman, 2018), concerns around safety, freedom of speech, and even freedom to assemble have been raised. Further, university-recognized groups, like student government, are becoming more and more oriented toward activism and equitable leadership practice, as seen through incidents like *The Machine* at the University of Alabama (Kingkade, 2015), that for decades dictated how members of Greek life should vote in student government elections and over time became powerful enough to influence politics in the state of Alabama (Ross, 2016).

Recognized student groups on campus are required to have professional staff, usually a student affairs professional, to advise student government, and this individual can serve in a full-time, part-time, and/or voluntary capacity. Serving part-time and/or voluntarily means that this service is above and beyond the requirements of the individual's full-time appointment on campus. Often individual campus organization dictates that student affairs professionals support recognized student groups, such as student government. The full-time appointments, if applicable, could be positioned anywhere in the institution's makeup. Often these individuals have some service in student government as a former student or were, or currently are, involved in leadership development work. This couples with the aforementioned problems in this study as advisors are not properly prepared or supported given the idiosyncratic nature of the role. The voluntary nature of serving as advisor exposes major gaps in expectations and qualifications for professionals, especially in current political and turbulent campus climate times. There are also considerations of to make regarding a lack of compensation for advisors and battle fatigue (Smith, 2004) that can contribute to harm for the individuals serving in these capacities, for student leaders, for the student government organization broadly, and for the institution.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how student government advisors, and the campus communities where they work, understand and conceptualize what the critical duties and responsibilities of the advisor role are, and to reconceptualize this role as one critical in supporting campus advocacy and activism in collaborative ways. Through the application of a 360-degree analysis approach, this study focuses on the experiences of advisors serving in full-time, part-time, or voluntary capacities to student government organizations at three institutions in the Midwest. This study can contribute to future research policy, practices, and theory on student government organizations and their advisors as campuses continue to evolve and respond to climate issues. This study will also introduce a new advising model, transformative advising, which can be implemented by student government advisors, and potentially others who support student organizations involved in advocacy and activism on campus.

“So, what do you do?”–Personal Narrative

While contending with the challenges advising through these contentious campus times, I was unsure if people within the organization understood what the student government advisor role really was, often wondering if I was a student or the student body president, myself. I would enter spaces, committee meetings, trustee meetings, interview processes, task-force work... and be asked, immediately following stating my title, “*So, what do you do?*” This question intrigued me and permeated my entire tenure as advisor. I wondered how this question might also be raced, classed, gendered, and microaggressive.

Research Question

“*So, what do you do?*” set the foundation to guide this research study and formulate the following research question: How do student government advisors, superiors, peers, student leaders, and colleagues understand and conceptualize the role of the student government advisor?

In this study, the following areas comprise the advisor responsibilities: (a) possessing institutional knowledge, (b) developing student leaders, (c) possessing certain characteristics or competencies, (d) serving on campus committees, (e) engaging in on-going professional development that is critically reflective, and (f) specified roles in campus activism. This work involved tending to each of these areas to support students in their advocacy and activism work.

To lay a foundation and situate this work in context, turning to literature on student government organizations and advising in each of the previously mentioned areas is critical, as literature in these areas could assist with making sense of how this work has evolved over time. Glaringly, the nuances that exist in this role, especially in a full-time capacity, is missing from previous research. Further, there is limited information on how a student government may be involved in advocacy and activism, specifically, that speaks to current societal challenges—some stemming directly from college campus communities.

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) undergirds this study as a theoretical frame. Transformative leadership, which is different and often conflated with transformational leadership, is grounded in an activist agenda (Shields, 2017). It adopts a social justice orientation and considers challenges at a societal level, not only challenges seemingly unique to educational entities—in this case, colleges and universities. Transformative leadership “emphasizes the socially constructed nature of society and the attendant outcome that certain individuals occupy a

position of greater power and that individuals with other characteristics may be associated with a higher likelihood of exclusion from decisions” (Mertens, 2007, p. 87; Shields, 2011). It also starts with critical self-reflection to *move through* new knowledge and understanding to address inequities thoughtfully and in partnership with impacted communities “not only with respect to access but also with regard to academic, social, and civic outcomes” (Shields, 2010, p. 570). This study examines the role of the student government advisor through the transformative leadership lens given the challenges, activism, and change nature of the role (and of student government leaders) on campus. The review of literature in Chapter 2 will expound upon transformative leadership as the viable leadership orientation for an advisor given the complexity of the role.

Methodology

This phenomenological qualitative study focused on the constructed reality of participants based on subjective and personal experiences. Qualitative semi-structured interviewing and document analysis were employed as data collection methods for three institutions.

This project was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Eastern Michigan University (EMU). This study is not testing a research hypothesis, and—as such, qualitative research allowed for data to drive findings. The research question allows for behavior and interactions to be explored from the first-hand experiences of participants. As this study could not explain conclusive relationships between student government advisors and the institutions where they are employed, a qualitative approach allowed for research that highlighted the need for continued exploration in this area and understanding this role on postsecondary campuses.

As the student government advisor is the key phenomena being explored, the spaces in which these individuals carry out their work served as the primary setting for this study. To

recruit participants, contact information for current student government advisors was obtained from each institution's website, from each institution's student government website, or from contacting the institution directly via phone. In addition to reading and signing the informed consent document developed in conjunction with the Office of Research at EMU, eligibility to participate meant that participants must be currently serving as the official advisor for the student government organization. Following this, participants maintain anonymity and were assigned gender-neutral pseudonyms to avoid revealing their identities.

The data analysis process took a pragmatic thematic analysis approach (Aronson, 1995) that (a) collected data from transcribed conversations using quotes and common ideas, (b) identified data patterns, and (c) combining patterns into themes.

This section provides an overview of specific methods employed in this study; Chapter 3 will clarify specific methodological approaches in detail.

Delimitations and Limitations

The population selected to interview for this study, student government advisors, yields a delimiting factor in this research study. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the understanding and conceptualization of the student government advisor role on campus, and—as such, the primary investigator is intentional in interviewing professionals working 360-degrees around the advisor on campus. No other individuals than advisors, peers, colleagues, student leaders, and superiors were interviewed.

This study contains five limitations. First, not all colleges and universities classify student government advisors in the same ways. Advisors can serve in full-time, part-time, or voluntary capacities and experiences varied depending on this specific context. Second, qualitative research can be limiting due to the inability to verify specific information (Creswell, 1994). All

individuals interviewed passed along their own biases and prejudices, and this project will only explore and make observations about advisors serving at the three institutions represented. Third, the number of interviews that take place is a limiting factor as findings could vary with a greater number of participants from each campus. Fourth, interviewing student leaders presents challenges as the voices of students are not generalizable to the experiences of all students. Finally, this study will not be generalizable to the role of student government advisors across the entire profession in the United States.

Significance of the Study

While studies (D'Angelo, 2015; Rath, 2005; Schaper, 2009) have analyzed and examined various aspects of college student governments, limited attention has been given to the student government advisor who is often critical in the success of the student government leaders and the organizational impact on the overall campus community (Rath, 2005). This study focused specifically on how advisors, and those working 360-degrees around the advisors, understood and conceptualized the role. This study will bridge a gap in literature by focusing primarily on the advisors' role and relationships throughout the campus community, instead of examining the relationships between student government advisors and student government members as has been done in myriad studies previously. Insights gained from this study have several implications for institutional practice and policy creation, specifically in the area of student affairs, campus climate, and activism. The findings from this study can assist administrators as they consider the selection, training, evaluation, and support needed for student government advisors to be successful in their role. Further, findings from this study provide a clearer understanding of the scale and scope of student government organizations for the entire campus community.

Student government advisors have major influence in the creation of an environment that allows students and other members of the college community to interact harmoniously (Fortune, 2000). Advisors not only influence student development but enhance student involvement within the campus community (Astin, 1996). This responsibility places the student government advisor in a pivotal position requiring on many occasions for decisions to be made based on what is considered best for the institution (Carpenter, 1996). This is a challenging responsibility, as the role positions them as an intermediary between faculty and administration and the student government organization (Fortune, 2000). Due to this immense level of responsibility, there is an ongoing need to understand the role of the individuals serving in this capacity and begin to reconceptualize it to address new challenges related to advocacy and activism on campus.

Assumptions

The investigator makes six primary assumptions. First, there is the assumption that there is not broad understanding and conceptualization of the role of the student government advisor. Second, student government organizations are critical to the campus community. Third, the advisor is critical to the successful operation and functioning of student government organizations. Fourth, senior administrators, particularly those with oversight into student affairs functional areas where student government organizations typically are housed, must value, understand, and support professionals serving in the advisory capacity on their campuses due to the scale and scope of role responsibilities. Fifth, the role of the student government advisor is different than that of advisors to other student organizations with different foci on campus due to the positioning of the organization in institutional governance. Finally, leadership approaches and navigation are raced, classed, and gendered, and can yield more nuanced tactics to navigating institutional politics serving in any role at any institution.

Bias

As a former student government leader and advisor, acknowledging biases was critical while gathering data and completing analysis for this project. It was particularly important during the interview process to remain mindful of this as participants conveyed their experiences and when analyzing data. Thus, phenomenology as a methodological lens was relied upon as a counter measure and was selected intentionally as this research orientation actively engages participants throughout the analysis process and presentation of the findings relying on the experiences shared during the semi-structured interviews.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter presented the background for the study, problem statement, purpose, framework, design, and significance of research study. Chapter 2 examines literature on student government organizations, student organization advising, and institutional governance. This review will look specifically at how student government advisors fit in the each of these complex organizational structures and how advisors may work through these considerations. An expansion of the framework, transformative leadership, will also be explicated. The methodology used for data collection and analysis is articulated in Chapter 3. Detailed information on the sampled population is provided, as well as, data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As articulated in Chapter 1 the role of student government advisors is crucial (Rath, 2005) as campus environments are experiencing increased levels of student activism, student government organizations are becoming more activism oriented collectively, recognized student groups are required to have an advisor, and many campus advisors are not receiving training, support, or compensation. The common voluntary nature of the advising role exacerbates these challenges. This qualitative study explored how advisors, superiors, peers, student leaders, and colleagues understood and conceptualized the role of advisors under these circumstances taking a phenomenological qualitative approach. The following pages reviews relevant literature on the inclusion of student voice and the role of institutions under the following areas: student activism, student government organizations, student government advising, and student involvement in institutional governance.

Student Activism in Response to Campus Climate

Following the 2016 presidential elections in the U.S., campuses have seen increases in race-based campus incidents (Bauman, 2018). For instance, an *Inside Higher Education* article deemed the opening of the fall 2017 academic year as a “September of Racist Incidents” (Bauer-Wolf, 2017). These incidents included a racial assault on a Black male student following an altercation with a roommate’s friend at Cornell University (Harris, 2017) that left the student bludgeoned, graffiti and confederate flags being left on students’ doors within residence halls at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (Jost, 2017), swastikas carved into elevators and slurs being written on white boards belonging to a Black student on campus at Drake University (Taylor, 2017), and additional vandalism at the University of Michigan (Slagter, 2017) that included more racial slurs.

These instances have also made waves across social media, where students are recording videos using slurs, like at American University, where Black students subsequently called for designated Black spaces on campus for safety and housing options (O'Donohoe, 2019). Another instance is the *Mizzou Effect*, where the University of Missouri experienced a 35% drop in freshmen enrollment following weeks of student protest over frustration with administrative response to race-based campus incidents, resulting in the resignation of the chancellor at the time (Bohanon, 2018).

Students have not only responded to race-based instances on campus. There has also been focus on environmental justice, for example. At the University of Southern California, students protested the inauguration of the new president prior to the start of their football game, and members of the student government organization, specifically the student body president, supported this action (Toomey, Giella, & Doherty, 2019). Another instance involves food insecurity at the University of Kentucky at Lexington, where approximately 300 students participated in a hunger strike calling for the university president to assist hungry students on campus (Patel, 2019). Following these efforts, the president announced, in conjunction with the student government organization, a plan to address food insecurity on campus, including the appointment of professional staffing and allocated funding (Patel, 2019).

Throughout each of these non-exhaustive incidents, the student government organization played some role, whether through responding directly to the issues or through advocating on behalf of them. As these incidents have continued, consideration around the role of the advisor should be made. This supports the EAB (2017) report that there are increasing expectations from students due to changing demographics, and these occurrences are not expected to dissipate. This report also recommends that colleges and universities develop strategies to address these

challenges. It can be inferred from the cited instances presented here that the student government organization and their advisor has a role in addressing these issues on campus. Students look to the student government organization to advocate for their needs and highlight their experiences and the advisor is behind the scenes cultivating and maintaining relationships with campus faculty and staff to lobby for these changes (Cuyjet, 1994). The critical role that student government plays should not be over, or underestimated, on campus and their unique positioning make them viable avenues to working collaboratively with students to address these challenges.

Student Government Organizations

It is important to understand the typical make up of student government organizations and the ways that organizational responsibilities have been articulated overtime. Covington (1986) stated that a student government organization properly defined consist of representatives of a student body, usually elected, to whom responsibility and authority for governing or sharing in the governing of specific areas of campus life is delegated. Student government is a multifaceted organization essential to the campus communities and has been described as a laboratory for learning about leadership (Dias, 2009; Falvey, 1952; Golden & Schwartz, 1994). Considering the significance of student governments on college campuses, these organizations are often called to serve as the official representatives of students to the institutional administration at large and a provider of select student services (Rath, 2005). Modern student government organizations range in complexity from simple college campus representative bodies to multifaceted entities providing a wide variety of purposes, interests, and services (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998). College student governments are similar in structure to the present-day U.S. political system with executive, legislative, and judicial branches, enabling students to vote on the allocation of campuses resources (Golden & Schwartz, 1994; Taylor, 2015). Student

government organizations may be called student government associations, student councils, or general assemblies but the aims and purposes of these groups remain the same—to serve as the voice of the student body and prepare students to learn about political process, rules, and procedures (Taylor, 2015). Student government organizations are critical in supporting campus life and advocating for students (Schaper, 2009). Took (1999) contended the responsibilities of student government organizations vary depending on the philosophy and type of institution but fall into these categories: (a) responsibilities outlined in the student government constitution, (b) responsibilities delegated to them by institutional leaders, (c) responsibilities deferred to them by other decision-making bodies, and (d) responsibilities to appoint students to serve as representatives on committees and boards.

The history of student government organizations parallels the history of the development of student organizations, student activism, and student activities, dating back to the student-run literary societies of the 1700s and 1800s (Coates & Coates, 1985; Fox, 2017; Rath, 2005; Horowitz, 2013; Otten, 1970). Literary societies provided students with avenues to discuss and debate issues that led to significant changes in higher education institutions (Dias, 2009). The decline of literary societies, tension between faculty and students caused by faculty with dual responsibility for teaching and disciplinary matters and shifts in perspectives regarding *in loco parentis* (in place of a parent) contributed toward the establishment for a system of student self-governance (Dias, 2009).

During the 1960s, student government organizations developed as a result of students wanting a means of organizing and channeling their opinions concerning programs, services, issues, and fees, particularly those areas which affect student welfare (Covington, 1986; Klopff, 1960). Student involvement in institutional decision-making later expanded to become part of the

shared governance structure at most postsecondary institutions—and resulted in opportunities for participation on committees, boards, and forums (Dias, 2009; Fox, 2017). Together, students, staff, faculty, regents, and trustees, had avenues to share in the daily decision-making processes of their institutions (Botzek, 1972; Fox, 2017).

Student government organizations are responsible for dealing with many important student concerns, including but not limited to student apathy, organizational funding, and student programming (Keppler & Robinson, 1993). Student government has been viewed as an organization authorized to exercise jurisdiction in prescribed areas of program development, program management, and student conduct (Covington, 1986). Additionally, student government organizations may have representation on institutional committees and are involved in university discussions of issues that impact students (Covington, 1986; Dias, 2009; Laufer & Light, 1977). Student government involvement can range from funding multi-million dollar facilities on campus to lobbying issues like the rising cost of college tuition (Schaper, 2009).

There are several purposes of modern student government organizations articulated in the literature. As stated previously, student government organizations often serve as the official voice of the student body to the institutional administration, a key purpose justifying their existence on college and university campuses (Cuyjet, 1994; Dias, 2009). Cuyjet (1994) articulates two additional purposes for student government: (1) handling administrative duties delegated by the university and (2) providing services and advocating for students' interest.

Chiles and Pruitt (1985) maintained that student government organizations should preserve the quality of student life, gained by the efforts of previous student leaders involved in student government organizations. Dias (2009) echoed this sentiment stating:

Student government presidents need to ensure that accomplishments achieved by past presidents continue during their presidencies. This is especially critical given the short tenure of the presidency and the number of new student and administrative issues faced by a new student government president each year. (p. 19)

While higher education institutions have continued to evolve, so too have college student governments. In the evolution of student government, the voice of the student body and students' advocating to the university administration has remained a core responsibility (Brubacher, 1976; Chiles & Pruitt, 1985; Madsen, 1969; Thelin, 2011). As the official voice of the student body to the faculty and administration, student government organizations continue to affect colleges and universities on issues in various ways to make a positive difference and influence campus climate (Dias, 2009).

Student Involvement in Institutional Governance

Lozano (2019) presented a study that examined the relationship and the connections between student government organizations and institutional governing boards, finding that student leaders had "mixed to negligible" effects on this relationship. The study was aimed at filling considerable gaps in understanding of the functioning of institutions. This study is relevant to the discussion of student involvement in institutional governance as it tenders whether or not the presence of students alone on these boards, not their actual voices, are enough for institutional administrators to feel that they have adequately included them. It is often seen that ability for students to be present is enough and that the students have a vested stake in decisions because they dually serve as board members and are students. Here, students are also held in deficit view when considering whether or not they are capable of serving in such a capacity.

Faculty and staff are responsible for creating pathways for student participation in decisions made on campus (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Traditionally, the responsibility for decision-making in institutional governance was assumed by campus administration. While members of the faculty and staff may disagree with this type of involvement because of considerations like lack of experience or immaturity, students remain engaged with all aspects of institutional operations (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). It is not uncommon for faculty and staff to see the role of students solely in the classroom absent from the decision-making processes that directly impact them. However, the variety and complexity of tasks performed by universities require interdependence among students, administrative staff, and academic staff (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999).

Student government leaders carry out much of their work not only under the guidance of the student government advisor, but within the institutional governance structure. The concepts and theories underlying participative decision-making, along with the writings on student rights and the legitimacy of student involvement, provide a convincing rationale for student participation in institutional governance (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Early reports of student participation in governance outlined the need to define this involvement through specific objectives. Falvey (1952) described these objectives as (a) training for citizenship, (b) educating for responsibility, (c) gaining experience in policymaking, (d) being a provision for student expression, and (e) developing leaders and followers.

Falvey (1952) argued that it is “only when the student faces the actual difficulties of governing by democracy that he begins to appreciate the complexity of a free society” (p. 14). This philosophical perspective viewed student involvement in institutional governance as “training for democratic living” (p. 14). Through educational programs and extracurricular involvement, students become educated citizens as they are equipped with certain information,

skills, and attitudes (Falvey, 1952). This cannot be under or over emphasized in the institutional context if students are expected to transfer knowledge and skills outside of campus life and into their personal lives to be contributing members of society. This places particular emphasis on the environment in which this development is cultivated, as the campus community is the ultimate determinant in adequate training for citizenship. The challenge under this objective is institutional avoidance of indoctrination, which is impossible. Falvey (1952) proposed the only way to address indoctrination is to accept its inescapability, making it critical for institutional administrators to allow space for student contention and divergence.

Student involvement leads to enhanced understanding of what a democratic and participative society is, the antithesis of institutional conformity and expectation (Falvey, 1952). This framework is critical not only for the student government advisor who trains and prepares student leaders, but also for faculty and staff members across institutions that work with student government organizations (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Further, many of these community members maintain that students general lack of experience make them ill-suited to participate in decision-making that impacts the campus community at large, particularly around sensitive and confidential issues (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). In this regard, student government advisors work to strengthen the training delivered to student leaders to help clarify the specific drives for their involvement and understand the campus community in more nuanced ways (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Student government advisors also “develop means whereby those faculty members and administrators who hold negative attitudes towards student involvement might be enlightened about the student role in university governance” (Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999, p. 10) as students contribute heavily by sharing information, knowledge, and understanding while advocating on behalf of student interests.

Joint efforts should be made by students, student government advisors, and administration to improve student involvement in the governance of the institution so that students feel included and impactful in their contributions (Falvey, 1952; Ratsoy & Zuo, 1999). Perpetual effort to understand student involvement in governance is critical and must be expressed from faculty and administrators who take these efforts seriously, while being equally concerned about common challenges (Falvey, 1952). Institutions must operate as a community in which each individual has a stake in the health of the campus and the student government advisor remains the core facilitator of this process.

Student Government Advising

Scholars and practitioners in higher education and student affairs have offered several descriptions of the advisor, dating back to when faculty members solely served as advisors to student groups and were responsible for the holistic development of student leaders outside of the classroom (Kellogg, 1999; Bryant, 2009). Bloland (1967) described the advisor as a member of the college who has been assigned to the role or who has answered an invitation to serve either from the administration or directly from students. This individual often serves as the liaison between student government leaders and university administration (Bloland, 1967). Han (1996) described the advisor as an individual who offers counsel to individual students and the organization as they carry out their work and suggests alternatives to situations that may be considered inappropriate. Meyer and Kroth (2010) described advisors as trainers, consultants, and participating members in university administration in varying capacities. In each of these descriptions, the constant remains that the advisor is critical, carrying high status in the student government organization and throughout the campus community (Bloland, 1967).

Who is Advising?

Considering who serves as a student government advisor on campus, Han (1996) described this individual as a professional staff member “trained and educated to provide support to student organizations on campus that plan activities and services for the university community” (p. 58). Most colleges and universities require for official student organization recognition that the advisor be a member of the faculty or staff to serve as an official sponsor and/or as the advisor to the group (Bloland, 1967). The methods used to select an advisor can vary. Several researchers (Croft, 2004; Cuyjet, 1996; Meyer & Kroth, 2010) have offered methods for selecting a student government advisor, including (a) the faculty or staff member expressing direct interest in the organization, (b) being asked directly by faculty or students, and (c) through an official administrative appointment directly and solely to the organization with no other appointments on campus. Further, while most institutions require the advisor to be a faculty or staff member of the college or university, some campuses allow community members with specific affiliations to serve as the official organization advisor. Considering the specific motivations of a faculty or staff member to advise student groups, researchers (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998; Meyer & Kroth, 2010) have reported that these motivations include (a) watching college students develop, (b) gaining recognition from the college or university, (c) serving as a professional reference for students, and (d) serving as a mentor for students.

Most institutions prefer student government advisors be a member of the faculty or staff. Although not mandatory, several studies have outlined some considerations that should be made in reference to the student government advisor. Banks, Hammond, and Hernandez (2014) outlined that institutions should select professionals who are able to communicate, understand, and interact successfully among varying cultural and ethnic orientations, and who remain

knowledgeable of challenges among the student population and developing strategies to respond to the needs and desires of students. Further, these professionals should understand and be “comfortable with their own identities, suspend judgment, develop realistic goals and objectives, check assumptions and biases, and develop a climate for open dialogue, reflection, challenge, and support around issues of diversity” (Howard-Hamilton, 2000, p. 22).

Typically, professionals selected to advise student organizations have gained most of their experience from their own undergraduate involvement, graduate school training, and learning on the job (De Sewal, 2007; Meyer & Kroth, 2010). Each of these characteristics (position, knowledge, and performance) gives the advisor credibility among the student group, which can also enhance or diminish that credibility (Han, 1996). The student government advisor serves as a teacher in many ways as this individual must go beyond the role of “passive bystander and be prepared to provide active and ongoing leadership” (Bloland, 1967, p. 8) to the student group. The primary technique of extracurricular teaching is student group advising as this role is multifaceted (Han, 1996). Bloland (1967) contended teachers (i.e., advisors) influence in extracurricular activities make the difference between meaningful experiences and non-purposeful student activities.

The role of the student government advisor continues to be complex. Early literature on advisors to student groups described these individuals as those who assisted students in carrying out their work successfully (Bloland, 1967). Han (1996) stated advisors “disseminate, articulate, and enforce the guidelines within which organizations must operate” (p. 58). The relationship between the advisor and the student group provides an avenue for the advisor to use their influence to positively impact the mission and vision of the organization and, in this sense, the student organization is the advisor’s classroom (Bloland, 1967). In this classroom, the student

government advisor has the ability to structure experiences that contribute to student development and growth (Bloland, 1967).

Literature on student government advisors has continued to articulate advising as a balanced approach between counseling, coaching, and planning (Evans, Evans, & Sherman, 2001; Love, 2003). Advisors have continued to take a supportive role by sharing “insights, suggestions, and administrative assistance to student leaders” (Meyer & Kroth, 2010; Steiner, 2003). Love and Maxam (2003) reported members of the institution’s faculty and staff who served as advisors viewed the role as a primary job responsibility, which stresses the importance and significance of the job on campus. These individuals consistently “provide advice, consultation, partnership, leadership, and technical assistance to student organizations” and their leaders (Meyer & Kroth, 2010, p. 408).

Specific responsibilities of the student government advisor can range significantly from basic administrative tasks to advising through complex and contentious issues. Bloland (1967) outlined a general job description of the advisor which included teaching or coaching functions, consultation on programs, providing continuity, counseling individual students, interpretation of policy, supervision, and meeting emergencies. The advisors role can be thought of in terms of three major areas according to Bloland (1967) including (a) maintenance functions, which are described as responsibilities that “[require] little initiative on the part of the advisor unless the demands of the situation call for them to respond” (p. 12); (b) group growth functions, which are described as activities that “improve the operation and effectiveness of the group that help it progress toward its goals” (p. 12); and (c) program content functions, which is described as content where the advisor assumed an educational function that parallels, complements, or supplements the overall offerings of the institution.

Leadership development is a part of any student government program and argued to be one of the more important objectives of higher education (Freeman & Goldin, 2008; King, 1997; Miller, 2003; Wilson, 2010). Student leadership development opportunities are found in the context of experiential programs such as student government, clubs and organizations, and service learning (Astin & Astin, 2000; Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 1999; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Freeman & Goldin, 2008; Kuh, 2003; Wilson, 2010). Student government advisors are critical to student leadership development (Rath, 2005). The student government advisor as a leadership educator should strive to maximize the benefits students gain from experience and association with student organizations (Han, 1996). Developing leadership capacity in college students requires a strategic approach on behalf of the advisor. Knowledge of student leadership development coupled with research in leadership theory and practice is critical to the effectiveness of the student government advisor (Rosch & Anthony, 2012);

Educators who maximize their potential in building student leadership capacity must be intentional in matching their intended program or course outcomes with relevant student and leadership development theory, and then apply effective strategies for the delivery of material to a diverse student population. (Rosch & Anthony, 2012, p. 38).

Kezer and Carducci's (2009, as cited in Fields, 2010) suggested leadership development programs should include the following critical components (a) extended time frames to adequately allow long-term development; (b) balancing leadership actions with a reflection component to allow students an opportunity to learn objectively; (c) promoting interdependence between all members of a group to share group leadership; (d) examination of context to show that situational leadership is not a universal set of skills; and (e) a focus on values to guide group

decision-making. Educators who apply this knowledge create opportunities for students to grow as emerging leaders (Rosch & Anthony, 2012).

Advisors provide structure to help connect development theory to the lived experiences of students both formally and informally (Rosch & Anthony, 2012). Modeling from faculty and staff is important in developing student leaders and administrators must ensure good advising practices (Fields, 2010; Rosch & Anthony, 2012). Rosch and Anthony (2012) contended all advisors are not selected intentionally and effective advisors have both strong interpersonal skills and the ability to listen and negotiate with different personalities. Students who participate in university leadership opportunities gain greater leadership skills, more social caring and involvement in their communities, and greater personal responsibility in reaching out and educating their communities, resulting in a variety of development outcomes in students (Cress et al., 2001). The success of student government organizations is directly linked to the efforts of the student government advisor (Meyer & Kroth, 2010; Wilson, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

As shared in Chapter 1, transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) undergirds this study as a theoretical framework because of its change and activist specific orientation. Transformative leadership is intentional in its aim to enact social justice which makes it activist oriented and emphasizes the prevention of inequity that are reified systemically (Cooper & Gause, 2007; Dantley & Tillman, 2006).

As student government organizations are concerned with creating change for campus communities to thrive, and as these organizations are continuously thrust directly into or in proximity to student activism which is often a ripple effect from larger issues as articulated, this makes the transformative leadership framework appropriate to examine the orientation needed

for a student government advisor to be successful. Transformative leadership (as opposed to transactional or transformational leadership) takes seriously Freire's contention "that education is not the ultimate level for social transformation, but without it transformation cannot occur" (p. 559; Shields, 2010).

While studies of student government organizations have considered transactional and transformational leadership frameworks (D'Angelo, 2015; Schaper, D, 2009), these theories fall short in creating the type of changes needed to serve as a student government advisor, particularly considering the activist orientation and instead focuses on change at the organizational level. Transactional, transformational, and transformative leadership each work in tandem to achieve equitable outcomes. It is important to briefly explore the foundations of transactional and transformational leadership.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is about exchanges (Burns, 1978) that occurs between leaders and followers. Within this frame, followers can focus on self-interests, but it is highly individual. This in many ways keeps individuals siloed and maintains the status quo within organizations. These exchanges are typically centered around gratification. While elements of this leadership style are revealed within student government organizations, it is not enough when adopting the activist orientation of transformative leadership. In fact, this gratification can be uprooted if the exchange is not in favor of maintaining the status quo, making this often a short-term relationship. As student government organizations are situational and contextual, transactional leadership is not enough. Many scholars (Beyer, 1999; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010; Yukl, 1999, 2011) have tendered criticism of transactional leadership because of its one-size-fits all approach that

dismisses situational and contextual information pertinent in the decision-making process. Finally, there is no development needed to act transactionally with followers (Burns, 1978).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational and transactional leadership are usually articulated as a dichotomy, as one impacts followers by raising levels of consciousness, while the other focuses on the exchange that occurs between leaders and their followers (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership is organization focused—centered on changing self-interests to drive organizational change and achieve success. This form of leadership reimagines organizations but falls short of creating deep equitable change. Studies have employed transformational leadership as a theoretical frame in relation to student government organizations, this theory does not embrace the activist approach either, which is most critical to the purposes of this study and to the ways that the advisor’s role might be reconceptualized.

Transformative Leadership

As articulated, colleges and universities are often caught off-guard responding to campus climate and flashpoints of activism and demonstrations. Relatedly, Marshall (2004) criticized and stressed for educational policies, practices, and programs to do more than “quick fixies” to address complex challenges (p. 7). The proactive nature of transformative leadership provides an avenue for the advisor to work towards mitigating these challenges using their unique positionality between students and campus administration that provides insight and access to information. Leading transformatively means challenging uses of power and privilege that maintain inequity (Shields, 2010). This is much of the work of the student government advisor, who develops inclusive governance structures within the advising, coaching, and mentoring of student government leaders, by embody a praxis that uses “positional power to promote

democracy, redress inequities, and empower various stakeholders, including marginalized students” (Cooper & Gause, 2007, p. 200).

In forming and articulating transformative leadership, Shields (2017) argued that a new approach to leadership was needed to address complex challenges in education as traditional leadership approaches were not deeply effective in stimulating lasting change. Shields contended that educational efforts are often “too narrowly focused” that actually overwhelm the issues instead “prompting reflection and creating understanding” (p. 8).

There are eight tenets of the transformative leadership model (a) the mandate to effect deep and equitable change (b) the need to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and injustice (c) the need to address the inequitable distribution of power (d) an emphasis on both private and public (individual and collective) good, a focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice (e) an emphasis on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness (f) the necessity of balancing critique with promise and (g) the call to exhibit moral courage.

Student government advisors navigate power perpetually—from both students and administrators/faculty. Han (1996) maintained that the advisor may be expected to meet several institutional expectations, which include but are not limited to (a) monitoring funds, (b) disseminating policy and procedural informational processing forms and contracts (c) advising on safety and risk management issues. Further, the advisor also serves in an educational capacity, developing strategies to influence the quality and content of students’ educational experiences outside the classroom (Han, 1996). In order to effectively, ethically, and equitably meet these expectations, while simultaneously advising students on strategies to meet the needs of the greatest impacted members of the student body and tending to the requirements on behalf of the

campus' administration and faculty, transformative leadership is an appropriate framework for understanding this phenomena on college campuses.

Finally, and most critically, transformative leadership calls for critical self-reflection and, while difficult is achievable through a collaborative ethos (Cooper & Gause, 2007). Evidence of this can be found throughout the descriptions of the advisors' relationship with students and members of the campus community. The advisor works collaboratively across spaces to lead for equitable change across campus. Reflecting critically means uncovering blind spots to view, understand, and counteract inequity (Cooper & Gause, 2007). Following this, an advisor can inspire and mobilize student leaders to build and deconstruct barriers which calls for change that is democratic rather than marginalizing and inequitable. Transformative leaders must also demonstrate the courage to facilitate and engage in hard dialogue about race, culture, class, language, and inequality and then make decisions that exemplify their commitment to equity and cultural responsiveness (Shields, 2017).

Concluding Thoughts

The role that institutions play in understanding and responding to campus climate and activism issues is still as critical today as it has always been. The lens of a student government advisor and the pulse that this individual has on the voices and needs of students provides institutions with an opportunity to be proactive and stand alongside students regardless of their positionality. Institutional leadership must begin to question their practices and consider the ways that students might be further marginalized because of structural and systemic barriers.

This chapter detailed relevant scholarship on student government organizations, student organization advising, an exploration of institutional governance, and an explication of each of the leadership theories considered to guide this study. Chapter 3 details specific methodological

interventions including a discussion of phenomenology, 360-degree analysis as an interviewing approach, data collection procedures, including qualitative interviewing and document analysis, data analysis procedures, and the peer-review process.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative study explored how advisors, superiors, peers, student leaders, and colleagues understood and conceptualized the role of advisors under these circumstances, taking a phenomenological qualitative approach.

This study focused on the constructed reality of student government advisors based on subjective and personal experiences. The following pages will clarify the specific methodological approaches considered to conduct this research study, qualitative, semi-structured interviewing and qualitative document reviewing, approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Eastern Michigan University (EMU). This study did not test a research hypothesis, as such, qualitative research allowed for data to drive findings. As this study cannot explain conclusive relationships between student government advisors and the institutions where they are employed, a qualitative approach allows for research that highlights the need for continued exploration in this area and understanding this role on postsecondary campuses. The research and interview questions in this study allow for behavior and interactions to be explored from the first-hand experiences of participants.

Phenomenological Approach

This research study adopted a phenomenological approach. Sokolowski (2000) defined phenomenology as “the study of human experience and of the way things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (p. 2). Further, phenomenology posits that identity and intelligibility are available in things and that we ourselves are defined as the ones to whom such identities and intelligibilities are given (Sokolowski, 2000).

Various aspects of the student government advisors’ experiences were explored to generate meaning. This included (a) how and to what scale and scope the advisors described and

understood their roles and responsibilities, (b) training and other forms of intentional professional development that aided in informing their practice as leadership educators, and (c) insight into the experiences working across the college or university community, which includes the direct support and positioning within the institutional makeup.

This research study aimed to understand the phenomena of interest—student government advisor roles—from the advisors’ personal perspectives working with student leaders in organizations, from reflection on the training and support received from cross-institutional partners and professional organizations, and from acting as agents of the postsecondary institutions. The phenomenological approach, in which personal experiences are explored, allowed for participants to be engaged in both the construction and validation of study findings. Gallagher (2012) reported researchers have used phenomenology as a method in varying disciplines to conduct both naturalistic and qualitative investigations.

360-Degree Analysis

A 360-degree analysis approach has been used by organizations of all sizes (Prochaska, 2006). Prochaska (2006) reported, “Those who provide 360-degree performance feedback on the individual being assessed can include customers, coworkers, team members, supervisors, subordinates, and the person being rated” (p. 808). Leadership particularly in the role of student government advisor involves the consideration of many internal and external factors, including motivations and beliefs, requiring unique feedback that is provided by implementing a 360-degree evaluation (Tee & Ahmed, 2014). Figure 2 displays the 360-analysis approach for student government advisor’s in this study.

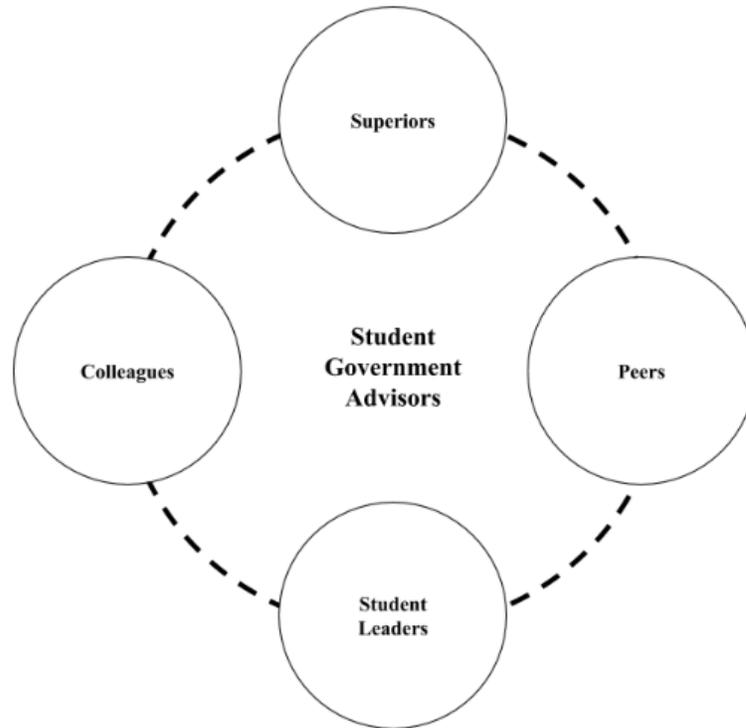


Figure 2. 360-Analysis for Student Government Advisors

The evaluation of a student government advisor cannot rely solely on a single cause and effect, which makes this approach to understanding the far-reaching impacts of this individual's efforts appropriate. Through the merger of assessment and feedback, this approach engages the student government advisor, and all those in proximity to this individual, as an active participant who “assumes responsibility, reflects, collaborates, and communicates” (Tee & Ahmed, 2014, p. 580). It is important for the evaluation of the student government advisor to be completed by multiple stakeholders due to the nature of the role.

The 360-degree analysis approach, also referred to as *multi-rater feedback*, has been used by myriad organizations and is essential as an approach to this study (Prochaska, 2006). This approach is particularly useful as the primary researcher will be able to obtain a broader picture

of the conceptualization of the advisor's role with much more detail (Prochaska, 2006). There is also a benefit to obtaining a greater focus on the perceptions of the organization's mission, vision, and goals through a 360-degree evaluative lens (Prochaska, 2006). Using data collected from a 360-degree evaluative approach around the advisor can inform and increase understanding of the role across the university community, as the feedback comes from many sources. The outcomes of the process can be used to create plans for employee development, strategic planning procedures, and evaluation (Ladyshevsky & Taplin, 2015).

Prochaska (2006) also reported a supervisor is the most accurate assessor of an employee's performance and that the employees are the least accurate raters of their own performance. In the case of the student government advisor, if this is true then it is critical to speak with individuals that work 360-degrees around the advisor to determine how far-reaching, or not, their work truly is in the campus community. Traditionally, 360-degree evaluation and feedback is used only for performance improvement and development; however, in this study, the evaluation was used to determine how the advisor's role is understood and conceptualized (Ladyshevsky & Taplin, 2015).

Setting

As the student government advisor was the key phenomena explored, the spaces in which these individuals carry out their work served as the primary setting for this study. These spaces are critical as they are the official grounds on which these professionals exist, work with students, and work with colleagues across the institution. Three public, four-year postsecondary institutions in the Midwest served as settings for this study. An understanding of the makeup of these institutions is critical to interpreting and analyzing data from study participants.

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (CCIHE) reports each of these institutions holding enrollments ranging from 20,000 to 45,000 students. These institutions offered the most comprehensive degree programs from bachelor's to terminal degrees in a variety of disciplinary fields. Many of these institutions focus efforts on preparing individuals to serve in roles in their local and statewide communities. Considering the student body, each institution is classified as large by the CCIHE, with two being primarily residential, and one being primarily nonresidential. While no associate degree options are offered in these institutions, it is common for these institutions to maintain articulation agreements with community colleges that do offer such degree programs. Each of these institutions are selective, with a high population of students transferring in to complete their undergraduate degrees. Finally, graduate program offerings also range across these institutions from predominantly professional programs, to comprehensive graduate programs without a medical school, to comprehensive graduate programs with a medical school.

Data Collection

Qualitative Interviewing

This research study utilized a semi-structured, qualitative interviewing approach, which is essential to understanding participant experiences and gaining in-depth information on the topic (McNamara, 1999). Edwards and Hollands (2013) stated not only that qualitative interviews have been the basis for many important studies across the range of disciplinary fields, but also that the interview is the most widely used method employed in qualitative research. Mason (2002) reported qualitative and semi-structured interviews have the following core features: (a) interactional exchange of dialogue between two or more participants (b) a thematic, topic-centered, biographical or narrative approach with a fluid and flexible structure and (c) a

perspective regarding knowledge as situated and contextual requiring the researcher to ensure relevancy.

Student government advisors, superiors, colleagues, peers, and student leaders were solicited for interviews for this study. Each interview began with a series of questions to obtain demographic information. Next, questions targeted the specific pathway taken that led to the appointment in the postsecondary institution for the student government advisor, superiors, colleagues, and peers. Inquiry focused on specific day-to-day tasks of the advisor and situations that were considered high-stakes, requiring more cross-institutional support. The nature of relationships across the institution to respond to any scenario that may arise was also engaged during the interview. Further, relationships with both individuals and policies were explored. Interviews concluded with questions that sparked reflection on campus activism that made meaning of all of their experiences, as the main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale, 1996). During interviews, additional questions were asked for clarification purposes only. This qualitative interviewing approach allowed the participant to focus on both past and present factors to understand and articulate current circumstances (Seidman, 1998). It also provided space for participants to articulate responses on their own terms with the semi-structuring allowing for comparison across interviews focused on the same subject (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Initial interviews lasted for one hour. Follow-up interview were requested via email as needed and lasted for 30 minutes.

Member Checking

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Identifying information was omitted from the data as to not reveal the identities and institutions of the participants. Participants were provided with a copy of the interview transcription for review to ensure reliability and validity of the data.

During this review, participants also reserved the right to have any portion of the data omitted from the thematic analysis process. Participants also could have elected to be excluded from the study at any point.

Recruitment and Participants

Contact information for current student government advisors serving at each of these public institutions was obtained from each of the postsecondary institutions' websites or from contacting the institution directly. These individuals were each invited to participate in this study via electronic mail. This initial contact included an introduction and biography of the researcher, a statement of the research purposes, program information from EMU where applicable, and a link to schedule the interview.

To solicit the participation of superiors, colleagues, peers, and student leaders, the student government advisor was asked for recommendations during their interview, or contact information was retrieved from the institution's website. This process took a "snowball" effect as those contacted were based on the suggestions from the advisors as these individuals should have useful perspective to contribute to the study based on their interactions with the advisor and student government organization overall. Superiors were either based on the recommendation of the advisor, or if the advisor did not have a direct supervisor, the senior level administration that oversees all campus activities and the functioning of student organizations was contacted to participate in an interview. This contact information was obtained from each university's website. Student leaders were also contacted based on the recommendations of the advisor. If there was no recommendation from the advisor, the president or vice president of the student government organization was contacted to participate or to provide a recommendation of a

different individual from the organization to contact. The president and vice president's information was also available on the organization's websites.

Finally, colleagues and peers were contacted based both on advisor recommendations and their proximity to the work of the student government organization. Colleagues worked generally in the same area as the student government advisor and held some familiarity with the role and operation of the organization. Peers must have served as an advisor to a student group on campus and possessed general understanding of the student government organization to participate. These individuals were contacted based on advisor recommendations. In any areas where the advisor may not have a recommendation, the superior was asked to provide names of individuals to contact in the institution.

Eligibility

Participants for this study must have currently been serving as the official advisor for the student government organization on their respective campuses in a full-time, part-time, or voluntary capacity to be eligible. Superiors must have directly overseen the student government advisor or all student organization functioning on campus through the campus activities office. Colleagues must have served in some capacity other than advising student groups but yet in proximity to the student government advisor to be eligible. Eligibility for peers meant that those solicited for interviews must have served as advisor to other student groups on campus. Finally, for student leaders to have been eligible they must have had current or previous involvement in the student government organization.

Piloting

To ensure good research design, a pilot study was conducted with five participants representing the advisor, superior, colleague, peer, and student leader categories. These

individuals are not affiliated, in any aspect, with the institutions selected as settings for this study. The purpose of this was to pretest the instrument, and ensure, clarify, or correct any portions of the data collection process, particularly the interview questions, that were unclear to participants. Further, this pilot was completed to ensure that questions posed will capture the problem specified as central to the project. Completing the pilot study allowed for any issues or errors to be corrected before conducting the full study. Feedback and findings from the pilot study indicated that questions aligned with the aims and purposes of the study and provided an avenue to answer the research question.

Informed Consent

Eligible study participants were required to read and sign an informed consent letter created in conjunction with Office of Research at EMU. The informed consent letter was sent via electronic mail, requesting an official response and signature upon reply. Further, the informed consent letter included the following pertinent information: (a) the title and scope of the research study, (b) a description of the base knowledge and understanding of student government organizations and advising needed to participate in an interview process, (c) a statement of the benefits and prioritization of doing no harm to research participants, and (d) the option to be removed from the study at any point.

Confidentiality

Where necessary for conveying themes, pseudonyms were used to avoid revealing the identities of participants. Further, identifiable information about each participants' institution was omitted.

Data storage and destruction. All data, including notes and audio recordings, were stored on a 200 GB external hard drive. Each interview was organized and categorized into

encrypted folders, requiring a password for access. Data will be discarded one year after the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study employed thematic analysis as a technique to analyze data collected from informants in interviews and from documents. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) defined thematic analysis as a form of pattern recognition in data which results in themes becoming the categories for analysis. This is appropriate to evaluate the shared experiences of serving in the student government advisor role across different institutions. Aronson (1995) detailed pragmatic steps to performing a thematic analysis which include: (a) collecting the data from transcribed conversations using direct quotes or reiteration of common ideas, (b) identifying all data that relate to the already classified patterns, and (c) combining and cataloguing patterns into subthemes.

Document Analysis

Atkinson and Coffey (1997) referred to documents produced, shared, organized, and used as “social facts.” In student government organizations, these social facts would include constitutions and operating procedures. Student government organizations operate under a constitution and, in some cases, these organizations have documented operating procedures for day-to-day functioning. Not only is the functioning of the entire organization detailed, but specific points on the role of the advisor from the perspective of student government leaders is often emphasized as well. This study included a document analysis of constitutions, rules, operating procedures, and/or handbooks, if available, to gather additional information on the internal workings of each organization on each campus.

Bowen (2009) described document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents, including both printed and electronic documents, and interpreting information to make meaning and construct empirical knowledge. Further, Bowen (2009) outlined steps to analyzing documents: (a) skimming, (b) reading, and (c) interpretation. This process involves finding, selecting, making meaning, and synthesizing information collected from the documents. Document analysis, coupled with qualitative interviewing, creates a pathway for data collected in this study that seek convergence and corroboration, triangulating data to provide credibility (Eisner, 2017).

Documents were obtained from each institution's student government website under each organization's "governing documents" section.

Peer Review

As it relates to data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation, these portions of the study underwent a peer review. The individual selected to complete the review held knowledge base and experiences related to the topic. The peer reviewer acted as professional support and provided ongoing feedback to mitigate bias in the interpretation and analysis process. As information is shared with the peer reviewer, identifying information was omitted to protect the confidentiality of participants. Peer reviewer feedback was analyzed, interpreted, and included in the study at the discretion of the primary investigator.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter presents an overview of the methodological approaches taken to achieve the stated goals of this study. This methodology first takes a phenomenological approach which is then complimented by qualitative semi-structured interviewing and document analysis. As student government organizations abide by constitutions to carry out their work, an analysis of

documents was employed to understand the recorded expectations of both the organization and their advisor and to triangulate findings. Finally, the procedures outlined added depth and breadth to the study as they consider the setting, recruitment, and data analysis processes necessary for scholarly work.

Chapter 4: Findings

The problem articulated in this study indicates limited training and support from institutions for student government advisors in higher education, while being expected to mitigate campus climate and activism challenges through advising the student government organization and answering to campus administration. This qualitative study explored how advisors, superiors, peers, student leaders, and colleagues understood and conceptualized the role of advisors under these circumstances taking a phenomenological approach. Adopting semi-structured interviewing and document analysis as methodological approaches, participants were recruited from three institutions within the Midwest and were positioned 360-degrees around the advisor within the organization.

The primary purpose of the chapter is to report findings according to the data collected during both the document analysis procedures—as well as—the semi-structured interviews. The predetermined categories for the 360-analysis process were (a) advisor roles in developing student leaders, (b) advisor characteristics or competencies, (c) advisor involvement in campus committees, (d) advisor participation in campus committees, and lastly (e) advisor roles in campus activism. Each category is presented, summarized, and articulated according to the most salient theme across the data sample for this phenomenological qualitative study.

Using a thematic analysis technique (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Taylor & Bogdon, 1984), interview transcripts and documents (i.e., student government constitutions) were evaluated to understand shared experiences across various sizes and types of high education institutions represented in this study. This analysis took pragmatic steps (Aronson, 1995) drawing upon direct quotes and commonalities in experiences, articulating data that reiterate or confirm previous patterns, and reveal particular subthemes were applicable. This study centered

on the constructed realities of participants based on lived experiences within respective organizations. As this study did not test a specific hypothesis, or employ quantitative or mixed methods, a qualitative approach allowed for exploration lived experiences in respective organization through particular behavior and interactions described.

The design of this study is intentional to account for nuance based on institutional size and type. An assumption, articulated in research and anecdotally, is that the scale and scope of a student government advisor's job will vary greatly due to these considerations (Cuyjet, 1994). This study found myriad similarities and no participants commented on how these considerations change based on institutional type.

Recruitment and Participant Selection

Participants were recruited from seven institutions located in the Midwest via email and phone over three months. Taking a snowball effect (Creswell, 1994), contact information for the student government advisor was collected first, if available, via the organization's website, or by way of the student government leader who provided the advisor's information. It is noteworthy that some institutions readily displayed the advisors name and contact information on a dedicated student government website, while others required more research to determine to whom advising responsibilities fall.

Continuing with the snowball effect (Creswell, 1994), and keeping the parameters of the study in mind, advisors provided recommendations for peers, colleagues, and specific student government leaders to recruit for this study's interview process. As previously articulated, advisors may be full-time, part-time, or voluntary, meaning it is likely that there is no direct oversight or supervision for their advising responsibilities specifically. In the case that the advisor did not have a direct supervisor, interviews were solicited from leaders of campus

activities offices. The sample for this study included three institutions, with a total of four advisors. Carter University has two advisors, while Giselle College and the University of Knowles each only have one. The advisors at Carter and Knowles each serve in voluntary capacities with no direct oversight, and in that case, the campus activities office director was interviewed. The advisor at Giselle College serves in a full-time capacity and reports to the dean of students. An interview was solicited for this superior to no avail and as such the campus activities office director was invited to interview as an alternative.

At the conclusion of the recruitment and participant selection process, 19 total interviews were obtained, some of which includes institutions that had more than one advisor, peer, or colleague. Table 1 represents the number of participants based on institution and indicates their role in the organization and their assigned pseudonym.

Table 1 Participant Overview and Pseudonyms

Institution	Role	Title	Pseudonym
Carter University	Advisor	Faculty Member	Taylor
	Co-Advisor	Executive Cabinet Member	Shannon
	Superior	Director of Campus Activities	Ryan
	Colleague 1	Ombudsperson	Sydney
	Colleague 2	Conduct Director	Angel
	Peer	Greek Life Advisor	Skylar
	Student Leader	SG President	August
Giselle College	Advisor	Full-time Advisor	Peyton
	Peer	Greek Life Advisor	Dominique
	Colleague 1	Service-Learning Assistant Director	Alex
	Colleague 2	First Year Experience Director	Charlie
	Superior	Campus Activities Director	Kendall
	Student Leader 1 Student Leader 2	SG Representative SG Representative	Dallas Blue
University of Knowles	Advisor	Rec Sports Director	Jessie
	Peer	Student Org Advisor	Riley
	Student Leader	SG Exec Board Member	Journey
	Superior	Campus Activities Director	London
	Colleague	Campus Activities Manager	Micah

Institutional Sizes and Types

This study included three institutions located in the Midwest. Each institution was assigned a pseudonym and other identifiable information was changed to maintain anonymity. Table 2 summarizes the institutional type as indicated by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, the approximate size of the student body, and the number of advisors at the institution. Table 3 summarizes these specific characteristics of each institution and provides the number of student government advisors on campus.

Table 2 Institutional Sample Overview

Institution	Type	Size (Approximate)	Student Government Advisors
Carter University	Research Comprehensive	22,000	2
Giselle College	Heavy Research Institution	44,000	1
University of Knowles	Regional Research Comprehensive	20,000	1

Data Collection

Utilizing a semi-structured, qualitative interviewing approach, in-depth information and experiences were able to be obtained (McNamara, 1999). Student government advisors, superiors, colleagues, peers, and student leaders were solicited for interviews for this study at three institutions located in the Midwest. Each interview began with a series of questions that obtain demographic information. Next, questions targeted the specific pathway taken that led to the appointment in the postsecondary institution for the student government advisor, superiors, colleagues, and peers. Inquiry focused on specific day-to-day tasks of the advisor and situations that were considered high stakes. Clarifying questions were asked only when necessary during interview processes. Initial interviews lasted for one hour. Follow-up interview were requested via email as needed and lasted for 30 minutes.

Institutional Responses

As stated, seven institutions were invited to participate in this study with a minimum of three to provide broader and robust findings for comparison and analysis purposes. To proceed to the data analysis portion, institutions needed at least one individual from each specific role (e.g., advisor, student leader, colleague, superior, and peer) that met the parameters of the study. In some cases, more than one individual was invited to participate in the semi-structured interview

process. Given the nature of this project, it is insightful that most institutions did not have enough time to participate, were eventually non-responsive after confirming interview times, or were not comfortable with the advisor interviewing about the nature of their job with an individual from outside of their organization. One institution from which interviews were solicited boasts four student government advisors positioned throughout the campus' division of student affairs. When interview participation was solicited, this resulted in the superior—the dean of students and vice president of student affairs, who oversees each of these advisors—declining each of the advisor's participation in the study unless it took place as a focus group and during which the dean/vice president could be present. In order not to compromise the validity of findings and garner true and personal reflections on their experiences, interviews were declined from this site by the researcher.

Document Analysis

Data collection procedures in this study included document analysis procedures (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997). Student government organizational constitutions, operating procedures (rule and protocols for day-to-day operation), and handbooks were collected and analyzed from each of the three institution's student government websites if available.

Documents were skimmed, read, and interpreted (Bowen, 2009) looking for information indicative of the advisor's role in supporting the organization. This process involved finding, selecting, making meaning, and synthesizing information collected from the documents. Document analysis, coupled with qualitative interviewing, created a pathway for data collected in this study to converge and be corroborated, triangulating data and providing credibility (Eisner, 2017).

Carter University. The student government at Carter abides by a constitution, disciplinary procedures, and bylaws. The constitution and disciplinary procedures make no mention of the advisor. Bylaws indicate that a candidate for an elected role in student government may appeal results of any student government elections to the advisor. Further, bylaws indicate that any disputes regarding the interpretation of the constitution or bylaws may be submitted for review by an ad-hoc committee, to which the advisor must appoint a senator, a student at-large, and a legal counsel as a non-voting member of the committee.

University of Knowles. Within the student government constitution at Knowles, the advisor was noted with responsibility for checking student grade point averages to ensure continued participation and placing students on probation who do not maintain minimum grade point average requirements. The executive branch of the organization (president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary) must attend mandatory weekly meetings with the advisor. Further, the constitution states that the student government advisor must attend all impeachment meetings, and that the advisor can be impeached as well. Finally, constitution notes that the advisor shall be the dean of students and that the president and executive committee members will decide on whether or not to include any co-advisors.

Student government bylaws at Knowles indicate that resignations regarding grade point average must be submitted to the advisor as well before the end of the semester.

Giselle College. While Giselle possesses a constitution, compiled code (bylaws), and operating procedures, no documents indicate any responsibilities of the advisor.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis as a technique to analyze data collected from informants in interviews and from documents was employed in this study which took pragmatic steps (Aronson, 1995; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). These steps included collecting data from interview transcriptions, identifying data that related to particular patterns, and combining patterns into themes and subsequent sub-themes were appropriate. This was an appropriate technique to evaluate the shared experiences of serving in the student government advisor role across different institutions considering the 360-degree analysis approach.

Peer Review

The data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation portions of the study underwent a peer review. The individual selected to complete the review held knowledge base and experiences related to the topic. The peer reviewer acted as professional support and provided ongoing feedback to mitigate bias in the interpretation and analysis process. As information is shared with the peer reviewer, identifying information was omitted protecting the confidentiality of participants. Peer reviewer feedback was analyzed, interpreted, and included in the study at the discretion of the primary investigator.

Institutional Descriptions

An Institution of Opportunity

Carter University (Carter or CU) is a mid-sized, regional, comprehensive university, described by many as an institution of opportunity. This phrasing was used to characterize the institution as one that offers “opportunity” for students who “otherwise may not have attended college” as described by Sydney, where more “competitive universities were inaccessible in some form and where individuals from working-class backgrounds can further their education, at

both the undergraduate and graduate level, without travelling far from home.” August, a student leader at Carter, discussed the institution’s roots in the region and the espoused institutional commitment to serving the people within the local community. August, as well as the conduct director, Angel, echoed the institution of opportunity mantra, thinking of Carter as a place where students can thrive and noting the institutional support students receive by way of financial aid:

We serve a population of kids who are doing well academically and find this to be a really good fit for them financially because of the aid that they're able to receive. I think it's also; you know, we consider ourselves an institution of opportunity. –August, Carter

We are, I think, an institution of access. A lot of students on financial aid. A lot of students unable to afford to be here with loans. So, our students are usually very hard working and fairly engaged. –Angel, Carter

As an institution of opportunity, Taylor and Shannon, the co-advisors of the student government organization, thought about both college readiness and the community that the campus provides to students who may not have enrolled in any form of higher education. Many students at Carter are first generation college students:

[Carter] is a regional institution that is, for lack of a better term, a university for opportunity. It is one of the most diverse, welcoming communities around when it comes to varied types of students that come here. You have some real brainiacs... and you have a large minority of students who are unprepared to come to college. –Taylor, Carter

I think that it is a mid-sized institution, that really supports students who want a good academic career. Students who maybe don't have the familial background of higher ed, like a first time, first in their family to go to college... this is really a place for them, to be able to have that higher ed space. –Sydney, Carter

Well, I like to say we are an institution of opportunity, which means a lot of the folks here are folks who might not otherwise have the chance to go to college. Whether it's because they're first generation, so that's not part of their family culture, or whether it's because of lack of finances. –Shannon, Carter

Participants discussed diversity at Carter, noting race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Carter also has a rich history and relationship with the local community, admitting legacy students whose families are long time community partners interested in the institution’s

longevity. Considering the myriad diversity on campus, Taylor, the co-advisor, talked about the ways that this make-up causes challenges on campus as many students are encountering difference for the first time:

When you take White students from rural area, who maybe had zero students of color, zero teachers of color, in their high school, and you bring them to [CU]'s campus, where again, 18 to 20% are Black, and you have folks from [suburban cities within the state] ... the city, as opposed to these rural White areas... Combine that with, we have a substantial Muslim population. We have an active Jewish population. And you get a lot of confusion, friction, and it can be challenging. But that's what we're also seeing in the real world. So, it's much more of a... [Carter] is much more of a microcosm of the real world than, I think, certainly most Ivy League universities. –Taylor, Carter

Touting the institution as one of opportunity, participants were asked to describe what that meant in their own words. Sydney, the campus Ombudsperson, summarized the perspectives of all of the participants at Carter by noting the commitment of both administrative staff and faculty members, within and outside of the classroom:

Having resources and support, that's invested in their success. I think it is an institution where, the faculty very much are student focused. And, that any sort of research or service that they do, is in support of that classroom experience, and how do they help create that experience for students. –Sydney, Carter

Large, Wealthy Research Institution

Giselle College (Giselle or GC) is a public research institution (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2019), often thought to “operate like a private one,” as shared by Dominique. It is a competitive institution and receives thousands of applications for fall admissions. Like many higher education institutions, Giselle is decentralized and heavily research focused on primarily on generating new knowledge. The student body comprises over 44,000 students who come from predominantly wealthy backgrounds, with admissions of about 7,000 incoming freshmen annually:

Giselle College is a large public research institution. –Peyton, Giselle

Large research-comprehensive institution. Overall, [about] 40,000 students. Very research-heavy from a graduate student perspective, as well as undergraduate I think for that matter. Lots of wealth, both institutionally and from alumni and those who give, as well as students who go here, so the, I think the median, the average family income is more like \$150,000 or something like that... –Kendall, Giselle

It is a large research institution... my focus is on the undergraduate population. So, we have about 7,000 incoming first-year students each year and then about a thousand-ish...transfer students that we work with. –Charlie, Giselle

Some participants felt that the institution's heavy focus on research translates to a lack of support for staff and administrators. This is mostly attributed to the decentralized makeup of the college:

I would describe the Giselle College as a large, decentralized, research one institution that focuses on creating knowledge and providing resources to the faculty and students. I think that they provide really great benefits for staff and administrators. –Alex, Giselle

The student body comprises a large majority of out-of-state students. Because of this, students come from higher income backgrounds, with very few able to afford to attend the institution from low income backgrounds without the support of financial aid and scholarships. Dominique, a peer and advisor to another advocacy-based student group, reflected on the in- and out-of-state dynamics that are created on campus based on recruitment efforts:

Interesting demographic of students in terms of about 40% of the population being out of state and 60% being in state, which means that the socioeconomic status of the students is often times very high because they're able to afford to come here. It really shifts the dynamics for a lot of different students in a lot of diverse bodies because often times we're looking at middle class and upper-class students. Very few students who are low socioeconomic status students. –Dominique, Giselle

Given the homogeneity of the student body from the perspective of wealth, demographics are less diverse in terms of race and income, as well as in-state and out-of-state students. As reported by Peyton, the student government advisor, "It's very affluent, I suppose, very White but I guess it's competitive to get into [Giselle College] and so they're typically high achieving students."

Dallas, a student government leader, considered how the makeup “of majority out-of-state students who are able to afford out-of-state tuition and their access to information, this makes [Giselle] inaccessible to all, although the mission of the institution is to serve citizens of the state.” Relatedly, Blue, reported being unaware of Giselle without the insight from her mother because recruitment efforts did not make it into her high school community, even being from the same state:

It's not accessible to everybody... If my mom didn't go to Giselle, like I probably would not have one known about it because it didn't funnel. There was no pipeline to Giselle through my high school. –Blue, Giselle

This was consistent with the perspective of Kendall, the director of the student activities office, who referred to the institution’s mission to serve individuals residing in the same state. However, the demographics on campus do not necessarily demonstrate or articulate that commitment in ways that the broader campus community can actually see:

The mission of the institution is really to serve the state. It actually says that, but when you look at the demographics of the students who are here, there's a lot about, it's about half-and-half, [in-state] and then out-of-state. Of course, out-of-state students pay more tuition. We're predominantly a White institution. –Kendall, Giselle

Dominique, a peer who advises another student group on campus, noted that Giselle operated more like a private or Ivy League institution, although it is public. The student body’s demographics contribute to this, as well as the alumni and donor network across career fields and industries. This contributes to the inaccessibility of Giselle and makes navigating the institution much more difficult for students who may not fit within these structures or come from such backgrounds:

Definitely not as racially, ethnically diverse or religiously diverse for that matter. Because of the institution often times we joke that it's a public private institution, that it mimics a lot of the Ivy Leagues in terms of the composition of the student body and maybe even the wealth that's generated. But it also means that there are some pretty big disparities and

there's a broad spectrum of what students need to make sure that they're successful here. – Dominique, Giselle

Students that arrive at Giselle, and persist, are often labeled high-achieving and really focused on their academics. Students have access that comes with a lot of power and privilege. They are also often concerned with creating change on campus and determining what is missing to continuously improve their own experiences on campus. Kendall articulated this during their interview:

I would say, that... I think there's just an air of perfectionism in our students, so there's this element of, "I'm here, and I'm focused on academics, and I really want to do well." I don't know, I don't know how much of that comes from, actually, the students themselves when they arrived here or if it's just the ethos of the culture of them being here. –Kendall, Giselle

Finally, Kendall also noted the challenges this creates when students who do not come from such backgrounds have to navigate the college differently. This is often necessary for their survival at the college:

We still have many students who don't come from a place of privilege who are navigating oppressive structures of this institution as well, so ways in which they can survive and resources that they need and those things, so... –Kendall, Giselle

Commuter-Based, Disconnected, and Decentralized

The University of Knowles (Knowles or UK) is a research-based, commuter institution that is decentralized and located in an urban city, with a predominantly White student body. Participants, like Riley, a peer who advises a graduate student organization, noted the institution as one where “students are siloed and often stay within their racial or cultural groups.” Knowles also has a “large commuter population of students from the local community” as shared by Jessie, the student government advisor. Institutional efforts, such as requiring students to live in campus housing for the first and second year, have been implemented to address the “detached” feeling of the campus and create robust experiences that students want to participate in on

campus. Jessie spoke to the local residents that really see the institutions as a space to advance their careers in a vast selection of professional programs:

We are a research-based university. We have over 20,000, if you want to call it a mid-major university... We are a university that is very strong in engineering, business, nursing, we have a medical school... It's a commuter school, there are a lot of commuters that attend [UK] being here in an urban city, I think you have quite a bit of those that are [local residents] that attend the university, not to mention you have a great deal of folks from [across the state], northwest [state] particularly. –Jessie, Knowles

As Knowles is a commuter institution, with a smaller percentage of students actually residing on campus, the decentralized makeup of the institution feels exacerbated. Riley, a peer and advisor to another student group and former student body president, discussed the makeup of separate campus and the siloed nature of programs contributing to the detached feeling of the institution:

It seems like a very detached institution. It seems like every college kind of does its own thing, and it would make sense, in a sense, because we do have two campuses. You have the health and science campus, which is where the nurses and of course the doctors and everything, attend their courses. And then you have the main campus. So, it seems like it's a little bit detached from that framework. –Riley, Knowles

Micah, a colleague in campus activities, described institutional efforts at the undergraduate level to create more community by way of campus housing; however, many members of the campus community identify as low income, which makes affording campus housing more difficult. Many students opt still to commute to campus:

It's definitely predominantly White... We're mostly a commuter school. They're trying to change that by having students stay on campus for their first and second year. But we're predominantly a commuter school, and it is definitely a blend, but I would say it's lower middle class. –Micah, Knowles

Micah then transitioned into a discussion of the various levels of need that exist on UK's campus, as the campus serves a student body that comprises students with high levels of need. This disparity is manifested not only through the costs of tuition, fees, and other supplies, but

also through living expenses, food, and other emergencies that arise. This positions the university as critical to the student body and the local community by providing resources that many may not have access to:

So, we have a lot of students in need on this campus. We have a food pantry here. We have that grant which helps people pay their rents. We don't do anything with tuition, but we have helped people pay their rents and car repairs. And they'll get a gift card for groceries if they apply. Originally, I would have thought middle class, but I think it's lower. –Micah, Knowles

Knowles offers a diversity of programs across professional areas. Students, both undergraduate and graduate level, are able to select programs of study from several professional schools which is in alignment with the mission of the university:

It's a higher education institution that provides opportunities to students from a multitude of diverse backgrounds. The mission is to improve the human condition and so we focus highly on doing that in a multitude of ways... We're actually one of the few institutions across the nation that have colleges in all the professional areas. –London, Knowles

While London, the leader of the campus activities office, noted the vast opportunities available to students academically through their various schools and colleges, Journey, a student government leader, described almost not applying to Knowles as she was mostly unaware of the institutions program offerings. While the institution serves many members of the local community, extending its reach beyond this geographic location is a challenge:

I think people just don't see it all the time. Like I almost didn't apply to [UK]. Now I'm here, so I think it's a really great place, like once you find it, because there's so many ways to get involved on campus, you have so many student organizations that cover all these different ideas. –Journey, Knowles

Members of the student body are actively engaged and willing to provide their feedback to those that take interest in their needs and experiences. As UK has a “student-centered” focus, this is welcomed, and “campus personnel are open to listening to their voices” as reported by

London. Simultaneously, Knowles is working to become more responsive to specific student needs that are in congruence with student demographics, as described by Jessie:

Students are very vocal here at [UK]. The students speak, people tend to listen/people tend to stop everything they're doing to take care of the students. One of our core values is being student centered and you can look at it a couple of different ways with that. I think we are becoming more of a responsive university, but we're still more of a reactive university... I think the university could do better with being more responsive to the demographics and the needs. – Jessie, Knowles

Becoming a Student Government Advisor

Prior research describes student government advisors as often having previous membership and service in their undergraduate careers (Whipple & Murphy, 2004). For many, this is what may even compel them to later serve in the advisory capacity. How advisors came to be in their roles is important and relevant for each institution within this study.

As this sample represents, advisors may be full-time, part-time, or voluntary. This sample makeup leans towards advisors having no direct supervision for service in the advisory capacity, only for their primary appointment on campus. Interrogating this information for the purposes of this study is important and relevant and this section presents how advisors came to be in their advisory capacities and any supervision they may receive.

Carter has two advisors, Taylor and Shannon, assigned to the student government organization that came to be based on the requests of student leaders. This is not uncommon as students often solicit asks for advisors through the relationships they build across campus. The primary advisor is a faculty member, while the co-advisor serves as a member of the president's executive cabinet. The faculty advisor described begin asked to serve as student government advisor by the vice president of student affairs, who was the organizations previous advisor, based on previous work experience with student groups and organizations:

I somehow got tapped for that because one of the student leaders came up to me and said, "Would you be our advisor?" So, I said, "Sure. Sure, why not?" I like undergrads. I like high-achieving undergrads, especially those in student government and [the student leader committee]. –Taylor, Carter

The co-advisor's trajectory into the advisory capacity followed assisting the group legal issues regarding funding, as they learned the cabinet member has a background in law and policy. Following the students denying a student group funding for a program or event, members of the student government executive committee at the time met with them to review their operating procedures. As student government organizations are managing student funds, there are many legal questions and training that takes place around the ways the organization funds other student groups on campus:

As legal issues would arise, they would come and periodically ask for help. And in ... I can't remember the year, they stumbled across a situation where they had denied funding to a student organization. –Shannon, Carter

After not taking the advice, the student government organization was sued by the student group and it was determined that the organization needed a complete overhaul of their rules and operating procedures around funding. After working with Shannon, the student leaders asked for the cabinet member to serve as a second advisor because of the legal advice and background that became necessary to carrying out their work:

So, they came to me and said, "Would you be our advisor?" I checked with my boss at the time, who was [president of the institution], and [they] said, "Okay, why not?" That's when I became their advisor. And I've been that ever since they ... I think primarily because, they like the legal advice, they like the political advice, because I have a political background. –Shannon, Carter

Neither advisor receives any supervision or training related to their role. The previous advisor was the vice president of student affairs. While receiving no direct supervision related to their role, the faculty advisor, Taylor, expressed having a clear understanding of institutional hierarchy:

I don't have a formal supervisor. But if the provost wanted, she could do ... She could step in ... Yeah. I mean, ultimately, student government answers to Student Affairs, which answers to the provost. I mean, I know the chain of command. Trust me. I have some power as a faculty member and as a full professor and tenured, and it'd really be pretty difficult to do anything to me. –Taylor, Carter

Giselle has one advisor, Peyton, to the primary student government organization on campus. Because of the vastness and decentralization of the college, there are 18 other student government organizations on campus that are attached to their specific schools, colleges, or program departments. For the purposes of this study, the primary student government advisor that represents all student voices was interviewed. At Giselle, there is a full-time advisor, an administrator, whose primary responsibility is to support the student government organization. Just like other members of the student affairs division, there was a formal application, interview process, and onboarding for this individual. This advisor is supervised by the dean of students and works very intimately with both the vice president of student affairs and several members of the board of trustees:

After spending three years working with the 14 student organizations, in some sense, either administratively or as their advisor I was hoping to gain a different experience that would allow me to continue serving students and serving in an advisor role, that would kind of broaden my horizons and give me ... equip me with new skills, I suppose. So, the student government advisor position opened up... so I pursued that and that's kind of how I fell into it. –Peyton, Carter

Finally, the advisor at Knowles, Jessie, who serves as the recreational sports director, was asked to serve as the advisor to the student government organization by the vice president of student affairs. This decision was made based on the advisor's previous experience advising student government and other student groups/organizations at another institution. While the vice president serves as the direct supervisor of this individual for their primary appointment, service as advisor is not included in their performance evaluation although it is a time-consuming aspect of their job.

Presentation of the Findings

The following pages present the findings from this study, presented according to themes under each category of developing student leaders, advisor characteristics, institutional knowledge, professional development and training, and campus activism. Table 4 provides a summary of themes from advisors, student leaders, superiors, peers, and colleagues for quick reference. Subsequent pages substantiate these themes with direct quotes from participants.

Table 3 Summary of Themes

Category	Developing Student Leaders	Advisor Characteristics	Institutional Knowledge	Professional Development and Training	Campus Activism
Advisors	Involvement with the Campus Activities Office	Understanding the Landscape of the University		Time Constraints	Adhering to Campus Policy, Protocol, and Procedure
Student Leaders	Navigating Institutional Structures	Being Human		Managing Leadership and Understanding Power	Ensure We Don't Get Sued
Superiors	Navigating Institutional Politics	Balancing Student Needs and Institutional Structures	Gathering Information from Across Campus	Attending Conferences	Asking Questions and Sharing Information
Peers	Building and Maintaining Relationships	The Advisor as a Coach		Understanding Diversity in the Community	Supporting and Encouraging Activism
Colleagues	Communication Expectations	Championing Student Voice		Privilege and Identity Work	The Advisor as an Activist

Developing Student Leaders

Developing student leaders is often considered a primary responsibility of student government advisors (Dunkel & Schuh, 1993), and the ways that this development occurs varies depending on the specific needs of student leaders, expectations of the communities in which advisor's do their work, and the capacity of advisor's to actually carry forward these tasks. In this study, themes under the category of developing student leaders included involvement with the campus activities office, navigating institutional structures, navigating institutional politics, building and maintaining relationships, and communication expectations all as key in student leaders on-going development.

Involvement with the Campus Activities Office

For advisors, the steps necessary to develop student leaders revolved around participating in leadership activities within the campus involvement center. For each of the institutions represented within this study, advisor efforts were coupled with the efforts of the campus involvement center, who each offered leadership trainings available to all registered student organizations. Some of these trainings and on-boarding sessions are joint efforts between these offices and the student government organization:

I think here at [Carter]; we've got a nice balance. Because a lot of the people who are in student government are in other organizations. And [the campus involvement center] does its very best to do leadership trainings and monitor the groups and help them learn to be adults without training wheels. And so, in that sense, it becomes a team effort. –Taylor, Carter

Student government does a wonderful job of having some onboarding sessions with all of the new incoming senators. They have an onboarding process. They shadow the outgoing senators. The Student Body President and Vice President meets and speaks with them and then the senate as a whole has a time where they have a test that they have to go through, so they have to go through some training beforehand. –Jessie, Knowles

Advisors across institutions described their role in developing student leaders as one that evolves depending on the group's needs, particularly around legal issues and campus processes. As previously shared student leaders developed a relationship with the co-advisor at Carter following a major legal issue related to their funding processes and procedures. Following this, Shannon, the student government co-advisor, has developed more of a coaching relationship with student government leaders to garner advisor input and suggestions before making final decisions that could lead to additional legal issues:

I would say in the beginning; it was more so the legal advice. And then it started developing to legal and process advice, "This is how you do this at the University." Today, I would say it's become even more coaching. "What is your advice on how we should respond to this major incident that's happened on campus?" And, "Can you review this speech we've written?" "Can you review this draft email that we want to ... or this draft social media comment that we want to send out? Do you have any thoughts?" –Shannon, Carter

Peyton, at Giselle College, thought of their coaching relationship with students as one that centers on self-reflection, "Asking some reflective questions, asking them to do things like complete the social identity profile, and think about how it impacts the way they interact with other students on student government, thinking through the various types of leadership." Their role was seen as critical in development and cultivating this sort of thinking among student leaders in order to approach their work more intentionally.

Navigating Institutional Structures

As student leaders are learning while doing, advisor resourcefulness and knowledge of institutional structures become necessary to student leader success. Student leaders were primarily concerned with understanding how to navigate structures in place at their respective institutions. August, at Carter, thought about their development as student leaders in terms of how the advisor teaches them how to do specific things on campus including but not limited to transferring funds:

If I have questions about how the university functions and we have to transfer money from our budget to a different department and I was like, I don't know how to do that. How do we go about doing that? Who's in charge? You know, [an advisor] knows that because [the advisor] has been here for years. – August, Carter

August went on to describe legal implications around specific activities and the advisor's criticality in facilitating and being knowledgeable of the facts, "For legality questions about something like, 'are we allowed to do this?' We send it to [our advisor] and if we have questions about whether ... 'is this okay? Is this, morally right?'" Blue, at Giselle, expressed similar sentiments regarding the advisor's ability to traverse institutional structures and went further to consider the the ability of the advisor to provide insight and feedback on personal matters like applying for and seeking new opportunities. Not only was the advisor responsible for developing student leadership capacity, being a relatable staff member to provide coaching, development, and mentorship was key to student leaders across the three institutions:

Everything! Life advice. Internship advice. Like trying to figure out if I like should apply for this or not. Like study abroad. Um, maybe student conflicts or just like asking like their experience with like something and just kind of like bouncing ideas off of them or like something like, but literally like everything. –Blue, Giselle

Navigating Institutional Politics

Superiors throughout this study leaned toward a developmental role in developing student leaders on campus that allows for students to see campus process and think through their decisions. Advisors were seen as critical in asking questions that challenge student's thinking in collaboration with campus experts where there may be mutual interest and need. Ryan thought about the ways that student organizations set missions, visions, and goals of their organizations and how advisors assist in creating action steps to meet them:

I think they need someone to help them see process, to set vision, to learn how to take an idea and turn it into an actionable thing, and a sort of perception check about, "How much can we do? What are realistic goals?" And the accountability piece. So, they for sure need someone to say, "That's a risk management issue, that programming thing you're thinking

about doing." And this should be developmental, too, right? But like, "That violates a policy, but how could we do it in a way that doesn't and is safe?" Or, "You're doing programming and you're not an expert in it. How can you partner with campus experts to provide students with that thing you want to provide them?" –Ryan, Carter

London echoed similar sentiments in challenging students to think critically and consider potential barriers to meeting goals. London specified the need for students to arrive at decisions on their own by not telling them what to they should do, but by providing a broader understanding of the political landscape of the institution:

They've got a big idea and they want to do something, it would be beneficial for the advisor to say, "Here's some of the potential roadblocks that you might have. Here's some ideas of how you can go about it." Not doing it for them and not telling what to do but giving them at least an understanding that, "Hey, here's some political landmines that you might to steer away from." –London, Knowles

In order to advise through their particular missions, visions, and goals, superiors agreed that it was necessary to understand the unique needs of the organization and identify the ways that the advisor can work to meet those needs by adapting their *style* and *communication*. This was best captured by Kendall who considered the advisor's ultimate focus to be on making sure that students are successful:

I think, through conversation, I would learn to understand maybe what they need on an individual or community level... and for me to recognize how I might need to adapt my style, my communication, my support in order to make sure they have what they need to be successful, because, ultimately, as the advisor, I'm focused on making sure that they're successful. –Kendall, Giselle

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Peers considered the success of the student government organization to be largely due in part to the critical relationships they have on campus across varying demographics within the campus community. For example, Shannon expressed that there should be relationships with the director of the campus activities office, as well as, the director of diversity, equity, and inclusion

initiatives on campus. Advisors were seen as key in being intentional in developing key relationships across the campus community:

I think that they should initially work with them to understand the relationships that they need to have on campus. So, helping them build relationships with key constituents, whether that be upper administration, [board of trustees], key alumni that might be around. But then other directors on campus... they should know [director of the campus involvement office] pretty well, and they should know [director of diversity, equity, and inclusion] really well. –Skylar, Carter

Skylar also thought it pertinent to recognize that students are students first and that this comes with understanding the development that happens while carrying out their work. While students may be privy to aspects of the makeup of their institutions, they are still learning while leading. Another peer, Riley, conveyed similar feelings that permeated all responses from peers, drawing from their service as a former student body president. Riley thought of all of the things they were not aware of prior to stepping into the role and how this required a shift in their leadership orientation. This was facilitated by the advisor, who Riley felt should be critically constructive:

I think some students maybe have an understanding of some of those things, but if you don't empower them and train them, at the end of the day they're still college students and there's still development that needs to happen. –Skylar, Carter

Very open... engages people where they are, and...very constructive. Critically constructive, at the same time, too. So, there are a lot of mistakes, and things that I needed to learn, in terms of when I first took over leadership of student government. Because I used to make a lot of, "I," statements. Or, "I would like for us to do this," or, "This is the direction that student government should be taking." –Riley, Knowles

Communicating Expectations

Building and maintaining relationships provides a bridge into how the advisor communicates expectations from the perspectives of colleagues. Colleagues within this study thought it pertinent to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the organization to better inform their steps taken when advising. Micah thought about the ways that having these

conversations with students was a simple way to gauge where students are and where they want to go. This development is also seen as a pathway to communicating the expectations of the student government organization overall:

I need to see what their strengths and weaknesses are. So even though you're elected, I need to know what you're capable of actually doing so that I know how to help get you there. I do that individually then I do it as a group and then I would like to know what their goals are for themselves and I need to let them know what the expectations of student government are, because they may not even know. –Micah, Knowles

Communicating expectations of the organization, understanding strengths and areas for growth, and navigating the institution were all considerations that went hand-in-hand from the perspectives of colleagues across institutions. As there are often multiple and complex competing priorities, keeping actions and tasks of the organization “constructive” was another sub-theme within this area. As students are not always privy to or have access certain information, the advisor becomes responsible for communicating with students in ways that they can understand from the perspective of campus colleagues. Sydney, at Carter University, best captured and summarized this perspective:

A significant portion of the steps that an advisor should, or does end up taking, are really around helping them understand how to best navigate and present themselves...I think, to try and help keep that action focused in a constructive way... But it can be tricky to navigate the institution, and you don't always know everything to every story. There may be more behind the scenes, than what even a student leader may have access to. –Sydney, Carter

Alex, a colleague at Giselle College, articulated common perspectives on the advisor's role in sharing information and coaching students through strategies that allow for them to navigate their institutions effectively. With this, Alex went further and articulated how the advisor in many ways becomes a major “catalyst for change” both within and outside of the organization. Alex, and other colleagues, shared that the advisor can really push student leaders to think more critically about the makeup of their organizations and how this impacts their

leadership. The advisor was seen as primarily responsible for recognizing these barriers, presenting these perspectives to students, and working to address those challenges within the student group:

I've seen the student government advisor be a catalyst for change within the organization, so trying to promote intra-group change whether it's to make the organization more inclusive, more diverse in terms of the race, ethnicity, gender identity, socio-economic status of the students that are involved in student government, knowing that at some institutions, because those roles are based on traditional ways that we think about leadership especially through a positional lens and because a lot of those positions are unpaid, that there can be a lot of barriers for students who aren't traditionally leaders. I'm using air quotes there. I've seen student government advisors be people who will highlight some of those barriers and work to tear those things down, so creating some intra-group change. –Alex, Giselle

Advisor Characteristics

Certain characteristics remain important to meeting organization goals and liaising between students and campus administration. Themes emerging from this category across advisors, student leaders, superiors, peers, and colleagues included understanding the landscape of the institution, being empathetic and human, balancing student needs and institutional structures, the advisor as a coach, and championing student voice.

Understanding the Landscape of the University

Advisors overwhelmingly considered having a thorough understanding of institutional structures as a primary characteristic necessary for their success. Advisors felt that in order even do this job effectively, this was necessary, especially considering the types of responses that may be required of behalf of the student government. More and more, student government organizations are often asked to take stances or issue statements on particular situations that arise on campus. Sometimes these issues are campus specific; however, local community, state-wide, or nationally issues which impact campus communities trigger student government organizations to speak out:

I'm not the full-time person, but still in my role and responsibilities as I've understood professionally, I need to know what's going on at the [university]. If I don't, how can I help the students? If I'm advising them, there's a major situation that could take place at this university. The student government president is probably going to be asked to give a statement and the student government president might say I want to give a statement. You need to understand what's the landscape of the university that you're on/what's going with the students. —Jessie, Knowles

Availability, knowledge of the university structure, [and] who to talk to. —Peyton, Giselle

You have to want to be a mentor to them... you got to understand the administrative intricacies of the institution. Because that's part of the job, too ... is to answer their questions when they ask them. —Shannon, Carter

Coupled with thorough knowledge of the institutional, advisors agreed that important characteristics included keeping the work of the student government organization primarily student led. All while providing insight into the innerworkings of their respective institutions, advisors noted being cognizant not to overstep, steer, or lead the work as critical. Jessie's comment in this regard summarizes consistent sentiments expressed across advisors:

Your role is the advisor. Your role is not to call people on campus and do the work for the students. Your role is to encourage them to do work. Call, email, cc me in your emails. If you made a phone, maybe follow up with me, let me know what's going on because I don't like surprises, but I want to be your advocate... but you've got to do the work and I think ... and make sure you're encouraging them to do that. —Jessie, Knowles

Being Empathetic and Human

Student leaders described humanistic characteristics of the advisor as most salient and important to them. Student leaders described a need for someone who is passionate about the work, that cares about them on an individual and group level, that wants to work with, develop, and help them, and that motivates them to keep going. Journey at the University of Knowles described a need for someone that is inspirational, “I think it's important to have someone who's like able to actually inspire people.” Along with being inspiration, Dallas at Giselle described

again the need to be knowledgeable of the institution, and also a level of passion that an advisor has as important because this is not something that can be hidden from students.

They have to know like first of all they have to know how the institution and the way the institution works...Um, so that's number one. Number two like you have to be passionate about it cause like if you're not, it's going to show. And students who care will notice. I think like passion, knowledge of one the institution, the department that you're under...the umbrella, and kind of just understanding students period. Just being approachable... I don't know, just like one, if you know how students are like it will make your job easier. –Dallas, Giselle

Empathy and communication tie will advisors having a humanizing or humanistic orientation. Considering subject matter that may be controversial or contentious, an advisor's ability to remain open and understanding through conflicting views and communicating through those differences was thought of as the bulk of an advisor's responsibilities from the perspectives of student leaders. Listening actively to student needs becomes a necessary and salient aspect of advisor characteristics:

You have to be empathetic; you have to be open minded and understanding because you're going to have a lot of people who have conflicting views. –August, Carter

And like how you communicate with students, your expectations of students, their expectations of you. Like if you just like understand that in itself, like a lot of the job right there. If you don't get that, you're not going to do the job right. This is going to happen. Also, like listening to your students is important. If you don't listen to them, like how are you gonna do your job? –Dallas, Giselle

Balancing Student Needs and Institutional Structures

Student government advisors are uniquely positioned between students, administrators, and faculty, which requires the frequent balancing of perspectives and priorities, and that often requires compromising by way of finding mutual ground. Superiors across institutions almost immediately noted this balancing characterization of advisors. In many ways, this asks for the advisor to be selfless, as articulated by London, at Knowles, who coupled this thinking with campus personnel's nature to “chart their own course”:

I do feel like it's a bit of selflessness. I say that in the context of an academic institution, where faculty and administrators are, in some ways, trying to just chart their own course, but I think this advisor is side-by-side with the student, trying to make sure that they can execute what they view is important in their work. –London, Knowles

Even with balancing various stakeholders, advisors are present to serve students. Kendall, at Giselle, described instances where it becomes the advisor's responsibility to push for change to meet student needs. In many ways is modeling leadership behavior for student leaders and serving as an ally across spaces where students may not have access, which displays a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in order to be of service to all students:

When students are unable to create change or do what they want to do, I think the advisors, it's part of their role, is to try to have the backs of the students, so the students feel supported. I believe that it's really important for the advisor to have multicultural competencies or commitment to diversity equity and inclusion specifically, because the [student government] is serving all students. –Kendall, Giselle

Building off of the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, garnering student voice to meet student needs is difficult and how advisor's work to remain aware of spaces that particular student voices come from on campus calls for intentionality. Superiors, including Kendall, thought it pertinent for the advisor to initiate conversations that challenge student leaders to consider the voices that are represented within or missing from their spaces. Relatedly, Ryan, at Carter, went a bit further and considered the advisor's role in assisting student leaders in developing an agenda that makes these types of considerations. Ryan thought of this more as a reflective activity for students where advisors should not create this agenda for them:

We need to be mindful of the makeup of the organization and who's showing up and who's not and who's voices are heard and who's voices are not. If the student government leaders are not thinking about those things and talking about the cultures that are represented around in the group, then the advisor needs to initiate those conversations. –Kendall, Giselle

A good advisor would help them form a cohesive agenda. Not do it for them, and that's really important too. Not to sort of manipulate that agenda, but to help them understand

how to build that agenda, and what are the steps that they need to take to do that. –Ryan, Carter

The Advisor as a Coach

Previous data throughout the findings have articulated the balance an advisor strikes between doing and telling. Peers in particular shared perspectives of the advisor as a coach, that causes for some self-reflection and keeps students mindful of their own priorities:

I think it's a tough job. I think that the [advisor] likely has to have a lot of bandwidth. A lot of patience and a lot of ability to coach the students in a way that still keeps education at the forefront of the mission, and I say that reflecting on my own position or on positions of people who I work with in other spaces that work with student organizations. –Dominique, Giselle

Similarly, Skylar, at Carter, thought about the doing and telling dynamic between an advisor and student leaders as a method to aid in their success. Skylar considered the ways that an organization with the power and influence of a student government is often controlled due to potential larger exposure, news, and attention that can be drawn to the university in negative ways. In Skylar's perspective, it becomes even more critical for an advisor to be a coach as this is still beneficial to students:

I think there needs to be a savviness around how to help them be successful, not to tell them what to do. I think especially with student government sometimes, it can be a very powerful organization, so you try to control it. I think institutions right now, because you think about some student activism efforts and student rights and things like that. And that's stuff that's, I'm not saying more on the forefront, because I think student activism is always on the forefront, but it's there. And that's something that makes the news. That's something that draws attention. And if it's stuff that has the capacity to potentially make the university look bad to our administration to outsiders and things like that. They're gonna try to control that. Which again, I understand. I understand the political dynamics there, but that does not help the students. –Skylar, Carter

A coaching relationship requires trust from Riley's point of view at Knowles. Advisors and student leaders have to have a strong and trusting relationships as different issues confront the advisor, and this permeates all members of the student organization. Riley felt that the dynamics

between these parties has to be strong in order for them believe the advisor is not in fact trying to control them:

So, the relationship between the advisor and the leaders has to be pretty strong. And I mean just the interpersonal relationship. But then also too, the relationship between the advisor's role, and the overall student government has to be pretty strong as well. And I think characteristics that I would associate with that would be number one, trust. So, you have student leaders are bringing different issues, and different concerns to this advisor. –Riley, Knowles

Championing Student Voice

Advisors are constantly doing student voice work across the campus community. Often the advisor may have to represent the perspectives of students when they are not present to make sure that their needs are considered among decision-making bodies and other authorities.

Colleague participants most salient characteristic of the advisor involved being a champion for student voice, which Micah, at Knowles, stated the advisor needs to be able to speak up and out about student concerns:

So, the advisor needs to be able to speak up because I noticed that some staff, they're afraid of the students. Just being able to stand up to them in a manner that, you need to be respectful but stand up and say look, I support you in this but let's think about these avenues and just how to navigate situations. – Micah, Knowles

Advocating for student voice is challenge and depending on the delivery can be received positively or negatively. As previously articulated, the advisor helps student leaders to strategize about particular missions, visions, and goals of the organization. Similarly, Angel, at Carter, thought about the strong pedagogical vision of the organization that the advisor has that teaches student leaders how to actually serve others and develop leadership skills:

I think the advisor needs to have a strong pedagogical vision of what student government... of how student government should serve the students who are serving on it, right? Like what they should get out of it. So, they should have almost like learning outcomes in their mind, like, a strong vision of how to tease out of the students who are working there, what it is they really want to do and help them to set up strong structures for doing it. I think that

they should really be there to help guide them toward those leadership skills. –Angel, Carter

Being a champion for student voice requires a lot of patience and, again, understanding campus politics in order to develop and maintain relationships across campus. Previous discussions indicate that the advisor may be positioned anywhere within the institution, in a full-time, part-time, or voluntary capacity. Sydney considered the advisor a person with the ability to “traverse all levels of the institution”:

I think ultimately, it has to be someone who probably has a lot of patience... I think also, someone who really can be a network builder. Knowing the politics... having some of that historical context, I think is helpful too. I think someone who has good relationships across campus and can be a bridge builder. I think especially, when you're working with students, if there is a misstep that happens or they get into a conflict with someone, being able to be someone who can smooth those things over and help rebuild those relationships... I think someone who knows and has the ability to really traverse all levels of the institution. – Sydney, Carter

Institutional Knowledge

Gathering Information Across Campus

Previous sections within the findings were presented based on themes that emerged from data within the category. This particularly section of the data is presented collectively as all study participants agreed that serving on campus committees was apropos for the advisor. Advisor’s service on campus committees was seen primarily as a way to gather information from across the campus community. These efforts are all completed in order to inform student’s leadership activities and initiatives. Their service on committees was also viewed as way to anticipate changes across campus that may be coming, as shared by Skylar, a peer with the Carter University: “You can help the student government understand ‘Hey, they might be coming through the pipeline, might be a good thing to collaborate with or be aware of, or try to create some change and communication around.’” Student leaders across the data sample supported

this, stating that the advisor being privy to campus information allows them to provide advice, direction, and understanding of the “lay of the land”:

They're able to get information from different parts of campus and you know, let us know what the lay of the land is. –August, Carter

I definitely think so because how else would they know what's going on on campus? How else would they be able to provide like good advice to whoever like whoever in [student government] may need it. If you don't know what's going on on campus. Like, what you doing? –Dallas, Giselle

Finally, London, at the University of Knowles, best summarized the perspectives of superiors stating that service on committees bodes for long-term strategic planning efforts (another committee were advisors’ insight was noted as necessary):

I think it's important for advisors to be in meetings, or the student government advisor to be in meetings of areas of importance and long-term planning because if they don't know that information, what can they actually provide as a resource? –London, Knowles

When reporting example committees were the advisors’ perspective, as well as, spaces where the voices of student government should be amplified, participants named leadership and diversity related committees as primary spaces where student government should be represented. Alex thought about leadership development efforts on the behalf of the advisor by way of committees to think about doing this work more democratically, while Charlie thought similarly and included work around harm prevention to display more of a collective impact approach to efforts within the Division of Student Affairs:

Things around student leadership, I think, should be happening for a multitude of reasons. Even though I talked about what the leadership culture of student government that I've seen, those people should still be in spaces with folks that are trying to do leadership development in a more democratic way. –Alex, Giselle

Including, but not limited to...leadership work that's happening. Um, yeah. Leadership, student development, like student activities, um, harm prevention. Those would be the top three. [Harm prevention is] the closest to my work, I think. Um, and we have, we've always actually had a student government leader introduce our online courses. I think setting the tone, um, around campus values and I think harm is harm prevention is a part of that. So, I

can see... I think it's a, it's a campus, it's a campus wide issue, so I would say that that's something that's important.” –Charlie, Giselle

Here it can be seen that there is a developed and sustained relationship with the student government organization as well, as Charlie stated the student organization’s involvement in introducing online courses related to harm prevention for incoming freshmen. As previously reported, Charlie serves as first-year experience director, making this a primary area of concern within their work.

In several instances, it was explicitly stated that the advisor should serve on campus committees and occasionally in place of student leaders when they are not available or if the information being discussed students do not, or should not, have access to. Jessie, the advisor at the University of Knowles, thought it pertinent for the advisor to serve on all campus committees to gain information because there is not an aspect of the campus community and decision-making process that does not directly impact the student experience. Jessie thought that advisors should be represented for all committees. Blue, a student leader, echoed this sentiment and felt the advisor should be compensated for these extra efforts if service to committees is a requirement of the role:

I actually think all of them, all of them... all committees, and I serve on a lot or have served on a lot. I just finished ... It was about a year and a half ago, I was on the Strategic Plan Committee, which obviously impacts student government, and it was Strategic Plan for the Division of Student Affairs. –Jessie, Knowles

I think it is important, especially if student access to those spaces is either limited or not allowed. Then it allows the advisor to provide some insight those students might not be able to get. I do think, though, if that is a requirement of the position, like if you're an advisor, you must serve on at least one committee... then that needs to be compensated accordingly. –Blue, Giselle College

Table 5 presents example committees that participants stated were important to the role of the advisor, many of which the advisors within this study have been members of or have

served as chair of. For instance, Peyton at Giselle, discussed their involvement as chair with two different student leadership committees, one of which focuses on awarding students for their campus service and involvement, and the other focused on strategic student leadership opportunities across campus:

I am currently the chair of the [student leadership awards committee], which is an award ceremony honoring student leaders, whether that's in their employment within their student organization or just recognizing the student as a second-year student, we have a variety of awards. So, leading that out, as well as serving on the [student leadership committee], which is focused on leadership opportunities across campus that all students can participate in. So, participating in that as well. – Peyton, Giselle

Table 4 Example Committees for Advisor Service

Example Committees
Dean of Students/Vice President of Student Affairs Advisory Committee
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee
Division of Student Affairs Strategic Plan Committee
Harm Prevention Committee
Sexual Assault Prevention, Education, and Training Committee
Student Leadership Awards Committee
Student Leadership Committee
Student Organization Space Allocation Committee
Title IX Committee

Ryan, with Carter University, immediately expressed that advisors should serve on “any sort of inclusion–DEI, diversity, equity, and inclusion–focused committee.” This was consistent across study participants who shared the perspective that the advisor, and more broadly the organization, should have a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across all three institutions represented within this study. For many participants, these efforts were to ensure a matriculation of student of color into the organization to elevate their voices, making their unique perspectives and experiences are represented:

I think that depending on what your student government looks like or what generally speaking area of students that you work with, it probably makes sense for you to be involved at some diversity spaces on campus. Because generally speaking, we would be

getting students from diverse backgrounds to sit down with student government. – Dominique, Giselle

I think any sort of committee that's related to diversity, equity, and inclusion that has a facet that focuses on retention, is a really important committee for an advisor to be part of. Because regardless of what the assembly looks like, it's a problem if we're not being able to recruit and retain and matriculate students of color. And then I think they could also give additional insight into why we're having diversity problems, and how those might be mitigated by getting a more diverse student government, if that makes sense. -Blue, Giselle

While participants expressed the criticality of an advisor's service on campus committees, recognizing the time commitment required to actually achieve this work was sobering. Ideally, student government advisors would be able to move throughout these committees as needed and necessary; however, balancing this work usually is not their primary work. Committing themselves and managing their limited time is a challenge. Still, even considering the time challenges, the advisor's involvement was viewed just as necessary and important as the organization's involvement itself:

Yes, if they have the time to be able to do it. Again, if you are a one human like team, I cannot imagine needing to be stretched to sit on divisional committees and workings that may have an impact in the long run on your students share but isn't directly related to that work. –Dominique, Giselle

So yes. I think so. At [UK] it's hard, though, because people are already overwhelmed because they're already doing two and three positions. But yes, I do definitely agree that that should definitely be a place for an advisor to be active just as much as the student org is.–Micah, Knowles

Professional Development and Training

On-going professional development was seen as critical to the role of the advising the student government organization, although the commitment and time necessary for advisor to do this is a challenge as similarly expressed within the campus committee's category. Themes emerging from this category related to the types of professional development advisor should participate in, as well as barriers in doing so, including navigating time challenges, managing

leadership and understanding power, attending conferences, and understanding diversity within the community. These efforts were seen as ways to aid the advisor in their success in the role.

Table 6 presents a summary of example professional development topics for advisors as reported by student participants.

Table 5 Summary of Example Professional Development Topics for Advisors

Reported Professional Development Topics and Activities
Campus Activities Center Trainings for Student Organization Advisors
Communication Styles
Conflict Resolution
Facilitation
Inclusive Leadership
Involvement with Professional Organizations (i.e. ACPA)
Leadership Development and Styles
Reading (i.e. Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed)
Student Government Conferences
University Structures and Hierarchy

Time Challenges

Advisors expressed participating in professional development as important but is often challenging considering the time required to commit to doing it. Some advisor reported participating in no professional development related to their advisory capacities and share that much of insight stem from other involvement that they strategically pinpoint as pertinent to student government. For instance, Taylor stated, “not so much,” after being asked if they were involved in any professional and went on to express, “It would probably be beneficial if they really took seriously the role of the advisor, other than to stop them from getting sued.” Taylor thought of their role as narrow enough on their campus that pointed and directed professional development is not necessary. Probing to gain more understanding of this perspective led to a discussion on whether or not professional development would be helpful:

I think it would be fun for the president and vice president and treasurer and sergeant at arms to go to a student government conference along with the advisor. And to have at that conference an advisor session for just the advisors. And there probably is one, but I wouldn't know about it.—Taylor, Carter

As shared, campus activities offices often offer various leadership trainings and developmental opportunities for student leaders. Some offices go further and offer similar trainings for advisors to student groups. Peyton articulated participating in trainings that are relevant to their work with student government specifically, as these training are open to all advisors. Because of this, sometimes topics are not necessary or relevant:

So, the [campus activities office] will offer various trainings for student organization advisors. As the student government, a registered sponsored student organization, I received those emails and will partake as I feel it's applicable. So, I actually have a seminar on Thursday, which is inclusive leadership for organization advisors, so just participating in those as they arise, as well as attending. I've been attending the ACPA National Conference and meeting other colleagues back partaking in seminars that are relevant to students. – Peyton, Giselle

As Peyton has a student affairs background, attending national professional conferences, like the American College Personal Association (ACPA) conference, is a major part of their professional development efforts.

Similarly, Jessie, the advisor at Knowles, relies heavily on divisional efforts to develop professionally, which in most instances tie directly to the student government organization. Beyond these efforts, professional development efforts are nonexistent. When probing around whether or not development in this fashion would be helpful, Jessie thought that an advisor in more of a full-time capacity could handle and commit to such participation. They also considered the positioning of the advisor, the access to certain types of information they may have, and whether or not the advisor has the necessary connections to help in determining the necessity of professional development:

No, that's it with the exception of anything that we do as a division professionally. Most of the time, those things always tie into student government. **CB: Okay, so no PD. Clearly, I know everybody does a bunch of PD things, but no PD directly related to student government?** No, outside... **CB: Would that be helpful?** I think it would be if... if you're going to be in the full-time role, I do think it's important. If you're not going to be in a full-time role and you're in a volunteer role, and again, going back to your level or responsibilities, then I would say I don't think it's as important. Because I think you can a lot of the information at the university because each university is different. But if you're in a full-time role, or if you're not connected as much as I am, if you're that type of person, I think it would be helpful for you to go to these things. –Jessie, Knowles

Managing Leadership and Understanding Power

From the vantage point of those inside the student government organization—those on the receiving end of the advisor’s leadership efforts, student leaders considered the importance of managing various styles of leadership and understanding power within the organization and that the advisors possess themselves. Literature articulates the student government organization as a testing ground for leadership development (Gold & Quatroche, 1994.) and cultivates a major role the advisor plays in meeting those outcomes. Many students join the student government organization to develop their skills as leaders, like August, who looked to the advisor as someone to foster this development during their experience within the organization, “I guess one would be a really good one would be, like leadership development. Like, how to make sure that you can keep your student government leaders, how you can foster them into better leaders I suppose.”

Relatedly, Blue thought of the advisor as an individual that is an expert in conflict resolution and communication, both of which are important leadership skills for students to practice, “Conflict resolution maybe, facilitation maybe. Something about like dealing with different types of people, like different types of leadership styles, communication styles, like stuff like that I think is important.”

Managing leadership and understanding power calls for critical self-reflection, particularly around what an advisor brings to the role, their background, and even how they came

to be the advisor of a prominent student group on campus. Dallas captured this well by including some direct questions for the advisor to consider that may in fact impede the organization's ability to do their work effectively and equitably. Dallas considered this through the lens of institutional politics that students may not be knowledgeable of or that they may not know how to respond to and address:

I really think the biggest part of the training would probably be, like I mentioned earlier, like some pretty heavy introspective work. Like who are you, how have you moved through life, how did you reach the point that you are a student government advisor? What kind of privilege do you hold in this position? Like really looking at yourself and understanding that first. And then probably some sort of ... some sort of piece on like institutional garbage is the word I'll choose. Like the things that happen at the institutional level that make challenges for students, or create inequity for students, and how you might go about helping students in student government utilize their position to push back on some of that. – Dallas, Giselle

For Journey at Knowles, considerations around power echoed those expressed by Dallas and also included the positional and expert power that an advisor might possess that may run counter to the needs, experiences, and insights of young student leaders. Journey felt that advisor's ability to manage leadership and understand power includes connecting with younger generations of students with new ideas.

I think probably like just trying to get inside of young adult mind. Typically the advisor is 20 years our senior and that's not a bad thing because then they have the experience, but just like trying to find ways to connect with the current generation of student leaders because we have all these fresh new ideas and they might go against how things are done. – Journey, Knowles

Attending Conferences

Overwhelming, superiors within this study agreed that attending conferences and staying knowledgeable of trends in higher education through various news publication outlets plays a major role in the advisors on-going professional development. Attending and participating in conferences provides an avenue to connect with other student government organizations and

advisors. These interactions can provide insight for advisors to return to their home campuses given the particular context of another institution's student government from the perspective of London, at Knowles, who also leads with development related to understanding the university structure:

I think some of the professional development things that are important are understanding university hierarchy and the political nature of an institution. And so, wherever they could potentially get that, whether it's a webinar or ... I'm trying to think if there's any conferences where advisors get together. I know there's the Texas A&M Conference, but advisors don't always go to that. But if they do... I think round tables there would be beneficial. I know there's the Student Government East and Student Government West's conference with NACA. But those tend to be just students that a lot of times go, so being a facilitator for one of those I think is beneficial because you get to connect with a lot of other student governments so that you can see what's important to different student governments in other places and then that helps you when you go back. –London, Knowles

I think being able to connect with other advisors is an important professional development opportunity. And then I think reading what's going on nationally. So, whether it's The Chronicle or The Washington Post. New York Times has an educational section. So just keeping up to speed on what's happening across other universities throughout the nation so that you can be a better resource for the students on campus. –Kendell, Giselle

Ryan, who has served as a student organization advisor previously, discussed learning about academic advising techniques, such as intrusive advising, through professional development by way of conference attendance. They considered drawing from frameworks that allow advisors to be development was critical in order for them to be comfortable working with student leaders, “Anything that would help them be comfortable being that sort of intrusive advisor, that's going to sort of insert themselves to get the information they need to be developmental, to make sure they are successful.”

Understanding Diversity in the Community

Understanding diversity within the community was considered most salient from the perspective of peers. Peers considered the thorough understanding the advisor must have of the community and critical connections to have in order to advocate for students. Skylar immediately

thought about the role the community plays both on campus and beyond in garnering certain outcomes for students. The advisor plays a key part in cultivating and maintaining those relationships:

I think that that is important. Other professional development, cause another thing that we haven't really talked about either, but I think is something worth mentioning, is how are they involved in the community? Not that an advisor needs to be out there in the community all the time doing stuff, but what are those town gown connections that they can help develop and cultivate. –Skylar, Carter

Working with the community, on campus and beyond, calls for understanding how to communicate across difference and consider perspectives, even and especially when in disagreement. Dominique considered the ways that other campus programs, such as intergroup relations programming, can inform the advisor's practice in working with student leaders who work within the community. This was similar to the perspective of Riley, who deemed it important to understand advocacy—what it means, what it looks like, and how to do that for students in equitable ways. Riley essentially thought about ways to garner the greatest possible outcomes for as many students as possible. Stated another way, how to accomplish any of the “low hanging fruit”:

I would say some type of communicating across difference, a conversation whether it be facilitated by folks who work in our... At [Giselle] we have a program on inter group relations where they do a lot of dialogue based social justice work, and I think that as an advisor you got to understand who you are, where you come from and the identities that you bring with you and have the students view that. –Dominique, Giselle

So, number one, I always think that any advisor of any organization should not go to one diversity training but should be consistently going to training and workshops about working with diverse populations of students. And then two, talking about advocacy... What does advocacy look like? So, as students, they only know so much about how to advocate for themselves. So, as advisors, how do we now advocate on a higher level for our students as well? Understanding that they're not going to get every single thing that they ask for. But, a lot of students don't get anything at all. So, that speaks to the level of your advocacy, if you as an advisor are not being able to get any of the low-hanging fruit available for students. –Riley, Knowles

Privilege and Identity Work

Along with being an advisor, a coach, and a leadership educator, findings indicate the advisor as a individual that does deeply introspective and reflexive privilege and identity work to inform their practice. Sometimes this shows up when advisors have access to various levels of information within the organization that may or may not be shareable with student leaders, according to Alex, who also felt this is a unique positionality for advisors to occupy. This shows up particularly when advocating on behalf students, even when advisors may be blindsided yet supportive. This power nuance was seen as particularly difficult for an advisor to navigate when in opposition to superiors' outlooks:

It would be something around navigating processes when you have different and varying levels of information that you can share, power, privilege in some spaces, and relationships with the stakeholders that you're working with. Knowing that I think that is a unique issue that student government advisors are dealing with because when you want to lean into what the students are doing, how do you advocate for yourself and the students to your supervisor who may be what the students are wanting to do goes against what some of the secret expectations of the organization that you're in that no one told you about but now you're being asked to uphold those things even though you weren't in the meeting where that decision was being made. —Alex, Giselle

This provides an excellent segway into the Micah's viewpoint, who considered these power dynamics that are constantly at play a primary justification for advisors to do privilege and identity work, as we are conditioned to think in rigid ways that are often exclusionary:

I always look at I really love identity work because we're so conditioned to think one way because of how we were raised, like our cultural background influences that. I'm always, identify work is always a first thing that I want to be trained in. Or at least start thinking about and being self-aware, because then it'll help them to understand somebody else's perspective. —Micah, Knowles

Similar to insights gained under attending conferences to gain information around advising techniques, Sydney considered the role that counseling might play in the advising relationship with students. This was not considered in a way act as a licensed counselor;

however, by engaging through a formalized class, advisors can use these strategies and techniques to engage with students:

I would say for an advisor; I think it is identifying more so tools and skills that are going to help enhance some of those roles... I think about an advisor... probably gonna utilize some of the same practices as what counselors do. So, maybe it's not professional development session, that's specifically focused on like practicing counselors. But they have the ability to maybe engage in a class, that's talking about a certain counseling tool that might help them in working with their students. –Sydney, Carter

Campus Activism

In sum, all participants within this study reported that the student government organization plays a significant role in campus activism. Participants viewed the role of the organization as one that listens to the unique needs of the students they serve, inserts themselves in ways and in spaces that the targeted group of students feels necessary, and uses the power and privilege of the organization to create change across the campus community that improves their experiences in the immediate future and for students that come to the institution after they have left. For participants, these efforts were seen as the clear way to advocate for and be the voice of the student body and to be in-tune with what is occurring across the campus community. The student government organization was also seen as a space where difficult questions are asked and grappled with for institutional consideration. Emergent themes include (a) adhering to campus policies, procedures, and protocols; (b) ensuring the student government organization does not get sued; (c) asking questions and providing information; (d) supporting and encouraging activism; and (e) considering the advisor an activist.

As all student leaders on campus are not involved in formal student organizations, some students operate under an activist identity and participants reported a partnership that should exist between these students and student government leaders to work alongside each other to create and stimulate change on campus. This is another area where leveraging the privilege of the

student government to the student activist who may not be favored or have a voice on campus to participate in institutional decision-making can have their voices heard. On-going conversations about what support looks like and how to be an ally was deemed as the advisor's responsibility.

For the purposes of this study, I looked specifically for perspectives of the advisor's role in support students in campus activism and their role in activism individually.

Adhering to Campus Policies, Protocols, and Procedures

While the overwhelming perspectives of study participants was that the student government and the advisor play a significant role in campus activism, advisors felt their primary responsibility during these instances is to ensure that students are adhering to campus policy, protocol, and procedure, more specifically, "To point out process to them," as articulated by Taylor at Carter University, and this was a consistent expression from all of the advisors. Jessie thought about change in terms of going through university channels to create it and strongly encouraging students to follow these standards. Jessie also considered the ways role that the organizations governing documents, supported by the campus activities office, plays in how students decide to pursue activism efforts:

My role is to advise them based on what the university policies and procedures are as it relates to students organizations and in their particular ... and reminding you all have a constitution that you've established, that was passed by the [campus activities office], which is basically going up through the university channels, so if you want to change that you've got to go through the process of doing it, but you have to stick to your ... I'm encouraging you, that's what I always say. I always use the word encourage. –Jessie, Knowles

Mirrored sentiments were expressed by Peyton, the advisor at Giselle, who referenced what the organization's governing documents articulate the rules as:

I think it's making sure they're following their policies and protocols. [Student government] has three governing documents, which are very, very long, and lots and lots of rules around how things should proceed. In those types of things, so making sure they're following protocol. – Advisor, Giselle

Shannon, while also an advocate for following policy and protocol, took a more challenge and critique approach in advising through activism by asking student leaders, specifically, to state their goals and determine ways to achieve those goals. With articulating goals, student leaders then become responsible for determining their own solutions to advance to decision-making bodies on campus. Shannon thought about the role of the advisor during these times as one that not only considers the establishment of rules and procedures, but an approach that is also developmental in nature:

Try to keep them focused on, what is your goal? And then, how do you achieve that goal? Don't get lost in the trees. Focus on the forest. And make sure you are very clear about what you want. Because if you're just screaming, we won't listen to you. Because you're not offering anything. Offer solutions. What is the desired outcome? That's the first question I'll ask them. "What's your goal?" And it's amazing how often the answer is ... And I'm like, "Then why are you here?" "Well, because people, because people are ... " And I'm like, "What's your goal? You need a goal." And so, then, "Let's talk about how to get to that goal." And I will say, often, "Don't let us off the hook." –Shannon, Carter

The balancing of promise and critique, as stated by Shannon, shows up in pushing the students to challenge administrators and faculty more and more. Shannon shared instances of reviewing specific asks of the student government organization and assisting students in determine strong policy changes that they want to see on campus as well as the evidence to support their claims.

If anything, there have been times when they've come, and they're like, "Okay. This is our goal, and this is what we've come up with we want." And they'll bring it to me. And I'll say, "This is great, but this is weak." I'm like, "You are getting in the right direction of what you should be asking for us. You're not asking for enough." I'm like, "You're still a little bit too in the trees." I'm like, "What is the institutional policy change that you want here?" And they're like, "Oh." So, my answer is that I'm happy to push them, and say, "You need to challenge us more." Yeah. And that is important. A lot of people don't want to do that, if they're in my role. –Shannon, Carter

Ensure We Don't Get Sued

I think in that situation it's just making sure that we're going about the proper channels. – Journey, Knowles

Making sure that our statements are legal. Yeah, 'cause I don't want, you don't want to say something that could get us sued. We always joke, student government rule one is don't get sued. We don't want to get sued. That's rule one, don't get sued... So, I think it's the advisor's role in those moments is to make sure that we are following proper legal channels. Essentially don't say something that can get a sued. It's things like that. – August, Carter

Student leaders echoed sentiments similar to advisors in making sure they followed channels that would not result in lawsuits. Each of the student government organizations represented within this study have been named in lawsuits due to legal challenges around funding, exclusionary practices, and equitable practices within the organization. All student leaders thought of the advisor's role as one that reviews whatever their planned actions are and can inform them of the legal implications of said decision. Blue thought that information should be regularly presented to the advisor for such reviews and insight:

I think in that sense it will be to help form whatever is going to be sent out. Kind of like, okay, well maybe that's a good idea. That's not a good idea. Like get all the [student government] group should be getting all of the like information and then taking it to the advisor. Like, okay, so what, what do you think the best course of action would be for us to take? How do you think we should go about XYZ? Maybe you shouldn't be tweeting out fuck the president of the university or whatever. I don't know. Maybe we should do that or maybe a representative of [student government] should not do that, you know, like having those of conversations. –Blue, Giselle

As reported, Blue thought about the coaching aspect of this as well, commenting on how certain conversations may be critical to have with students to think about potential outcomes of their decisions and actions. This was not thought of as preventative, but more of reflection work to expand student's leadership capacities.

Asking Questions and Providing Information

It was clear to superiors that student activism efforts cannot be stopped or controlled if students are committed doing to whatever particular action they have organized, whether they are members of the student government or the student body at large. Advisors were viewed as key in asking clarifying questions and providing campus policy information. Kendall, at Giselle, thought of the ways that the advisors provide information to student leaders that they may not be knowledgeable of, while simultaneously working to understand and interpret their concerns:

I think the advisor's role is to ask questions to prompt conversation to really sort of in an in-depth way, understand sort of where the students are coming from, and raise issues that maybe the advisor knows about on campus and asking if the students are being considered. Sort of, find out what they care about, right? I think the advisor's role would be to the extent that is needed help student government, student's access spaces that maybe they would need in order to be a part of the conversation. I think the advisor's role is to advocate on behalf of what the students are doing. I think the advisor's role would be to break down any barriers or uncertainties about how to get this done on campus. –Kendall, Giselle

Relatedly, Ryan, at Carter, considered the information that the advisor provides to student leaders policy and structural information only. Ryan thought of the advisor as potentially trying to prevent student activism, reiterating that “you can’t stop them” from acting in whatever manners student leaders choose. This includes breaking policies as well:

The role of an advisor when a student org wants to protest, demonstrate, sit in, whatever that is, it is to provide, "Here's the policy and structure that the university has for that. Here's what could happen if you don't follow that." And that really is where the advisor's role ends, other than maybe agreeing or advocating for them with the administration or something. But you can't stop them. And sometimes that means willfully breaking that policy to make a point. –Ryan, Carter

Coupled with asking questions and providing information, superiors noted the advisor having responsibility in advocating on behalf of student even in these instances, as well.

Supporting and Encouraging Activism

Superiors, while indicating the advisor having an orientation toward information sharing, the notion that advisors hold responsibility in advocating for students provides an excellent segway into the perspectives of peers who thought of the ways that the advisor encourages the activism by connecting with the student body and other activism on campus. Consider the perspective of Riley, at Knowles, “I think the role of the advisor is to not only support and have knowledge, but to encourage that activism. To encourage the student leadership to connect the student body. And then have the issues that the student body is having addressed.”

Dominique believed the advisor should encourage the activism as well and considered ways to benchmark practices from other institutions on ways to support students involved in activism on campus, as this is not work that the community is provided adequate training on. Dominique thought of the advisor as a key individual in facilitating and interpreting information on behalf of the student leaders and the campus administration:

If in the case of activism student government wants to support the leaders and student activists on campus, the advisor should be trying to figure out maybe from peer institutions, maybe from advisers of the student organizations that are primarily in activist spaces, what it looks like to support students who are involved in campus based activism. Because activism and community organizing is a whole other subset of work that people aren't necessarily trained for, that professionals aren't necessarily trained for, that students definitely aren't trained for and if you're in government. The advisor might be a key person in facilitating that, and a key person in communicating to the folks above them about what those students are asking for and what they mean. –Dominique, Giselle

The Advisor as an Activist

Supporting activism on campus sometimes calls for the advisor to be an activist, and being the filter between students, faculty, staff, and administration meant being proactive in advocating on behalf of students from the perspectives of colleagues in this study. Micah, at Knowles, thought of the advisor working in this manner possessing the ability anticipate

pushback and ways to navigate disagreement and contention with the broader campus community.

Again, it's that advocacy piece. So, being that filter between the students and the administration. But then also, too, being supportive as well. I think if you are working with an advisor, and you can kind of see some of the pushback, or the hesitation in terms of, "Well, we want to do this. Well, I don't necessarily know." If everything that you come back with is counter to what we have going on, then I think that also says a lot. – Micah, Knowles

For Micah, this advocacy did not only look like sharing information, but actually supporting the student's initiatives and activities. Sydney, at Carter, echoed these sentiments and considered the ways that the advisor is a proactive voice behind the scenes between various spaces on campus. There was particular emphasis on the advisor's efforts not being highly visible as student government is a student run organization; however, as the advisor is in place to support students, often their efforts call for this orientation:

I think they can serve in some of that activist role, through being a proactive ear to the pavement, so to speak. I think it ends up also, being when activism comes through in that advisor role, something that is not highly visible. It is far more behind the scenes. –Sydney, Carter

A critical piece about the activist orientation that Alex summarized includes the advisor being an administrator that supports all students, not just student leaders in student government. This means not only supporting student government leaders through activism endeavors, but also connecting with student activists at large to find avenues to support them. Student activism on campus was seen as a holistic effort by Alex and the methods to go about creating and stimulating change can be different:

I think there's also some pieces of ... that you're there for all students. You're not just there for the students that are just in student government. So, how can we provide support to student activists who are also trying to change campus for the better? We're just going about it maybe in some different ways. –Alex, Giselle

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter presented findings to address the primary research question: to understand broad understanding and conceptualization of the student government advisor's role across varying higher education institutions of multiple sizes and types. Three institutions are included within this study, representing broad and understanding and conceptualization.

Interviews revealed that while minimal attention and commitment is dedicated to the role of both training and supporting the advisor, high expectations, stretched accountability, and balancing multiple stakeholders permeated all respondents' perspectives, including those positioned among high-level decision-making bodies within the institution. Common themes emerged across institutional size and type, and interviews provided insight on the impact of advisor's efforts across the campus community. Advisors reported high levels of commitment and expectations, and student leaders echoed those sentiments while still viewing the advisor as critical to their ongoing success and development as leaders. Peers, colleagues, and superiors all spoke to the advisor's role interfacing and intersecting with their areas of focus on campus while still working to support student leaders and advocate for student voice.

Finally, and most noteworthy, respondents felt the need to follow campus policies, protocols, and procedures as critical across many of the reported categories and themes, and referenced time commitments as a major challenge to the advising relationship with student leaders, as well as developing and maintaining relationships with other campus administrators, faculty, and staff. The advisor's positioning within the organization exacerbates the challenges that persist when advising student groups and organizations, particularly those as prominent as student government organizations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This phenomenological qualitative study explored how student government advisors, student leaders, superiors, colleagues, and peers understood and conceptualized the role of the advisor, particularly when addressing campus climate issues and activism. The problem presented within this study articulates limited training and support from institutions for student government advisors specifically, coupled with expectations from the campus community at large to mitigate such campus climate and activism challenges. This study adopted semi-structured interviews and document analysis to obtain and analyze perspectives from participants. Participants were recruited from three institutions within the Midwest and were required to be positioned 360-degrees around the advisor within each organization, as indicated in Figure 3.

This chapter presents a critical interpretation of and conclusions from the findings in Chapter 4. Findings will be discussed in relation to the reported literature and transformative leadership, which served as the framework for this study. This discussion will answer the research question and present transformative advising as a potential model for advising.

This chapter will also present conceptual and theoretical implications, implications for practice, limitations, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with final thoughts and hopes for the future of this work.

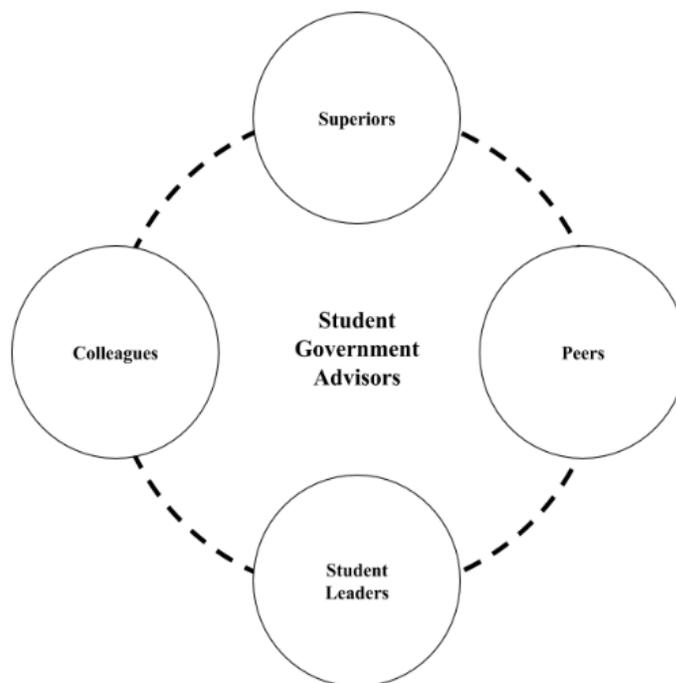


Figure 1. Individuals Positioned 360-Degrees around the Student Government Advisor

Answering the Research Question

This investigation provided insight that supports, counters, or extends the literature review; critiqued traditional methods of student group and organization advising; and illuminated what is needed to transform theory into practice. The results of this study articulate broad understanding and conceptualization of the student government advisor's role and specifies the unique nature and inherent challenges of the job. This study posited the following research question: How do student government advisors, superiors, student leaders, colleagues, and peers understand and conceptualize the role of the student government advisor? Table 7 presents a summary of categories and themes based on the results of this study.

Table 6 Summary of Categories and Themes

Category	Developing Student Leaders	Advisor Characteristics	Campus Committees	Professional Development	Campus Activism
Advisors	Involvement with the Campus Activities Office	Understanding the Landscape of the University		Time Constraints	Adhering to Campus Policy, Protocol, and Procedure
Student Leaders	Navigating Institutional Structures	Being Human	Gathering Information from Across Campus	Managing Leadership and Understanding Power	Ensure We Don't Get Sued
Superiors	Navigating Institutional Politics	Balancing Student Needs and Institutional Structures		Attending Conferences	Asking Questions and Sharing Information
Peers	Building and Maintaining Relationships	The Advisor as a Coach		Understanding Diversity in the Community	Supporting and Encouraging Activism
Colleagues	Communication Expectations	Championing Student Voice		Privilege and Identity Work	The Advisor as an Activist

Findings from this exploration revealed the idiosyncratic nature of the job, the nuances that exist from campus to campus, and the various levels of commitment to the advisor and by proxy student leaders. These results specifically illuminate the challenges the advisor faces in serving in this capacity as the wants and needs student leaders and campus administration broadly are grappled with. The following section, which interprets the findings, will focus on the challenging nature of the job which emerged as most salient across participants responses.

Interpretation of the Findings and Unanswered Questions

Completing and analyzing data collected from the semi-structured, qualitative interviews illuminated the challenging nature of serving as the student government advisor by participants situated throughout each organization. Considering the responses under each category (e.g., developing student leaders, advisor characteristics, service on campus committees, professional development activity, and advisor roles in campus activism), participants held deep understand of the difficulty of the job and even the lack of commitment from the institution, as articulated by the advisor, Taylor, at Carter, “It would be nice if they took seriously the role of the advisor, not it just being a role that keeps [the student government organization] from getting sued.” This example is insightful in that the advisor has seemingly internalized the lack of attention paid by their institution to the positionality of the student government organization given their unique link to student voices. Interpretation of the findings through the lens of challenges translated into role marginalization, tension, and power.

Marginalization

Findings both articulate and imply that the role of the student government advisor is often marginalized on campus. Stated another way, the position is often not taken seriously by way of institutional support, or by way of information sharing and access across spaces and with people within the organization. For instance, other than the advisor who serves in a full-time capacity, none of the other advisors are compensated in some fashion for these efforts that are in addition to their primary appointments. This service is also not included in their performance appraisals, which could serve as an avenue to document these efforts, at minimum:

[I receive] no extra comp[ensation]. If I gave it up, or they chose somebody else, my comp[ensation] wouldn't change. I would just have a lot less on my plate. So yeah, it just happens to be something I do. And I get no extra comp for it. It's not part of my evaluation.
–Shannon, Carter

Given increasing responsibility across campus communities, and continual decreases in other resources like staff, funding, and time (Brownstein, 2018), it is challenging to serve as a voluntary advisor to this student group and manage any potential fluctuation of the advisor's full-time appointment on campus. Even for the advisor within this study that worked in full-time capacity with the student group, accounting for all of the nuances of the job that arise is difficult.

Many of the relationships that students have on campus are developed and maintained by the advisor, especially when considering potential turnover within student government organizations. Student leaders can decide to continue or not continue with the student government organization in any capacity at any point, as they are not required or obligated to remain involved. This relates to a previous point regarding the time necessary to cultivate, develop, and maintain these relationships, even as student leaders are trying different things in their leadership approaches. As students are working with offices and on new initiatives, the likelihood of stakeholders being unhappy with their approach is high. As students are learning while doing, faculty and staff should allow space for them to learn new ways and allow this to occur which does not impede their work or growth. Some staff want nothing to do with the student government organization, calling on the advisor to assist in determining who students should and should not look to for assistance and support. In many ways, this unique work can contribute to the advisor's marginalization, as focusing on the inclusion and consideration of student voice is not considered of primary importance in varying spaces across campus communities.

The advisor's positioning within the university hierarchy becomes a factor in this marginalization as well. Findings also imply that an advisor's positionality in the structure of the institution allows for more or less access to information—as a member of the president's

executive cabinet will have more or different types of access to information perhaps than a director of recreational services reporting to the vice president of student affairs. The co-advisor Shannon, at Carter, articulated this complication, "If [the advisor] were someone lower in the institution, we might have to, "We're thinking about this." They may not have ever heard of the issue, and we'd have to give them the whole context."

Time is another critical component in advisor marginalization. For example, while all participants noted service on campus committees as a key avenue to gain institutional knowledge, the time required to accomplish this is limited. During each interview, participants commented on some aspect of time constraints:

It takes so much more time than I thought it would. And my predecessor said to me, "It's going to be much more time than you think." It takes so much more time than I thought. Because everything [happens] from, "How do I move this money?" As I said before, "How do we do this little, obscure technical thing," to "Oh, my God. We're faced with this major crisis. How should we respond?" So, that's the biggest challenge. –Peyton, Giselle

There is seemingly no time to serve on campus committees beyond those related directly to the advisor's full-time appointment on campus. Even for the advisor that served in a full-time capacity, there was a need to find committees to be a part of that made sense for their work as all committees are not geared toward the student government organization. There are instances where students cannot serve on select committees, requiring the advisor to serve in their place. Further, the advisor was considered a key individual to be included in diversity, equity, and inclusion committees to ensure equitable access regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation.

Time constraints showed up within the student government organization as well in the relationship between student leaders and advisors. While there were two advisors at Carter, the student body president, August, reported not communicating with their advisor's frequently and

emphasized asking legal questions as the primary reason for them to interface, “Honestly not very often. Usually it's just via email if we have questions about something.”

Probing deeper, it was surprising to hear there were two advisors that the student leader communicated with on a limited basis. I wondered how helpful it truly was to have multiple advisors if student leaders only communicated with them around specific legal issues:

It is helpful to have two advisors because like I said, [the co-advisor is an executive cabinet member] and [they're] always super busy. [They] get like a million emails a day. So, if somebody wants to book a room, you have to go, ‘I don't know if you know how that works on campus’, but if you go to book a room...you have to have an advisor sign off on a room booking. And if you sent it to [the co-advisor], you're not getting a response for like maybe you know, five to ten business days. But if you send through [the advisor], they will do it like right away. So, that's why I like having two advisors. –August, Carter

This account is both promising and challenging. While it is critical for student leaders to have support in their work and having a secondary advisor is helpful in this regard, the student leader here has limited understanding of each of the advisor’s roles in supporting them, as the student has understood, interpreted, and internalized the time constraints of the advising role, and is also missing out on critical leadership development in the process. Further, what might this mean for response time during contentious campus times or flashpoints of activism? How might this makeup contribute to the reactionary nature of institutions in responding to campus climate challenges and student activism as indicated in the Educational Advisory Board (2017) report mentioned previously?

This emphasizes the importance of engaging in professional development. As there are time constraints around the role’s makeup, this limits the amount of time that can be dedicated to related professional development to learn and implement strategies to facilitate this leadership development. One advisor was almost confused when probed regarding professional development, thinking of it as almost unnecessary given their rank and tenure at the university.

What does this mean for the advisor's continued growth addressing challenges in continuously changing campus demographics? What does this mean for students? What might this mean for student activism? Further, another advisor noted participating in professional organizations and attending national conferences such as the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) or the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) as critical in their continued professional development; however, this participation contributes to time constraints. There are also cost considerations to make regarding funding these opportunities. Who might be responsible for allocating such funding if the role is not clearly defined? Also, there is an assumption that the advisor will always be a student affairs professional. What would professional development look like for this individual?

A major consideration to make regarding the undefined role of the advisor involves the point at which these commitments impede on the advisor's work within their primary appointment, especially and particularly when advisors are not serving in a full-time capacity.

I already have an extremely demanding job. But I also always say, "First and foremost, we're here for the students. I wouldn't have a job if it weren't for the students." And they are truly committed to doing good work. So, that's why I'm like...it's worth the time and investment. –Jessie, Knowles

Tension

Coupled with role marginalization, the undefined makeup causes tensions across the campus community, the first related to controlling students and supporting students when there is interest convergence. As the student government organization is a powerful group in some regards, as its composition usually holds a lot of power, privilege, and access, institutions have vested interests in protecting their image and does not want to be viewed in negative light. This adds to the tension around the role of the advisor to support and lobby for student interests, even if that means the institution will look bad. Skylar, at Carter, best captures this, "It's not okay to

challenge [Carter's] way of doing things or thinking, or whatever on campus. They're going to try to control that."

This provides an appropriate segway into the doing versus telling relationship between students and advisors. Advisors have to make these distinctions, sometimes for their own protection. How can equitable practice be ensured that positions student leaders to go forth and make informed leadership decisions while balancing institutional expectations around control? Further, what expectations are communicated implicitly and explicitly and who is constructing them? What are the consequences? Finally, if the role is not clearly defined and structured, nor included in performance evaluations, who informs and maintains expectations of the advisor? Perhaps some of the communication of expectations lies within the information that students may or may not have access to, positioning the advisor as a change agent in the absence of students to advocate for their voices. Advisors recognize these barriers and consider the ways that they can be a catalyst for change; however, this is not favored:

I've often said to people who said, "Why'd you let Student Government do that?" I said, "Because they were going to get a bloody nose from that and that's probably a good thing. They learned that that wasn't a good idea. It didn't harm anybody. They got caught between a rock and a hard place, and now they know better." We're a university. A university's role is to provide a safe and secure environment for students to learn and teachers to teach and researchers to research. So, if I'm constantly bailing them out, making sure they don't make mistakes, I'm not doing my job. – Taylor, Carter

This is relevant to the doing versus telling relationship, and also sheds deeper light into the need for professional development. In the coaching relationship, the advisor, too, needs a coach. Might there be a disservice done if the advisor is not coaching students in ways that ensure their success if their primary responsibility is supporting the efforts of the organization? Would this be inherently choosing the interests of the institution over student voices and perspectives? How can advisors build trusting relationships with student government leaders and

the broader campus community given this? Is this, again, priming the pump for continue campus climate issues and student activism?

When it becomes the advisor's responsibility to push for change, the balancing of these competing priorities and perspectives of stakeholders becomes increasingly important and can prove to be a major point of tension if it seems that advisors are doing the work for students, instead of advising them. Participants in this study felt the advisor was and is, more or less, responsible for enacting change within the organization and campus community when student leaders do not have enough information, or faculty and administrators need pushing in order to understand student perspectives. Blue, a student leader, provides insight into reasons why an advisor might be called to intervene without the asks of student leaders or administration, noting some of the internal organizational challenges that can have an impact on the campus community externally.

People can be, people can lie, or they don't know what they are doing and then they just messed this stuff up. Yeah, they could know something and struggle back and forth with reporting it. If there's something like, you know on that edge, walking the line of "Oh I need to report this." –Blue, Giselle

Student government advisors are uniquely positioned between students, administrators, and faculty, and this creates tension if there is not congruence across wants, needs, and desires. Further, championing student voices means being able to “traverse all levels of the institution” according to Angel at Carter. This is navigating institutional politics, and this may require the advisor to have rank and respect on campus. Depending on the role's situating in the organization, the advisor could have more or less power and access to information to navigate these politics. Further, there is a balance required in order not to impose institutional ideology on students while possessing particular information through the advising relationship. Superiors thought of navigating institutional politics along the lines of avoiding conflict with campus

administration, faculty, and staff. Are there moments where the challenge from student leaders to campus administration is needed and necessary? How necessary is conflict? I argue that communities should disagree and allow for challenging conversations. Perhaps there are times when “seeing process”, according to Ryan, at Carter, is literally that—seeing that the processes the institution has put in place are, in fact, the root of the issue. Sometimes “seeing process” is exactly what is necessary to challenge and push the institution towards mitigating structural barriers in creative and inclusive ways.

How might understanding of activism and advocacy be limited on campus? When probed about activism, many participants immediately turned to contention that draws major media attention following a race-based incident. While these occurrences have rippled college and university campuses, there are other instances that call for activism and advocacy as well, and the organization’s governing documents are not designed, nor should they be designed, to prevent action on behalf of the student government related to supporting, initiating, or preventing any forms of activism or advocacy.

Power

Finally, both marginalization and tension of the role are results of the power dynamics at each institution and how this role fits into those power dynamics. The positionality of the advisor, access or lack of access to information, attention to national trends, communicating information across boundaries to those who will potentially be impacted, and supporting the best interest of students, as articulated, all exist within specific power dynamics. As such, the individual occupying the role—their background, training, and interest—not only varies from location to location but informs what the role will look like due to its undefined nature. These power dynamics exacerbate this lack of clarity and idiosyncratic makeup.

Implications for Practice

Coupled with increased activism and continued calls for calculated responses from student government, there are myriad implications for practice inherent in this study as advisors are in need of intentional structure, support, and access. The critical role an advisor plays in developing student leaders outside of the classroom cannot be taken for granted. Institutional commitments to advisors could look like dedication to the development of students leaders by supporting and compensating their advisors for their efforts, especially and particularly beyond their primary appointments. College and university campuses might reconsider the makeup of policy and practices on campus that contribute to the continued marginalization and tension of the advisor role and position them to carry out this critical work without barriers. Some of this involves self-reflective work on behalf of the advisor, as noted by several participants, which is critical in their development practice to uncover and understand structures that perpetuate the problem.

As higher education institutions continue requiring professional staff members to serve as advisors to student government, and other student groups and organizations, structures should be implemented to recognize this additional subset of work beyond their primary appointments. Further, training and preparation should be intentional, not just through reliance on previous education and professional experiences. It should not be assumed that an advisor is prepared for all that is required of the role, especially during turbulent campus climate times, and can tend to the developmental needs of students as well.

Implications for Theory

This study presents conceptual and theoretical implications through a leadership lens as it relates to the student government advisor. This study adopted transformative leadership as a conceptual framework to move beyond models of leadership that do not focus specifically on how the leader might need to change in order to stimulate change in organizations and systems, adopting an activist orientation based on the primary investigators personal experiences.

Previous studies (D'Angelo, 2015) have employed situational and transformational leadership to explore the orientations of student government organization and student leaders. While these leadership theories could be present in many ways as the advisor carries out their work, these theories could be further explored within the advising context coupled with transformative leadership for individuals working with advocacy and activism-based organizations on college and university campuses. More studies are needed that center on the realities of advising student government organizations, and student groups and organizations broadly.

Situational Leadership

Situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982) maintains that the most effective leaders are those who are able to adapt their style of leadership dependent upon the specific situation by determining the task-relevant maturity levels of individuals or groups to achieve the highest results (Hersey, Angelnin, & Carakushansky, 1982). Situational leadership proposes a taxonomy consisting of four leadership styles, ranging from directing to delegating, and a framework for matching each style to specific situations (Thompson & Glaso, 2015). In later iterations of the theory, situational leadership underwent many revisions with the wording “maturity level” changed first into development levels and then later, in the newest edition, into

performance readiness levels (Meier, 2016). Yoon (1996) maintained that the advisor may be expected to meet several institutional expectations, which include but are not limited to monitoring funds, disseminating policy and procedural information, processing forms and contracts and, advising on safety/risk management issues. Further, the advisor also serves in an educational capacity, developing strategies to influence the quality and content of students' educational experiences outside the classroom (Yoon, 1996). Situational leadership signals those leaders who embody different styles of leadership dependent upon the specific situation making this approach ideal for a student government advisor. Future research could employ this theory to explore the advisor's role through situational contexts. This situational context can also be explored comparatively across institutions.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) refers to those leaders "who raises the follower's level of consciousness about the importance and value of desired outcomes and the methods of reaching those outcomes" (McCleskey, 2014). Transformational leaders provide learning opportunities and a supportive climate (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass (1985) modified the original transformational leadership construct resulting in four emerging factors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (McCleskey, 2014). The transformational leader exhibits each of these four components to varying degrees in order to bring about desired organizational outcomes through their followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Student government organizations provide a unique environment where transformational leadership can exist and thrive in the middle of an institution otherwise beset by a framework of highly procedural and bureaucratic transactions (Gold & Quatroche, 1994). Potential studies could explore how advisors influence and facilitate transformational

organizational change through student government organizations and beyond throughout campus communities.

Transformative Leadership

Finally, future studies could articulate how advisors might lead transformatively, facing challenges on campus and building relationships to effect deep and equitable change on campus through an activist orientation. Ethnography could be employed as a qualitative approach to follow and document advisor interactions with the student government organization as well as the broader campus community over time as they advocate for student needs across spaces. The personal and reflective steps taken to achieve and teach transformative leadership could also be documented to inform future practice keeping with the articulated democratic nature of student government organizations.

Toward a Model of Transformative Advising

The following model, transformative advising, is presented as a potential approach to advising student government organization that can be adopted regardless of institutional size and type, or positionality within the institution. Figure 4 presents the model of transformative advising. The model adopts transformative leadership (Shields, 2010; 2011; 2017), proactive, or intrusive, advising (Cannon, 2013; Earl, 1988; Glennen, 1975; Varney, 2007), and critical self-reflection (Brown, 2004; Capper et al., 2002; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016) Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002).

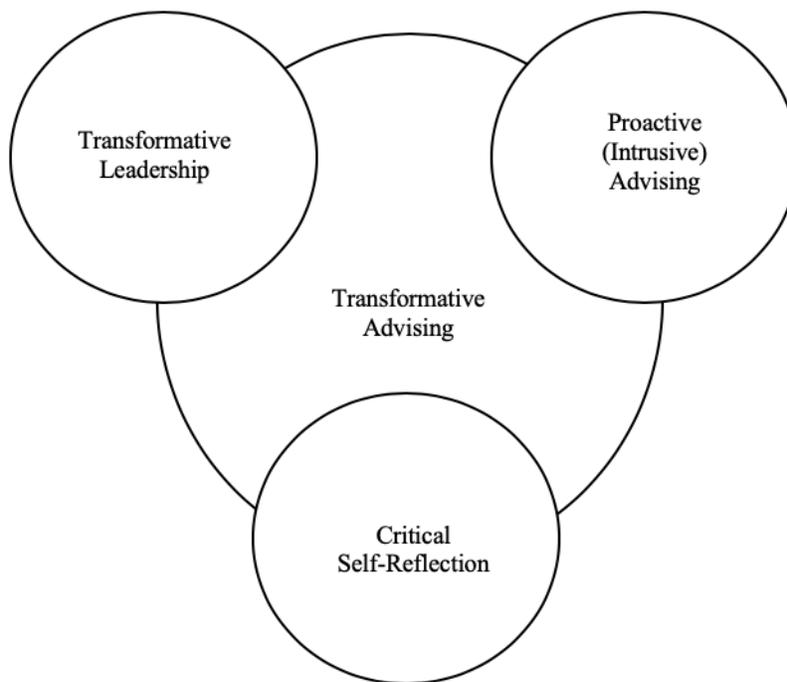


Figure 2. Model of Transformative Advising

Transformative Leadership

As articulated, transformative leadership adopts a social justice orientation with eight tenets of the transformative leadership model including (a) the mandate to effect deep and equitable change; (b) the need to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate inequity and injustice; (c) the need to address the inequitable distribution of power; (d) an emphasis on both private and public (individual and collective) good, a focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice; (e) an emphasis on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness; (f) the necessity of balancing critique with promise; and (g) the call to exhibit moral courage.

The reported literature in Chapter 2 and responses from participants indicate the viability of the student government advisor as a transformative leader in higher education institutions. Perhaps the lack of a clearly defined role creates conditions to emphasize the actions of a

transformative leader and work to address challenges within and outside of the student government organization, especially in regard to campus activism.

Proactive Advising

Findings and practices of the advisor also emphasize the need to be proactive, or intrusive, advising. For the student government advisor, it is important to be “intrusive without intruding, and be warm, friendly, and inviting while still providing the tough love and information that students need to hear” (Cannon, 2013, p. 1). While traditionally used within academic advising contexts, this approach bodes well for relationships between student leaders and advisors. The more information an advisor has about students, the more specific they can become in supporting and meeting their needs on campus and for allowing this space to grow and develop as leaders. This advising approach calls for the advisor to ask pointed, detailed, and open-ended questions to build connections (Cannon, 2013). According to Varney (2012), proactive advising involves: (a) deliberately intervening to enhance student motivation, (b) showing interest and involvement with students, (c) advising designed to increase student success, (d) educating students on options, and (e) approaching students before situations develop.

Critical Self-Reflection

Finally, self-reflection is critical to achieving transformative advising and was noted by advisors and student leaders in this study. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) discuss critical self-reflection under the culturally responsive leadership framework. The self-reflection component of this leadership framework is applicable to the student government advisor to adopt an activist orientation as articulated by the transformative leadership portion of the model. Khalifa et al. (2016) reported previous scholarly work that supports the engagement in self-

reflection as key in leader's personal growth and "unearths personal biases, assumptions, and values that stem from personal backgrounds" (p. 1285). Critical self-reflection is transformative (Khalifa et al., 2012; Cooper, 2009; Shields, 2010). This means that the advisor must work to develop a *critical consciousness* in order to advise students through their work and advocate knowledgeable and intentionally on their behalf. Khalifa et al. (2016) posit suggested reflective activities from several scholars (Brown, 2004; Capper et al., 2002; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002) for critical self-reflection as well that are apropos for the advisor including "cultural and racial autobiographies, educational plunges, cross-cultural interviews, diversity panels, and journaling on critical topics of culture" (p. 1285). As the student government advisor moves throughout these relationships on campus, reflection on their theory and practice is key.

Together, and in conjunction with literature and findings of this study, transformative advising has the potential to be adopted as a critical advising framework for student government organizations that critically supports students and potentially mitigates challenges with campus climate and student activism due to the model's proactive nature. Future testing of the model could be extended to student government organization advisors at additional colleges and universities within different geographic areas and could further be situated within the context of advising other student groups. The following section details limitations and additional areas for future research that could employ the transformative advising model.

Limitations and Future Research

Completing this research project revealed a few limitations. The first limitation concerns my bias as the primary researcher. As mentioned, I have served as a student government leader and advisor. My educational background and research centers around advising relationships,

both academic advising and student organization advising, and the relationships between advisors and the institutions where they work. This has informed my own experiences and lenses through which I view and interpret the criticality of this work on college and university campuses. Given this, my experiences and lenses can both reject or intersect with the perspectives of all participants. I was mindful of my primary purposes for this project, allowing the voices of participants to shine through. These efforts were supported by the methodological design of the study to guard against such biases as much as possible.

Another limitation present in this study involves the number of participants. With 19 interviews from individuals across different institutions, I was able to gather broad and varying perspectives on the same phenomena that provided richness and depth. This also meant that while some findings were consistent across the institutional samples, the findings are not generalizable. As this was an exploratory study on a phenomenon that is idiosyncratic in nature, gathering broad perspectives was intentional. Recruiting a different targeted sample of participants could yield varying or more complex results. For example, no presidents of institutions, vice presidents of student affairs, or other individuals who would be considered senior university leaders were represented in the sample although advisors reported interfacing with these individuals to varying degrees.

Future research on this topic might solely involve student government advisors, student leaders, and senior university leadership, such as presidents or vice presidents of student affairs (VPSA). Reports have indicated that the VPSA often serves as the advisor to student government organizations (Dunkel & Schuh, 1993). These new directions might further explore the challenges advisors face in carrying out this work on campus and number of participants could be expanded to advisors working within the same network of institutions based on conferences

(e.g. Big Ten, Big Twelve), for example. The classification of an advisor being full-time, part-time, and/or voluntary presents another area for future research, as considerations and institutional support may vary based on these points. Consistent and nuanced documentation on this role on college and university campuses can contribute significantly to filling considerable gaps in understanding student government advisor roles and aims and purposes of student government organizations overall.

Considerations around geographic location is another direction in which this research could explore this phenomenon, to determine how the activity of the student government organization, and subsequent advisor responsibility, may change depending on their location across the country. A case study approach could provide another avenue to explore student government advisors, student leaders, and flashpoints of campus activism, limiting the number of participants and situating the advisor's and organization's work in current and specific contexts.

Final Thoughts

Student government has a lot of potential to be really great, but it will only be a strong learning opportunity and the voice that the university wants it to be if the students have strong educators in place. And so, using and thinking about the student government advisor as an educator, a leadership development educator and a mentor to the students and so they need resources in order to be able to do that. I think that it's an investment for institutions to have student governments and so they have to take care of those investments. –Alex, Giselle

Determining ways to support student activism on college and university campuses is a pressing matter and both supporting and challenging individuals that sit at the front lines of this work—like the student government advisor—is critical. However, as illuminated by the findings, there is little focus on the role of the advisor and ensuring there are structural supports from the institution to carry out their work in inclusive, transformative, and productive ways that benefit members of the campus community. This project revealed a troublesome notion related to the governance of college and universities in garnering student voice and supporting staff that do

that work in the process. Given the state of campus climate and student activism across the U.S. involving student government organizations, an in-depth look at institutional structures to strategize around what support and partnerships between students and administrator is necessary.

The stories presented from participants in this study raise critical questions and concerns regarding how advisors are supported on campus—structurally and financially; how student voice is garnered and considered; and how higher education institutions may be “priming the pump” for continued student activism and demonstrations. When students do not feel listened to, they will make their voices heard. Are we listening?

This project caused continual reflection for me as a scholar, practitioner, and activist, as such, the stories inherent throughout this project that led to specific findings and implications are for me to consider and reflect upon in my practice as well. As the transformative advising model calls for on-going critical self-reflection, transformative leadership, and drawing from advising frameworks, I am more compelled to determine the viability of the approach regardless of institutional sizes, types, and geographic locations. As student affairs as a field concerns itself with creating and developing students both within and outside of the classroom, this work is imperative if propping student government organizations up as the official voice of the student body continues to be our collective framework.

Again, as a scholar, practitioner, and activist, I am continuously compelled to dedicate time, effort, and energy to this area in higher education as I believe in the transformative nature of the work. Through personal mentorship and coaching relationships outside of the classroom, I was able to grow and develop my leadership capacity in more individualized ways. This is work that I care deeply about—empowering individuals in campus communities to create lasting and positively impactful change. This work is imperative and requires shifting thinking that

welcomes contention and disagreement. It is time to have difficult conversations about fear and complicity, “oiling the wheels” for issues to continue. I want this research to serve as both a call-in and call-out to all those invested in the well-being of college students and the staff that support them.

This research study allowed for greater understanding of the marginalization, tension, and power often wielded across campus that impede the advisor’s, and by proxy student leaders, ability to enact change. I have experienced many of these challenges, and speaking with individuals across the institutional makeup, I was able to gain greater understanding of the driver of these ideologies—fear. It seems that we, faculty, staff, and administrators, are afraid of students and the policies and practices often enacted are rooted in control and compliance. I believe that things we have yet to understand, we fear and try to control. Keeping the role of the advisor nuanced and streamlined is an attempt to mitigate that fear. It is time to be fearless and examine beliefs and practices about student and staff relationships. I agree with the assertion of Reynolds (2009), who posited that educators must “confront who they are and what they believe” (p. 175). Student affairs as a field must take the gaze off of “fixing” or “addressing” student behaviors and focus on the biases inherent in each of us that do this work. Transformative advising and the reflection component of the model is a potential pathway into achieving this and is also useful for supervisors or superiors as well.

I am hopeful that the perspectives throughout this study coupled with relevant data and research will spark reflection, grappling, and questioning. I am hopeful that hearing the voices of advisors will compel institutions to reconsider their support of them. I hope that student leaders who may encounter this work might remain hopeful that faculty, staff, and administrators are considerate of their unique needs in reflective ways before enacting policy. I will continue

elevating, highlighting, and telling stories about advisors and student leaders on campus to contribute to new thinking and direction for this makeup across college and universities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Dissertation Project Title:

“So, What Do You Do?” Transformative Advising: Reconceptualizing the Role of Student Government Advisors in Higher Education

Primary Investigator:

Clyde Barnett III, M.A., Ed.S.
Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University

Advisor Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your professional and educational background.
2. How did you come to be the advisor for the student government on this campus and for how long have you served in this capacity?
3. Is your service as student government advisor a full-time, part-time, or voluntary appointment?
4. Can you describe for me your institution?
5. Tell me about the student body.
6. Tell me about the student government organization.
7. Describe your student government leaders.
8. What steps do you take to develop student government leaders?
9. What do you think are the strengths of the student government organization?
10. What do you think are the weaknesses of the student government organization?
11. Given that, what characteristics do you think are important for the individual serving in this role to have?
12. What do you think makes a great leader?
13. How do you think about leadership within student government?
14. How do you think leadership within student government expands across your campus and beyond?
15. How do you think about leadership as it relates to your role or affiliation in student government?
16. What are some of the challenges of serving in your role?
17. Do you have a direct supervisor?
18. Who do you consult when you need support?
19. How do you assess and evaluate the needs of the student government organization?
20. Can you describe any cross-institutional collaboration or benchmarking that you have completed on behalf of the student government organization?
21. Are you involved on or with any committees, task forces, or other campus services? Can you describe them?
22. Describe any professional development you have participated in that is directly related to the student government organization.
23. Describe your broader professional development activities.
24. What else is helpful to know about your work with the student government organization?
25. Do you believe that your campus student government organization has a role in campus activism? If YES, proceed question set 1. If NO, proceed to question set 2.

26. Set 1:
1. What is the student government organization's role?
 2. What is your role as advisor?
 3. What is your supervisor's role?
 4. What is your institution's role?
 5. Has the student government organization been involved in any campus activism? If YES; can you describe the situation?
27. Set 2:
1. Do you think there a person, group of individuals, or unit that has a role in campus activism? Why? Why not?
 2. What you think would be the responsibilities of such a role?
 3. Has your campus experienced any forms of activism? If YES, can you describe the situation?
28. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me before we conclude?

Superior Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your professional and educational background.
2. Do you supervise the student government advisor? If YES, how did you come to be the supervisor for the student government on this campus and for how long have you served in this capacity?
3. Can you describe for me your institution?
4. How much do you know about the student government organization?
5. What can you tell me about the student government organization on this campus?
6. Can you describe the student leaders involved in the student government organization on your campus?
7. Can you describe steps the student government advisor takes to develop student leaders? If NO, what steps would you take? What do you feel is most important?
8. What do you think are the strengths of the student government organization?
9. What do you think are the weaknesses of the student government organization?
10. Given that, what characteristics do you think are important for the advisor for the student government to have?
11. What do you think makes a great leader?
12. How do you think about leadership within student government?
13. How do you think leadership within student government expands across your campus and beyond?
14. What are some of the challenges of serving in your role?
15. How often are you consulted by the student government advisor?
16. Are you familiar with any assessment and evaluation of the needs of the student government organization completed by the student government advisor? If NO, how might you go about assessing and evaluating the needs of the organization?
17. Can you describe any cross-institutional collaboration or benchmarking that the student government advisor has completed?
18. What committees, task forces, or other campus services do you feel it is important for the student government advisor to be involved with?

19. What types of professional development activities do you think are critical to the role of student government advisor?
20. Do you believe that your campus student government organization has a role in campus activism? If YES, proceed question set 1. If NO, proceed to question set 2.
21. Set 1:
 1. What is the student government organization's role?
 2. What is the advisor's role?
 3. What is your role?
 4. What is the institution's role?
 5. Are you aware of the student government organization's involvement in any campus activism? If YES, can you describe the situation?
22. Set 2:
 1. Do you think there is a person, group, or department/unit that has any role in campus activism? If YES, why? If NO, why not?
 2. What you think would be the responsibilities of such a role?
23. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me before we conclude?

Student Leader Interview Questions

1. What are you currently studying?
2. Describe your involvement on campus and within the student government organization.
3. How would you describe the student government organization on your campus?
4. How did you come to be involved student government?
5. For how long have you been involved in student government and in what capacities?
6. What would you say are the greatest strengths of the student government organization?
7. What would you say are the greatest weaknesses of the student government organization?
8. Describe your institution in your own words.
9. Describe the student body on this campus in your own words.
10. Given that, what characteristics do you think are important for the individual serving in this role to have?
11. What do you think makes a great leader?
12. How do you think about leadership within student government?
13. How do you think leadership within student government expands across your campus and beyond?
14. How do you think about leadership as it relates to your role or affiliation in student government?
15. Do you think the student government advisor faces challenges in their role? If YES, what are some of those challenges? If NO, why not?
16. How often do you consult your advisor and for what types of cases?
17. Has your advisor ever asked you for overall feedback on the student government organization? If YES, how? If NO, what would you want to tell the advisor about your experience in student government?
18. Have you ever worked with other campus student government organizations? If YES, in what ways? Was your advisor involved? What was their role?

19. Do you think it is important for the student government advisor to be involved with committees, task forces, or other campus services? If YES, why and which ones? If NO, why not?
20. If the student government advisor was to attend sessions on how to develop themselves so that they may serve you better, what would those sessions be about?
21. Do you believe that your campus student government organization has a role in campus activism? If YES, proceed question set 1. If NO, proceed to question set 2.
22. Set 1:
 1. What is the student government organization's role?
 2. What is the advisor's role?
 3. What is your role?
 4. What is the institution's role?
 5. Are you aware of the student government organization's involvement in any campus activism? If YES, can you describe the situation?
23. Set 2:
 1. Do you think there is a person, group, or department/unit that has any role in campus activism? If YES, why? If NO, why not?
 2. What you think would be the responsibilities of such a role?
24. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me before we conclude?

Peer/Colleague Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your professional and educational background.
2. Have you worked of collaborated with the student government advisor? If YES, in what capacities? If NO, why not?
3. How would you describe your institution?
4. How would you describe the student government organization?
5. How would you describe student government leaders?
6. What steps do you think the student government advisor takes to develop student leaders?
7. What do you think are the strengths of the student government organization?
8. What do you think are the weaknesses of the student government organization?
9. Given that, what characteristics do you think are important for the student government advisor to have?
10. What do you think makes a great leader?
11. How do you think about leadership within student government?
12. How do you think leadership within student government expands across your campus and beyond?
13. Are you aware of any challenges the student government advisor may be facing in the role? If NO, what do you think some challenges would be?
14. Who might the student government advisor consult if they are in need of assistance?
15. Have you ever seen the student government organization collaborate with another institution? If YES, what did that look like? If NO, what might the student government organization consider as a future collaboration from your perspective?

16. Do you believe that the student government advisor has a role in serving on campus committees, task forces, and other campus services? If YES, what committees would those be? If NO, why not?
17. What forms of professional development activities do you think might be important to the role of the student government advisor? Why?
18. Do you believe that your campus student government organization has a role in campus activism? If YES, proceed question set 1. If NO, proceed to question set 2.
19. Set 1:
 1. What is the student government organization's role?
 2. What is the role of the advisor?
 3. What is your role?
 4. What is your institution's role?
 5. Has the student government organization been involved in any campus activism? If YES; can you describe the situation?
20. Set 2:
 1. Do you think there a person, group of individuals, or unit that has a role in campus activism? Why? Why not?
 2. What you think would be the responsibilities of such a role?
21. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me before we conclude?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Dissertation Project Title:

“So, What Do You Do?” Transformative Advising: Reconceptualizing the Role of Student Government Advisors in Higher Education

Primary Investigator:

Clyde Barnett, III., M.A., Ed.S.
Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University

Dissertation Chair:

Dr. Ronald Williamson, Ed.D.
Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University

Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in this qualitative research study. Eligibility to participate means that you currently serve as student government advisor, serve as a superior to the advisor, serve as a student leader under the direction of the advisor, or serve as a peer or colleague to the advisor at the university. Your participation is voluntary, and you are welcome to ask any questions regarding your involvement in this study.

- Participation in this study involves completing a 45 minute to 1 hour interview, and one follow-up interview for 30 minutes should it be needed.
- It is essential for your interview to be recorded for this study. If you are audio recorded, it will be possible to identify you through your voice. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you may not be eligible to participate in this study.
- Your confidentiality will be protected by the primary investigator, as no identifiable information will be revealed throughout the data analysis, and reporting.
- Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and you can conclude your participation at any point in the study.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to explore the organizational understanding and conceptualization of the role of the student government advisor on your campus.

Data Collection:

Data for this study will be collected via semi-structured qualitative interviewing. The primary investigator will ask questions about your experiences serving as student government advisor, or in your capacity as superior, colleague/peer, and student leader. Questions will then explore participant backgrounds, perspectives on the institution, student government organization, challenges, needs, and outlooks on student activism on campus. Demographic information such as age, race, gender, and sexual orientation will be collected as well.

Participation:

Participation in this study includes completing one 45 minute to 1 hour interview that will be recorded, and one follow-up interview for 30 minutes if needed. Follow-up interview invitations will be sent via email.

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, without repercussion. You may choose to leave the study at any time without repercussion. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

Risks:

There are no expected risks to participation. Confidentiality, by far, is the largest risk involved in this study and as such the primary investigator will not reveal any identifying information from participants. Further, where appropriate, pseudonyms will be used to protect participant identities. Interviewees are also encouraged not to answer any questions from the interview protocol that they are uncomfortable asking. Please inform the primary investigator immediately if there are concerns with any of the questions.

Participant Benefits:

There is no direct benefit garnered from participating in this research. Broadly, this study can contribute knowledge to higher education institutions and organizations seeking to understand roles within their operations. Specifically, those involved with student government organization, particularly advisors and superiors, can utilize information found in this study to inform practice, policy, and evaluation.

Confidentiality:

The findings of this study will be interpreted and published without any identifiable information of participants or the institutions where they work. Data collected will be kept confidential throughout the entire investigative process.

We will make every effort to keep your information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. The principal investigator and the research team will have access to the information you provide for research purposes only. Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control for safety purposes. These groups include University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, of federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research, including the Office for Human Research Protections and the Food and Drug Administration. The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

Storage:

Notes and audio recordings will be stored on a 200 GB external hard drive, organized and categorized into encrypted folders, labeled without using participant names, which will require a password for access. Data will be discarded three years after the completion of the study.

Participation Alternatives:

The alternative is not to participate.

Costs:

There are no costs to participate in this study.

Compensation:

There is no compensation associated with this study.

Contact Information:

Questions regarding this study can be directed to the primary investigator or the dissertation project chair.

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(734) 252-6479
cbarnet5@emich.edu

Dr. Ronald Williamson, Ed.D.
(734) 487-0255
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For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at (734) 487-3090.

Statement of Consent:

I have read over this form, have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and I am satisfied with the answers that I received. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

NAME (PRINT) _____ DATE _____

SIGNATURE - AUDIO RECORDING _____ DATE _____

SIGNATURE – STUDY CONSENT _____ DATE _____

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

NAME OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT: _____

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT: _____

DATE: _____

Appendix C: Demographic Data Survey

Name:

Institution:

Years Affiliated with Institution:

Employment Status (FT/ PT / Voluntary):

Official Employment Title:

Are you an alumni of this institution? If, YES, from which program did you graduate?

Age:

Race/Ethnicity:

Gender:

Sexual Orientation:

Highest Level of Education Completed:

Appendix D: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Date: 11-15-2018

IRB #: UHSRC-FY18-19-110

Title: "So, What Do You Do?" A Qualitative Exploration of the Role of Student Government Advisors at Selected Universities in the Midwest

Creation Date: 11-13-2018

End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Clyde Barnett

Review Board: University Human Subjects Review Committee

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Clyde Barnett	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	cbarnet5@emich.edu
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Member	Ronald Williamson	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	rwilliams1@emich.edu
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Member	Clyde Barnett	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	cbarnet5@emich.edu
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