

THE FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE TRANSFER  
ADVISING PROCESS OF ADVISERS IN THE  
ALABAMA TRANSFER ADVISING CORPS:  
A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

This grounded theory study examined the factors which influenced the transfer advising process as it unfolded within the context of ten community colleges which were located in rural counties in the state of Alabama. The participants in this study included nine recent graduates from The University of Alabama who were involved in the Alabama College Transfer Corps' program to assist students from rural community colleges in transferring to four year colleges or universities. This program utilized a philosophy of transfer advising known as near peer advising. The near peer approach advocated that an advisor who is close in age and experience to the students they advise has advantages which more traditional advisors do not share. The development of this grounded theory came from the vantage point of these nine participants and included 27 in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The chronological parameters of this study extended from the fall of 2009 until the spring of 2011.

Five categories of factors emerged which exerted an influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the experience of the nine near peer advisors who were assisting students in ten rural community colleges in the state of Alabama. The four main categories were *institutional factors, cultural factors, contextual factors, and adviser factors*. The core category was *student factors*. The process by which the main categories influenced the core category was random and dynamic. The main category of *adviser factors* functioned as a synthesizer through which much of the influence was filtered before being deposited in the core category, the *student factors*.

This grounded theory was the first theory devoted to the transfer advising process. As such, this research endeavor provided a vehicle through which practitioners in the field of transfer advising can better understand the factors which exert an influence upon the transfer advising process. In addition, this theory provides a contextual framework by which further academic research can be conducted in the field of transfer advising.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Dr. Luther Webb, whose life-long dream was that his son would attain a doctor's degree. I finally made it. I know that you would be proud.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my church, the Collinsville Presbyterian Church, who patiently listened to my ideas concerning the factors that influenced the transfer advising process. Thanks to their prayers, patience, and encouragement, I was able to persevere to the conclusion of this wonderful and enjoyable project.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The first junior, later to be designated as community college, was founded in Joliet, Illinois in 1901. As the brainchild of William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago and later known as the “father of the junior college in America” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), the original junior college had a dual purpose. The first purpose was to provide an opportunity for higher education to students who were unable to gain admission to a university and for those who were not part of the upper class (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The second purpose was to relieve four year colleges and universities from the task of orienting first and second year students to higher education, thus freeing the universities to engage in knowledge creating research and teach advanced studies (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). As such, the central mission of the early junior college was transfer education (Townsend, 2001), and the initial curriculum was designed to parallel the curriculum of the four year colleges and universities so that the junior college student, upon completion of two years at the junior college, could transfer seamlessly into a four year college or university (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

In the period between 1920 and 1960 a number of events took place that increased the popularity and demand for junior colleges, while at the same time, challenging its original mission (Young, 1996). This period witnessed tremendous growth in the number of junior colleges due to several specific developments. These included an increasing number of high

school graduates who wanted to pursue a college education, a growing demand in industry for technically trained employees, local communities with sufficient taxable wealth and a citizenry that was willing to support a junior college, and a vast number of individuals who aspired to have their children enjoy the fruits of a college education, many of whom could not afford the cost of attending a university (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

As history would verify, not all of these new developments would prove favorable toward the transfer aspect of the original junior college mission. In fact, in 1932 a battle over the original purpose and mission of the junior college was initiated. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching issued a report which advocated the proposal that the transfer function should no longer be the primary function of the junior college and that the focus should be upon terminal or vocational education (Frye, 1992). For the next thirty years advocates and critics battled each other on a number of fronts and a number of key events tilted the battle in favor of those who were advocates of the Carnegie proposal.

The first change event occurred at the end of World War II. Numerous men returning from the war needed to be retrained and have their job skills updated. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill, had an enormous effect on higher education in general and junior colleges in particular (Lucas, 1994). The GI Bill provided a form of scholarship for veterans. The result was an overall increase in enrollment as well as an increase in nontraditional students. Many of these veterans were not interested in pursuing a four year degree but only in upgrading their job skills. As a result, the majority of these students ended up enrolling in junior colleges. This event brought about a significant shift in the curricular offerings of junior colleges. Fewer liberal arts and transfer programs were offered and vocational and terminal occupational programs increased (Eaton, 1994).

A second event occurred in 1947 with the *President's Commission of Higher Education*, known as the *Truman Commission*. This commission suggested that junior colleges endorse an open access policy which would provide remedial academic services to under prepared students who would be admitted (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). This development had both advantages and disadvantages. One of the disadvantages was that it proportionally increased the number of students who would not be capable of transferring to a four year college or university.

These policies worked their way through the junior college system during the 1950s and 1960s and then the 1970s and 1980s witnessed further changes which affected the transfer rate of community colleges. One change concerned the academic rigor of the courses offered at community colleges. According to Eaton (1996), a combination of lower skilled community college students and their socio-economic background resulted in a less rigorous academic climate than was to be found in four-year institutions which produced a detrimental effect on community college transfer programs. A second change concerned the shifting demographics of the community college student population. During these two decades the student population shifted from predominantly full time students to one consisting of many part-time adult students, who worked full time. Deegan and Tillary (1985) noted that this led to a larger proportion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and they concluded that differences in social class generally implied less interest in general educational goals. These changes served to further erode the transfer component of the community college mission.

The change of government policies and the change of society and educational expectations brought about a shift in the community colleges' emphasis and progressively lowered the number of students who transferred to four year colleges or universities. The effects of the GI Bill and the Truman Commission's open access policy influenced the transfer rate in

the 1950s and the 1960s. In the 1950s the transfer rate hovered around 70% and by the end of the 1960s that rate had dropped to approximately 60% (Medsker, 1960). However, combined with the declining academic rigor and the changing demographics from full time traditional students in the following two decades the transfer rate fell to 57 % in the 1970s and plummeted to a rate of 28 % by the mid-1980s. During the 1990s the introduction of noncredit functions further depressed the percentage of general education students as part of the total enrollment and further eroded the transfer rate (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Since that point in time the transfer rate of community colleges has worked its way steadily down to a rate of 22% in 2008 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

#### Statement of the Problem

According to Tinto (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), lack of information and misinformation are two of the primary reasons which contribute to institutional and program incongruity and, in turn, lead to failed retention. This is a significant issue as it relates to students from low-income environments. This information gap, as it is known, causes difficulties in three specific areas as it relates to community college students from rural communities. The first difficulty concerns the admission process. Students from low income families are less likely to receive information about application guidance (Epstein, 2005). The second difficulty relates to financial barriers. The inability to pay for higher education is one of the primary impediments that prevents many students from continuing their education and students from low-income families are less likely to receive information about financial aid (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2006). The third difficulty concerns the particular system that is in place in the state of Alabama. Alabama is comprised of a loosely connected network of 57 postsecondary institutions. The system is composed of 32 four-year institutions, four technical

colleges, and 21 community colleges. Attempting to navigate this network creates a number of challenges for disadvantaged rural community college students. The system weaves a complex of barriers that provides a number of formidable difficulties for those who are uninitiated or who lack experience in dealing with the complexities presented by this system (The University of Alabama, May, 2006).

In 1997, prior to his death, the late Jack Kent Cooke set aside funds in his will to establish a foundation that would provide scholarships to help young people of exceptional promise with financial need to reach their full potential through education. In 2000 the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (JKCF) was established to fulfill this vision. In June of 2006 the Foundation announced the offer of ten grants of \$1 million each to selective colleges or universities. The purpose of the grants was to create a “College Advising Corps” in the state of each university or college that received a grant. The “Corps” was designed to train recently graduated university students to serve as guides for low income high school and community college students as they attempted to negotiate the process of attaining a bachelor’s degree (Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, July, 2006).

One of these grants was awarded to the Education Policy Center at The University of Alabama. The four year grant established the Alabama College Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC) in 2007. The specific focus of the ACTAC was to assist low income community college students to transfer successfully to a four year college or university (Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, February 2008). In May of 2008, as the initial class of ACTAC, eleven recent graduates from The University of Alabama were selected as guides known as Community College Transfer Advisers. These Advisers went through two forms of training. The first form was administered by the representatives of the National College Advising Corps (NCAC) and the

second form was administered by the representatives of the Alabama College Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC). In the summer of 2008 the participants spent a week in Chapel Hill, North Carolina at the University of North Carolina, where they received training from the NCAC. They were trained in areas such as financial aid advising, admission advising, and the benefits of selective colleges for high-achieving, low-income students. In the fall of 2008 the participants went through a five week training program in Tuscaloosa, Alabama at The University of Alabama. This training included the following modules: admissions application preparation, financial aid and scholarship research and application preparation, transfer issues and articulation, academic advising, effective entry and partnering with community college students and personnel, presentation and communication development, and the history and environment of higher education in Alabama (The University of Alabama, September, 2006). In the Fall of 2008 these eleven Advisers were placed on the campuses of eleven community colleges which were located in the Black Belt and Appalachian regions of the state of Alabama. Their purpose was to encourage and assist students from these community colleges in navigating the process of transferring to a four-year institution of higher education.

The stated goal of the ACTAC was to increase the community college to four-year institution transfer rate in the state of Alabama, with specific attention on community colleges serving counties with high rates of rural poverty in Alabama's Black Belt and Appalachian Regional Commission counties. As part of this overarching goal, it was hoped that the reasons why the transfer rate was 3.7 % compared with a national average of 22% would become clear (Hardy & Katsinas, 2006). The assessment goal of the ACTAC was to discover the strategies that were successful in raising the transfer rate and the reasons why those strategies were

successful. In order to accomplish these goals the ACTAC undertook a rigorous employment of a mixed methods approach (Alabama Transfer Advising Corps, 2006).

#### Purpose of the Study

This dissertation used a qualitative mixed methods approach. This study assessed the factors that exerted an influence upon the transfer advising process as it was experienced by the ACTAC Advisers who were advising community college students seeking their assistance in transferring to a four year college or university. Specifically, this study developed a theory that explained the factors which exerted an influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the experiences of the ACTAC Advisers who were advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama. The study accomplished this objective by means of a substantive grounded theory research design.

#### Significance of the Study

The study of the influences upon the transfer advising process in rural community colleges in the state of Alabama was important for several reasons. First, this study had implications in the domain of research. This study added to the growing literature of grounded theory research. Specifically, this dissertation took its place alongside the few early applications of grounded theory in the field of education. Second, there was an indirect benefit for community college students who desired to transfer to a four-year institution. A better understanding of the factors that influence the transfer advising process enabled ACTAC Advisers to assist community college students in overcoming the information gap which had been identified as one of the primary transfer obstacles to lower socioeconomic students who were the first in their families to pursue a baccalaureate degree (Epstein, 2005). Third, this study also benefited the ACTAC Advisers themselves. Knowledge of which factors influence the transfer advising

process and how they function in exerting that influence helped the ACTAC Advisers to alter, adapt, and improve the quality of advice they gave to students who were seeking to transfer. Fourth, the findings of this theory were of value to those policy makers who were involved in directing this program. The use of this substantive grounded theory provided the administrators of the program with a body of information that was patterned, conceptual, integrated, and transcendent (Glaser, 1978). A clearer understanding of the influences upon the transfer advising process provided added insight in selecting, orienting, and training future ACTAC Advisers in the program.

#### Statement of the Research Questions

The grounded theory research design posed six research questions at the outset of this study. The first question was the central research question and the following five questions were associated sub-questions.

1. What factors influence the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama;
2. How do these factors influence the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama;
3. How do these factors influence each other in the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama;

4. Which factors exert a powerful influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama;
5. Which factors exert a positive influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama; and
6. Which factors exert a negative influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama?

#### Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

This research study operated under four philosophical assumptions taken from symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, and constructivism. The first assumption was that experience is located in the larger conditional context within which it is embedded (Mead, 1934). The second assumption was that the process of action, interaction, or emotions must be described in response to the events and problems that arise to inhibit those actions, interactions, or emotions (Dewey, 1929). The third assumption was that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it (Schwandt, 1998). The fourth assumption was that researchers are part of the world they study. Thus the data they collect and the grounded theories they construct are accomplished through their past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices (Charmaz, 2006).

According to Creswell (2003) there are three areas of potential limitations which apply to all qualitative research designs. The first applies to the integrity of the research data, the second applies to the quality of the research instrument and the third applies to the generalizability of the findings. Corresponding to the first potential limitation, it should be noted that the participants in

this study may not always give honest and truthful responses to the interviewer. Concerning the second potential limitation, it is important to mention that since the researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the findings of this study will be as strong or weak as the skills of the researcher dictate. With regard to the issue of generalizability, it should be stated that due to the relatively small sample size, the research design does not lend itself to strong generalizability.

This study was delimited to the nine returning Advisers who participated in the ACTAC during the first year of its existence which began in June of 2008 and concluded in May of 2009. This decision was deemed prudent in light of the fact that these nine participants provided several advantages for the research. First, they had completed the orientation and training involved in the program. Second, they had a year of experience in advising and assisting community college students who were interested in transferring to a four-year institution for the purpose of pursuing a baccalaureate degree. Third, these individuals had a significant amount of time to reflect upon the process that is undertaken in advising community college students concerning the transfer procedure. In building a grounded theory of the influences upon the transfer advising process in near peer advising it was decided that these nine individuals would be the participants who could give the most valuable data for this type of research.

#### Operational Definitions

The following terms and definitions are provided as a reference for the terminology used in this study:

Analysis- Analysis involves examining a substance and its components in order to determine their properties and functions, then using the acquired knowledge to make inferences about the whole (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Analytic Tools- Analytic tools are thinking devices or procedures that, if used, correctly can facilitate coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Axial Coding- A sophisticated method of coding data that seeks to identify incidents which have a relationship to each other (Goulding, 2002).

Coding- Deriving and developing concepts from data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Comparative Analysis- Compares incidents against incidents for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Concepts- Words that stand for groups or classes of objects, events and actions that share some major common property(ies), though the property(ies) can vary dimensionally (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Conceptual Saturation- The process of acquiring sufficient data to develop each category/theme fully in terms of its properties and dimensions and to account for variation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Conditional/Consequential Matrix- An analytic strategy useful for helping analysts to consider the wide range of possible conditions and consequences that can enter into context (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Constant Comparisons- The analytic process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Constructivism – A social scientific perspective that addresses how realities are made. This perspective assumes that people, including researchers, construct the realities in which they participate. Constructivist inquiry starts with the experience and asks how members construct it. To the best of their ability constructivists enter the phenomenon, gain multiple views of it, and

locate it in its web of connections and constraints. Constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction (Charmaz, 2006).

Context- Structural conditions that shape the nature of situations, circumstances, or problems to which individuals respond by means of action/interaction/emotions. Contextual conditions range from the most macro to the micro (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Core Category – A main theme which sums up a pattern of behavior and must be explained in terms of its relevance to other categories. It has theoretical significance and its development should be traceable back through the data (Goulding, 2002).

Dimensional analysis- An alternative version of grounded theory proposed by Schatzman (Goulding, 2002).

Dimensions- An abstract concept with associated properties that provide parameters for the purpose of description and comparison (Goulding, 2002).

Grounded Theory- A specific methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the purpose of building theory from data. In this work the term grounded theory is used in a more generic sense to denote theoretical constructs derived from qualitative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Integration- Linking categories around a central or core category and refining the resulting theoretical formulation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Microanalysis- Detailed coding around a concept. A form of open coding used to break data apart and to look for varied meanings of a word or phrase (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Open Coding- Breaking apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Paradigm- An analytic strategy for integrating structure with process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Postmodernism – A theoretical turn that challenges the foundational assumptions of the Enlightenment with its belief in human reason, belief in science, and belief in progress through science. Postmodernists range from those who wish to acknowledge intuitive forms of knowing to those who call for nihilistic rejection of modern ways of knowing and being in the world and their foundation in Enlightenment values (Charmaz, 2006).

Process- The flow of action/interaction/emotions that occurs in response to events situations or problems (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Properties- Characteristics or components of an object, event, or action. The characteristics give specificity to and define an object, event, and/or action (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Research Problem- The general issue or focus of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Research Question- The specific query which the research is designed to address. The question(s) sets the perimeters of the project and suggests the methods to be used for data gathering and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Saturation- Is usually explained in terms of “when no new data are emerging.” But saturation is more than a matter of no new data. It also denotes the development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variation, and if theory building, the delineating of relationships between concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Theoretical Comparisons- An analytic tool used to stimulate thinking about properties and dimensions of categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Theoretical Sampling- A method of data collection based on concepts/themes derived from data. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to collect data from places, people, and events that will maximize opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

### Conclusion

The national transfer rate from community colleges to four-year institutions has steadily declined over the past century. The transfer rate in the state of Alabama is significantly below the national average and the transfer rate in the counties with high rates of rural poverty is below the state rate. The ACTAC was formed and funded by the JKCF in order to understand the causes of this problem and to find solutions to remedy this situation. This dissertation assisted in this endeavor by developing a substantive grounded theory designed to explain the factors which influenced the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who were advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama.

## CHAPTER II:

### METHODS

Qualitative inquiry is designed to discover and describe a phenomenon that is occurring in the everyday lives of a group of individuals (Maxwell, 2005). Grounded theory, as a specific research design, is constructed to go beyond the general parameters of qualitative research and explain the mechanics of a phenomenon. Grounded theory seeks to accomplish this aim by collecting data from participants who are actively involved in the phenomenon and developing an explanatory theory based upon the data which are put forward by those participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Unlike other research designs, the initial research questions in a grounded theory study were, of necessity, provisional, broad, and general. As data were collected and analyzed those initial research questions became more focused, narrow, and specific (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

#### Restatement of the Research Questions

The initial research questions of this study which were identified in Chapter I were:

1. What factors influence the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama;

2. How do these factors influence the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama;
3. How do these factors influence each other in the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama;
4. Which factors exert a powerful influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama;
5. Which factors exert a positive influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama; and
6. Which factors exert a negative influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolds in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who are advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama?

#### Setting for the Research

The state of Alabama is divided into three sections. The northern third of the state contains the Appalachian counties, the central third is known as the Black Belt region, and the lower third of the state is the southern region. The Appalachian region is comprised of 35 counties, the Black Belt region contains 17 counties, and the southern region is made up of 15 counties (Center for Economic and Business Research, 2008).

The Black Belt region is named for its dark soil and occupies the central portion of the state. Historically, the region is known for its agricultural fruitfulness and its plantation system.

Economically, the Black Belt is characterized by underemployment and poverty. The Black Belt counties rank at the lowest level in the state with respect to average median family income and the highest levels with respect to percentage of population in poverty and percentage of minority population (Hattery & Smith, 2007). The Appalachian region is named for the fact that it encompasses the foothills of the southernmost area of the Appalachian mountain range. Historically, the region is remembered for the bloody warfare by which European migrants displaced the region's Native American inhabitants and the development of a backwoods farming society which experienced an unhappy fate during the Civil War and was driven deeper into the mountains with the emergence of a new post-war industrial order (Williams, 2001). Economically, the region is characterized by intense poverty and intense desperation (Caudill, 1963).

This study embraced ten community colleges in the state of Alabama. Seven were located in the Appalachian region and three sites were located in the Black Belt region. All ten community colleges participating in the program were classified as rural by the Carnegie Basic Classification System. Two were classified as rural small, three were classified as rural medium, and five were classified as rural large. The largest institution had an unduplicated credit head count of 15,276 and the smallest had 1,951. The institution with the highest transfer rate was 6.3%, which was the third highest in the state. The institution with the lowest transfer rate was 1.5%, which was the lowest in the state (IPEDS, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

Table 1

*New Transfers Enrolled at the Community Colleges Where the Participants Worked in the 2004-2005 Academic Year*

Community College	2005 Carnegie Basic Classification	2004-2005 Unduplicated Credit Headcount	New Transfers for Public Four Year Universities	Percentage Transferring
Bevill State	Rural Medium	5,667	83	1.5%
Calhoun State	Rural Large	12,982	611	4.7%
Gadsden State	Rural Large	8,318	166	2.0%
Jefferson Davis	Rural Small	1,951	63	3.2%
Northeast Alabama	Rural Medium	2,959	185	6.3%
Northwest Shoals	Rural Medium	6,340	231	3.6%
Shelton State	Rural Large	15,276	333	2.2%
Snead State	Rural Small	2,764	164	5.9%
Wallace-Hanceville	Rural Large	7,342	297	4.0%
Wallace State-Selma	Rural Large	5,021	106	2.1%
Total		121,257	4,506	3.7%

Data Source: Katsinas, S. G. (2008). *The Alabama College Transfer Advising Corps Program: Year One Evaluation, Planning Year (2007-2008)*.

#### Participant Selection

The singular characteristic which distinguishes qualitative research from other forms of inquiry is purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2005). As such, qualitative methods select participants who will be most able to supply the researcher with the specific types of information necessary to understand the process, answer the research questions, and accomplish the aims of the study. This quality is even more crucial in a grounded theory study which seeks to advance beyond description to explanation and then to theory development (Goulding, 2002). A delimiting

decision had to be made with respect to the participants selected for this study. During the initial year, 11 advisers participated in the program (Katsinas, 2008). Nine of these advisers returned for the second year of the program and were joined by three new advisers (Katsinas, 2009). The study chose to focus on the nine returning advisers because their experiences were congruent and developed. The three new advisers were in the initial stages of their involvement in the program and it was judged that they were not able to contribute the depth and comprehensive type of data which the nine returning advisers were able to contribute.

The nine individuals who were selected as participants in this study adequately fulfilled the above-mentioned requirements. The Alabama College Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC) sought to select advisers who fit the context in which they were working, in terms of comfort with the institutional setting and also in dealing with the unique needs of first generation college students (Katsinas, 2009). For example, seven participants were female, two were male, eight were white and one was African American. Additionally, eight of the participants were originally from rural communities, seven were transfer students, and seven participants were first generation college students (Katsinas, 2008). All nine participants were recent graduates of The University of Alabama and possessed the following characteristics. All nine had experience in advising community college students concerning transfer matters. Each participant demonstrated a strong commitment to the program and shared a passion to make a positive contribution to the lives of rural community college students. All nine individuals participated in the ACTAC as an Adviser during the academic year of 2008-2009, which gave each of them the added advantage of one year of experience with and reflection upon the factors that influenced the transfer advising process. In light of these qualifications, it was considered that these participants would be able to provide the researcher with the thick, deep, and rich data which would prove

advantageous in developing a theory (Charmaz, 2006) that would explain which factors exerted an influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the experience of the ACTAC Advisers who were advising students from rural community colleges in the state of Alabama.

### Method Selection

Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as existing when “one undertakes research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language” (p. 14). Merriam (1998) described the following characteristics which distinguish qualitative research from quantitative research. Qualitative inquiry is interested in how the parts of a phenomenon work together to form a whole, is concerned with understanding a phenomenon from the participants’ perspective, is adaptive to changing circumstances, employs a deductive research strategy, and is theory building rather than theory testing.

There are four reasons why a qualitative approach was adopted in this dissertation. The primary motivation was that there were no existing theories to explain which factors influence the transfer advising process involved in near peer advising. The second reason for using a qualitative approach was that the subject has not been addressed with this particular group of participants (Morse, 1991). The ability to explore the perspectives of participants who are close in age to the students they advise, yet somewhat removed provided a unique opportunity to discover the various dynamics involved in the factors which influenced the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the experience of near peer advisors as they advised students who are contemplating transfer to a four year college or university. A third reason for employing a qualitative method was that the phenomenon under consideration was a process which lent itself

more favorably to qualitative description and explanation. A fourth reason for utilizing a qualitative approach was that qualitative inquiry is flexible and generates data that is deep, rich, and robust, all of which are necessary for theory generation.

## Research Design

### *Origin of Grounded Theory*

In 1965, the methodological stars aligned in a rather unique fashion. Sociology's version of the odd couple came together for the purpose of studying the experiences of chronically ill patients. The older member of the duo, Anselm Strauss, came out of the University Of Chicago School of Pragmatism which had been founded and guided by such luminaries as George Herbert Meade and John Dewey. The junior member of the team, Barney Glaser, had grown up in the Columbia University tradition of positivism, influenced by such scholars as Robert Merton, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Hans Zetterberg. The positivist tradition of Glaser emphasized the scientific method which set forth a belief that an unbiased observer could discover abstract propositions which would explain phenomena in a factual manner uninfluenced by values. The pragmatist tradition of Strauss viewed reality as a fluid and indeterminate process in which multiple perspectives emerge from people's actions to solve problems (Morse et al., 2009).

The result of such collaboration was *Awareness of Dying* (1965) which changed the relationship between doctors and terminally ill patients. Throughout the research process both Glaser and Strauss realized that they were doing something unique, something that was out of the ordinary for research methodology in that era. In this light, both scholars collaborated once again in an effort to explain what they had done in this research endeavor. The end product was *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), an initial attempt to lay the foundation for a completely new approach to engaging in research. The initial presentation is best viewed as a work in

progress with many existing gaps that would be filled at a later date in a variety of ways by a variety of scholars.

It is important to assess the research method known as grounded theory against the historical, cultural, and academic backdrop in which it arose. Grounded theory arose in reaction to a certain intellectual and academic climate. Grounded theory was a reaction to the logico-deductive method of theory generation which logically deduced theory from a priori assumptions. Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocated the proposal that theory development should be grounded in data. The 1950s and 1960s were also an era in the social sciences in which creative and original thinking had seemingly ground to a halt. The situation has been labeled as the age of Grand Theory or the Great Man syndrome. Glaser and Strauss (1967) acknowledged the fact that there were many great theories from the past, yet lamented that students in their day were trained to master these theories and to test them in small ways, but not to question them. Grounded theory encouraged students to analyze, question, challenge, and improve upon the received theories of their age. Its developers also believed that there were many theories yet to be developed and that there were also many problems, both great and small, which were yet to be solved. One of the long term goals of Glaser and Strauss was to enlist a host of future researchers who would develop theories to explain a multitude of phenomena by grounding their theories in data rather than speculation informed by a priori assumptions.

#### *Components of the Original Grounded Theory*

As was mentioned previously, the original work, *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), was a work in progress. The method evolved over the course of a research project in which the two researchers gradually realized that they were doing something that had not been done before. Throughout the writing of the text, *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, the authors point to examples

which exemplify parts of the method but add that, at that time, there were no complete examples, not even of their own work, which gave a clear and full demonstration of grounded theory. It was also noted that at the time *Discovery of Grounded Theory* was written there were still some gaps in the method that would eventually be filled in a variety of ways by a variety of scholars.

At this juncture we will give a brief synopsis of the salient points which characterize the original formulation of the grounded theory method. We will order these points as they occur along the research continuum. The original conception of grounded theory set forth two logical, yet radical propositions for its day. The first was that the researcher should not consult research literature in the substantive area of the investigation prior to data collection and analysis. The reasoning behind this proposition was “in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas” (p. 33). An even stronger statement was voiced in the words, “Carefully covering all the literature before commencing research increases the probability of brutally destroying one’s potentiality as a theorist” (p. 253). These statements were an obvious reaction to the academic climate of that era when researchers mastered the Grand Theories, tested them, but never challenged them, and, as a result, very little creative or original work was accomplished in the area of theory generation. There was also the concern that as the researcher seeded his or her mind with previous literature the concepts and propositions of that literature would overtake, and perhaps, squelch original ideas which occurred to the researcher in the course of investigation. In the original work, the literature from the substantive area of investigation was not consulted until after the core category had emerged, which would have occurred toward the end of the research process.

A second proposition set forth in the original grounded theory work was that a theoretical or conceptual framework should not govern or guide the research. The purpose of grounded

theory is to generate theory, not replicate or test theory. In essence, the purpose of the grounded theory method is to develop a theoretical framework for studying a particular phenomenon. Therefore, it makes sense that the process should not be governed by a preconceived framework. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommended that the research begin with a partial framework of local concepts or features concerning the phenomenon which would be studied so as to give the researcher a foothold on the research. As the research progressed the specifics of the phenomenon would emerge. As the participants began to tell their story the researcher would begin to accumulate data and the data, created by the participants, would determine which direction the research took.

The process by which the data directs the movement of the research and develops the emergent theory is governed by a third proposition of the original grounded theory which is known as theoretical sampling. Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined theoretical sampling as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes data and decides what data to collect next, and where to find them, in order to develop the theory” (p. 45). The emerging theory points to the next phase of data collection. The researcher does not know where theoretical sampling will lead until he or she is guided by the emerging gaps in the theory and new research questions which are generated by previous data. Theoretical sampling also progressively narrows the focus of the research by filtering out extraneous and nonessential aspects while highlighting and bringing to the forefront, those concepts which are significant to building a theory that will explain the phenomenon being investigated.

The means of data analysis adopted in grounded theory is comparative analysis. The constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) combines the analytic

procedure of constant comparison with an explicit coding procedure and a style of theory development. The purpose of the method is to generate theory more systematically. The method was designed to assist the analyst in generating theory which is integrated, consistent, plausible, and close to the data in a form clear enough to be readily operationalized for testing in quantitative research. The constant comparative method, as it was originally developed consisted of four broad stages. The initial stage involved comparing incidents applicable to each category, the second stage integrated categories and their properties, the third stage delimited the theory, and the fourth stage involved writing the theory. It is important to mention that as the research progresses all four activities are performed simultaneously.

In the first stage the analyst starts by coding each incident in the data into as many categories as emerge. The basic rule of the constant comparative method is to code an incident for a category by comparing it with previous incidents in the same and different categories. Then the analyst starts thinking in terms of the full range of types or properties of the category, its dimensions, its consequences, and its relation to other categories. After three or four categories have been coded the second rule of comparative analysis comes into play. The analyst stops coding and writes a memo (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Memos are analytic documents in which the analyst reflects upon the data and carries his or her thinking to its logical conclusions. Once this is accomplished the analyst returns to coding and comparing more data. The purpose of this initial stage of analysis is to fracture the data in such a way that a clear understanding of the phenomenon will be obtained so that it will be neatly integrated into a more abstract storyline at a later period.

As the analyst continues coding, making comparisons, analyzing data, and writing memos, a subtle change occurs. The second stage of the constant comparative method merges

with the first stage. The analyst knows this stage has arrived when incidents which were being compared with other incidents start being compared with properties of categories that have emerged from previous comparisons. This is a sign that the categories are being integrated which will result in a unified whole. At this stage of the research the theory begins to emerge and integrate. The categories integrate with their properties, categories integrate with other categories, and the theory begins to take shape. New questions arise which; assisted by theoretical sampling, fill in the gaps which are found in various categories. This results in a narrowing of the focus of data collection as well as a strengthening of the explanatory power of the emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The third stage of the constant comparative method is delimiting the theory which occurs at two levels. The first level of delimiting takes place within the categories. By the process of reduction, the reduplication of properties and categories are discovered which enables the analyst to collapse some of the properties and some of the categories. This results in a smaller number of higher level categories. The second level of delimitation occurs with respect to the emerging theory. As coding, comparison, analysis, and integration progress, the theory begins to solidify as major modifications become fewer and fewer. The delimitation of categories allows the theory to achieve two major requirements of theory: parsimony and scope. Parsimony narrows the quantity of categories to a manageable number and scope broadens the application of the theory to a wider range of situations. The delimiting of the theory creates a smaller number of key categories which lend greater explanatory power to the theory. At this stage of the research two important ingredients appear. As categories are collapsed, coded, and integrated, not only are key categories created, but saturation begins to occur. Saturation is that point in the research process when no additional data are being found whereby categories can be further developed. This is a

sign to the researcher that the theory is becoming full and robust and the time to enter into the fourth stage of the method is quickly approaching. However, there is one additional strategy which enters at this stage of the research. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), this is the stage at which the analyst should begin consulting the research literature in the substantive area which is being investigated. However, the analyst should treat this literature as data to be coded, compared, analyzed, and integrated into the emergent theory.

When saturation of the major categories begins, the analyst becomes aware that it is time to initiate the fourth stage of the constant comparative method which is writing the theory. At this stage the analyst possesses the following ingredients: coded data, field notes, and a series of memos which contain the saturated categories and the nascent theory which has emerged from the research endeavor. The objective of this stage is to assemble the theory in a clear, concise, and coherent format which explains the phenomenon that has been investigated. The first step in writing the theory is to collate the memos according to each category. The content contained in the memos behind the categories will eventually become the major themes of the theory. The coded data and field notes can be used to validate points, display data behind hypotheses, and provide illustrations. At this point in the research the analyst performs a comparative analysis between the emergent theory and existing theories in the substantive area that has been investigated. The result of such a comparative analysis may end in a disagreement with existing theories, a modification of the emergent theory, or an alignment with one or more of the extant theories. The format for presenting the theory can be either discussional or propositional. Glaser and Strauss (1967) preferred the discussional format and recommend this style of presentation for research which is at the exploratory stage and also for researchers who are novices.

In the original grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) opted for an evaluation of the method based upon credibility which they defined as “believability” or “trustworthiness.” According to the authors, there are two problems with conveying credibility. The first problem is getting readers to understand the theoretical framework and the second problem is describing the data and presenting the theory in such a way that the reader can literally experience the phenomenon in a vicarious fashion. These problems are confronted and credibility is addressed in three ways. First, does the researcher use a codified procedure which allows the reader to understand how the analyst obtained the theory from the data? The constant comparative method, when utilized properly, will leave a data trail which will overcome any objections concerning this question. Second, does the reader become sufficiently caught up in the description of the phenomenon so that he or she feels vicariously that he or she was also in the field? This is achieved through rich, thick, and deep description which is apparent when the method is employed correctly. Third, how does the reader assess the means by which the researcher came to the conclusions set forth in the theory? The constant comparative method’s procedure of triangulating multiple comparison groups as well as multiple forms of data will answer this question and enhance the credibility of the theory.

The original grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) set out to accomplish six objectives. The first was “fit.” The theory must correspond closely to the data. In other words, it must be derived from the data and, as such, it will be faithful to the everyday realities of the substantive area under investigation. The second is “work.” The theory must be relevant to and able to explain the behavior being studied. The third is “understanding.” The theory must be understandable to those people who are working in the substantive area. The concepts of the theory should serve as a bridge between the theoretical thinking of the researcher and the

practical thinking of people concerned with the substantive area. The fourth is “generality.” The theory must be abstract enough to serve as a general guide to multi-conditional, ever-changing, daily situations. The theory should be flexible enough to allow the individual using it to adjust or reformulate it when applying the theory to specific situational realities. This underscores one of the predominant themes of the original grounded theory; namely that theory should be viewed as a process, and an ever developing entity. The fifth is “control.” Closely associated with the previous objective, the theory must be controllable in the sense that it enables the individual using it to have enough control of the theory to make its application in everyday situations worth trying. The sixth is “preparation.” The theory is not designed to guarantee that two analysts working independently will achieve the same results. The method is designed to produce theory which can be tested by more rigorous methodological approaches.

#### *The Aftermath of the Discovery of Grounded Theory*

With the completion of *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) a new method of research was born. It was a method with much promise and optimistic expectations for furthering creative thinking and original research which would usher in a new age of discovery in the field of social science. Yet, there was much more work that remained to be done. The original formulation was a good start but there were obvious gaps in the method which needed to be filled, there were some elements of the method which needed to be expanded, and perhaps other elements which needed to be altered or reformulated. There were no explanatory texts for seasoned scholars who were interested in the method and its potential to generate new theory and there were no “how to” books for novice researchers who were eager to employ the method in their theses and dissertations.

Unfortunately, none of these texts would be forthcoming for at least a decade. Instead, methodological storm clouds were gathering. Glaser and Strauss never collaborated again after this initial endeavor. Both went in their separate research directions. However, both original authors continued to employ grounded theory and each nurtured a number of protégés in the method. Something ominous was simmering under the surface. Kathy Charmaz, who studied under both Glaser and Strauss, observed that from the very beginning, there was a tenuous alliance between the philosophical underpinnings of the original grounded theory method. She remarked that these differences were significant and consequential (Morse et al., 2009), and as a result, placed grounded theory on somewhat unsteady ontological and epistemological grounds which planted the seeds of divergent directions that the method would eventually take.

The first effort to fill in some of the gaps and develop a more refined method of grounded theory came eleven years after the original method was developed when Glaser published *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978). It would be another twelve years before Strauss added his refining contribution to the method with co-author, Juliet Corbin, when they published *The Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (1990). This was the point in time when the methodological bottom dropped out. After reading the text of Strauss and Corbin's work, Glaser was disturbed. He immediately requested that Strauss withdraw the book from publication. He further requested that his name be disassociated from the book and removed from its text. He considered Strauss and Corbin's work a completely different method and refused to call it grounded theory. He described the book as "without conscience" and "bordering on immorality" (Glaser, 1992, p. 3).

At Strauss' suggestion, Glaser wrote a book to critique the work of Strauss and Corbin and to correct the errors which he perceived to be presented in the method which they had

developed. Two years later, *Basics of Grounded Theory: Emergence Versus Forcing* (1992) was published. In this book, Glaser critiqued the work of Strauss and Corbin chapter by chapter and section by section. Glaser contended that 90% of the method developed by Strauss and Corbin was out of accord with the original development of grounded theory. His main criticism was that the method which Strauss and Corbin had developed was “forced, preconceived, conceptual description,” a characterization he leveled at least a dozen times in the first twenty pages of the book.

There were three significant areas where Glaser demonstrated this claim. The first concerned the coding system advocated by Strauss and Corbin. This was the crux of Glaser’s criticism, namely that Strauss’ coding system was forced and preconceived. Attention was drawn to what Glaser described as Strauss’ “pet code” which he claimed was “conditions.” According to Glaser, Strauss forced this code upon the analyst who was employing the method. A second area which Glaser criticized was the paradigm, a tool developed for identifying contextual factors. The paradigm utilizes the questions “why,” “when,” “where,” and “what.” Glaser saw this as a preconceived set of questions which did not allow the concepts to emerge naturally from the data. A third area of controversy concerned the conditional consequential matrix which was designed to frame the theory along a continuum of broader and narrower contexts. According to Glaser (1992), this was another effort to force the data into areas which it may not want to go rather than allowing the theory to emerge from the data and letting the data control which direction the theory would take.

From Strauss’ perspective the criticism came as something of a surprise and he attributed the controversy to differences in writing styles and interpretation (Goulding, 2002). In later editions, Corbin clarified some of the language with statements like, “an important point to

remember is that the paradigm is only a tool and a set of directives (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and “the matrix is meant only to be a conceptual guide and not a definitive procedure.” In much of the work subsequent to Glaser’s criticism in 1992, both Strauss and Corbin went to great lengths to communicate to readers that the method developed and presented in their writings was a set of guidelines or principles to aid the researcher in developing theory. Specifically, the method should be viewed as principles, strategies, and techniques to be adapted, developed, and utilized by the analyst to suit his or her research needs. Recently, Corbin (Morse et al., 2009) stated that this approach is designed to encourage researchers to enter the investigation with an open mind, ready to hear what participants are saying. Furthermore, it is a method which rejects a dogmatic and rigid approach to doing research, and embraces the role of the other, giving voice to participants. In other words, Strauss and Corbin did not intend that their method should be understood in a rigid fashion with rules and regulations which required virtually religious adherence and implementation.

It is now generally accepted today that several versions of grounded theory do exist. Researchers who use the method are cautioned to make a reasoned decision as to the advantages and disadvantages of each form of the method prior to selecting the version they intend to employ before embarking upon their research (Goulding, 2002). From an interpretive stand point, Charmaz (2006) noted that Glaser’s version contained strong positivist leanings that sought to convert emergent categories into variables that achieve parsimony and scope in explanatory power. She also noted that the version developed by Strauss and Corbin, on the other hand, was comprised of a blend of positivist and interpretivist elements. They understood theory as a set of well-developed concepts which constituted an integrated framework which could explain or predict phenomena. The analyst’s interpretive position in the research was

acknowledged but was viewed as an unavoidable limitation. From a procedural perspective, Goulding (2002) described Glaser's version as an interpretive, contextual, emergent approach to theory development, while the version established by Strauss and Corbin was depicted as a highly complex system of coding techniques.

The aftermath of the division between Glaser and Strauss has been an interesting story. Strauss died in 1996, four years after Glaser's published critique of his work. Glaser has continued to publish and has mentored a significant number of scholars in his version of grounded theory to this day. Glaser and his associates continue to refer to his version of grounded theory as "grounded theory" or "classical grounded theory," and all other versions by some other designation, but not as grounded theory (Glaser, 1998). Corbin and other former students of Strauss have continued to publish and advance the version of grounded theory which came to be associated with their late mentor's name. It has been 19 years since the split, and the version advanced by Strauss and Corbin has ruled the day in academic circles. The tendency within academic disciplines, especially those outside sociology, has been to focus primarily upon the Strauss and Corbin adaptation of the method to the exclusion of Glaser's version (Goulding, 2002). There are, perhaps, three reasons why this has occurred. Glaser chose to publish his own books through a so-called "vanity press" which he established and called Sociology Press. However, in publishing his own work, he by-passed the most treasured of academic steps; namely "peer review" (Morse et al., 2009). A second reason may be the amorphous approach which his version entails. The version, developed by Strauss and Corbin with its principles, guidelines, and intricate structure, is often preferred by novice researchers, student's writing theses and dissertations, as well as academic supervisors who advise them, in part, because of its ease of use for researchers new to the approach (Charmaz, 2006). A third reason why the

academic world may have embraced Strauss' version of grounded theory to the exclusion of Glaser's version could possibly be due to the somewhat strident tone taken by Glaser in his critique of the version authored by Strauss and Corbin.

### *Versions of Grounded Theory*

Within the Strauss and Corbin tradition of grounded theory, three other approaches have developed. One developed alongside of the original grounded theory by a colleague of Strauss, and the other two were developed as separate versions of grounded theory by two of Strauss' former students. The first variation of grounded theory was developed by Leonard Schatzman, who was a student and future colleague of Strauss. Schatzman worked closely with Strauss in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1973 they co-authored a book entitled *Field research strategies for a natural sociology*. It was during this collaboration that two important events occurred. The first was that both Schatzman and Strauss realized that Schatzman's approach was not grounded theory, and the second was that a new method emerged (Morse et al., 2009). Schatzman called this new method "dimensional analysis." Unfortunately, Schatzman was not a prolific writer and much of his method has been handed down to his students by oral tradition.

Schatzman's focus was narrower than the focus of grounded theory. His passion concerned the process of analysis and his ultimate objective was to develop a general theory of analysis. He taught and assisted many students of Strauss who were employing the original grounded theory to write their dissertations. Ultimately, Schatzman's dimensional analysis (1991) had three major concerns. The first concern was how someone comes to define the situation, whether that someone was the researcher or the informant. As such, perspective was kept in the forefront of the investigation. The second concern was to overcome "recognition/recall," which Schatzman understood to be the researcher's tendency to mistakenly

discover dimensions, properties, and concepts in the data which were, in reality, guided by the researcher's prior assumptions or perspectives. The third concern was that the method directs the researcher to remain open to what informants have to say. In fact, according to Schatzman, it is the job of the researcher to encourage informants to designate concepts, calling out dimensions and properties, to develop a rich and comprehensive bank of dimensions generated from the informants.

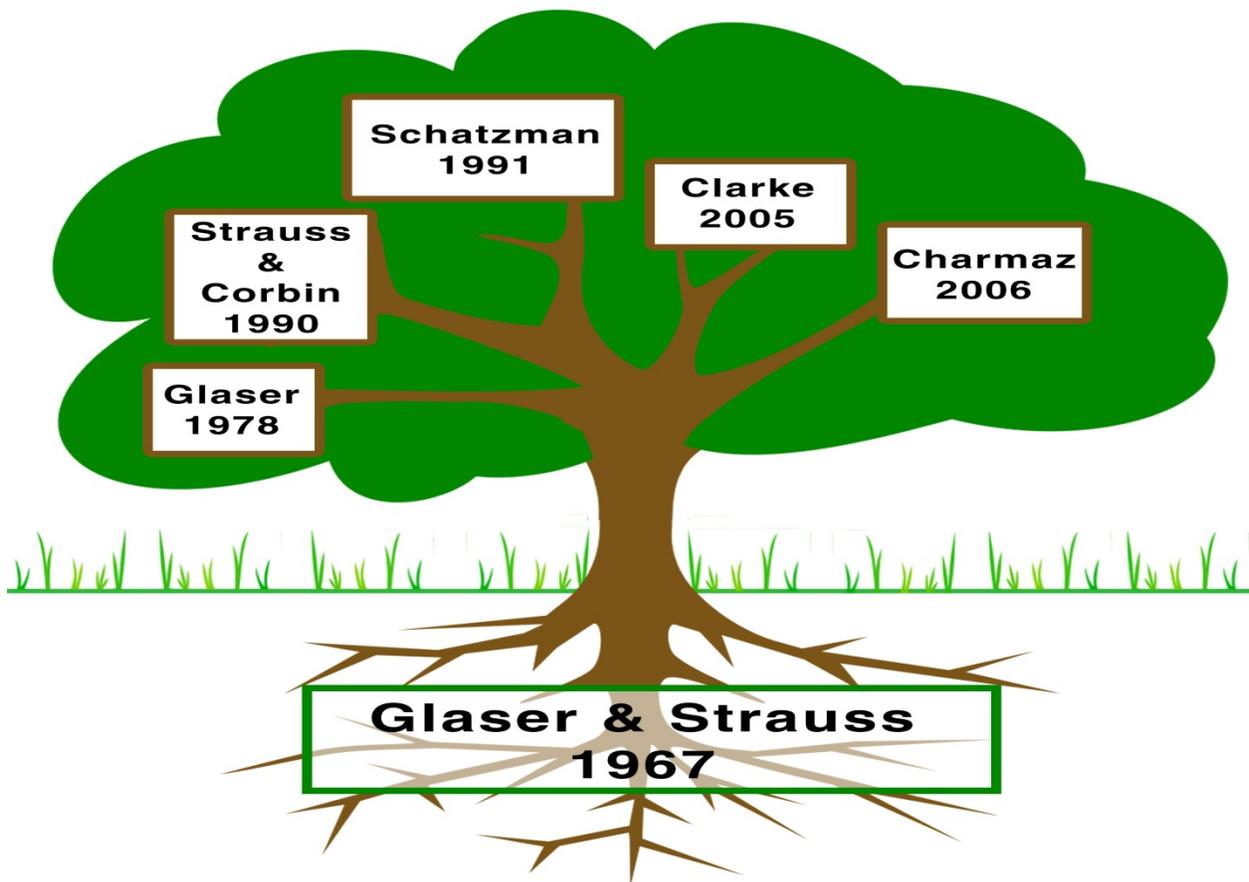
A second variation of grounded theory was developed by Kathy Charmaz, who studied under both Glaser and Strauss, but appears to have been more influenced by the Strauss and Corbin version of the method. Charmaz (2006) labels her method as the constructivist grounded theory, which she describes as a contemporary revision of the original grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss. The constructivist grounded theory, as proposed by Charmaz, exhibits the following characteristics. The method is built upon a philosophical base which assumes a relativist epistemology that acknowledges multiple perspectives. Knowledge is constructed or produced within a social construct by individuals grappling with empirical problems. Research is not viewed as a neutral act. Instead, research is influenced by the researcher's background, perspectives, and positions. As a result, analysis is an interpretive rendering and not an objective report.

Unlike the original version of grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), constructivist grounded theory does not suppose that theory is discovered, but rather that theory is constructed by the researcher through past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices. Furthermore, researchers are not passive receptacles into which data is poured and the research process is not value free. The researcher is influenced by a vast number of factors, and likewise, influences the research process in a number of ways.

This acknowledgement is broader but similar to the idea of “recognition/recall” mentioned by Schatzman (1991) in dimensional analysis. However, unlike Schatzman, Charmaz does not see this as a negative to be eliminated, and unlike Corbin and Strauss (2008), she did not view it as an unavoidable consequence which must be endured. Rather, constructivist grounded theory views this type of researcher influence as a potential positive if it is recognized, acknowledged, and controlled. The manner in which researcher influence is controlled is called “reflexivity.” According to Charmaz (2006), researchers should attempt to become aware of their presuppositions and wrestle with how they affect the research. Realizing that the researcher’s personal experiences can unconsciously or subconsciously influence the research findings, the researcher should consistently communicate to the reader, possible ways in which this may occur. Such a practice serves the purpose of increasing the credibility of the research.

A third variation of grounded theory came out of the influence of Strauss. A post-modernist approach to grounded theory was developed by Adele Clarke, who was a student of Strauss. Clarke entitled her method “situational analysis” (2005) which she described as an attempt to reground grounded theory in Straussian worlds and arenas suffused with the assumptions of feminism and post-structuralism (Morse et al., 2009). In situational analysis the root metaphor shifts from the social process/action to social ecology/situation. The key point in situational analysis is that the situation has become the fundamental unit of analysis. A situation is viewed as an incident and the social ecology is the ecosystem which gives rise to it and defines it. Situational analysis replaces the conditional matrix, which placed the individual at its center, with a situational matrix, which places the situation at the center. As analytic tools, Clarke utilizes a mapping system comprised of three techniques. Situational maps lay out the major human, nonhuman and discursive elements in the research situation and analyze the relations

among them. Situational maps are specifically designed for relational analysis which assists the analyst in clarifying the nature of the relationship between categories, and also, in deciding which stories to pursue in the research. Social worlds/arena maps set forth the collective actors and arenas of commitment and discourse within which they are engaged in ongoing negotiations. Positional maps establish the major positions taken, and not taken, in the data with respect to specific axes of difference, concern, and controversy surrounding issues involved in the situation. The mapping system is designed to elucidate the key elements, discourses, conditions, and possibilities which characterize the situation.



*Figure 1.* History of Grounded Theory

### *Grounded Theory Commonalities*

Regardless of which version of grounded theory a researcher chooses to employ there are several facets that are common to all of them (Morse et al., 2009). All versions utilize the constant comparative method as a means of analyzing data. This method of analysis isolates concepts, organizes them into categories and develops them by means of properties and dimensions until saturation is achieved. Theoretical sampling is another commonality by which the various versions of grounded theory unite data collection and data analysis in such a way that the focus of the research is progressively narrowed until the theory emerges or is constructed. The writing of theoretical memos is an analytic tool adopted by all versions of grounded theory as a means of tracking the research process as well as engaging in analytic theory development.

### *Rationale for Choosing a Version of Grounded Theory*

The important question which needs to be answered is “which version of grounded theory should a researcher adopt and also how should the researcher make that decision?” According to Glaser (1998), it is a simple decision. There is only one version of grounded theory, the original version which he and Strauss (1967) developed and the trajectory that version has taken through his subsequent writings. All other versions developed by Strauss and through his tutelage are not regarded as grounded theory by Glaser. They are labeled as “forced, preconceived, conceptual description.” Strauss (Strauss & Fischer, 1979) viewed grounded theory as a banquet of ideas and analytical tools from which people could come, take what they want and leave the rest. Clarke (2003) used the same metaphor to describe situational analysis. Corbin (Morse et al., 2009) noted that the importance in research does not depend on whose approach is chosen, but upon the quality of findings that the research produces. She added that all of the versions of grounded theory have the potential to produce quality findings. Furthermore, she stated that

people should choose the method that most speaks to them and that they will use in ways that make sense to them. Charmaz (2006) views grounded theory as a mindset, a set of principles and practices, which is a flexible methodological package. According to Charmaz, a researcher should use those aspects of the package that are applicable to the research goals and are compatible with the researcher's personality and background.

In the research design for this current study, a decision was made to use the original grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a base, and to fill in the gaps with a flexible utilization of the Strauss and Corbin version (2008). Certain portions of the design incorporated compatible facets from dimensional analysis (Schatzmann, 1991), constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), and situational analysis (Clarke, 2005). The reasons for selecting this type of research design were that the version of grounded theory developed by Strauss and Corbin and the versions developed by their associates were more user-friendly, flexible, directive, widely accepted, and readily adaptable to dissertation work than the approach developed by Glaser.

### Grounded Theory Design

Grounded theory is a research method which is designed to analyze a process that is unique or which has not received much attention in previous scholarly work (Charmaz, 2006). In this research study the phenomenon which was investigated was the process by which Advisers participating in the ACTAC advised community college students who were seeking information concerning transfer to a four year college or university. The purpose of grounded theory is to produce a theory which is systematic, explanatory, and grounded in the data (Goulding, 2002). This is accomplished through a series of analytic steps that are theoretically integrated and constantly revolving (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Perhaps the picture of a pyramid is the most apt

way of understanding the overall result of the method. The process begins with the initial gathering of a broad range of data which would be represented by the base of the pyramid. This data is analyzed and the focus of the research is narrowed and refined. Another round of more specific data is gathered on the basis of the previous analysis. That second round of data is analyzed and a third round of even more specific data is collected. This process continues to narrow and refine the focus of the research until a theory emerges which would be depicted by the pinnacle of the pyramid. In order to accomplish these objectives this research project proceeded along five logical phases that build upon each other systematically and simultaneously.



*Figure 2.* Grounded Theory Research Design.

### *Phase One: Concept Analysis*

Phase one of the research design was entitled “concept analysis” and began with an initial round of interviews with the participants in the study. The purpose of these first interviews was to gather a broad range of information (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this reason, the interview format was loosely semi-structured and the interview questions were broad, general, and open. The objective of this initial set of interviews was to allow participants to respond and elaborate on matters that were important to them. This approach was designed to facilitate the collection of rich and detailed experiences from the lives of the participants involved in the study. Successive rounds of interviews incorporated progressively more narrowed and focused interview questions as issues became clarified and data began to emerge.

The original version of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) did not begin with a particular research question or set of research questions. The concern was to avoid influencing the participants in any particular direction or forcing the data into any preconceived mold. The desire was to let the data give voice to the participants and allow the data to emerge by means of its own momentum, detached from any outside forces. Corbin and Strauss (2008) were in agreement with this perspective. They began with a general open-ended research question which was narrowed, refined, and changed as the research progressed. In this research study I began with the general question of how the participants make decisions concerning the advice they gave to community college students who were seeking information pertaining to transfer to a four year college or university (see Appendix A).

After transcribing the data collected in the initial round of interviews, the constant comparative method of data analysis commenced. The initial step of data analysis was open coding which is a type of brainstorming approach. Open coding is a process of breaking down

the data into distinct units of meaning (Spiggle, 1994). The intent was to fracture the data into independent elements. The data was subjected to micro-analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) which broke open data and considered all possible meanings. Its purpose was to generate ideas, focus on pieces of data which seemed to be relevant, and ultimately to identify concepts which represented the analyst's understanding of what was being described by the participants.

Once a significant number of concepts were identified and labeled, the next step was to initiate axial coding. Axial coding involved sorting concepts, synthesizing them, and ordering them into higher level and lower level concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Concepts were linked provisionally in order to show relationships. Axial coding took place at the conceptual level rather than the level of raw data, as in open coding. The process of axial coding involved the delineation of properties which made up the categories and the dimensionalization of those properties. The purpose of axial coding was to organize and reassemble large amounts of data, at the conceptual level (Charmaz, 2006). Whereas open coding fractured data into separate pieces, axial coding brought that data back together into a coherent whole. The ultimate end of axial coding was to delineate a core category around which all the other categories revolved. However, that did not fully occur until the fifth phase of the research design.

The first step in axial coding was to sort the concepts and classify them as higher level and lower level concepts. Higher level concepts were relabeled as categories. The concepts that were elevated to categories were those which occurred throughout the data and were able to pull together some of the lower level concepts. Lower level concepts filled in, explained, and provided details concerning the higher level concepts or categories. This was accomplished by providing properties and dimensions for the categories. Unlike categories, properties were not able to stand alone, but instead were conceptual elements of a category which contributed, with

other properties, to the full understanding of the category. As such, properties functioned to increase a category's generality and explanatory power (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The next step in axial coding was to dimensionalize the properties of each category. Dimensions represent the full range of a property and can best be understood as occupying various points along a continuum. The properties of a category were dimensionalized by evaluating them in terms of their intensity or weakness (Spiggle, 1994). In every process there are different individuals, groups and organizations that fall at different points along the continuum of a property. Dimensionalizing the properties of a category revealed the variety that existed among the participants in the study. The specification of property variation plays an important role in theory development because it gives explanatory scope, depth, and power to the emerging theory.

The analysis of data, the process of conceptualization, and its results were recorded in memos. The memo is a specialized type of written record in which the researcher carries on a dialog with the data, makes comparisons, and explores ideas. Memos also help the analyst to get inside the data, feel them at a gut level, and experience the phenomenon through the eyes of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Memos also provided a bank of ideas which could be revisited as the research proceeded (Goulding, 2002). Memos were also advantageous in mapping out the emerging theory. Memos were the primary analytical recording device employed in this research study.

At this point in the research, there were a number of categories with properties which had been identified and dimensionalized. These results served as the foundation of the research by which further data collection proceeded. On the basis of these initial findings the first phase of the research design drew to a conclusion by engaging in theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss,

1967). The initial research questions were refined to move in the direction which the research was proceeding. A new set of interview questions was developed (See Appendix B). These questions were narrower and more focused in order to gather information that would answer the more specific research questions which had emerged during the initial phase of the research.

### *Phase Two: Category Analysis*

Phase two of the research design was entitled “category analysis” and began with a second round of interviews with the participants in the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This round of data collection and analysis built upon the previous phase of the research design. This second phase of the research design was more focused by virtue of the analysis of the initial data collected and the more specific research questions which arose from that analysis.

The data gathered in the second round of interviews was, once again, examined at the conceptual level by means of open coding. New concepts were added and filled in with properties and dimensions. The new categories which emerged in the second round of data analysis were compared with those categories that emerged in the previous round of data analysis. Once again, axial coding was employed to delineate categories, properties, and dimensions. However, in this phase of the research design a new stage of axial coding was introduced. Categories were compared with and related to other categories. To assist in this endeavor a technique was adapted from situational analysis. The specific technique was situational mapping and was used for relational analysis (Clarke, 2005). Situational maps were designed to portray graphically the relationships which existed among the various elements in a situation. In our analysis, some slight modifications were made to this technique and it was applied to a process. Each property was placed on a map and was related to the other properties through a series of lines and directional figures. Three iterations of this situational map spelled

out the nature of the relationships which existed among the categories (see Appendices C, D, and E).

Theoretically based questions were asked of the data which led to further narrowing of research questions, further specification of interview questions (see Appendix F), and further data collection and analysis by means of theoretical sampling. Data collection and analysis continued until conceptual saturation was achieved. Conceptual saturation requires that each category is fully described in terms of its properties and dimensions, sufficient variation is accounted for, and a coherent explanatory story can be articulated (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

As the research continued to move through these rounds of data collection and analysis, the research questions became progressively more focused and the description of the phenomenon became progressively more thick, rich, and deep (Creswell, 1998). The analytic strategies of asking questions and making comparisons continued to be the major strategies for elaborating the analysis. The creation of memos continued to be the primary vehicle for recording and maintaining findings and analyses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). With each round of interviews, knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon and the experience of the participants continued to expand.

### *Phase Three: Context Analysis*

Phase three of the research design was entitled “context analysis” and focused upon contextual related matters that broadened the scope of the investigation to encompass the historical, social, and political environments which exerted an influence upon the phenomenon as well as the participants involved in the study. The version of grounded theory developed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) understands context as “the conditions in which problems and situations arise and to which persons respond through some form of action, interaction, or

emotional response and, in doing so, bring about consequences which might go back to impact upon the conditions” (p. 88).

This phase of the research involved the analysis of the context in which the phenomenon took place. There were two parts of the context. One part involved the micro conditions which included those conditions faced by the participants on a day-to-day basis and the other part involved the macro conditions which included the historical, social, and political conditions that influenced the phenomenon as well as the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Once a concept had been identified as belonging to the context, two additional strategies were employed for analysis. These two strategies were the “paradigm” and the “conditional consequential matrix.”

The paradigm is an analytic tool for identifying contextual factors. It involves a set of analytical questions designed to analyze the following areas of interest: conditions, interactions/actions/emotions, and consequences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). With regard to conditions, the paradigm conceptually grouped answers to questions about “why,” “where,” “how,” and “what happens.” Interactions, actions, and emotions are the responses made by individuals or groups to situations, problems, happenings, and events. Consequences answer the questions about what happened as a result of those interactions, actions, or emotional responses.

The conditional consequential matrix is a more rigorous tool than the paradigm (Goulding, 2002). The purpose of the conditional consequential matrix was to assist the researcher in analyzing the micro social structures and relating them to the macro social conditions and the consequences that unite to shape the situation that is being studied. The conditional consequential matrix consists of a series of concentric and interconnected circles with arrows representing the intersection of conditions or consequences and the resulting chain of events. It was designed to track the various levels of influences upon the phenomenon being

studied (Goulding, 2002). This was accomplished by a set of decreasingly inclusive circles embracing broad conditions at the perimeter and moving inward to conditions which were narrower in scope near the core. The beginning of the outer edge of the circle is the most macro area and was represented by the term “international.” The succeeding areas were designated “national,” “community,” “organizational,” “institutional,” “sub-organizational,” “sub-institutional,” “group,” or “collective individuals.” The most important level was located in the center and was designated “interaction pertaining to the phenomenon.” The conditional consequential matrix is a tool which is meant to be a guide and not a definitive procedure. As such, the matrix can be modified to fit the purposes of each individual study (Morse et al., 2009). In this study two slight modifications were made to the matrix. The factors influencing the transfer advising process was the most important level and was, therefore, placed at the core of the matrix. Rather, emphasis was placed on the individual and the group for analysis and the institutions and organizations for context.



Figure 3. Adapted from Corbin and Strauss (2008) Conditional Consequential Matrix.

The data for this phase of the research design was collected from a variety of historical documents, some of which were formal such as books and articles and others less formal such as journals, email messages, public relations materials, training manuals, and policy documents. The documents were used for informational purposes and, as such, were treated as data which had been collected and were analyzed with the same procedures that were applied to other forms of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The next round of data collection was governed by the contextual questions which arose out of the phase three analysis and how those questions related to the process of the phenomenon being studied.

#### *Phase Four: Process Analysis*

Phase four of the research design was entitled “process analysis” and involved a reflection upon the state of the research as it had progressed to that point (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This phase of the research summarized the progress of the study, drew together many of the loose threads, and developed an initial graphic depiction of the theory that had begun to emerge (see Figure 4).

By that point in the research there was an intuitive understanding of what factors exerted an influence upon the transfer advising process. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define process as “ongoing action, interaction, or emotion taken in response to situations or problems, often with the purpose of reaching a goal or handling a problem” (p. 96). Variation was built into process which gave it a dynamic quality. Different individuals or groups of individuals responded in a variety of ways to the situation or problem and arrived at different goals by different means. The analysis of process sought to capture this variation to give richness, depth, and scope to the emerging theory. Analyzing data for process gave two advantages to the research. It gave a sense of life or movement to the findings and it incorporated variation into the findings.

The conceptualization of the process depends on the interpretation of the data. Process can be described in developmental terms such as phases, sequences, or stages which imply a linear or progressive nature. Process can also be portrayed in nonlinear terms such as circular or chaotic patterns (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, process can be conscious, subconscious, or unconscious. The analysis sought to uncover and describe the process by which the factors influenced the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the experience of the participants in the study.

The first action of this phase of the research design was to step back from the analysis and review transcripts, memos, and other forms of data. The purpose of this reexamination was to understand how the process fits within the context. The second action involved writing summary memos which brought together a wide range of concepts that had previously remained separated. The analysis of the data for process employed two strategies. The first strategy was to ask a series of analytic questions calculated to identify patterns in the data. The second strategy was to link categories together at a higher degree of abstraction (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Once the factors involved in the transfer advising process had been uncovered in the data the goal was to create a conceptual picture which would add to the understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This was accomplished by a graphic technique. A conceptual diagram was produced which portrayed the relationship between categories, situated the process within the context, and portrayed the movement and the patterns of the process as it unfolded (see Figure 4).

#### *Phase Five: Theoretical Analysis*

Phase five of the research design was entitled “theoretical analysis” and was the final step of theory development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Once the categories were filled in with

properties, those properties were dimensionalized, and conceptual saturation was achieved, the process of theoretical integration took the categories which were related in the previous phases of the research design and brought them into an organic whole. This procedure fashioned an overall unified explanatory framework that raised the findings to the level of theory.

The first step in theoretical integration was to select a core category. The core category was the main theme of the research and had the power to pull all the categories together in order to produce an explanatory framework. The core category had several distinguishing characteristics and accomplished a number of objectives necessary for theory development. It had the greatest explanatory power of all the categories. It had the adhesiveness to keep all the other categories together. It conveyed theoretically what the research was all about. It answered the question, “What is that special something that ties together the different categories to create a coherent story?” It was also the substance of what was going on in the data (Glaser, 1978).

There were four techniques which were used to accomplish theoretical integration (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The first technique was “writing the storyline.” This involved writing a few descriptive sentences which described what seemed to be going on in the phenomenon. A series of analytic questions were asked of the categories to determine where each fit in the overall architecture of the theory. Various categories were experimented with using this technique until one emerged as the core category. The second technique was an “integrative diagram” (see Figure 5) which updated the relational diagram (see Appendix E) from phase three and merged it with the conceptual diagram (see Figure 4) which was developed in phase four of the research design. It gave a different perspective upon the process of theory development. It presented the categories and their relationships in a pictorial fashion. This graphic vantage point of the material aided in bringing the categories and their relationships into clearer focus. A third

technique for theoretical integration was to develop a metaphor or series of metaphors which described the situation under investigation. The metaphor took a common function of a readily understandable experience and explained a similar yet more obtuse experience that was not common or readily understandable (Maxwell, 2005). The fourth technique involved looking for a unifying theme within the extant literature. This was also the point in the research where the theoretical literature in the substantive field was consulted in order to place the findings of this study within the larger body of professional literature.

The concluding activities of the final phase of the research design involved three activities: reviewing the scheme, attending to poorly developed categories, and validating the scheme (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Reviewing the scheme involved searching for internal inconsistencies and gaps in logic. This was accomplished by reviewing memos and diagrams and also reassessing the core category. Special attention was paid to the core category to make sure that it accurately and extensively conveyed what the research was about, and that it connected all the categories into a unified whole.

Attending to poorly developed categories included filling in inadequately developed categories and trimming extraneous categories. This ensured that the theory had density and variation. Density requires that all salient properties and dimensions of a category have been filled in (Goulding, 2002). Variation includes negative cases as well as cases occupying diverse points along the dimensional continuum (Spiggle, 1994). Both density and variation gave categories precision and increased their explanatory power. Also, extraneous categories that did not fit or contribute to the overall framework of the theory were discarded.

Validating the theoretical scheme was not used in the quantitative sense of testing the theory. Rather, it is understood as determining how well the theory fits the data and whether any

salient points have been omitted (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). One method of accomplishing this objective was to review the theory comparatively to see how well it was capable of explaining most of the cases involved in the study. A second method involved sending the initial scheme to participants in the study to solicit their feedback. In particular, they were asked to make a determination as to whether they recognized themselves in the storyline and whether they thought the theory fit their particular case.

### *Evaluation*

From the very beginning, grounded theory has developed an evaluation procedure unique to itself. Virtually all practitioners of grounded theory have been reluctant to use the categories of “validity” or “reliability” due to the fact that these two forms of assessment were developed for evaluating quantitative research and are poorly equipped for evaluating qualitative research. Corbin and Strauss (2008) refuse to use these measures because they carry a connotation of dogmatism and according to the presuppositions of grounded theory there are multiple realities and thus there should not be a rigid standard of evaluation. In the original version of grounded theory Glaser and Strauss (1967) set forth the ideas of “applicability” and “credibility” as a means of evaluating grounded theory.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) built upon four principles established in Glaser and Strauss (1967); namely “fit,” “understanding,” “generality,” and “control.” Corbin and Strauss set forth the notions of “quality” and “credibility.” Credibility is defined as “the condition that indicates that the findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect the participants’, researcher’s, and readers’ experiences with a phenomenon, but at the same time, the explanation is only one of many plausible interpretations from the data”(p. 301). Corbin and Strauss (2008) listed ten criteria for assessing the quality of a grounded theory study and then another thirteen criteria for evaluating its credibility. There is a considerable overlap among these twenty-three criteria, some

redundancies, and several that are less applicable to this specific study. For the purposes of evaluating this research dissertation we have edited the twenty-three criteria established by Corbin and Strauss by deleting some and merging others. We have also supplemented these criteria by adding one additional criterion adapted from the work of Charmaz (2006). As a result the following six criteria are presented as guidelines for assessing the credibility of this research endeavor.

The first criterion is “fit” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Did the findings of this study resonate with the experience of both the professionals for whom the research was written as well as the participants who took part in it? Was there descriptive language that added richness and variation and lifted the findings out of the ordinary? Was the theory validated with the participants in the study?

The second criterion is “usefulness” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Did the findings of the study offer new explanations or insights? Can the findings of this study be used to develop policy, change practice, and add to the knowledge base in the profession? Were the findings readily adaptable for factors that influence the transfer advising process in other substantive areas? Do the findings have an ongoing significance?

The third criterion is “conceptual development” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Did the findings have substance? Were the categories developed in terms of their properties and dimensions? Did the categories display density and variation? Were there examples of cases that did not fit the pattern? Were there cases that did not show differences along certain dimensions or properties? Was the core category selected on the grounds that it is the main theme of the research and was it effective in pulling all the other categories together into a cohesive whole?

Does the theory display theoretical integration that exhibits explanatory power? Did the findings go beyond description to explanation?

The fourth criterion is “contextualization” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Were the research and its findings placed within their historical, social, and political context? Can the reader understand why certain meanings, and not others, are ascribed to the events? Were the conditions and consequences built into the study and explained? Was process accounted for? Did the process assist theory users to explain factors that influence the transfer advising process under changing conditions or in a variety of situations?

The fifth criterion is “logic.” Did the findings make sense from the data analysis? Were methodological decisions made clear so that the reader could judge their appropriateness for gathering data and doing analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)? Were the questions driving the data collection arrived at through analysis? Did theoretical formulation guide data collection? Did the categories prove to be representative of the data?

The sixth criterion is “researcher proficiency.” Did the researcher demonstrate sensitivity to the data? Were the findings presented in a creative and innovative manner? Did the researcher exhibit the characteristics of analytical ability, theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978), ability to think in different ways, and sufficient writing ability to convey findings? Did the researcher take a reflexive stance toward the research process and its products? Did the researcher seem to be aware of his presuppositions and communicate to the reader how those presuppositions might have affected the research? Did the researcher recognize the presuppositions of participants in the study and communicate how those presuppositions may have influenced the findings of the research (Charmaz, 2006).

## Data Collection Procedure

There were three types of data that were collected in this study: interviews, observations, and documents. The primary emphasis was upon data collected from interviews, a secondary emphasis was placed upon data collected from documents, and a significant but lesser emphasis was given to data collected from observations. Due to the fact that participants involved in this study were scattered geographically throughout the state of Alabama the amount of time spent in observation was, of necessity, limited. This was one of the trade-offs which had to be made when designing a study that involved multiple sites (Stake, 2006).

Approval was sought (see Appendix G) and received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection and analysis (see Appendix H). Consent was received from all nine participants before interviews were conducted (see Appendix I). There were four face-to-face encounters with participants at four specific points in time. The initial round of interviews occurred in the early Fall of 2009. The purpose of these initial interviews was to gather a broad range of information (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The format was semi-structured and the interview questions were general and open (see Appendix A). The objective of this initial round of interviews was to allow the participants to elaborate on matters that were important to them (Goulding, 2002). After a round of data analysis, certain categories emerged with their properties. At that point, a second round of interviews was conducted during the latter part of the Fall of 2009. During this round of interviews, the purpose was to gather data that filled in categories with properties and assisted in dimensionalizing those properties. The format continued to be semi-structured; however, in this round the interviews were more focused and the direction was more narrowed on the basis of the categories which emerged after the first round of interviews (see Appendix B). After the second round of analysis which involved

conceptualizing new categories, dimensionalizing properties, and relating categories, a third round of interviews were conducted during the early part of the Spring of 2010. The purpose of this round of interviews was to gather data which assisted the categories in achieving saturation and also facilitated the emergence of the core category of the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The format was semi-structured and the interview questions were very specific (see Appendix F). A fourth interview was conducted in the later part of the Spring of 2010. The purpose of these interviews was to engage the participants in the process analysis by means of dimensionalizing the properties of the theory (see Appendix J).

The documents consulted in this study fell into three categories: informal, formal, and personal (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Informal documents included public relations materials, training manuals, policy statements, and memoranda. These documents were used primarily to provide background for the study, situate the study within its historical, social, and political environments, and also to connect the factors which influenced the transfer advising process within those contexts. Formal documents included published documents such as articles and books. These documents were analyzed as data and contributed to theoretical integration with the specific focus of generating the core category of the study. Personal documents included emails, personal correspondence, and journals created by the participants in the study. These documents were employed in the service of deepening, corroborating, validating, and extending the data obtained through the interviews.

Observations were limited to the occasions when the researcher was on the various campuses to conduct interviews with the participants and also when the participants were gathered together for meetings and seminars on the campus of The University of Alabama. The type of observation which was conducted is what Maxwell (2005) described as “hanging-out”

observation. This is an informal type of observation that involves taking note of events and actions which seemed significant to the researcher. This type of observation was conducted in the course of interviews, campus visits, and session attendances. Special significance was noted of any events or actions remarked upon by the participants. Other events which seemed significant were the subject of dialog between the researcher and the participants. Generally, these types of observations were useful for understanding the background, establishing the setting, and correlating the context in which the research occurred.

### Data Analysis Procedure

The grounded theory research design is a highly integrated design in which data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The method of analysis that was employed in this study was the constant comparative method which is an analytic procedure of constant comparison with an explicit coding system designed to develop theory which is systematic and grounded in data. Once certain techniques and strategies were introduced into the data analysis they continued to be performed throughout the process. As the analysis progressed there were new data continually being gathered by theoretical sampling and there were new analytic tools and strategies being introduced to analyze data. All the while this was going on there were previously introduced techniques and strategies that were continually working alongside those that were introduced. Finally, the new strategies and tools operated back and forth with recently acquired data as well as previously acquired data. By means of this method a theory eventually emerged which had depth, scope, and explanatory power.

The beginning stage of analysis was “open coding” which had the purpose of breaking the data into separate pieces. This involved conceptualizing the data by labeling each segment with an abstract title that described what the participants were communicating. These abstract

labels were called concepts. Once a significant number of concepts had been assembled the process of “axial coding” began. Axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) involved sorting, synthesizing, ordering, and relating the concepts to each other. The purpose of axial coding was to bring the fractured data back together at the conceptual level and reassemble them into explanatory segments which developed a theory that was explanatory and grounded in the data.

The first step in axial coding was to sort the concepts into higher level and lower level concepts. Higher level concepts were designated as “categories” because they were prominent in the data and had cohesive characteristics (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Lower level concepts were designated as “properties” because they combined to give explanation to the categories. The next activity was to dimensionalize the properties of each category which evaluated the properties along a continuum of intensity and weakness (Goulding, 2002).

The second step in axial coding was to relate categories with each other. This process took the data analysis to a higher level of abstraction and was accomplished by a technique designated as “relational mapping” (Clarke, 2005). Relational mapping graphically traced the relationships which existed among the various categories that had emerged. This technique began the process of identifying the nature of the relationships which existed among the categories (see Appendices C, D, and E).

The third step of axial coding focused upon contextual matters which influenced the participants’ transfer advising process. This part of the analysis situated the transfer advising process within its historical, social, and political environments. Two analytical tools were used to satisfy this objective. The first was the “paradigm” which utilized the questions “why,” “where,” “how,” and “what happens” in order to determine the macro as well as the micro influences upon the participants and their procedures for advising transfer students. The second tool was the

“conditional consequential matrix” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The matrix (see Figure 2) was a more rigorous tool than the paradigm and related micro conditions to the macro conditions in a way that revealed how the situation shaped or influenced the transfer advising process as it was experienced by the participants (Goulding, 2002).

The fourth step in axial coding involved process analysis which defined the process of transfer advising and described its nature as linear, nonlinear, or chaotic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A further goal of this stage of axial coding was to situate the transfer advising process within its personal, historical, political, and social contexts which were established and delineated in the previous step. Two analytical tools were used to accomplish this goal. A series of summary memos were written with the purpose of identifying patterns within the data and further linking of categories. The product of this analytic procedure was a conceptual diagram which described the transfer advising process, situated it within its various contexts, and depicted the patterns of categorical relationships.

The final step of axial coding was theoretical integration which united all the categories into an organic whole and produced an analytic framework which raised the findings to the level of theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This was accomplished by selecting a core category which pulled all the categories together and produced an explanatory framework. Four techniques were employed to accomplish this goal. The first technique, writing the storyline, experimented with several categories until the core category emerged. The second technique, an integrative diagram (see Figure 5), merged and enhanced the relational diagram (Appendix E) and the conceptual diagram (see Figure 4), which were developed in previous stages of analysis. The third technique, metaphorical development, presented mentally what the integrative diagram depicted visually. The fourth technique was to consult the extant theories in the substantive area. This

exercise compared the theory's unifying theme and also placed the study's findings within a larger realm of professional literature.

#### Timeline for the Study

The timeline for this research study included an overlapping structure. The first phase of the study, concept analysis, began in early Fall of 2009 and concluded at the end of February of 2010. The second phase of the study, category analysis, began in early March of 2010 and concluded at the end of May of 2010. The third phase of the study, context analysis, began in June of 2010 and concluded at the end of July of 2010. The fourth phase of the study, process analysis, began in August of 2010 and concluded at the end of September of 2010. The fifth phase of the study, theoretical analysis, began in October of 2010 and concluded at the end of December of 2010.

#### Ethical Considerations

At the outset of this research project there were no specific ethical issues which could have been anticipated, beyond those general issues which were commonly associated with qualitative research. This study did not deal with an issue or an experience which would have been considered overtly controversial or sensitive. In the course of the study there were no unexpected ethical issues that arose. The primary ethical issues which merited attention revolved around matters of privacy (Creswell, 2003). In order to overcome those issues the study masked the names of people, places, institutions, and activities.

#### Research Positionality

Researchers are not passive receptacles into which data is poured (Charmaz, 1990), nor are they absolutely objective observers who observe phenomena with scientific neutrality. The same claims also apply to individuals who participate in a study. They each bring to the research

assumptions which influence the data collected and the analysis of that data. Researchers are obligated to be reflexive about the biases that they bring to the research and how it may affect the findings of the study. Likewise, the researcher should be reflexive about the biases which are brought to the study by participants and how those biases might affect the data which is collected.

In qualitative research in general, but in grounded theory particularly, there are three types of bias which may exert a deleterious effect upon the theory that develops. Broadly categorized they can be described as researcher bias, participant bias, and theoretical bias. Researcher bias enters into the study when researchers allow their personal feelings to color the types of questions asked, the manner in which those questions are asked, the way in which data is collected, and the manner in which data is analyzed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participant bias or “respondent duplicity” (Becker, 1970), can enter the study when participants allow their personal feelings to influence the responses they give to questions and also the data they present to the researcher. Theoretical bias can enter the research process when researchers allow a rigidly fixed theoretical construct to govern or control the research process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical bias can influence data collection as well as the data analysis. The end result is usually the omission of important data which could contribute to a more accurate understanding and explanation of the phenomenon under consideration.

The threat of researcher bias was met with three strategies. The first strategy was researcher bias identification by which the researcher explained his personal opinions concerning the transfer advising process as well as his personal feelings toward those individuals and institutions involved in the process. Researcher bias cannot be completely eliminated, but this strategy helped the researcher recognize its existence and mitigate its negative influences.

Furthermore, this strategy assists the reader in evaluating the findings and conclusions of the study (Wolcott, 2009).

A second strategy which was used to overcome researcher bias was respondent validation or “member checks” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The longitudinal nature of the research design gave the participants at least two occasions to review their previous responses and confirm whether or not they thought the researcher had accurately reflected their responses and successfully captured the spirit of their involvement in the transfer advising process. After the final round of interviews had been completed, a fourth opportunity was presented to the participants to validate the findings of the study.

A third strategy designed to counteract the negative influences of the researcher bias was “peer review” (Merriam, 1998). The researcher continually discussed the methods, research design, and findings with other colleagues in the University of Alabama Higher Education Administration doctoral program to fulfill this role. The function of this peer review was to assist the researcher in detecting personal bias which the researcher had allowed to creep into the research process.

Three strategies were implemented in order to alleviate the negative influences of participant bias. The first strategy was long term involvement with the participants and the research data (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher interviewed and observed the participants on four separate occasions over the course of a year. This extended involvement with the participants in the study gave the researcher an opportunity to assess and compensate for the unique perspectives of each participant in such a way that their perspectives were less likely to bias the study in a negative fashion.

The second strategy used to lessen participant bias was rich data. According to Becker (1970), long term involvement enables the researcher to collect data which are detailed and varied enough to provide a full picture of what is going on. Such data countered the threat of respondent duplicity by making it difficult for respondents to produce data which consistently supported a mistaken conclusion. One specific application of this strategy took place at the initial interview when participants were asked what attracted them to the program, why they applied for the program, and what they hoped to achieve as a result from their involvement in the program. The data gathered from these interviews were used to construct participant profiles and these profiles were updated throughout the study and used as an interpretive control on subsequent data gathering from each participant. There was a particular issue of participant bias that arose in the early stage of data collection. It occurred to the researcher that the principle investigator of the ACTAC was the chairperson of this dissertation committee and that the co-principle investigator and evaluator of the ACTAC was also a member of this dissertation committee. In light of this issue, the first participant was asked if this state of affairs would influence the responses which she would give to the questions asked in the interview. Her response was, "No, of course not. I would not say anything in private that I would not be prepared to say in front of anyone involved in the program." This question was repeated to the other eight participants and their responses echoed the sentiments of this first participant.

A third strategy used to control participant bias was the multi-site design of the study. The very nature of the design isolated any participant who might generate data which was of an extreme nature. The design enabled the contributions of all participants to be registered and to make a significant contribution to the study. The multi-site design controlled the data and sufficiently diluted it with the result that two or more participants with strong perspectives were

not be able to disproportionately influence the findings, conclusions, or recommendations of the study (Stake, 2006).

Theoretical bias is one of the most potent threats to the credibility of a qualitative study. Theoretical bias occurs when a researcher allows previous research to govern or control the research process. When this happens a number of negatives occur. Key data is missed, more penetrating research questions are not developed, problems are not adequately understood, processes are not completely described, solutions are not sufficiently formulated or implemented, and theories lack scope, depth, and explanatory power. This study implemented three strategies to control theoretical bias. The first strategy was triangulation. Triangulation involves collecting data from a diverse range of individuals and settings by using a variety of methods (Denzin, 1970). There is always a temptation to rely on secondary sources or an already developed theory which leads researchers to search selectively for confirming evidence. Triangulation contributed to resisting this temptation because data came in many shapes from many different directions with many diverse purposes.

A second strategy which this study utilized to overcome theoretical bias was the presentation of discrepant evidence (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). When writing a dissertation that generates theory there is always a desire to develop a theory that is logical, consistent, and confirmatory. Discrepant evidence can become an annoying nuisance for the researcher who is looking for a clean, neat, and air-tight explanation of the phenomenon under consideration. The reality is that very few things in life are clean, neat, and air-tight. Discrepant evidence served two functions. The first was to force the researcher to change, adjust, and alter the original theory. In this sense, theory development is an ongoing process which undergoes several iterations before reaching the final version. The purpose of this dissertation was to produce a grounded theory

which would explain a local reality. A second function of discrepant evidence was to affirm the theory. This dissertation did not ignore or hide disconfirming data. Where possible, the theory was adjusted to incorporate the disconfirming evidence. When this was not possible, the evidence was presented for the reader's consideration.

The third strategy which was employed to lessen the negative effects of theoretical bias was a technique that distinguishes grounded theory from all other methods of inquiry. From the introduction of the method, Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocated the delay of a literature review until after the theory had emerged and taken shape. Corbin and Strauss (2008) moved that activity forward in the research process to the point of theoretical integration. This dissertation followed the pattern established by Corbin and Strauss (2008). By this means the tendency to allow a certain theoretical framework to control the research was overcome. Likewise, the tendencies to look for confirming evidence, gather data selectively, and bury negative cases and discrepant evidence was also avoided.

### Conclusion

This dissertation employed a qualitative method in order to generate a substantive grounded theory which explains the factors that influence the transfer advising process as it unfolded within the context of ten community colleges located in rural counties in the state of Alabama. This theory was developed through the lens of the experiences of nine ACTAC Advisers who were recent graduates of The University of Alabama and had the advantage of being close in age and experience to the students whom they advised with respect to the process of transferring from a community college to a four year college or university. In order to accomplish this goal, the study adopted the format of the original grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which was supplemented by tools adopted from the version of grounded theory

developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and techniques adapted from dimensional analysis (Schatzmann, 1991), situational analysis (Clarke, 2005), and Charmaz's (2006) constructivist approach to grounded theory. This study implemented a research design which was unique and was comprised of five phases which included concept analysis, category analysis, context analysis, process analysis, and theoretical analysis.

### CHAPTER III: CATEGORY FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of this substantive grounded theory study. The initial findings incorporate the first three phases of the research design and are labeled as category findings. These findings were drawn from the concept analysis, the category analysis, the context analysis, and the two rounds of theoretical sampling which were sandwiched between them.

The nature of grounded theory is cumulative and overlapping. The first three phases of the research design involved a series of research questions which gathered and analyzed data. On the basis of data analysis, a series of new and more focused research questions were constructed by means of a process known as theoretical sampling. This process was engaged for the first phase, concept analysis, and repeated for the second phase, category analysis, and for the third phase, context analysis. For the purposes of presentation, the category findings incorporate the findings which resulted from the first three phases of the research design. However, prior to the presentation of these findings, it is necessary to give a brief presentation of the process so that the reader can understand the progressive nature by which the findings were uncovered.

During the initial phase of the research design, the participants in the study were approached from a “tabula rasa” perspective. Each participant was asked to tell the researcher

what they thought was important to know in order to understand the transfer advising process. Throughout the first round of interviews the researcher primarily listened, asking a few questions for clarification, and only a limited number of follow up questions. There was a twofold purpose to these initial interviews. The primary purpose was to allow the participants to tell the researcher what they thought was important in order to understand and to be able to explain what was involved in the transfer advising process. The researcher intentionally refrained from reading the theoretical literature in the area of advising so as not to consciously or unconsciously guide the participants or the data into any specific direction. The purpose of this study was to develop a substantive theory which explained the transfer advising process; specifically how the process of transfer advising unfolded and to account for the variations which occurred in that process as it took place in different contexts which involved different individuals. In order to prevent prejudicing the research or the data collected it was necessary to implement these safeguards. The second purpose was to gather as broad a range of data as possible. It was apparent that the participants in this study had not thought systematically through the process of advising. Many of their responses came across as a sort of stream of consciousness endeavor. There was no chronological or logical order to their responses. For these reasons the researcher decided that it was not in the best interests of the study to interrupt the participants or request that they elaborate on any particular point which they were making. It was considered that those questions could be posed in the second, third and fourth rounds of interviews. It was the researcher's task to take the participants' responses in the form of data and systematize them, putting them in their chronological and logical order.

The first step in the analysis of the data, after transcription, was to perform the task of open coding. Open coding fractured the data into individual self-contained units of meaning. The

data from the initial round of interviews brought forth a number of these self-contained units of meaning which were designated as concepts. Approximately forty-two such concepts emerged from the first round of data collection. After open coding was completed, the data was analyzed by axial coding, a process by which concepts were compared with each other for the purpose of establishing which concepts were of a higher level and which were of a lower level. Higher level concepts are relabeled as categories. These higher level concepts possessed stronger and broader explanatory powers. They also pulled together a significant number of the lower level concepts which were relabeled as properties. Each lower level concept contributed to the explanation of one of the higher level concepts. After axial coding was completed six categories were tentatively established. The categories which emerged from the data were institutional factors, cultural factors, contextual factors, adviser factors, student factors, and program factors.

In summary, the participants in the study outlined five very clearly demarcated categories which were involved in the transfer advising process and one concept which figured very prominently in the process, but did not meet the full requirements of categories in that it did not have strong connecting points with two of the other categories. A decision was made to fold the concept, “program factors,” into the category, *adviser factors*. The data revealed a clear logical progression of explaining the transfer advising process. The participants conveyed a logic which reflected the various influences that were involved in the advising process. Factors derived from the student, the adviser, the institutions, the culture, and the context all contributed to the eventual outcome of the transfer advising process.

After engaging in theoretical sampling a new set of more focused and narrowed interview questions were developed (see Appendix B). Four questions were designed to fill in several properties which had emerged in the first round of data analysis. Specific attention was given to

the properties of personal philosophy and near peer advising, both of which fell under the category of advisor factors. Explicit consideration was also paid to the properties of senior leadership and the partnerships between two year and four-year institutions which came under the category of institutional factors. Finally, a large amount of attention was paid to the category of cultural factors.

During the first round of interviews one participant mentioned that his political and social philosophy played a large role in his motivation to be involved in the Alabama College Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC) program. He also said that he viewed his involvement in the program as a way of furthering the agenda of this particular philosophy. In the process of open coding it became apparent that several other participants had indirectly mentioned a variety of political, social, or religious beliefs which had influenced them to varying degrees. In this light, it was determined to ask all of the participants a more direct question concerning their personal belief system. Each participant was asked if they had any strongly held social, philosophical, religious or political views. A number of follow up questions were developed to determine to what degree these views influenced their lives in particular and their involvement in the ACTAC program specifically. A third line of follow up questions (see Appendix B) was developed to determine to what degree these views influenced the specific advice they gave to students in the course of their involvement in the ACTAC program.

The rationale behind the ACTAC program was that graduates who had recently experienced what is involved in obtaining a college degree and were close in age to the students they were advising would have certain advantages that an older professional advisor would not have. Dr. Stephen Katsinas, who operated as the project's co-principal investigator said, "The National College Advising Corps model operates from a somewhat unique philosophy that a

‘near peer’ advisor in terms of age and recent experience can sometimes encourage young students to believe in themselves and their potential in ways that others may not have been able to do” (The University of Alabama, June 24, 2008). During the first round of interviews this concept of “near peer” advising seemed to be hovering in the background. It was alluded to by several of the participants, yet none of them elaborated in great detail concerning its ramifications for the transfer advising process. Theoretical sampling determined to ask each participant concerning their perceptions of this philosophy in the second round of interviews. It was decided to ask each participant to elaborate on whether they felt that being closer in age and experience to the students they advised changed the dynamics of the advising process.

A couple of participants mentioned specifically the involvement or lack of involvement of senior administrators in the transfer process. This prompted a series of questions to inquire concerning the vision and priorities of the senior administration of each of the community colleges where the participants in the study worked. These questions were followed with another series of questions designed to determine the degree to which the senior administration was able to communicate that vision and those priorities. These questions were followed with more specific questions with regard to where transfer fit into the priorities, whether any specific senior administrator had transfer as a specific concern, and what concrete actions were being taken to improve the transfer rate at the specific community college where each participant worked.

In the first round of interviews a number of participants referenced various types of arrangements, associations, relationships, or partnerships which their community college had with a variety of four-year institutions. These relationships included transfer arrangements, offices on campus, and scholarship agreements. It appeared that these types of arrangements could possibly be a significant property under the category labeled institutional factors. In the

second round of interviews each participant was asked some specific questions designed to discover more details concerning this property. Each participant was asked if their community college had any arrangements with four year colleges or universities. This question was followed by a series of questions asking the participants to describe those arrangements and give their opinions concerning whether these arrangements influenced the transfer advising process and if they felt that these relationships were instrumental in increasing the transfer rate at their community college.

In the first round of interviews the notion of culture kept coming up. However, it wasn't until the final participants were interviewed that it became clear that culture would emerge as a concept and it wasn't until open coding and axial coding that it became apparent that culture would be one of the major categories of the research. The first round of data collection acquired a lot of data concerning culture. Unfortunately, there were not many links that could connect the disparate elements and there were also quite a few glaring gaps in the narrative. In the second round of interviews each participant was asked to describe the culture in the area where the community college was located. As a follow up to this question each participant was asked to comment on how this culture related to higher education in general and then to the idea of transferring from the community college to a four-year institution. This line of inquiry was followed with a question which asked the participants to express their views on how this culture arose and also how it was perpetuated.

As the second phase of the research drew to a conclusion the essence of the substantive theory began to emerge and its parameters began to take shape. A tentative decision was made to designate *student factors* as the core category. The primary reasons for this determination were twofold. The first reason was that every participant in the study strongly insisted that the student

was the focus of the entire advising process. In the words of one participant “the advising process begins, ends, and revolves around the student as well as the student’s desires, wishes and goals.” In the words of another participant, “the transfer advising process is controlled and governed by the student.” A second reason for designating *student factors* as the core category was because *student factors* was the one category that had deep penetrations into the other categories and functioned as the theoretical glue that gave adhesion to all five categories in a holistic fashion. Also, the category *student factors* gave explanatory depth to the remaining four categories. Finally, none of the other categories was able to produce the overall theoretical resonance which the category, *student factors*, was able to produce.

A second characteristic emerged from the data concerning the nature of the theory. The vast majority of data presented by the participants pointed toward an *influence theory*. The categories which contributed to the explanation of the transfer advising process were *institutional factors*, *cultural factors*, *contextual factors*, *adviser factors*, and *student factors*. The properties which explained the *institutional factors* were personnel relationships, support, environment, organization, and senior leadership with respect to the two year institutions and communication, competence, and concern with respect to the four-year institutions. The properties which explained the *cultural factors* were economic perceptions, ties to the geographical location, ties to the past, fears, personal perceptions, and perceptions of outsiders. The category designated as *contextual factors* was the specific focus of the third phase of the research design. However, during the second phase of the research, three properties emerged and those were educational support, educational preparedness, and educational affordability. The properties which explained the *adviser factors* were transfer student, first generation college student, academic background, family background, personal belief system, home town, and training. The properties which

explained *student factors* were goal formation, academic standing, personal characteristics, and background. Each category exerted multiple influences upon the other categories. The properties within each category exerted multiple influences upon other properties within its category as well as properties outside of its category. The enumeration of these cross influences were the subject of the fourth phase of the research design. However, all of the influences eventually filtered down and exerted a cumulative influence upon the student and the factors which comprised that category. This ultimate influence and the path by which the various contributing influences traveled is understood as the transfer advising process.

At the conclusion of the second phase of the research, the data was analyzed by using a modified version of the technique known as situational mapping, which was developed by Adele Clarke (2005). Using this technique, the categories and their constituent properties were placed on a large poster. The data were reviewed and arrows were employed to depict graphically the connections between the various categories and properties. The purpose of this technique was to uncover patterns in the data which would lead to a systematic explanation of the phenomenon that was being analyzed. After three iterations (see Appendices C, D, and E) of the situational map the results of the analysis affirmed *student factors* as the core category. All arrows on the map pointed in the direction of *student factors* as their ultimate destination. The situational analysis also affirmed influence as the proper designation for the theoretical development. Finally, situational mapping revealed a new insight from the data. *Student factors* functioned as a receptacle for the influences which were generated by the other categories. Some categories exerted a direct influence, some categories exerted an indirect influence, and some categories exerted a combined influence. Regardless of the nature of the influence or the path it traveled, it always ended up being collected by the *student factors* category. During the third iteration of the

situational map the categories and properties aligned in such as fashion as to suggest an explanatory metaphor which was depicted in a diagrammatical manner.

The metaphor was a color scheme which was represented by a digital printer module similar to those found on most computer screens. Many colors are available for the background of a document. In fact, the possibilities are almost infinite. In most computer programs, approximately thirty colors are available to create such a color scheme. They range from teal to peach to lava. In order to produce the desired color, a combination of other colors must be mixed in appropriate amounts. In the transfer advising process there are four categories with twenty-seven constituent properties that interact with each other directly, indirectly, and in a variety of combinations. The result of this interaction filters down to the student and the properties that comprise the category of *student factors* in order to produce a specific outcome that is unique for each individual student, depending upon the potency or lack of potency which each influence, represented corporately by categories and individually by properties, exerts upon that individual student. The diagram was a tentative graphic depiction of the transfer advising process as it had emerged in an *influence theory*.

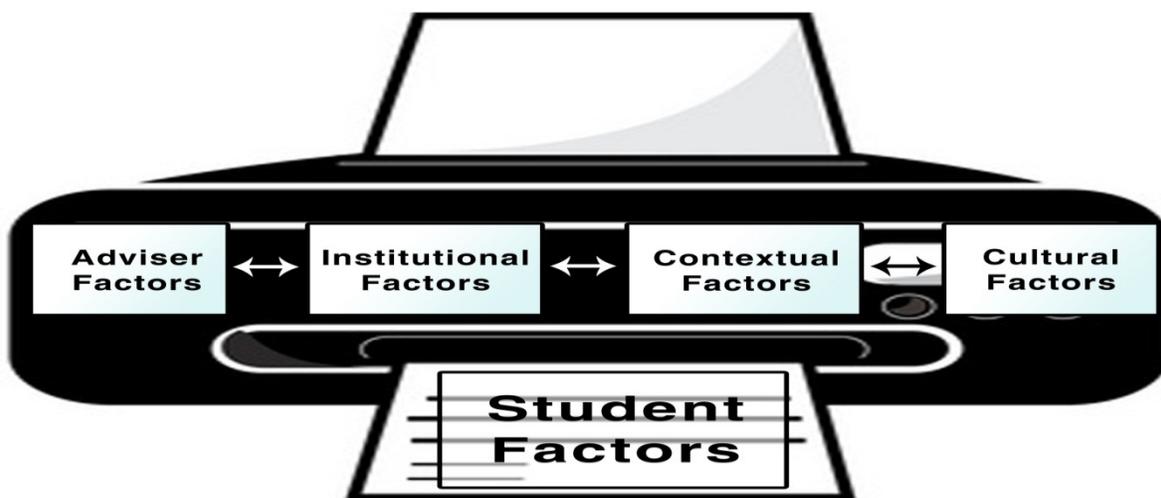


Figure 4. Influence Theory: Conceptual Diagram.

The third phase of the research was intended to further test the core category to see if it was confirmed by the data. A second intention was to further test the main categories to determine whether they manifested the explanatory depth that qualified them as categories. A third intention was to probe the data in order to add depth to the properties which had emerged and determine if any new properties were emerging. At the conclusion of the second phase of the research design, it became apparent that conceptual saturation was nearing completion. New categories and new properties were no longer emerging and data were beginning to reach redundancy levels.

During this phase of the research design, particular emphasis was paid to the *contextual factors* which related to the investigation. These matters encompassed the historical, social, and political environments which exerted an influence upon the transfer advising process. Two strategies were employed to analyze the contextual data. The strategy known as paradigm focused its attention specifically upon the data that were received from the participants through interviews. This endeavor isolated three particular areas of interest. The first area related to educational support and included the social and institutional influences which affected the transfer advising process. The second area concerned the educational preparedness of students and focused upon several institutional factors which influenced the transfer advising process. The third area involved the educational affordability of the students and included several economic factors which exerted an influence upon the transfer advising process. The second strategy known as the conditional consequential matrix (See Figure 3 on page 47) isolated a series of statistical data points which affirmed and lent credibility to the three properties that were uncovered by the application of the paradigm strategy.

## Institutional Factors

The first category, institutional factors, was bifurcated into two branches. One branch was occupied with influences that arose from the four-year institutions and the other branch was occupied with influences which arose from the community colleges. The branch related to the four-year institutions had three properties that contributed to its explanation and the branch related to the community colleges had five properties that contributed to its explanation.

### *Communication*

The first property related to four-year institutions was *communication*. Every single participant registered a dissatisfaction concerning the level of communication with four-year institutions and three expressed that the lack of communication on the part of four-year institutions was the largest obstacle which they had to overcome in doing their jobs. The participants listed the following criticisms with regard to the communication of the four-year institutions that they had to deal with. The participants said that their emails and phone calls were not returned. The participants asserted that when they called, they were routinely placed on hold for long periods of time or were transferred in a circular fashion. The participants also commented on the fact that the web sites of the four-year institutions were incomplete and usually contained information that was out of date or inaccurate.

### *Competence*

The second property was *competence*. The participants noted that oftentimes they received information from four-year institutions that was confusing, conflicting, and, on occasions, contradictory. The general impression conveyed by the participants in this study was that the representatives of four-year institutions, as a general rule, demonstrated a low degree of

competence when it came to understanding the rules and regulations that applied to community college students who were seeking to transfer.

### *Concern*

The third property was *concern*. A number of participants in the study did not feel that representatives from four-year institutions had a deep concern for transfer students and their welfare. Several participants registered the criticism that many representatives from four-year institutions did not understand the STARS guide, a statewide articulation agreement between two and four year public institutions in the state of Alabama, and some even disregarded its application to their institution. Other participants mentioned instances when four-year institutions agreed to the STARS provisions and reneged upon those requirements after students had transferred, requiring them to take courses that were not required by the STARS agreement.

### *Personnel Relationships*

The first property related to community colleges was *personnel relationships*. Most of the participants reported that they had relatively neutral relationships with their supervisors and other members at the community colleges where they served. One participant summed up this relationship with the words: “My supervisor is pretty flexible. She lets me do my thing. She is not proactive, but if I ask for assistance she helps if she can.” Two participants reported very negative relationships with supervisors whom they considered controlling and micromanaging. Another participant reported that after a year and a half, she was still unsure who her supervisor was. A number of participants reported that certain administrators attempted to use them in an intern capacity. Another participant reported that several of the advisers were given tasks which they were not qualified or trained to do. Some participants stated that they were being given the responsibility to do academic counseling and considered that to be dangerous. A number of

participants felt a tension from certain individuals who gave them the impression that they thought the advisers had been placed on campus to take their jobs or to make them look bad. A number of participants experienced a general unwillingness among faculty members to cooperate with them in the transfer advising process. Most participants expressed some dissatisfaction with the level of advising employed by many of the faculty members at the institutions where they worked. One participant stated that the faculty members advised students along the curriculum established by the community college and ignored the STARS guidelines. It should be noted that the majority of participants said that they had good overall working relationships with the personnel at their institutions. One specific participant noted that she had previously attended the community college where she had been placed and had close personal and family relationships with the personnel at the community college. She considered these relationships as a strong advantage in helping her accomplish her job as a transfer adviser.

### *Support*

The second property was *support*. This involved the material concerning the personnel not being proactive but neutral. The participants noted that the community colleges where they worked had no one on staff whose specific responsibility was to advise students with respect to transfer prior to their arrival on campus. According to the participants, they were, in many instances, viewed as contract workers, who had come to campus to do a job and were left to work independently. The participants mentioned that there was some divergence in the way they were viewed by the personnel of the community colleges. According to the advisers, some people viewed them as independent contractors, some viewed them as outside experts, and others viewed them as advanced interns. Several participants felt that they could have been more effective if they had received more assistance in achieving contact with students. This property

spanned the full dimensional range depending on the institution. In the opinion of the participants, some institutions were very proactive, some were hands off, and others seemed to misunderstand the purpose of the adviser's presence on campus, using them more for their own purposes rather than the purposes outlined for the Alabama College Transfer Advising (ACTAC) program.

There were two models of dealing with participants that emerged from the data. One model is best described as an "outsourcing" model or the "outside expert" model. In this model the ACTAC adviser was in control of the entire transfer process and functioned as a stand-alone individual. The adviser was given resources and support when they requested them, but the adviser was the one who did all of the actual work in transfer advising. One participant summed up this approach when she said, "The administrators give me full support, resources, and access but I do all the work." In this model, rather than having everyone involved in the transfer process, community college administrators and personnel took a "hands off" approach.

The second model was the "intern" model. In this model the community college viewed the adviser as someone who did transfer advising along with a number of other functions which the institutions needed. Several participants directly stated that the community college where they worked was severely understaffed. Another participant expressed her role at the community college as one of "filling gaps." She explained that because the college was so understaffed there were a lot of gaps that needed to be filled. Some of those gaps included running errands, planning functions, tutoring, proctoring standardized tests, and academic counseling. A couple of the participants were happy to comply with requests to assume responsibilities which were not within their job description. Several participants complied with these requests but were not happy about having to devote time and energy to projects which took them away from transfer

advising. There were some participants who refused to comply with an institution's request to engage them in activities that were not related with their job as transfer advisors. Finally, there were a number of participants who expressed an affirmative dislike for being asked to engage in academic counseling. Two participants stated that academic counseling comprised the lion's share of what they did at the institutions where they worked. All the participants regarded this as an alarming activity because they had not been trained in this area and were not qualified to do academic counseling. Many feared that any mistakes they made would have long term negative implications for the students they advised.

#### *Environment*

The third property was *environment*. Several participants remarked concerning the overall environment of the community college and how that environment affected the transfer process. One participant described the overall environment at her community college as an environment with a low emphasis upon achievement. Another participant described the environment at the institution where he worked as lacking motivation, discipline, and organization. A third participant considered the lack of a conducive transfer environment as the primary reason why the transfer rate was so low at the community college where she worked. Other participants, particularly those who worked in larger rural environments remarked that the environment at their institutions was more conducive to promoting transfer.

#### *Organization*

The fourth property was *organization*. Many of the participants expressed frustration with the lack of organization at the community colleges where they worked. A number of participants observed that there was a lack of specific assignments for various responsibilities. Specific to this research was the lack of any individual on campus whose specific responsibility was transfer

advising. One participant mentioned that he had several constructive ideas during the year that had narrow windows of opportunity. According to this participant, the bureaucratic organization of the community college required that each of his suggestions be passed up the chain of command. This adviser expressed frustration that by the time the answer came back down the chain of command, the window of opportunity had long since closed.

### *Senior Leadership*

The fifth property was *senior leadership*. One participant mentioned that there was not a lot of leadership from senior administrators on the issue of transfer. According to this participant, transfer was simply not a very high priority at the community college where he worked. A recent study in the state of California (Serban, 2008) investigated eight community colleges that exhibited unusually high transfer rates and uncovered a number of characteristics that were common to all eight institutions. The primary factor was leadership on transfer from the senior administration. In these institutions, the senior administration accomplished three objectives. First, they incorporated transfer into the college mission statement which made it a part of the institutional vision, and, as such, a top priority. Second, they created a transfer culture which was an environment in which transfer was a topic that was within the vision of students on a daily basis. In other words, students were constantly reminded that their associate's degrees should not be the stopping point of their education but rather the beginning point. Third, the senior administrators viewed transfer as a responsibility of everyone who worked at the college rather than as a task assigned to those whose job description focused on transfer.

When asked concerning the vision and top priorities established by the senior administration at their institutions, two participants produced a small laminated card that had been issued to all employees as well as students. This laminated card contained the senior

administration's vision statement along with the institution's top three priorities which arose out of that vision. Those priorities were accessibility, opportunity, and diversity. However, most of the participants had a long hesitation before answering, and most of the priorities they mentioned were rather vague generalities, leaving the researcher to conclude that the vision had not been clearly formulated or that the priorities had not been clearly established or that the communication of that vision and those priorities had not been successfully articulated to students and employees at the respective community colleges. Another participant had a very revealing comment to make with specific respect to transfer. He said, "Our presence has served to make the senior administration a little more aware of the fact that the transfer rate was quite low and that this was a problem."

The following priorities were mentioned as receiving most of the attention from senior administrators: recruitment, retention, community outreach, and public relations. Most of the participants came to the conclusion that transfer did not fit into the top three priorities of the institutions where they were located. Several reasons were offered to explain why transfer was not a high priority at the college where they worked. The rationale corresponded to what one participant described as a "systemic issue." According to several of the participants, transfer was not a priority and would not become a priority because of the way the system was designed. Another participant further explained that recruiting and retention were the only two priorities that truly mattered at the institution where he worked. A third participant declared "recruiting keeps students coming through the doors and retention keeps them inside the doors and that is what keeps senior administrators in a job and that trumps transfer every day of the week." A fourth participant commented that transfer was not a priority because there was nothing to be gained from it. A fifth participant detailed accounts of senior administrators discouraging

students from transferring until they had completed their associate's degree. A sixth participant put the matter bluntly when he said, "Recruiting and retaining students for two or more years produces revenue for the college. Transfer produces no revenue for the college. Therefore, transfer is not going to be a high priority for most community colleges." One final participant offered a solution to the problem. He said that unless the release of funds was tied to the transfer rate of an institution, transfer would not be an important consideration. However, if money was to be gained, transfer would become an overnight priority. Otherwise, transfer enthusiasm would have to be supplied by some body outside of the college.

When asked if any specific senior administrator had transfer as their specific concern, several of the participants mentioned names. However, when the follow up question asked what concrete actions these administrators were taking to improve the transfer rate many of the participants drew a blank. After some thought, the following actions were mentioned; participation in the ACTAC program that brought the participants in this study to their campus, annual or semi-annual events including transfer presentations, transfer fairs, and covering the STARS guide during freshman orientation. However, after reflection, most of the participants considered that these events had become traditional over the years and, at this point in time, were routine or perfunctory. According to many participants, these events were not, for the most part, well-conceived or well planned and, as such, had little sustained momentum that kept transfer in the vision of the students on a day to day basis. One participant saw these events as efforts to provide cover for the college and its administrators in case they were accused of not doing anything to promote transfer.

There was a noticeable pattern in most of the larger rural institutions. According to the participants, the assumption was that students who wanted to transfer to a four-year institution

knew how to transfer or at least should be able to find out how to transfer with little difficulty. According to the participants at these institutions, there was also an assumption by many senior administrators that most of the students at their institutions did actually transfer to a four-year institution. However, there was a disconnect between these assumptions and the actual statistics which demonstrated that the transfer rate of all these institutions was well below 10%. This was a negative case that provided discrepant information. The participants explained this discrepancy by indicating that the senior administrators were not informed on this issue. Nonetheless, according to the participants, based upon these two assumptions, senior administrators at larger rural institutions saw transfer as a matter which should take care of itself. The participants were of the opinion that the senior administration at these institutions felt that the transfer process was a responsibility left exclusively to the student. The participants felt that the senior administrators did not see themselves as collaborators or associates with the student in the transfer process. One participant summed up the perspective thus: "If the student decides to transfer, the senior administrators view that as a good thing. On the other hand, if the student decides not to transfer, they do not see it as a negative reflection upon themselves."

Another sentiment that was touched upon by a number of participants was that senior administrators and community colleges in general, encouraged students to aim low. One participant observed that the philosophy at the institution where he worked was to start with the lowest vision and then work up from there. He found that this philosophy encouraged students to set their goals low and have low expectations of themselves. It should be noted that the system also contributed to this phenomenon. According to this participant, the system rewards the community college for keeping students in the college until they finish their associate's degree and does not reward the community college if the students continue their education beyond the

associate's level. According to this participant, in this way, the system had an indirect effect of encouraging students to set their aims low or, at least, did not encourage students to set their aims high. One participant related a frustrating experience. She was asked to speak at a career fair. Her goal was to speak to a gathering of students about the advantages of pursuing a higher degree in education. This participant related that the person who spoke prior to her, a community college administrator, spoke to the students about how they could make just as much money, if not more, by getting certain technical degrees.

The collective assessment of the participants involved in this study was that senior administrators were not successful in incorporating the three objectives that are found in institutions with high transfer rates; incorporation of transfer into a vision that places transfer as a top priority, creation of an environment that impresses the importance of transfer on the minds of the students on a regular basis, and the impartation of a mindset that transfer is everyone's responsibility (Serban, 2008). Two reasons for this failure were articulated. The first reason mentioned by the participants was that a cultural mentality which viewed education exclusively in terms of its economic benefits had filtered over into the environment of the community college and even exerted an influence upon administrators and other personnel who were employed by the institutions. A second reason which the participants cited was a systemic breakdown that had an indirect effect of encouraging students to aim low when formulating their educational goals and rewarded institutions when students underachieved. Finally, most participants saw senior leadership as a crucial link in the transfer process which held the potential for exerting a strong positive influence in improving the transfer rate at community colleges in the rural counties in the state of Alabama. However, the participants considered that

this would continue to be a missing ingredient until something was done at a system level which would bring success in transfer into alignment with funding.

### *Partnerships*

During the initial interviews, the participants alluded to various types of relationships, arrangements, and associations that their community colleges had with several of the four-year institutions in the state of Alabama. In the second round of interviews a number of focused questions (See Appendix B) were asked in order to clarify these associations and determine what type of impact they had on the transfer advising process at these community colleges. Further inquiry revealed that there were four specific types of relationships. The first was an online program that several four-year institutions had in conjunction with several community colleges in the state of Alabama. The second type of arrangement was an office with a full time representative on campus. Athens State had such an arrangement with five of the nine community colleges where participants worked and Jacksonville State University had this type of arrangement with one of the community colleges where a participant worked. A third type of arrangement involved periodic visits to the community college campuses by representatives from the four-year institutions. The fourth type of arrangement consisted of scholarships which four-year institutions designated to individual community colleges.

With respect to the online programs, the participants in the study stated that since these online arrangements were still in their infancy, it was difficult to determine if they were having any influence at this point in time. With regard to the office on campus, one participant said that most of the students she advised did not realize that these offices existed. Another participant expressed frustration that the representatives from the four-year institutions were rarely in their office, did not return phone calls, and did not respond to email messages. Another participant

stated, “I have been here on campus for a year and a half and I have yet to encounter one of these representatives from the four-year institution with an office on campus.” Concerning the periodic visits to campus, several participants noted that, on some occasions the representatives of the four-year institutions simply appeared on campus without any previous notification, and on other occasions the community college representatives forgot to notify students that the four-year institution’s representatives were going to be on campus. In either case, only a few students were able to benefit from these visits because they were not aware of them. There were also some problems related to the scholarships which four year schools designated to community colleges. The participants in the study observed that these scholarships were not well publicized by the four-year institutions or the community colleges. Most students were not even aware of their existence and several participants expressed consternation at the fact that even getting information about these scholarships proved difficult. One participant speculated that there might have been a design not to publicize these scholarships to any great extent.

#### Cultural Factors

The preponderance of data collected in the second round of interviews related to the category of cultural factors. The presentation of this material begins with a brief sketch of what life is like in a small rural community in the state of Alabama. This sketch is followed by a number of results that arose from this profile. These results represent the properties that assist in yielding explanatory power to the category which is labeled *cultural factors*. These properties include *economic perceptions of education, ties to the geographical location, ties to the past, fears, personal perceptions, and perceptions of outsiders*.

This sketch of the smaller rural communities was compiled from the data presented by the participants in the study, most of whom were born and raised in smaller rural communities

and had first-hand experience of the culture they described. Some of the characterizations used to describe the smaller rural communities where the participants worked were “warm,” “friendly,” “close-knit,” “safe,” “predictable,” “insulated,” “isolated,” and “naïve.” Most of these communities have very low crime rates and violent crime is virtually nonexistent. The lifestyle is slow and, for the most part, the same from day to day. Generations of families have lived in these communities for over a century. Over this time frame, very few new families have moved into these communities and very few of the old families have moved out. Everyone is acquainted with everyone. A child meets 30 to 40 other children on the first day of school and these children become his friends and peers for the rest of his life. The child knows everyone and trusts everyone, for the most part. The few in the communities who are not trustworthy are clearly marked out and known by everyone. People in smaller rural communities rarely travel outside the community they live in. They take the occasional vacation or trip to visit relatives who usually live in similar smaller rural towns in other locations. Most of their knowledge of the world outside their smaller rural community comes from what they see on television and that information is usually bizarre or negative from their perspectives. The other knowledge which they have of the outside world usually comes from one of their fellow citizens who had to travel to a large city and returned with horror stories about traffic jams, outlandish prices, drive-by shootings, and incorrigibly rude and impolite city people. These events unite to comprise an experience that is isolated from much of the outside world and insulated from many of the influences and ideas which come from that world. This creates a life that is stable, predictable, and closed off from outside influences which, for the most part, are viewed as bad and undesirable. One participant described this as a “comfort zone” and another participant described

it as a “cocooning effect.” Out of this environment, a number of factors emerged which had a direct or indirect influence upon a student’s desire to pursue a degree in higher education.

### *Economic Perceptions*

The first property that emerged from the data was labeled *economic perceptions*. One participant explained that, in these smaller rural communities, with few exceptions, there are not many jobs that require a person to have a college education. Most of the population is engaged in some form of agriculture or manual labor. The average person who lives in a smaller rural community is poor by typical standards. However, they do not really see themselves as poor. According to several participants, as long as they have a gun and a truck to hunt with, high school sports to entertain them on Friday nights, and the occasional weekend trip to the stock car races, they are quite content with their lives. On the other hand, when it comes to getting a college education, it boils down to a simple question that was put forward by one of the participants. That question was “If it is not going to make me more money, then why would I want to waste my time and energy?” The ultimate testing point for obtaining a degree in the smaller rural community is the economic advantage that a degree might provide, and, since there aren’t many jobs in that environment that would pay a higher wage for someone with a college degree, there is little incentive.

### *Ties to the Location*

A second property which emerged from the cultural factors concerned *ties to the location*. According to the participants in this study, perhaps one of the strongest impediments to pursuing higher education or transferring to a four year college or university is an extremely strong physical, emotional, and psychological attachment to the geographical location. One participant explained that, this culture and this lifestyle is all that the people in smaller rural communities

know. Therefore, it is very alarming for rural people to think about moving away and leaving this life behind. For them, it is essentially turning their backs on everything that they have come to know. One reason suggested to explain this emotional attachment to the location was the fact that many generations had been born and remained in the locality. The participants mentioned certain routines or rituals which served to cement people to the area. One such routine is eating lunch at the grandparent's house every Sunday after church. Another significant routine is attending the local sporting events, supporting the high school team, jeering at the referees, and taunting the opposing players. Another ritual is hanging out with the guys, usually at a convenience store or a gas station. According to the participants, these routines give their members a sense of belongingness and satisfaction. These rituals emphasize to their participants that they are significant and life is good. These rituals are also strongly binding in a social sense that they are ingrained, reinforced, and looked forward to with great anticipation.

Another reason for this strong emotional attachment to the geographical location is that, for the most part, these communities are racially and socially homogenous. The communities located in the Appalachian region of the state are predominantly lower income, lower educated, Caucasian people and the communities located in the Black Belt region of the state are populated predominantly with lower income, lower educated, African American people (Center for Economic and Business Research, 2008).

One of the intriguing aspects of this research was the discovery that most of the people who live in these communities did not understand why they were so emotionally attached to the geographical region. The participants acknowledged that most of the people who live in smaller rural communities cannot explain the attachment or its origin. According to the participants, most of the inhabitants of smaller rural communities are unable to describe the history of their

communities beyond the days of their parents and a few events from the days of their grandparents. So, this attachment is not based upon understanding. Rather, it appears to be based upon an unconscious or subconscious belief which gets embedded into the consciousness of the people who live in these communities and, oftentimes, these unconscious or subconscious beliefs have a stronger force upon people than their conscious counterparts.

There was one negative case which did not seem to fit the data. One of the participants who worked at a smaller rural institution noted that there were a significant number of students who were eager to get out of that smaller rural town. After exploring the situation with this participant, it was discovered that these students were generally the children of parents who had moved to this smaller rural community from some other place. On the other hand, those students whose parents were born and grew up in the community manifested the familiar trait of being emotionally and psychologically tied to the geographical location. So, the phenomenon of having roots in the community appears to be what creates the emotional and psychological attachment to the geographical location. However, the reason a large number of families would have migrated to this area at some point in the past remains a mystery. The participant in the study was not aware of any event which could have functioned as a catalyst to bring about an influx of new people. Nonetheless, the lack of a rationale does not diminish the finding or the hypothesis.

#### *Ties to the Past*

Just as there are emotional and psychological ties to the geographical location, a third property relates to the *ties to the past*. Many of the characteristics of the community contributed to this phenomenon. According to the participants in this study, the insulated and isolated nature of the communities plays a pivotal role in filtering out influences from the outside world. Several participants observed that the fashion and hairstyles of the students reflected styles that were

popular with teenagers in large cities 10 to 15 years prior. The participants mentioned another characteristic which binds the people together. There is a strongly held belief that lower income people, usually referred to as people who have to work for a living, need to stick together. Such a belief carries with it a deep-rooted resistance to change and to the influences of forces from outside their group. Another factor that strengthens the solidarity of this group is the homogenous characteristics of the community. Several participants suggested that all of these elements produce a life that is slow, stable, predictable, and comfortable. As several participants indicated, this is the only life that these people have ever known. Life in the smaller rural communities is one dimensional without a lot of variety or options. Some of the participants asserted that this leads people to inhabit a “comfort zone” which produces a “play it safe” mentality.

One participant summed up this mentality by describing these communities as “stuck in the past.” According to this participant, people from rural communities want to keep things the way they are, when, in reality, life is presently the same as it has been for the past 50 years. A number of participants mentioned that people in these smaller rural communities like things the way they are. They do not want to change. They do not want to move forward. They do not want to progress. In fact, according to many of the participants, people from smaller rural communities do not consider becoming like city people as progress. They want things to stay the same; comfortable, predictable, and stable. They are happy with their lives and the way things are and they are quite resentful of people who tell them that they need to change. One participant mentioned that people who live in smaller rural areas see this as patronizing and condescending. Another participant described her community as “living in a time capsule.” She described the people as living life the same way that people lived 50 years ago. Many things have changed in

the outside world but people in the smaller rural communities are trying to keep things the same. Several participants noticed that history keeps repeating itself and attitudes get more entrenched and calcified with each generation.

### *Fears*

The previously discussed cultural characteristics such as isolation, insulation, homogeneity, slow pace, predictability, lack of variety, lack of options, ties to the geographical location, ties to the past, and tight social bonding all lead to a series of *fears* which is the fourth property of the category labeled as *cultural factors*. There are a number of fears which characterize people who live in smaller rural communities. According to the participants, these include fear of the world outside of the community, fear of outsiders, fear of largeness, fear of failure, fear of losing control, fear of rejection, fear of danger, and fear of ridicule. Numerous participants noticed that people who grow up in these smaller rural communities are accustomed to a life that is slow paced, comfortable, and predictable. This environment leads them to a certain comfort zone. The thought of leaving this environment and going out into a strange environment where life is not predictable and where they are not in control of their various situations petrifies some people from smaller rural communities. The participants were of the opinion that, there is a tremendous fear of the unknown among people from smaller rural communities, primarily because they have never been outside of their homogenous community which is lacking in variety and options.

One participant mentioned that people from smaller rural communities had a fear of the largeness of things outside of their community. For example, most of these smaller rural communities have a population that is smaller than most universities. Most inhabitants of smaller rural communities have attended school with the same 40 to 50 or fewer people for their entire

lives. Transferring to a university or to many four year colleges would require these students to relocate to a city much larger than any to which they are accustomed. Some of their classes would have as many as three hundred people in them. Even the buildings on campus would be much larger than any buildings which they had ever seen. There is also the fear of getting lost in such a large place and having to ask some stranger for directions. Accompanying this is the fear of being laughed at by strangers for not knowing where they are. The participants acknowledged that the fear of the largeness of things and all the accompanying difficulties present a formidable challenge for students from a smaller rural community who are contemplating transfer to a four year college or university.

A third type of fear concerns strangers. Students from smaller rural communities have spent their entire lives in a homogenous environment without a lot of variation and without many options. Simply put, they have rarely, if ever, encountered anyone who was not like them and the thought of having to deal with people who are different is more than a little intimidating. The participants were of the opinion that most of the students they advised from smaller rural communities were not prepared for such an undertaking and the thought of having to interact with strangers was a worrisome encounter for them to consider. The thought of having to leave their comfortable and stable environment and travel to a strange environment and interact with people strange to them is one aspect of this fear. However, another aspect of the culture is the fear of strangers moving into their environment. One participant noticed this aspect of the fear of strangers and designated it as one of the key reasons why smaller rural towns do not advance economically. According to that participant, there is a very clear reason why smaller rural communities do not encourage businesses to locate in their area and some go so far as to actively discourage businesses from locating in their communities. This participant stated that people

from smaller rural communities realize that businesses would provide better paying jobs for some of their citizens and would give a much needed boost to the local economy. However, their greater fear is that, if too many outsiders moved into the community they might change the culture or the culture might naturally start to change as a result of the outsiders' presence. Such an event would shatter the comfort zone and destroy the stability that brings about the contentment with life as it presently exists in these smaller rural communities. The data uncovered this deeply embedded resistance to change that is found in the culture of most smaller rural communities.

The fifth type of fear concerns rejection. Because of the social isolation and insulation, coupled with the social homogeneity, and the general lack of variation, there is a strong sense of uncertainty in many students from rural communities which manifests itself in a deep seated fear of rejection. Many participants observed that, because they have spent their entire lives in this one dimensional environment, many students from smaller rural localities are afraid that if they leave this environment they will not know how to behave in a new environment which is strange to them. Specifically, they fear that they will be laughed at and rejected by those who are more at home in this new environment.

A sixth type of fear concerns failure. Several participants mentioned that most of the students they advised had lived in a sheltered environment. Thus, most of these students' knowledge of the outside world came from second hand sources. The big cities, the big universities, and the people that inhabit those domains seem bigger than life to the students from the smaller rural communities. Because they have never ventured outside of their community and have never encountered people other than the people they have associated with their entire lives, they have never been exposed to life outside of the rural community and they do not have

reference points. As a result, the superiority of the outside world and those who inhabit it gets reinforced and blown out of proportion. Thus, as the participants in this study noticed, many of these students become convinced in their own minds that they could never succeed if they attempted to go away to a university and get a bachelor's degree. The outcome of all these experiences is what one participant called a "play it safe" mentality. This participant remarked that many students say to themselves, "If I don't step out on a limb and try something dangerous, then I can't fail." This coping mechanism allows a student from a smaller rural community to keep his or her ego and feeling of self-worth intact.

A seventh set of fears revolved around ridicule. According to many of the participants, when a student from a smaller rural community leaves the community and relocates to a four-year institution in an effort to further his education and is not successful, then he will return to the smaller rural community feeling like a failure. This is a traumatic situation for most of these students and involves a broad spectrum of emotions and fears. A participant from a community that is predominantly African American stated that the fear of being told "I told you so" is the greatest fear that students from this smaller rural community have. She said:

In this community, the older generation is living in the past. They felt inferior to the educated white people who lived in the big cities and attended large universities. They just assumed that they were not smart enough to compete with these individuals, so most of them never tried. Of the few who attempted to go away and get a four year degree, most did not succeed and had to return home as failures. On the other hand, the two or three who did succeed never came back and were soon forgotten or labeled as uppity sellouts. The older generation passes this mentality along to the next generation and discourages them from going away to a four year school. Whenever one of the younger students goes away and attempts to earn a bachelor's degree, if they do not succeed, the first thing they hear from the older generation is 'I told you so.' The pain that comes from hearing those ridiculing words is worse than the pain that comes from failing out of college. The younger students watch this drama unfold before their eyes and most of them decide that it is not worth taking the risk. In their minds the emotional and psychological punishment for failure is not worth taking the chance. As a result, these students set their sights low and say to themselves, 'If I don't try then I can't fail' and 'if I don't fail then I will never have to hear those horrible words 'I told you so.'"

### *Personal Perceptions*

The fifth property is *personal perceptions*. This property has some overlapping characteristics with the property of fear, specifically the fear of failure and the fear of ridicule. The isolation and the insulation of these smaller rural communities, coupled with some of the other disadvantages that come along with this environment produce a number of negative self-assessments in those who inhabit them. The first noticeable self-reflecting attitude which appeared in the data was inferiority. According to several participants, people in the smaller rural communities feel inferior to people who live in big cities, people who are educated, and people who are outsiders. The participants noted that part of this feeling of inferiority is the result of being insulated socially and isolated culturally. Everything and everyone outside of the rural bubble appears to be bigger and better. In the county that is predominantly African American, the participant described the situation as follows:

When a young person decides that they want to go away to college and get a degree, the first thing that the older people do is tell him that he is not capable of doing that. The mentality is that this is not their world. The older people tell him that he is not smart enough, that he should not attempt to rise above what he is. They say to him, 'You don't have the mental capacity to go off and get a college degree.' This mentality is bred into people and then reinforced and perpetuated to future generations. They have the mentality that this is the elite white man's world. He lives in the city, he has the brains, and, as a result, he has the money. 'You need to realize that you can't compete with him and you can't live in his world. So, instead of setting yourself up for a disappointment why don't you find something you can do around here?' As a result, the young people just assume that this is true and there is really nothing for them beyond this smaller rural town. From there, they begin to connect the dots and come to the conclusion that this is all they deserve in life and, if so, the logical conclusion is that they must be nothing themselves.

It was interesting that a number of the participants who were located at institutions in smaller rural communities which had a predominantly white population echoed these same sentiments. However, for this group, it was the elite white man's world and he is from the city or from up

north somewhere. Several participants mentioned that this inferiority is expressed, sometimes by groveling, sometimes by anger, and at other times by resentment.

This feeling of inferiority leads to what many participants described as a “defeatist mentality.” Many of the students from the smaller rural communities feel that the deck is stacked against them, that they are operating from a severe disadvantage, and that they have very little chance of succeeding. A participant conveyed this situation with the following words: “They just assume that if they go away to the big city and the big university that they will get eaten alive by the machine, that they will get chewed up and spit out. Then they would have to return home as failures and that is the worst possible thing that could ever happen to them.”

Numerous participants mentioned that this feeling of inferiority, combined with a defeatist mentality, leads these students to set their aims low in hopes of avoiding failure. The participants asserted that in small rural communities there is a lot of emotional capital invested in not appearing to be a failure and this is a theme that kept reappearing in the data. The culture of the smaller rural community has built up a tremendous psychological resistance to appearing to be foolish, a loser, or a failure. As a result, these students are terrified to take any risks and the play-it-safe mentality which results produces a culture of youths that have low expectations for themselves. According to the participants, the culture, itself, reinforces this mentality in a variety of ways until it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Many participants alluded to a chain of events that led to this result. For example, many students from the smaller rural communities feel inferior, they convince themselves that they are inferior, they make decisions that give others the impression that they are inferior, they behave as though they are inferior, and, as a result, other people view them as inferior and, consequently, treat them as inferior.

### *Perceptions of Outsiders*

The sixth property is *perceptions of outsiders*. According to the participants, the negative assessments which students from smaller rural communities have with respect to themselves create a number of negative attitudes toward those who are outside of the smaller rural environment. Several participants in this study noticed that, from the perspective of those who live in these communities, there is a clear demarcation between themselves and those who are not members of this community. The latter group is designated by a variety of labels including “outsiders,” “strangers,” “educated people,” “city people,” and “rich people.” The participants also noted that people from smaller rural communities tend to view those people who are outside the community as a homogenous group which is different from the homogenous group that lives within the smaller rural community. Of course, this is not the case in reality; however, it is a very real perception of many who live in the smaller rural communities.

The negative self-assessments such as inferiority, defeatist mentality, and low expectations lead to several negative assumptions and attitudes which are directed toward those who are outside of the community. According to the participants in this study, there are three noticeable attitudes that reveal the rural community’s perception of outsiders. First of all, the inhabitants of rural communities are threatened by outsiders. Second, there is a strong distrust of outsiders. Third, there is a strong resentment of outsiders. Several of the participants noticed that people from smaller rural communities tend to be threatened by outsiders because they see them as arrogant and condescending people. Many people from smaller rural communities who have been mocked or treated unkindly by outsiders, at some point, transfer their resentment to all outsiders. According to the participants, many people in the rural communities see outsiders as city people who have education and think they are better than the common man who has to work

for a living. Several participants mentioned that there are a number of stereotypes that people from smaller rural communities have created and perpetuated with reference to outsiders. For example, one participant mentioned that many people from smaller rural communities resent people who wear dress shirts with ties, and use astute grammar when they talk. According to this participant, many of the people from smaller rural communities assume, rightly or wrongly, that these people are city folks and think they are superior to the common man who works for a living.

The participants also noticed that many people from smaller rural communities have a strong distrust of outsiders. A few participants pointed out that the people from smaller rural communities read the papers and hear the news on the television about all of those corrupt bankers on Wall Street who nearly caused the collapse of the entire financial system. These individuals epitomize what people from smaller rural communities picture as the rich, educated, upper class, corrupt individuals who are living high on the hog while the common man who lives in the smaller rural community has to work hard and struggle just to get by. Then, the people from smaller rural communities look at those politicians in Washington D.C. who took the working man's tax money to bail out the corrupt bankers and then they see them paying each other big bonuses and the people from smaller rural communities see, yet another example of the corrupt, big city, educated individuals who take care of themselves, game the system, and leave the hardworking man from the rural community to pay the bill. The participants noted that, rightly or wrongly, these images are applied to everyone who is from a big city, educated, or cultured in any respect. According to the participants, for those who live in smaller rural communities the rich, educated individuals from the big cities represent everything that is wrong with this country and they want to stay as far away from them as they can. They do not want to

have any dealings with them or be like them in any respect. They are afraid that, if they have dealings with these people, the educated people will use their superior intellect to cheat them or take advantage of them in some way. A couple of participants intimated that many people from smaller rural communities truly despise people from the outside and do not want to become like them in any shape, form, or fashion. The participants in the study were virtually unanimous in the opinion that this is one of the primary reasons why higher education is not encouraged and in some instances actually discouraged in many smaller rural communities.

The participants in the study noted that many people from smaller rural communities have a strong resentment toward outsiders, especially those who are educated. The researcher was able to get a rare look into the soul of the rural community. This window was opened by the experience of two participants who returned to their smaller rural communities after completing their bachelor's degree. One participant observed that the residents of her community resented the fact that one of their own had risen to a level above them. She said, "When I returned, people treated me like I thought I was better than other people. I think a lot of people resented me for succeeding and they were angered because they could not get in my face and say, 'I told you so!'" A second participant recounted that people treated her with contempt when she returned. She reported that several people said to her, "You are too big for your britches. You think you know everything. You think you are better than us." This participant considered that some of this resentment came from envy and jealousy, some came from feeling inferior to educated people and some resulted from the painful memory of having been disrespected by educated people at some point in the past. She speculated that some of the resentment directed specifically toward her was because "they would have liked to have done what I did but they did not have the drive and determination, and they were unable to conquer their fears." This participant summarized her

situation quite sharply with the words, “I think they resented me because my presence was a daily reminder of their cowardice and further reinforced their inferiority in their own minds.” The participant considered that, seeing one of their own being transformed into the type of person they resented reinforced their resentment of educated people and further hardened their resolve to discourage anyone else from going away to get an education.

There were two negative cases presented by participants whose experience was the opposite of the experiences just presented. One of these participants remarked that she had not experienced any negative feelings or resentment upon her return. The second participant said that she was also warmly received upon her return. There were two differences between the two participants who were warmly received and the two participants who were not warmly received. The participants who were not warmly received returned to their smaller rural communities in order to change things and neither participant had any intention of staying in the community beyond the termination of the ACTAC program. Remarkably, both participants who were not warmly received independently described their time in the rural community as similar to “serving a prison sentence.” On the other hand, the two participants who were warmly received described their return to the smaller rural community, not as an effort to change things, but as an effort to help improve things. Also, both of these participants were happy living in the smaller rural community and both hoped to be able to stay in the community after the ACTAC program expired. It should be mentioned that both of these participants who were warmly received were desirous of being employed by the community colleges where they were located. It is also important to notice that neither of the participants who were warmly received denied the cultural profile that was presented above. In fact, both confirmed it. Both of these participants stated that they understood the mentality in the smaller rural communities that was somewhat negative

toward education and were happy to live with it because they felt that there were other positive aspects of living in the smaller rural community that outweighed the negative aspects.

### Contextual Factors

The contextual matters that related to the investigation encompassed the historical, social, and political environments that exerted an influence upon the transfer advising process. Two strategies were employed to analyze the contextual data. The strategy known as paradigm focused its attention specifically upon the data that were received from the participants through interviews. This endeavor isolated three particular areas of interest. The first area related to educational support and included the social and institutional influences that affected the transfer advising process. The second area concerned the educational preparedness of students and focused upon several institutional factors that influenced the transfer advising process. The third area involved the educational affordability of the students and their parents. This area included several economic factors that exerted an influence upon the transfer advising process. The second strategy known as the conditional consequential matrix (see Figure 3) isolated a series of statistical data points that affirmed and lent credibility to the three properties which were uncovered by the application of the paradigm strategy.

### *Educational Support*

The majority of the participants in this study noted that students from smaller rural communities did not receive a lot of encouragement or support in pursuing a degree in higher education. Closely associated with this assertion was a second observation that students from smaller rural communities did not receive very much information concerning the procedures involved in transferring to an institution of higher learning. In addition, the participants noted that the students they advised had not received a large amount of information related to the

procedures involved in pursuing a degree in higher education. These two realities resulted in a student who was confused and lost when it came to understanding what they needed to do in order to attain a bachelor's degree. The participants mentioned three reasons to explain this state of affairs. The first reason was that most students' parents had never attended college. The second reason was that educational achievement was not a common phenomenon in these students' background. The third reason was that the students came from smaller rural communities which did not place a high priority on education.

The conditional consequential matrix uncovered a series of statistical data points that related to this issue. To assess the assertions of the participants, two statistical data points from the US Census Bureau ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)) were referenced. The first statistic concerned the percentage of people who possessed a high school degree or equivalent. The second statistic related to the percentage of people over the age of 25 who possessed a bachelor's degree or higher. A third statistical data point was referenced from the Alabama State Department of Education ([percentagewww.asdse.edu](http://percentagewww.asdse.edu)). This statistic concerned the amount of money that school systems spent on education.

According to the US Census Bureau, the Alabama state percentage of individuals with a high school diploma or equivalent was 75.3 % (see Appendix K). Of the 38 counties surrounding the community colleges where the participants worked, five had a percentage that equaled or exceeded the state percentage. When the larger rural counties were left out of the equation the result was three counties with a population of high school graduates that equaled or exceeded the state percentage. This finding added credibility to the participants' assertion that the students from smaller rural communities did not come from an environment in which educational attainment is a common phenomenon.

The US Census Bureau also recorded the number of people over the age of 25 who possessed a bachelor's degree or higher (Appendix K). The percentage for the state of Alabama was 19 %. Of the 38 counties surrounding the community colleges where the participants in this study worked, two had a percentage that equaled or exceeded the state percentage. When the larger rural counties were factored out of the equation, the result was that none of the counties had a population with a bachelor's degree or higher that equaled or exceeded the state percentage. This finding added credibility to the participants' assertion that the majority of students attending smaller rural community colleges came from families in which neither parent attended an institution of higher learning.

The Alabama State Department of Education issued a letter grade for each county in the state of Alabama which had reference to the school systems' per student spending. The formula for this grading system took the total amount of revenue collected locally for public school purposes, divided by the value of one system mil of ad valorem tax. The letter grade was derived by comparing this figure with the state, regional, and national per student spending averages (Appendix K). The grading system was A = excellent, B = Good, C = Average, D = Poor, and F = Fail. Of the 38 counties surrounding the community colleges where the participants involved in this study worked, three received a grade of A, no county received a grade of B, 11 received a grade of C, 14 received a grade of D, and 10 counties received a grade of F. When larger rural counties were removed from the formula, two counties received a grade of A. This finding lent credibility to the participants' assertion that smaller rural community college students came from a background which did not place a high priority upon education.

### *Educational Preparedness*

A second contextual property which emerged from the data and was isolated by the paradigm strategy concerned the *educational preparedness* of the students. According to the participants in this study, students from smaller rural communities were, as a general rule, underprepared academically and not capable of performing the caliber of scholastic work that is necessary to complete a college degree. The primary reason suggested for this state of affairs was the low scores which these students attained on placement exams upon enrolling in community colleges.

The conditional consequential matrix uncovered a series of statistical data that related to this issue. The Alabama Commission of Higher Education ([www.ache.alabama.gov](http://www.ache.alabama.gov)) recorded two data points that assisted in assessing the assertions set forth by the participants involved in this study (see Appendix L). The first data point recorded the percentage of students who graduated from high school in the spring of 2009 and were enrolled in an institution of higher learning in the fall of 2009. The second data point recorded the percentage of those high school graduates who entered an institution of higher education and were required to take at least one remedial course. In the state of Alabama 56% of high school graduates enrolled in an institution of higher education. Of those high school graduates who enrolled in an institution of higher learning, 33% were required to take at least one remedial course.

Of the 38 counties surrounding the community colleges where the participants involved in this study worked, 25 had a percentage of high school graduates who enrolled in an institution of higher education that equaled or exceeded the statewide percentage. When the larger rural counties were left out of the equation, the number of counties that equaled or exceeded the statewide percentage was 22. Of the 38 counties surrounding the community colleges where the

participants involved in this study worked, 30 had a number of students who were required to take at least one remedial course that equaled or exceeded the statewide percentage. When larger rural counties were removed from the equation, the number of counties that equaled or exceeded the statewide percentage was still 30. These findings added credibility to the participants' assertion that students from smaller rural communities are, as a general rule, underprepared and less capable of doing the caliber of scholastic work that is necessary to complete a college degree.

### *Educational Affordability*

The participants in this study mentioned a third property under the category contextual factors which they considered to be influential on the transfer advising process. This property related to the economic environment that surrounded the smaller rural communities in which the students lived. This economic environment was considered to exert an influence upon the *educational affordability* that confronted students from smaller rural communities as they considered transferring from a community college to a four-year institution. According to the participants in this study, most students and their parents from smaller rural communities cannot afford to pay the tuition and other expenses associated with transferring to a four year college or university.

The US Census Bureau ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)) recorded three statistical figures which made it possible to assess the credibility of the assertions made by the participants in this study (Appendix M). The first figure was median household income, the second figure was the percentage of individuals who are living below the poverty level, and the third figure was the unemployment rate. The median household income in the state of Alabama was \$42,586. Of the 38 counties surrounding the community colleges where the participants in this study worked, 30

had a median household income that was below the state median. The percentage of people living below the poverty level in the state of Alabama was 15.90. Of the 38 counties surrounding the community colleges where the participants involved in this study worked, 20 had a higher percentage of people living below the poverty level than the statewide percentage. The unemployment rate in the state of Alabama was 10.60 %. Of the 38 counties which surround the community colleges where the participants involved in this study worked, 26 had an unemployment rate that exceeded the statewide percentage. These findings lent credibility to the participants' assertion that most students and their parents from smaller rural communities may not be able to pay the tuition and other expenses associated with transferring to a four year college or university.

#### Adviser Factors

The fourth category was labeled *adviser factors* and was comprised of nine properties. These properties related to the participants in the study and encompassed those characteristics and events in their lives which bore an influence upon the transfer advising process. Early in the first round of interviews a number of properties emerged that had a specific reference to the participants who were involved in the study. The participants were of the opinion that their experiences and their unique backgrounds gave them a distinct advantage when it came to advising students from smaller rural communities with regard to the transfer process. One participant suggested that, in many ways, he had travelled the path that the students he was advising were attempting to travel. A number of participants felt that they had much in common with the students and that these commonalities were of great assistance in the transfer advising process. There were nine specific properties which emerged as specific influences that were

related to the advisers who were participants in this study. The participants also regarded these properties as playing a strongly positive influence in the transfer advising process.

#### *Transfer Student*

Seven of the participants in the study were transfer students and had recently experienced many of the events and many of the frustrations that the students they were advising were presently experiencing. One participant shared the frustration she had experienced of wanting to transfer and continue her education, but not knowing what to do or whom to ask. Another participant shared his consternation with attempting to gather information that he needed to transfer, but continually coming up empty and not being able to find anyone who could assist him. Several other participants told similar stories of difficulties they had experienced and how the transfer process had left them depressed, debilitated, and defeated. All the participants considered the difficulties they had to overcome in order to transfer as one of the primary advantages that enabled them to assist students in their efforts to navigate the difficulties which they would encounter in their efforts to transfer.

#### *First Generation College Student*

Six of the nine participants in the study were first generation college students as were the majority of the community college students whom they were advising. Many of the participants reflected upon their experience of being the first person in their family to attend college. They isolated three issues that they had to confront and overcome in their quest to obtain an advanced degree.

The first issue concerned the lack of support from family members and surrounding parties. One participant mentioned that the members of his family were neutral about him pursuing a degree in higher education. Another participant related that her family members

thought it was odd or strange that she wanted to attend college and several relatives and social acquaintances expressed their feelings that she was wasting her time pursuing a degree in college. Two participants confided that they had received negative feedback from their family members and relatives when they expressed a desire to pursue a college degree. One participant stated that she had been mocked and the other participant indicated that she had been resented.

The second issue related to the knowledge of the procedures involved in pursuing an advanced degree in education. All six of the participants who were first generation college students admitted that, when they decided to get a bachelor's degree, they had no idea what they needed to do to make this desire a reality. Because no one in their immediate family and none of their social acquaintances had attended college, they had no one to ask concerning what things they needed to do in order to pursue an advanced degree. One participant described the situation as being in a maze in a room with no lights, knowing that there was a door located somewhere but not knowing where it was or how to find it.

The third issue involved a matter of confidence. Because they had not received much moral support and because they were at a loss when it came to knowing what they needed to do, most of the participants who were first generation college students acknowledged that they had experienced periods of very low self-esteem. One participant said, "I knew that I wanted to get a bachelors' degree and improve my life but I saw the road to that goal as so difficult that there were many times that I felt like it was hopeless and I just wanted to give up."

#### *Academic Background*

The third property was *academic background*. Most of the participants suggested that their previous educational training in their major exerted a helpful influence upon the way that they advised students. For example, two participants who had studied marketing were of the

opinion that their academic training was helpful in giving them the knowledge of how to attract students to their meetings and other functions which introduced the idea of transfer to students. Another participant who studied business administration considered that the skills he learned from his academic training enabled him to relate well with the students who came to him for assistance. Another participant who obtained her master's degree in academic advising intimated that her academic training was very useful in helping her to assist students in engaging in critical thinking in order to discover solutions to problems that arose in their lives. However, the most significant influence, from the participants' point of view, came not so much from the specific training they received in their major, but from the overall experience of negotiating their way to a bachelor's degree.

There were three specific areas in which the participants considered that their academic backgrounds assisted them in advising students with regard to the transfer process. The first area related to mistakes. Several of the participants related a number of mistakes they had made during their college years. Some of these mistakes were of a personal nature, some were social mistakes, and some of the mistakes were of an academic nature. All in all, the majority of the participants felt that they could help students avoid making similar mistakes by imparting to them vital information which they had to learn the hard way.

A second area can best be comprehended as understanding. One of the participants referred to this as reinventing the wheel. He described a number of things that happened to him both inside and outside of the class room that cost him an enormous amount of needless time and energy and at a later time he discovered that there had been a relatively simple and easy way of accomplishing those tasks. Most of the participants in the study felt that giving this type of knowledge to future students was one of the greatest aids that they could impart to them.

A third area is best described as savvy-ness. Several participants noted that there was a certain type of awareness that college students needed to acquire in order to be successful in completing their bachelor's degree. One particular participant noted that as a first year college student he was quite naïve. He said that he trusted everyone and believed everything that he was told. According to this participant, as a result of his naiveté, he was taken advantage of by numerous individuals and ended up in several bad situations. He, and other participants, felt that imparting this experience to the students they advised, was a valuable insight which they could contribute to students who desired to transfer.

On the whole, the participants in this study felt that their recent experiences of negotiating a four year academic degree enabled them to communicate to transfer students the lessons from their mistakes, the knowledge, and the savvy-ness that would enable them to function as independent and autonomous individuals which the participants considered to be the keys to success in obtaining a college degree.

#### *Personal Belief System*

The fourth property was *personal belief system*. The intense desire to help other people, especially those students who are struggling through similar experiences, was an influence which permeated the responses of all the participants and seemed to guide, control, monitor, and motivate the behavior and actions of the participants. All the participants seemed to get their personal sense of pleasure out of helping other people. One participant spoke for the group with the words, "I think everyone in this program gets their greatest fulfillment and personal enjoyment in life from helping other people." During the initial round of interviews one participant accounted for this influence based upon a specific political and social philosophy that

he embraced, whereas the other participants alluded to similar philosophies but were less specific in their articulation about the motivation.

In the second round of interviews each participant was asked to comment upon their specific philosophy of life and what role it played in their involvement in the ACTAC program. As the data were compiled from the second round of interviews, this series of questions opened a window into the participants' inner person. One interesting observation was that in answering the initial question concerning the description of their personal beliefs most of the participants stumbled around looking for the appropriate words to express their positions. There were numerous starts and restarts, pauses, hesitations, and periods of silence. One participant began by saying that she had no strongly held philosophical, social, religious, or political opinions. Then, twenty minutes later, after attempting to explain why she had no strongly held opinions, the participant paused in mid-sentence and said, "You know something, I just realized that I actually do have some strongly held beliefs." The act of answering the question was a process of discovery for many of the participants. Many had strong beliefs that influenced their daily lives and motivated them to participate in the ACTAC program. However, these beliefs were latent and bubbling beneath the surface of their consciousness. These beliefs were unrealized and unarticulated until these participants started to answer this question. One participant described it as a "journey toward consciousness" and another described it as a "process of discovery."

#### *Family Background*

The fifth property that emerged from the data was *family background*. There were some overlapping areas among this property, *first generation college student*, and *home town*. However, it was decided to keep all three properties as separate individual properties because each property made a unique contribution to the overall theoretical architecture. Two participants

came from single parent households and acknowledged that they had experienced a number of psychological and social difficulties as a result. One participant was required to take care of her mother who was ill and an uncle who was severely burned in a house fire, while working two jobs and taking a full course load in college. Another participant came from a family in which neither parent finished the tenth grade. Her mother became pregnant when she was 16 years old and her father joined the army. In spite of these hardships, these participants said that the difficulties they had encountered served as motivational events to spur them on to accomplish great things in life. The remainder of the participants had relatively traditional family backgrounds with two parent households. Several participants mentioned that while they did not have the benefits of having parents or siblings who had attended college they, nonetheless, considered their family background to have been an overall positive influence in their lives and, as a result, a positive influence upon their involvement in the transfer advising process.

### *Hometown*

The sixth property was *hometown*. Seven of the nine participants were born and grew up in smaller rural communities. One participant spent the first twelve years of her life in a smaller rural community before her family moved to an urban city. The remaining participant was born and grew up in an urban city. However, as a child he spent the summers with relatives who lived in a smaller rural community. Thus, all of the participants had personal exposure to life in a smaller rural community. Also, all of the participants in the study felt that being born and raised in a smaller rural community gave them certain advantages when it came to advising students from these communities with regard to transferring to a four-year institution of higher education.

The participants in the study isolated two particular advantages that their familiarity with smaller rural communities gave to them. The first advantage concerned an understanding of the

cultural mindset that exists in smaller rural communities. One participant described this advantage with the words, “I know exactly what these students are thinking because I grew up in the same way that they are growing up and two years ago I was right where they are today. On many occasions, I know exactly what they are going to ask even before they ask it.” A second advantage involved a solution procedure. The participants in this study were of the opinion that their experience of being born and raised in smaller rural communities equipped them to discover solutions that would enable students from smaller rural communities to overcome their fears and feelings of inferiority and thus, successfully transfer to a four-year institution of higher learning where they would ultimately realize their dreams of attaining a college degree.

#### *Emotional Investment*

The seventh property was *emotional investment*. There was an obvious difference in the emotional investment or psychological involvement in the transfer advising process on behalf of the participants involved in this study. The perspectives of the participants spanned the dimensional range from very high to very low. Three participants rated their emotional investment in the transfer advising process at an extremely high level of intensity. Four participants considered their level of emotional investment to be moderate or neutral. Two participants felt that it was necessary to avoid a strong emotional investment in any particular student or with any specific outcome of the transfer advising process.

The participants who registered a high level of emotional investment were of the opinion that “students need someone who will listen to them and reassure them that everything will be all right.” One participant described her approach to transfer advising as “caring.” Her reasoning was that in order to be a successful adviser a person had to care deeply about the students they advised. Along similar lines, a third participant described her approach to advising as “mentoring.” Her perspective was that she had traveled the hard road of obtaining a college

degree, she had made a lot of mistakes along the way, and she had encountered a number of hardships. As a result, she viewed her mission in life as serving as a guide to future students who would be attempting to travel that same road. All three of these participants agreed that the most rewarding part of their work was knowing that they had made a positive impact in a student's life.

The participants who registered neutral on the property of emotional investment shared many traits with those participants who exhibited a high level of emotional investment. These participants viewed themselves as role models and considered their experience as a reservoir of advice from which students could profit. These participants also demonstrated a commitment to the students they advised and felt that they went beyond the call of duty when it came to helping students who were in need. However, there was one characteristic which distinguished these participants from the participants who manifested a high level of emotional investment. The high level participants viewed their job as a calling and were absorbed with the process of helping students. The success or failure of the student exacted an emotional toll upon the participants with a high level of emotional investment. The participants with a neutral level of emotional investment viewed their jobs as an important facet of their lives but were not as absorbed by it as the high level participants were. They, likewise, wanted to see students succeed but were not emotionally devastated when students did not succeed. One participant explained this difference with the words, "I have learned how to leave it at the office. I don't bring it home with me." Another participant explained her perspective by saying, "Of course, I want to see students succeed, but at the end of the day, that is up to the student and I can't allow myself to become too depressed each time a student doesn't have success."

The participants who registered low in emotional investment did so intentionally and for personal reasons. One of these participants described her approach in the following words, “My responsibility is to get the student to think critically and the rest is up to them.” The other participant described his perspective in the following manner, “My responsibility is to show the student how to build the reality that they desire to build and not to play a role in determining what that reality will be.” These participants felt that a high level of emotional investment could be detrimental to both the adviser and the student. The participants with a low level of emotional investment also expressed mild negative sentiments toward the “advisor as mentor” perspective. One participant stated, “The purpose of advising is to get students to think critically and once that goal is achieved the student does not need a guide or a leader or a mentor.” This participant saw the high level of emotional investment manifested in the mentoring approach as something that would interfere with the student developing the capacity to act independently and autonomously. The other participant with a low level of emotional investment did not feel that it was healthy for advisers to get too emotionally involved with the process of advising students. He mentioned that he had observed several advisers who had put themselves on an emotional roller coaster which was governed by the success or failure of the students they advised, and, in his opinion, this was not advantageous for the adviser or the students they advised.

All of the participants drew upon their personal experiences from a variety of encounters. The first group of participants used these experiences with purely informational purposes. The second group was more actively involved in not only communicating information to students, but also in actually leading students through the transfer process. Finally, the third group of participants was even more involved, to the point of serving as role models and mentors. Which approach was more effective remained an open question. There was no consensus on this issue.

### *Training*

The eighth property was *training*. The participants in this study received training from two sources. The first source was the National College Advising Corps (NCAC) and the second source was the Alabama College Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC). The participants spent a week in Chapel Hill, North Carolina at the University of North Carolina, where they received training from the NCAC. They were trained in areas such as financial aid advising, admission advising, and the benefits of selective colleges for high-achieving, low-income students. The participants were universal in their response that this training was not beneficial for the work that they had been called to do. The participants agreed that this training was valuable, but it was geared toward individuals who were going to be working with high school students. The participants in this study were scheduled to work with community college students and, therefore, they did not find the training principles to be applicable in their context.

The participants went through a five week training period in Tuscaloosa, Alabama at The University of Alabama, where they received training from the representatives of the ACTAC and other experts from The University of Alabama. The participants were trained in admission application preparation, financial aid preparation, scholarship research and application preparation, transfer issues and articulation, academic advising, effective entry and partnering with community college students and personnel, presentation and communication development, and the history and environment of higher education in Alabama (The University of Alabama, September, 2006). With respect to the training they received from the ACTAC, the participants universally acknowledged that it was influential from a factual and informational standpoint. However, from the standpoint of actually dealing with students on an individual basis, the participants were of the opinion that the training was of limited value. One participant summed

up the other participants' sentiments when he said, "The training prepared us for the nuts and bolts of advising, but the mechanics of advising were left up to us." Another participant further elaborated, "Each student is unique and each advising situation is different, and it is impossible to train someone to deal with these types of conditions."

### *Near Peer Advising*

The ninth property was *near peer advising*. The rationale behind the program was that graduates who had recently experienced what is involved in obtaining a college degree and were close in age to the students they were advising would have certain advantages that an older professional advisor would not have. The promotional material for the ACTAC contained the following statement, "The National College Advising Corps model utilizes a 'near peer' advising philosophy based upon the belief that, for many students, working with an advisor whose age and experience is close to their own can be highly beneficial." (The University of Alabama, 2008).

The data with respect to *near peer advising* fell into two discrete directions. The first direction concerned the participants' personal evaluation of the philosophy of near peer advising. The second related to the participants' perspectives concerning the effectiveness of near peer advising. Specifically, the participants outlined both the positive and negative aspects of the near peer advising approach.

The participants' perceptions with regard to *near peer advising* were slightly polarized. Two participants felt that being close to the students in age and experience had a neutral to slightly positive influence upon the advising process. One of these participants described near peer advising as a nonfactor and the other participant stated that near peer advising might be useful in some limited capacity, but on the whole, he did not consider it to be very significant.

Both of these participants did not consider themselves to be close to the students in age or experience. Both stated that they did not behave, dress, or think like they were in close proximity in age or experience to the students they advised. Therefore, neither considered themselves peers or near peers to the students they advised. They were of the opinion that students felt comfortable talking to them because they were competent and knowledgeable professionals and not because they were close in age or experience. As such, these participants felt that knowledge and competence in the field of advising was more important than being a near peer. Both considered that students were interested in talking with an advisor who was knowledgeable and competent regardless of that advisor's age.

On the other hand, the remaining seven participants felt that their closeness in age and experience created a number of advantages for them in the transfer advising process that would not have been available for someone who was somewhat more removed from the students in age and experience. There was universal agreement on five issues. According to these participants, students were more willing to open up to the near peer advisors, students were more trusting of the near peer advisors, students were more receptive of what the near peer advisors had to say, the near peer advisors were more understanding of the student's situation, and the near peer advisors had more empathy for the student's problems.

The specifics of these advantages and the reasons behind them are best demonstrated when contrasted with the advising style employed by the institutional advisors who were on staff at the community colleges where the participants in the study worked. In the course of answering the questions pertaining to near peer advising many of the participants readily compared their style of advising with the advising approach implemented by those advisors who were employed by the community college where they worked. As these data were analyzed three striking

contrasts emerged. The first contrast related to the way in which students were viewed and perceived. The second contrast concerned the actual method of advising. The third contrast involved the quality of the interaction that took place between students and advisors.

The first contrast concerned the manner in which students were viewed. According to several participants, many community college advisors did not have a very high opinion of community college students. According to some participants, the advisors employed by the community colleges tended to view community college students as less talented and less capable of accomplishing significant things in life. For that reason, the participants felt that the community college advisors tended to have lower expectations of students and did not encourage them to set their goals in life at a high level. On the other hand, the participants, as near peer advisors, viewed the students as people who had great potential and, if given the proper guidance, could accomplish great things in life. As a result, the participants, as near peer advisors, received great pleasure in seeing community college students gain confidence and begin to believe in themselves. In light of this perception, the participants encouraged the community college students to set their aims in life higher than the students normally would have set their goals themselves. This contrast in the way students were viewed led to two additional contrasts.

The second contrast between the near peer advisors and their community college counterparts related to the approach taken to advising. Several participants mentioned that community college advisors utilized pre-cut plans that told the students what they needed to do. One participant observed that the institutional advisors at the community college where she worked did not listen very carefully to what the students had to say. Instead, according to this participant, the community college advisors simply offered the students a pre-designed program

that would satisfy what the advisor thought was best for the student. According to many of the participants in the study, this approach to advising arose out of a predetermined evaluation that the student was less talented and less capable of figuring out what they could do or what they needed to do in life. Thus, according to a number of participants, the institutional advisors saw their role as the one who needed to determine what the student needed to do. Most of the participants agreed that this resulted in a neat, simple, and easy to understand package. Several participants stated that because the professional advisors viewed the student as less capable of accomplishing significant goals, these precut packages were usually very menial. All of the participants in the study found this approach to be somewhat patronizing. More than one participant had a negative reaction to this approach because the memory of the way they had been treated as community college students was still fresh in their minds. One participant said,

When I was a community college student I had dreams and things that I felt very passionate about and I could not find anyone who wanted to listen to my desires. Several advisors seemed like they wanted to pour cold water on my dreams and pigeon hole me into some menial job that was going nowhere in life.

The participants considered that the approach, which they employed as near peer advisors was in sharp contrast to that of the community college advisors. All of the participants said, “We always begin with the student. The initial step is to listen to the student and let the student express their desires.” The near peer advisors indicated that they sought to help students explore their desires and discover what they were passionate about doing in life. Once this was accomplished the near peer advisors proceeded to help the student craft a program based upon their desires and passions.

The third contrast between the near peer advisors and the community college advisors concerned the nature and the quality of interaction between the students and the advisors. A number of students expressed to the participants that they felt that the community college

advisors did not have time for them, were not able to help them with information concerning four year schools, and did not give the impression that they were concerned about them or their futures. According to the participants, numerous students mentioned that they felt like their community college advisors came across as judgmental, assumed that students were less than capable, gave them negative feedback, and seemed to want to pour cold water on their enthusiasm. In contrast, the near peer advisors asserted that they saw their role as someone who was there to support and encourage the students. According to the participants, the students viewed the near peer advisors as someone who would listen to their desires and help them develop a plan based upon what they wanted to accomplish. One student summed up this sentiment with a comment he placed on an evaluation form of one of the participants:

My faculty advisor was too busy to meet with me when I first asked for his assistance. I had already wasted too much time and money taking classes that would not transfer because of improper advising. I felt that proper advising was pivotal at this point. When I met with Ms. Jones she was able to explain all the transfer requirements and made some wonderful suggestions about what classes would most benefit my career. She also took it upon herself to examine my transfer transcript and point me in the right direction. I am upset that my advisor did not take the time to help me, but I am grateful that Ms. Jones was made available to me. I owe all of my success to her patience and advising.

The participants noted three disadvantages of near peer advising. Two of the disadvantages were regarded as mild and the third disadvantage was regarded as a problem that could be easily remedied. The first two disadvantages related to the nature of the adviser's association with the students whom they were advising. The third disadvantage related to the adviser's social network and the location of the community college in which the adviser worked.

The first two disadvantages were closely related to each other and were closely associated with the students who were involved in the advising relationship. Several of the female participants mentioned that they were subjected to unsolicited forward behavior on behalf of some of the male students they were asked to advise. These incidents ranged from mild

flirtations to being asked for phone numbers to being asked out on dates. Two of the participants reached the point of having to request institutional assistance in order to deal with stalking situations. Several participants mentioned a second disadvantage in the form of students feeling the liberty to use vulgar language in their presence as well as engage in conversation concerning certain subjects that would be considered taboo. Subjects such as alcohol and drug usage along with sexual activity were mentioned specifically by the participants.

The third disadvantage for near peer advising in a smaller rural setting was a phenomenon which one participant described as an emotional, social, and psychological no man's land. The participants in this study came from a four year university located in a relatively large city where they enjoyed numerous individuals who shared their interests and a multitude of interesting social activities. Suddenly, they were taken from that environment and placed in a smaller rural community where there were very few, and in many instances, no individuals who were their age and shared their interests. Also, social opportunities in these communities were extremely limited. One participant described the situation in the following words:

I am in my early 20s and single. In Tuscaloosa I had a lot of friends who were my age and single. I also had a lot of places to go and a lot of things to do. When I came here to this smaller rural community I discovered that there was virtually nothing to do. Most of the people I work with are in their 30s or 40s or older and most of them are married and have children. So, I don't have a lot in common with them or fit into their world. On the other hand, I am not a kid anymore, so I don't completely fit in with the students either. The unwritten ground rules for socializing with students are very cloudy and the whole scene can be awkward at best and fraught with many dangers. So, this is an avenue that I consider off limits. That leaves me stuck in the middle, in a social and emotional no man's land.

The social and emotional ramifications of no man's land were a universal phenomenon which was experienced to some degree by virtually every participant in the study to one degree or another. One participant shared that she felt very isolated on many occasions and found herself oftentimes fighting against depression. Another participant who had recently gotten

married stated that he had experienced some mild symptoms of no man's land prior to getting married. Several participants returned to work at a community college which was located in their home town. Many of these participants had attended the college where they were working. These participants were also living in their parent's home. Yet, in spite of these advantages, the participants acknowledged that they had struggled with the no man's land issue to a certain degree. One of the participants stated that things do not stay the same. He mentioned that in his absence, old friends had moved on with their lives. Some had gotten married and others had found new friends to socialize with. Several participants said, "I know this place. I used to live here, but I don't fit in here anymore."

Another group of participants relocated to a community which was within driving distance of their home towns or their friends in Tuscaloosa. All these participants acknowledged that the no man's land phenomenon created in them an emotional alienation that, at times, was quite intense. All of these participants said that they either went home or traveled to Tuscaloosa every weekend and that was one of the remedies that allowed them to cope with the social isolation.

Finally, one participant was initially located on a campus of which she had no prior knowledge and this campus was not within a convenient driving distance of her home or any city where she had friends or acquaintances. This participant had the most difficulty with no man's land. She mentioned that she took a long trip to visit friends every time she received a three day weekend. She revealed that this experience had been a traumatic time for her. She also acknowledged that the social and emotional alienation which accompanied the phenomenon of no man's land had taken a toll on her personally and had exerted a deleterious effect upon her ability to do her job as a transfer adviser. This participant was eventually able to move to another

community college which was located in a larger rural community. All in all, the phenomenon of no man's land and the social and emotional strains which it exerted upon the participants turned out to be the biggest disadvantage that accompanied near peer advising in the smaller rural communities.

On the whole, the majority of participants felt that near peer advising exerted a positive influence upon the transfer advising process. There was also a consensus that a near peer approach was superior to traditional approaches of advising, at least in the narrow area of transfer advising. While there were some acknowledged disadvantages with near peer advising such as the over familiarity of some students and the emotional no man's land phenomenon, the positive features of this philosophy were considered to outweigh its negative characteristics.

#### Student Factors

All of the participants in this study stated that their starting point in the advising process was the student. They mentioned that the student was the director, the governor, and the controller of the advising process. Each participant had a slightly different style of advising and approach to advising. However, every participant initiated the advising process with what they called a student evaluation, and this student evaluation was comprised of four specific activities which the participants considered to be critical in the advising process.

#### *Goal Formation*

The first property was *goal formation*. Every participant, without exception, mentioned that the first step they took in the transfer advising process was to explore the student's desires and aspirations. According to the participants in the study, some students were clear concerning what they wanted to do in life and merely required advice concerning what major they needed to declare and what curriculum they needed to follow. Other students were less clear concerning

their desires and were unsure about what options were available to them. When dealing with these students, the participants presented a variety of career paths and the accompanying curriculums which would point the student in the proper direction. The participants mentioned a third type of student as “clueless.” These were the students who had no idea what career options they wanted to follow and usually had no idea about what they wanted to do in life. With these students, the participants usually asked a series of questions such as “what do you enjoy doing,” “what do you see yourself doing ten years from today,” and “what is the one thing that would get you excited to get up out of bed and go to work every day?” Usually the participants gave these students some information to look up on the internet or research from other sources and report back to them in a short period of time. The participants said that the ultimate goal of this stage of the transfer advising process was to help the students discover what they wanted to do in life, then help them find a major and curriculum that would assist them in achieving that goal. The next step in the advising process was to help the students find the four-year institution that would be the best fit for them and their desires. Then, the final step in the transfer advising process was to help the students fill out all of the forms and fulfill all of the requirements that were necessary in order for them to transfer from the community college to the four year college or university of their choice.

#### *Academic Standing*

The second property was *academic standing*. Once a student’s desires and goals had been clarified, the participants proceeded to investigate the student’s academic standing in order to determine if the student’s desires and goals were realistic. The procedure involved consulting the student’s transcripts, comparing those transcripts with the STARS guide, and an evaluation of the student’s grade point average. Several of the participants mentioned that they encountered a

number of students who had unrealistic goals. For example, one participant recounted a number of students who wanted to transfer to selective universities, yet these students had grade point averages that were well below the necessary requirement for entrance to those institutions. Another participant mentioned that he had encountered several students who wanted to go into elite professions such as law or medicine, yet whose grade point averages were far beneath the minimum required for those professions. In cases such as these, the participants attempted to reorient the student's desires and help them develop goals which were more realistic. A number of the participants observed that many students had taken a lot of classes that would not transfer and other classes that did not count toward their major. In situations such as these, the participants spent energy to educate students to become familiar with the requirements of the STARS guide, to consult with the institution to which they desired to transfer, and to take care to organize their course schedules in a way that would keep them from having to spend extra time and money in the pursuit of their degree.

#### *Personal Characteristics*

The third property was *personal characteristics*. In the process of the student evaluation the participants used a variety of techniques to ascertain whether a student was emotionally and socially mature enough to leave home and take up residence in a university town. A second component of this property was designed to determine whether a student possessed the necessary drive and motivation to transition from a community college where success may be built into the system to a four-year institution where success was expected of the student by the system. As the participants explored the personal characteristics of the students they advised, they uncovered three strong characteristics in many of the students which they considered detrimental to academic success at a four-year institution.

The first characteristic was an academic weakness. The participants considered the average student they advised to be academically unready to tackle the rigors of academic life at a four-year institution. Some of this weakness pertained to being unprepared academically, but a more important part related to a cultural issue. One participant explained the issue in the following manner. He said, “Many community college students are accustomed to having bonus questions on tests, being told what they need to study before the test, and being allowed to do extra work at the end of a session in order to bring their grades up.” The participant believed that “these students will be hit with the cold reality that none of that takes place at a four year college or university and many community college students are not emotionally prepared to handle this.”

A second characteristic reported by several of the participants related to the fears that were reported in the cultural factors. According to the participants, many of the students they advised were very nervous about getting to the big university and not knowing where to go, what to do, or how to behave.”

A third characteristic uncovered by the participants corresponded to the cultural influence of insecurity and inferiority feelings with respect to others from outside of their community. Several participants noted that they spent a large amount of their time encouraging, motivating, and reassuring students that they were capable of being successful in their endeavor to obtain a bachelor’s degree. In fact, one participant registered her opinion that lack of confidence in themselves was the single greatest obstacle that students from smaller rural communities had to overcome in order to negotiate the transfer process successfully.

#### *Background*

The fourth property was *background*. Hovering above the student evaluation process was the unique background of each student. The participants acknowledged that several commonalities emerged as they engaged students in the transfer advising process. According to

the participants, many, if not most, of the students they encountered were not well prepared academically, many were not sufficiently mature emotionally, and many were not highly developed socially when compared with their counterparts from larger rural communities, from urban areas, and from metropolitan localities. The participants noted that these characteristics were detrimental to academic success and mentioned several reasons. The participants discovered that most of the students they advised came from families in which neither parent had attended college. The participants noted that many of the students they advised were not closely acquainted with anyone who had attended a four year college or university. The participants also observed that most of the students came from environments in which they were insulated culturally and isolated socially. According to the participants, these background influences were responsible for many of the issues which made it difficult for the students they advised to transfer successfully to a four year college or university.

### *Conclusion*

As the first two rounds of data collection and analysis drew to a conclusion the essence of the substantive theory emerged and its parameters began to take shape. A tentative decision was made to designate *student factors* as the core category. There were two primary reasons for this determination. The first reason was that every participant in the study strongly insisted that the student was the focus of the entire advising process. In the words of one participant “the advising process begins, ends, and revolves around the student as well as the student’s desires, wishes and goals.” In the words of another participant, “the advising process is controlled and governed by the student.” A second reason for designating *student factors* as the core category was because *student factors* was the one category which had deep penetrations into all of the other categories and functioned as the theoretical glue that gave adhesion to all five categories in a holistic

fashion. Also, the category *student factors* gave explanatory depth to the remaining four categories: *institutional factors*, *cultural factors*, *contextual factors*, and *adviser factors*. Finally, none of the other categories was able to produce the overall theoretical resonance which the category *student factors* was able to produce.

## CHAPTER IV: PROCESS FINDINGS

The fourth phase of the research design was labeled process analysis. The purpose of this phase was to draw together loose threads from the data, build variation into the theory, and account for the nature of the process as it was viewed from the perspective of the participants in the study. There were four steps involved in this analysis. The initial step was another review of the data including transcripts, memos, charts, diagrams, and other forms of data. The second step was to formulate the pieces of the theory and place them in a logical order. The third step presented the categories and the properties of the theory to the participants of the study for their feedback. Specifically, the participants were asked to give their opinions regarding the influence of the categories and properties of the theory as well as their opinions on the direction of that influence. In response to questions related to the nature of the influence which the properties exerted upon the transfer advising process the participants continually used the word “power” to describe their understanding of the nature of this influence. The participants further dimensionalized their understanding of this “power” by categorizing it along a spectrum which extended from weak to strong. The fourth step incorporated the analytic technique known as dimensional analysis (Schatzman, 1991) for the dual purposes of measuring the power and

direction of the properties on a continuum and also bringing to light the variation of each property in the theory.

### Components of the Theory

After a thorough review of the data, the following categories and their properties were assembled. These categories and their properties, along with a brief explanation, were presented to the participants in the study for their impressions.

#### *Institutional Factors*

The first category was *institutional factors* and was divided into two branches. The four-year institutional branch had three properties. *Communication* referred to the way in which representatives from four-year institutions responded to inquiries from students as well as inquiries initiated by the participants in the study. *Competence* concerned the knowledge of the transfer process and other matters involved in the transfer process as it was exhibited by the four-year institutions and their representatives. *Concern* represented the overall value which the four-year institutions and their representatives placed upon the well-being of transfer students.

The second branch of *the institutional factors* related to two year institutions and was comprised of six properties. *Personnel relationships* encompassed the personal relationships that the participants had with their supervisors and other members of the community colleges where they worked. *Support* involved the institution's willingness to assist the participants in areas related to the transfer advising process. *Environment* encompassed the overall atmosphere on campus as it related to encouraging students to transfer and also in facilitating the transfer advising process. *Organization* represented the degree to which the institution and its representatives worked to accomplish the overall mission of the institution and how this affected the transfer advising process. *Senior Leadership* represented the decisions and actions taken by

Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Deans to promote transfer among students and how these decisions and actions impacted the transfer advising process as a whole. *Partnerships* was comprised of those associations between community colleges and four-year institutions which were specifically designed to provide an infrastructure for the transfer process. These associations included online programs, visits to campus, and full time representatives on campus.

### *Cultural Factors*

The second category presented to the participants in the study was designated as *cultural factors* and was comprised of six properties. *Economic perceptions* related to the general attitudes toward education, the economic advantages that a bachelor's degree could provide and the overall influence which these attitudes exerted upon a student's decision to transfer to a four-year institution of higher education. *Ties to the geographical location* represented an unwillingness to leave the smaller rural community which is exhibited by those who live in these communities and how this affects a student's decision to transfer to a four year college or university. *Ties to the past* encompassed a general resistance to change that is characteristic of smaller rural communities and how this perception plays a role in a smaller rural community college student's decision to transfer and pursue a higher degree in education. *Fears* encompassed a number of elements that frighten people from smaller rural communities, including fear of outsiders, fear of failure, fear of rejection, and fear of ridicule. *Personal perceptions* referred to the image which people from smaller rural communities have of themselves in contrast to people from outside the smaller rural community. *Perceptions of outsiders* included the attitudes that people from smaller rural communities have concerning people from outside their community.

### *Contextual Factors*

The third category presented to the participants in the study was designated as *contextual factors* and was comprised of three properties. *Educational support* encompassed the encouragement or lack of encouragement a student received from family and others in the community where he or she resided. This property determined the student's knowledge of the transfer process and affected his or her motivation to pursue a higher degree in education. *Educational preparedness* incorporated the educational background and training a student received and determined whether he or she was capable of performing the caliber of scholastic work necessary to complete a bachelor's degree. *Educational affordability* included the economic environment which surrounded a student and determined whether his or her family would be able to pay the tuition and other expenses that are associated with transferring to a four-year institution of higher learning.

### *Adviser Factors*

The fourth category presented to the participants in the study was designated as *adviser factors* and was comprised of nine properties. *Transfer student* indicated whether the adviser was a transfer student. *First generation college student* indicated whether the adviser was the first person in his or her family to attend college. *Academic background* referred to the adviser's course of study as well as their overall experience as an undergraduate student. *Personal belief system* concerned the philosophical, social, and political views which motivated the adviser to engage in the activity of transfer advising. *Family background* revolved around the adviser's personal relationships with parents, siblings, and other family members. *Home town* indicated the type of community where the adviser was born and grew up. *Emotional investment* referred to the attachment which an adviser had to the students they advised and the impact the outcome

of the transfer advising process had upon them. *Training* concerned the preparation the advisers received from the National College Advising Corps (NCAC) as well as the preparation administered by the representatives of the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC). *Near peer advising* described the philosophy which believed that advisers, who were near in experienced and age to the students they advised, had advantages over those advisers who were more removed in experience and age from those students they advised.

#### *Student Factors*

The fifth category presented to the participants was designated as *student factors* and was comprised of four properties. This category represented the starting point of the transfer advising process and encompassed the first areas of investigation initiated by the advisers. *Goal formation* included an exploration of the student's desires and the transformation of those desires into academic and career goals. *Academic standing* regarded the student's grade point average and other factors related to the student's academic progress. *Personal characteristics* encompassed the student's emotional maturity and social skills. *Background* referred to the resulting impact which cultural and contextual factors had upon the student.

#### *Participant Responses*

The preceding categories with their constituent properties were presented to the participants in this study. The participants were first asked to give an indication concerning the power of each property. Specifically, the participants were asked to rank each property with respect to its influence upon the transfer process. The ranking scale extended from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating no influence and 10 indicating the highest influence (Appendices N, O, and P). It should be noted that one participant spent the first year of her involvement in the program at a smaller rural institution and the second year at a larger rural institution. In the process analysis,

this participant gave two sets of responses, one which applied to the smaller rural institution and the other which applied to the larger rural institution. For this reason, the responses in the charts number ten instead of nine. Second, the participants were asked to give an indication concerning the direction of the power inherent in each property. Specifically, the participants were asked to rank each property with respect to its direction of influence on the transfer process as negative or positive (Appendixes Q, R, and S). The ranking scale extended from 0 to 10, with 0 indicating the most negative influence and 10 indicating the most positive influence. The ensuing presentation adopts the following format. The first number represents the power of the factor's influence and the second number represents the direction of the influence. Three sets of numbers are listed. The first set of numbers relates to all participants, the second set of numbers relates to those participants who were situated in smaller rural institutions, and the third set of numbers relates to those participants who were located in larger rural institutions.

It should be noted that the number of participants involved in this study does not allow the data analysis to reach the level of statistical significance. However, for the purpose of theory generation the data analysis is sufficient to give a tentative indication of which direction the data may be pointing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A future study with a larger number of participants and more rigorous statistical measures could test this aspect of the theory to determine if there is statistical significance.

*Institutional Factors*

Table 2

*Process Analysis: Institutional Factors: Four Year: Communication*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.7	7.9	7.3
Direction	3.6	3.1	4.7

Overall, the *communication* property was moderately influential and moderately negative. There was a noticeable divergence between the influence this property exerted upon the transfer advising process in smaller rural community colleges and the influence it exerted in larger rural community colleges. The property was more influential and negative in smaller rural community college settings and less influential and virtually neutral in larger rural community college settings. This analysis quantified several observations made by the participants in the study. Specifically, the participants located at larger rural institutions noticed that students from those institutions were, as a general rule, more up to date and acquainted with the procedures involved in transferring to a four-year institution. On the other hand, participants at smaller rural institutions noticed that a lack of communication or bad communication from four-year institutions and their representatives was more influential and more negative in its impact upon students from smaller rural institutions.

Table 3

*Process Analysis: Institutional Factors: Four Year: Competence*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.1	7.1	7.0
Direction	3.7	3.1	5.0

Overall, the *competence* property was modestly influential and modestly negative in its influence. There was a noticeable difference in the impact this property exerted in smaller rural contexts and the impact it exerted in larger rural contexts. The property was moderately influential and moderately negative in smaller rural environments. In larger rural environments the property was considered modestly influential and neutral in its direction. This analysis quantified the perspective of many of the participants involved in the study. The participants in the study who worked at larger rural institutions considered students from those institutions to be more knowledgeable about negotiating the transfer process. On the other hand, participants who worked at smaller rural institutions considered students from those institutions to be less knowledgeable about negotiating the transfer process. As a result, a lack of competence on the part of four-year institutions and their representatives appeared to have a stronger influence and a more negative impact upon smaller rural community college students than it did upon students who attended larger rural community colleges.

Table 4

*Process Analysis: Institutional Factors: Four Year: Concern*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	6.7	6.9	6.3
Direction	3.9	3.7	4.3

Overall, the *concern* property was modestly influential and modestly negative in its direction. There was a slight difference in the impact this property exerted in smaller rural community colleges and the impact it exerted in larger rural community colleges. The property was moderately influential and moderately negative in smaller rural community colleges. In larger rural community colleges this property was only modestly influential and slightly negative in its direction. This analysis quantified the perspective of the participants involved in the study. The participants who worked in larger rural community colleges were of the opinion that students from those institutions, as a general rule, were more informed concerning the procedures involved in the transfer process. On the other hand, the participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges were of the opinion that students from those institutions were less informed concerning the procedures involved in the transfer process. As a result, a low degree of concern for students and their needs, as manifested by many four-year institutions and their representatives, seemed to have a stronger influence and a more negative impact upon students from smaller rural institutions than it did upon students from larger rural institutions.

Table 5

*Process Analysis: Institutional Factors: Two Year: Personnel Relationships*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.7	7.6	8.0
Direction	6.1	5.9	6.7

Overall, the *personnel relationships* property was moderately influential and modestly positive. There was a slight difference between the property's influence in smaller rural contexts and its influence in larger rural contexts. The property was slightly stronger and slightly more positive in larger rural community colleges than it was in smaller rural community colleges. This property seemed to be institution specific and there was not enough information to draw conclusions concerning whether or not this factor was affected by the size of the institution. The data involved in this property was, in all likelihood, skewed by one participant who had negative experiences in a smaller rural institution and then positive experiences in a larger rural institution. Some participants who worked at larger rural community colleges suggested that these institutions were more formal, and therefore, personnel relationships were less problematic. However, that suggestion was not corroborated by the participants who had positive experiences at smaller rural community colleges.

Table 6

*Process Analysis: Institutional Factors: Two Year: Support*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.4	8.7	7.7
Direction	6.2	6.1	6.3

Overall, the *support* property was very influential but only modestly positive. There was a slight difference between the influence this property exerted upon the transfer advising process in larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted in smaller rural community colleges. This property seemed to be institution specific and did not appear to be affected by the size of the institution. This analysis reflected the participants' comments concerning this property. All the participants agreed that institutional support was extremely important for the transfer advising process which explains the high ranking given for the power question. However, a number of participants did not feel that the institutional support they received was very effective which explains the lower ranking given for the direction question.

Table 7

*Process Analysis: Institutional Factors: Two Year: Environment*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.5	7.6	7.3
Direction	5.8	5.6	6.3

Overall, the *environment* property was moderately influential and slightly positive. There was a slight difference between the property's direction in smaller rural community colleges and the direction which it exerted with respect to larger rural community colleges. In all likelihood, the property is institution specific and is not affected by the size of the institution. However, a number of participants who worked in larger rural community colleges were of the opinion that these institutions were more organized, and thereby, had an environment that was more

conducive for the transfer advising process. This would serve to explain the slightly higher ranking participants from larger rural institutions gave to the direction question.

Table 8

*Process Analysis: Institutional Factors: Two Year: Organization*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.0	7.0	7.0
Direction	5.8	5.9	5.7

Overall, the *organization* property was moderately influential and modestly positive. This property appeared to be institution specific and there was virtually no difference between its impact in smaller rural community colleges and its impact in larger rural community colleges. This analysis quantified the participants' observation that overall organization of the community college played a minor but modestly positive role in affecting the transfer advising process.

Table 9

*Process Analysis: Institutional Factors: Two Year: Senior Leadership*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	6.7	6.4	7.3
Direction	5.9	5.9	6.0

Overall, the *senior leadership* property was modestly influential and slightly positive in its direction. The property was slightly more influential in larger rural community colleges than it was in smaller rural community colleges. However, the direction of the influence was virtually the same in both types of institutions. This property appeared to be institution specific and did

not seem to be affected by the size of the institution. This analysis quantified one particular observation that was made by the participants involved in the study. That observation was that senior leaders, as a general rule, were not involved in the transfer advising process.

Table 10

*Process Analysis: Institutional Factors: Two Year: Partnerships*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	3.4	3.1	4.0
Direction	5.1	5.0	5.3

Overall, the *partnerships* property did not register as very influential and its direction was neutral. There was little divergence between the impact this property had upon smaller rural community colleges and the impact it had upon larger rural community colleges. This analysis quantified three observations that the participants in the study made with respect to this property. The first observation was that partnerships between two year community colleges and four year colleges or universities held great potential for exerting a strong positive influence upon the transfer advising process. However, there were two issues that were presently preventing that influence from being realized. The first was the infancy of some of the partnerships such as online programs. The second issue was a lack of initiative in longer standing programs such as visits to campus and full time four-year institution representatives on community college campuses.

*Cultural Factors*

Table 11

*Process Analysis: Cultural Factors: Economic Perceptions*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.0	7.6	5.7
Direction	3.6	2.6	6.0

Overall, the *economic perceptions* property was moderately influential and moderately negative. However, there was a dramatic difference between the influence this property exerted in smaller rural community colleges and the influence it exerted in larger rural community colleges. In larger rural community colleges the property had a slight influence that was modestly positive. However, in smaller rural community colleges this property exerted a moderately strong influence that was strongly negative. This analysis quantified a key observation made by the participants in the study. The participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges observed that in smaller rural communities there were few jobs which could be secured by college graduates that would pay them a higher wage than other individuals who did not possess a college degree. Therefore, since there was little to no economic advantage in transferring to a four-year institution, there was little to no incentive for students from smaller rural community colleges to transfer to a four year college or university. However, those participants who worked in larger rural community colleges observed the opposite. The participants who worked in larger rural community colleges noticed that, since there were higher paying jobs available in the larger rural communities, there was incentive for community college

students who attended those institutions to transfer to a four-year institution. Thus the direction of this property was positive in larger rural community colleges.

Table 12

*Process Analysis: Cultural Factors: Ties to the Location*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.2	9.0	6.3
Direction	3.0	2.1	5.0

Overall, the *ties to the location* property was one of the strongest influences on the transfer advising process. There was a dramatic difference between the impact which this property exerted upon the students from smaller rural community colleges and the impact it exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges. This property was only slightly influential and neutral in its direction with respect to students from larger rural institutions. However, this property recorded the highest strength rating and the most negative direction rating in the study upon students from smaller rural institutions. This analysis quantified two observations which were made by the participants in this study. Those participants who worked at smaller rural community colleges noticed that students from those institutions were extremely insulated culturally and extremely isolated from outside influences. Participants who worked in larger rural community colleges were of the opinion that students from those institutions were not so insulated culturally and not so isolated from outside influences. As a result, students from smaller rural community colleges appeared to be more emotionally attached to the geographical location. Thus, the possibility of leaving that area and relocating to a strange place, seemed to exert a strong negative influence upon their willingness to transfer to a four-year institution. The

participants who worked at larger rural community colleges observed that cultural insulation and the social isolation was less of an issue with students from those institutions. Thus, the emotional attachment to the geographical location did not seem to be significantly strong with respect to these students. As a result, this property did not appear to exert a strong influence upon students from larger rural community colleges.

Table 13

*Process Analysis: Cultural Factors: Ties to the Past*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.1	8.9	6.3
Direction	3.0	2.1	5.0

Overall, the *ties to the past* property was extremely influential and strongly negative in its direction. There was a dramatic difference in the influence which this property exerted in smaller rural community colleges and the influence it exerted in larger rural community colleges. The property was mildly influential and neutral in its direction with respect to students from larger rural community colleges. However, this property was extremely strong and extremely negative with respect to its influence upon students from smaller rural community colleges. This analysis quantified the observations that the participants made with respect to the influence which this property exerted upon the transfer advising process. The participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges observed that, due to the cultural insulation and the isolation from outside influences, students from those institutions were strongly accustomed to life as it presently exists and less open to change in general and different ideas in particular. As a result, this mindset made students from smaller rural community colleges reluctant to transfer to a four-

year institution. On the other hand, the participants who worked at larger community colleges observed that students from those institutions were less influenced by this mindset and, as a result, were less tied to the past and less reluctant to transfer to a four-year institution.

Table 14

*Process Analysis: Cultural Factors: Fears*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.6	8.1	6.3
Direction	2.9	2.0	5.0

Overall, the *fears* property was moderately influential and moderately negative. There was a dramatic difference between the effect this property was perceived to have in smaller rural community colleges and the effect it was perceived to have in larger rural community colleges. In larger rural community colleges the property was perceived by those who worked in these institutions to have a mild influence which was neutral in its direction. However, this property was perceived by those who worked in smaller rural community colleges to be extremely influential and extremely negative on students who attended those institutions. This analysis quantified several of the observations that the participants in the study made with respect to the influence this property exerted upon the transfer advising process. The participants who worked in smaller community colleges noted that, due to being insulated culturally and isolated from outside influences, students from those institutions had strong fears of the unknown, of outsiders, and of ridicule, all of which exerted a strong negative influence upon their endeavors to transfer to a four-year institution. On the other hand, the participants who worked in larger rural community colleges noticed that the effects of cultural insulation and social isolation was less

rigid in those institutions and led to fewer fears and thus, a less negative influence upon those students' willingness to transfer to a four-year institution.

*Table 15*

*Process Analysis: Cultural Factors: Personal Perceptions*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.8	8.6	6.0
Direction	3.1	2.3	5.0

Overall, the *personal perceptions* property was modestly influential and modestly negative in its direction. However, there was a strong difference between the influence this property exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges. For students from larger rural community colleges this property was slightly influential and neutral in its direction. For students from smaller rural community colleges this property was strongly influential and strongly negative in its direction. This analysis quantified what the participants in the study observed with respect to students from smaller rural communities. The participants who worked at smaller rural community colleges stated that, as a result of cultural insulation and social isolation, students from those institutions were characterized by a feeling of inferiority with respect to individuals from outside of their community and that these feelings of inferiority functioned as a deterrent with respect to the transfer advising process. The participants who worked at larger community colleges observed that this sense of inferiority was not present to any large degree in students who attended those institutions.

Table 16

*Process Analysis: Perceptions of Outsiders*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.5	8.0	6.3
Direction	3.3	2.6	5.0

Overall, the *perceptions of outsiders* property was moderately influential and moderately negative. There was a strong difference between the influence that this property exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges. This property was modestly influential and neutral in its direction with respect to students from larger rural community colleges. However, this property was very influential and very negative with respect to students from smaller rural community colleges. This analysis quantified what the participants stated in regard to students from smaller rural community colleges. The participants who worked at smaller rural community colleges remarked that a strong distrust and an intense skepticism toward educated people in general and people from outside the community, functioned as a negative influence upon the transfer advising process as it involved students from those institutions. The participants who worked at larger rural community colleges noted that these perceptions of outsiders were not as pronounced in the lives of students from those institutions.

*Contextual Factors*

Table 17

*Process Analysis: Contextual Factors: Educational Support*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.2	8.6	7.3
Direction	3.5	2.1	6.7

Overall, *the educational support* property was strongly influential and modestly negative. There was an extremely wide divergence between the influence which this property exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges. The property was moderately influential and modestly positive with respect to students from larger rural community colleges. However, this property was extremely influential and extremely negative with respect to students from smaller rural community colleges. This analysis quantified two key observations made by the participants who participated in this study. The first observation made by participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges was that students from those institutions came from environments in which most of their parents had never attended college and in which educational advancement was not a common phenomenon, both of which exerted a negative influence upon the transfer advising process. The second observation made by participants who worked at larger community colleges was that a somewhat less intense situation actually had a positive influence upon the transfer advising process with respect to students from those institutions.

Table 18

*Process Analysis: Contextual Factors: Educational Preparedness*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.4	8.9	7.3
Direction	2.9	1.4	6.3

Overall, the *educational preparedness* property was rated very influential and moderately negative. However, there was a wide divergence between the influence this property exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges. With respect to students from larger rural community colleges, this property was moderately influential and slightly positive. With respect to students from smaller rural community colleges, this property was extremely influential and extremely negative. In fact, this property received the most negative ranking of all the properties which comprised this theory. This analysis quantified the observations made by the participants in the study. The participants who worked at smaller rural community colleges remarked that students from these institutions, as a general rule, were academically underprepared and that they believed many were not capable of doing the caliber of scholastic work necessary to complete a bachelor's degree. The participants who worked at larger rural community colleges noted that this was less the case with students from those institutions. In fact, some of participants who worked at larger rural community colleges were of the opinion that students from larger rural institutions were, in many instances, adequately prepared to perform the caliber of scholastic work required to complete a bachelor's degree.

Table 19

*Process Analysis: Contextual Factors: Educational Affordability*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.1	8.4	7.3
Direction	3.8	2.6	6.7

Overall, the *educational affordability* property was moderately influential and modestly negative in its direction. However, there was a large difference between the influence this property exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges. The property registered a moderately strong influence which was slightly positive with respect to students from larger rural community colleges. With respect to students from smaller rural community colleges this property registered a strong influence that was moderately negative. This analysis quantified the comments that the participants made with respect to economic conditions in the rural communities. With respect to smaller rural community colleges, the participants who worked at those institutions considered that students and their families, on the whole, lacked the financial resources necessary to pay for tuition and the other expenditures associated with obtaining a bachelor's degree. On the other hand, the participants who worked at larger rural community colleges did not find that students and their families, on the whole, lacked the necessary resources to pay for tuition and the other expenditures associated with obtaining a bachelor's degree.

*Adviser Factors*

Table 20

*Process Analysis: Adviser Factors: Transfer Student*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.0	8.3	7.3
Direction	7.9	8.0	7.7

Overall, the *transfer student* property was strongly influential and strongly positive in its direction. There was a moderate difference between the influence this property exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges. The property exerted a moderate influence that was moderately positive with respect to students from larger rural community colleges. However, the property exerted a strong influence that was strongly positive with respect to students from smaller rural community colleges. This analysis quantified several observations which the participants in this study made with regard to students from rural community colleges. The participants who worked at smaller community colleges acknowledged that being transfer students played a strongly positive role in their efforts to assist students from these institutions to navigate the transfer process. The participants who worked in larger rural community colleges also acknowledged that being a transfer student played a positive role in their efforts to assist students from those institutions in navigating the transfer process, but did not consider the advantage to be extraordinary.

Table 21

*Process Analysis: Adviser Factors: First Generation College Student*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.8	8.0	7.3
Direction	8.7	7.9	7.7

Overall, the *first generation college student* property was a strongly influential and strongly positive. There was not a lot of difference between the influence this property exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges. This analysis quantified one of the statements made by the participants in this study. The participants in the study were of the opinion that their experience as first generation college students was an advantage in assisting students who were also first generation college students, regardless of whether they were from larger rural institutions or smaller rural institutions.

Table 22

*Process Analysis: Adviser Factor: Academic Background*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.3	8.4	8.0
Direction	8.1	8.1	8.0

Overall, the *academic background* property exerted a strong influence which was also strongly positive in its direction. In fact, this property was the strongest positive influence across both smaller rural and larger rural sectors. There was only a slight difference between the

influence that this property exerted upon students who attended larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students who attended smaller rural community colleges. This analysis quantified one of the statements made by the participants in the study. The participants in this study felt that their experiences as undergraduate students played a positive role in helping them to assist students who were attempting to navigate the transfer process.

Table 23

*Process Analysis: Adviser Factors: Personal Belief System*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	6.7	6.6	7.0
Direction	7.2	7.1	7.3

Overall, the *personal belief system* property was modestly influential and modestly positive with regard to the impact it exerted upon the transfer advising process. There was not a lot of difference between the influence this property exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges. This analysis appeared to reveal that this property, more than any other property, was specific to the individual participant, and also quantified two observations made by the participants in this study. The participants stated that their personal beliefs exerted a strong motivating influence upon them personally which moved them to desire to be in a program in which they assisted students in the transfer process. However, each participant acknowledged that they took preventative measures not to allow their individual beliefs to influence the students they were advising.

Table 24

*Process Analysis: Adviser Factors: Family Background*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.8	8.1	7.3
Direction	7.7	8.0	7.0

Overall, the *family background* property exerted a moderate influence that was moderately positive upon the transfer advising process. There was a slight difference between the influence this property exerted upon participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon participants who worked in larger rural community colleges. This result was due to one participant who skewed the data and not to an institutional difference. Otherwise, this analysis quantified the majority of the participants' belief that their relationships with their parents and siblings played a positive role in equipping them to assist students in the transfer process.

Table 25

*Process Analysis: Adviser Factors: Home Town*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.2	8.6	7.3
Direction	7.7	8.3	6.3

Overall, the *home town* property exerted one of the strongest positive influences on the transfer advising process. However, there was a strong divergence between the influence this

property exerted upon students who attended larger rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students who attended smaller rural community colleges. Participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges felt that this property exerted a very strong and very positive influence upon students who attended those institutions. Participants who worked at larger rural community colleges felt that this property exerted a strong but moderately positive influence on students who attended those institutions. This analysis quantified several beliefs which the participants had with respect to their home town of origin. The participants, on the whole, felt that their experience of coming from a smaller rural community enabled them to understand the cultural mindset of students from smaller rural communities and thus, placed them in an advantageous position when it came to assisting these students with the transfer process. On the other hand, the participants felt that their background of coming from a smaller rural community was a modest advantage when it came to assisting students from larger rural community colleges with the transfer process, but not to the degree that it aided them in assisting students from smaller rural community colleges.

Table 26

*Process Analysis: Adviser Factors: Emotional Investment*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.3	7.6	6.7
Direction	7.1	7.4	6.3

Overall, the *emotional investment* property was moderately influential and moderately positive in its direction. There was a slight divergence between the influence this property exerted in smaller rural community colleges and the influence it exerted in larger rural

community colleges. In smaller rural community colleges this property exerted a moderately strong influence that was moderately positive in its direction. In larger rural community colleges the property had a modestly strong influence that was modestly positive. This analysis quantified two observations made by the participants in the study. The first observation was that participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges tended to have a higher emotional investment because students in those institutions tended to be in more need of assistance and, as a result, a higher emotional investment on the part of the participants had a stronger influence that was more positive. On the other hand, participants who worked in larger rural community colleges tended to have a moderate level of emotional investment because students in those institutions tended to be in less need of assistance and, as a result, the emotional investment on the part of the participants had a less strong influence that was slightly less positive.

Table 27

*Process Analysis: Adviser Factors: Training*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	5.9	6.0	5.7
Direction	5.1	5.0	5.3

Overall, the *training* property was only slightly influential and the direction of the influence was neutral. There was only a slight difference between the influence this property had with respect to participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges and participants who worked in larger rural community colleges. This analysis quantified two observations made by the participants in the study. The first observation related to the training received from the National College Advising Corps (NCAC). The participants felt that, due to the fact that the

national training was geared toward individuals who were intended to work with high school students, it was not applicable to those individuals who were working with community college students. The second observation related to the training the participants received from the representatives of the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC). The participants felt that, since the advising of community college students concerning transfer issues was so new and student specific, it was virtually impossible to train someone for this work. However, a number of participants remarked that as information was collected from the first participants in the program that it would inform administrators concerning some of the specific issues encountered and would enable the training of future participants to be more specific, more focused, and more effective.

Table 28

*Process Analysis: Adviser Factors: Near Peer Advising*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	8.3	9.2	7.3
Direction	8.1	9.1	7.7

Overall, the *near peer advising* property was very strong in its influence and very positive in its direction. In fact, this property manifested the strongest influence overall. It also exhibited the most variation between its influence in smaller rural community colleges and its influence in larger rural community colleges. In larger rural community colleges the property was modestly influential and slightly positive in its direction. Some of this divergence could be explained by the fact that two of the participants who worked in larger rural community colleges did not consider themselves to be near peers and thus, considered the property not to apply to

them or the institutions where they worked. Other parts of this divergence might be explained by one observation made by the participants in the study. The participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges remarked that students from those institutions were, as a general rule, less prepared to negotiate the transfer process. Participants who worked in larger community colleges felt that students from those institutions, as a general rule, were better prepared to negotiate the transfer process. As a result, students from smaller rural community colleges appear to have been more dependent upon others to assist them in navigating the transfer process. As such, the near peer advising philosophy seemed to have exerted a more strongly positive influence with students from those institutions.

*Student Factors*

Table 29

*Process Analysis: Student Factors: Goal Formation*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.3	7.6	6.7
Direction	5.2	5.3	5.0

Overall, the *goal formation* property was moderately influential and virtually neutral in its direction. There was a slight divergence between this property’s influence in larger rural community colleges and its influence in smaller rural community colleges. This property was a little more influential in smaller rural institutions but virtually neutral with respect to its direction in both smaller rural and larger rural institutions.

Table 30

*Process Analysis: Student Factors: Academic Standing*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	6.8	6.9	6.7
Direction	5.0	5.0	5.0

Overall, the *academic standing* property was modestly influential and completely neutral in its direction. There was a slight difference between the influence this property exerted in smaller rural community colleges and the influence it exerted in larger rural community colleges. In both smaller rural and larger rural institutions this property was modestly influential and neutral in its direction.

Table 31

*Process Analysis: Student Factors: Personal Characteristics*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.1	7.0	7.3
Direction	4.7	4.6	5.0

Overall, the *personal characteristics* property was modestly influential and slightly negative in its direction. There was a small divergence between the influence this property exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges. This analysis quantified an observation made by the participants in the study. The participants who worked in smaller rural community colleges remarked that students from those institutions were, on the whole, less emotionally mature and

less socially adaptable. The participants who worked at larger community colleges did not feel that this was the case with students who attended larger rural institutions.

Table 32

*Process Analysis: Student Factors: Background*

	Overall	Smaller Rural	Larger Rural
Strength	7.5	7.6	7.3
Direction	4.8	4.4	5.7

Overall, the *background* property was moderately influential and virtually neutral in its direction. There was a noticeable divergence between the influence this property exerted upon students from smaller rural community colleges and the influence it exerted upon students from larger rural community colleges. The property exerted an influence that was moderately influential and slightly negative upon students in smaller rural community colleges. However, the property exerted a modest influence with a slightly positive direction with respect to students from larger rural community colleges. This divergence probably was due to the fact that cultural and contextual factors exercised a negative influence upon students from smaller rural institutions and exercised a more neutral influence upon students from larger rural institutions.

Conclusion

The participants in the study remarked that it was difficult to determine how influential the category of *student factors* were and whether the influence was positive or negative. The participants indicated that each student was a unique case and that with certain students some properties of the category *student factors* were strongly influential and other properties were less influential. Along the same lines, the participants noted that with certain students some

properties from the category *student factors* exerted a positive influence and other factors exerted a negative influence. According to the participants in the study, the students they advised did not exist as a uniform group. The participants remarked that the students were the recipients of all the other influences and, as a general rule, only exerted a minimum influence themselves. For this reason it was difficult for the participants in the study to determine which properties of the category *student factors* were influential and which were not influential. Likewise, it was equally difficult for the participants to determine which properties of the category *student factors* were positive and which properties of the category *student factors* were negative. The participants stated that there was not a uniform picture when it came to the strength or the direction of the category *student factors*. The participants viewed the category *student factors* as a category which primarily received the influences generated by the other categories. This state of affairs, once again, lent credibility to the category of *student factors* as the core category of the theory of influences upon the transfer advising process in rural community colleges, hence forth referred to as the *influence theory*.

## CHAPTER V: THEORETICAL FINDINGS

The theoretical literature in the substantive area of academic advising was consulted for the first time during the fifth phase of the study. The purpose of this phase of the research design was to place the findings of this study into the larger framework of the field of academic advising. The goal was to determine at what points the *influence theory* aligned with extant theories, diverged from extant theories, and at what points this theory made significant contributions to the field of academic advising. It was discovered that there were not any substantive theories which were devoted to the specific area of transfer advising. So, the theoretical net was cast wider in order to incorporate existing theories of academic advising in general. The findings of this review were enlightening and are presented below.

Academic advising has been around in some fashion since the beginning of American higher education in 1636 (Frost, 2000). In the early years of academia, tutors functioned in much the same capacity as near peer advisors. In the antebellum era of the 1870s electives were introduced into the curriculum, faculty specialization occurred, and a rigid separation between faculty and students resulted (Bush, 1969). Over the next century a host of individuals, including faculty members, campus psychologists, and college chaplains advised students with regard to a variety of academic, social, and personal matters (Rudolph, 1962). In 1972, two articles appeared

which marked the first occasion when those who were doing advising began to compare and contrast their methods and approaches with those of other institutions (Kuhn, 2008). The two authors, Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972), ushered in the era of academic advising as a formal field of examined activity. In 1979 the initiation of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) solidified the field of academic advising as a credible field of research and gave it direction as well as an outlet for publishing and disseminating research findings.

### The Literature on Academic Advising

The study of academic advising is still in its infancy. As an area of scholarly specialization (Creamer, 2000; Frost, 2000; Kuhn, 2008), it is only 40 years old. As a result, the theoretical literature on transfer advising is virtually nonexistent at this point in time. The literature in the broader field of academic advising is sparse but gaining momentum. Five approaches to academic advising have been distinguished in the research literature. Those approaches are prescriptive advising, developmental advising, deficit remediation advising, strengths based advising, and academic centered advising.

### *Prescriptive Advising Versus Developmental Advising*

Of the two original articles written upon the topic of academic advising the article by Crookston (1972) has received greater notoriety. In this article the author contrasts what he sees as two competing approaches to academic advising. The first approach he described as prescriptive advising and the second approach he designated as developmental advising. It is important to mention at the outset that prescriptive advising was a foil against which Crookston established his own model, which is developmental advising. As Lowenstein (2005) noted, the prescriptive approach has no advocates or adherents, although that does not mean that it has no practitioners.

In the prescriptive approach the advisor tells the student which actions to undertake. The student's responsibility is to follow these directives. The flow of information in the prescriptive approach is in one direction, from the advisor to the student. Crookston (1972) described this relationship using the metaphor of a doctor/patient relationship. The patient has an ailment and describes the malady to the doctor. The doctor diagnoses the illness and prescribes the remedy. The patient then follows the doctor's orders in order to cure the illness. In a similar fashion, the student comes to the advisor and describes his situation. The advisor diagnoses the problem and tells the student what he needs to do. The student's responsibility is to follow the advisor's advice.

Crookston (1972) enlarged upon the prescriptive approach by describing three specific areas in which it was applied. The first area was abilities. The prescriptive advisor examines past records and interprets test scores, not as predictors of large populations, but as predictions for the individual student. The second area was motivation. The prescriptive advisor assumes that students are not very motivated and need to be controlled, directed, and issued incentives. The third area was maturity. The prescriptive advisor views the student as immature, irresponsible, and incapable of making sound decisions. As such, the student needs to be told what to do by someone who is more knowledgeable and possesses more experience.

In contrast to the prescriptive approach, Crookston (1972) presented the developmental approach to academic advising. Crookston based his approach upon the foundation of Chickering's Seven Vectors of Development (1969). In this way developmental advising takes a broader perspective of academic advising. Crookston's model described advising as encompassing more than a simple vocational decision. Instead, the developmental approach to advising included the student's rational processes, environmental, and interpersonal interactions,

behavioral awareness, problem solving, decision making, and evaluating skills. The design of developmental advising is to help students develop a life plan, within which a vocational decision is a small part. The focus of developmental advising is upon the needs of the student in determining how the advising process will proceed (Hagen & Jordan, 2008). The developmental advisor assists the student in reaching an awareness of his personal values, characteristics, and needs (Gardiner, 1994). The flow of information is two directional as the student and the advisor interact in a communicative endeavor which will seek to achieve the goals of student development. The ultimate result of developmental advising is the creation of a plan for personal growth and fulfillment. The metaphor of a consultant/client relationship is an appropriate analogy. A client has a goal in mind and he approaches a consultant concerning his desires. The consultant, working with the client, assists the client in establishing a plan that will help the client achieve his desired goal. In a similar manner, a student approaches an advisor with his desires and goals. The developmental advisor, working interactively with the student, helps the student develop a plan that will achieve those goals.

In contrast to prescriptive advising, developmental advising takes a different view of a student's abilities, motivation, and maturity. The developmental advisor looks for potential within the student (Crookston, 1972). Records and test scores are indicators of some things that are known about a student but the student's potential for growth is not revealed by these instruments. Concerning motivation, the developmental advisor suspends judgment and does not allow preconceived notions of college students in general to color his perception of individual students. Instead, the developmental advisor allows the student to reveal his motivational level by means of his actions. Finally, the developmental advisor sees the student as a growing, maturing, responsible, and capable individual (Crookston). The developmental advisor shifts

decision making responsibility to the student by providing him with information and helping him to develop his problem solving and decision making skills.

Writing contemporaneously with Crookston (1972), O'Banion (1972) created a similar approach to academic advising. O'Banion was, likewise, influenced by Chickering's Seven Vectors of Development (1969) and also viewed academic advising as a relationship between the advisor and the student that could be viewed as a partnership in which the advisor provided information to the student and created a climate in which the student could make responsible decisions. O'Banion's model was based upon a logical sequence of steps that followed in the advising process. These five steps included exploration of life goals, exploration of vocational goals, program choice, course choice, and scheduling of courses.

In the aftermath of the seminal works by Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) developmental advising has followed the trajectories taken in the field of student development research. Specifically, developmental advising has followed three paths. One path has focused upon student identity development and has adapted a variety of psychosocial theories which include Erickson's Eight Stages of Negative Reinforcement (1963), Chickering and Reisser's Seven Vectors of Development (1993), along with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978). A second path has focused upon how students think, reason, and create meaning. These approaches have adapted a variety of cognitive development theories which include Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (1969) as well as similar theories which were developed for understanding women (Gilligan, 1982), Asian American students (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2002), Black Identity Formation (Cross, 1995), Homosexual Identity Formation (Cass, 1979), and Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Formation (D'Augelli, 1994). A third path has focused upon differences in personality types and how individuals adapt to educational and work

environments. These models have adapted a variety of typology theories which include the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (1985) and Kolb's Learning Styles (1984).

### *Deficit Remediation Advising Versus Strengths Based Advising*

A second dichotomy of advising approaches is between what is known as strengths based advising and weakness based or deficit remediation advising. The strengths based approach was formed in opposition to the deficit remediation approach (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Strengths based advising is predicated on helping students discover their natural talents and acquire confidence, skills, and knowledge to succeed at the college level (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005) According to its advocates, strengths based advising is similar to developmental advising in that both approaches advise beyond purely academic matters. However, the strengths based approach differs from the developmental approach in that it is based upon student motivation rather than focusing upon problems that need to be solved.

In reality, there is no weakness based approach that has advocates or adherents. However, once again, this does not mean that the approach has no practitioners. The weakness based approach or deficit remediation approach is a foil against which the strengths based approach can be articulated. It is asserted that the foundational assumption underlying much of higher education is that deficit remediation is the most effective strategy for enabling students to complete a higher degree (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). As a result, the generally accepted strategy is to teach students how to overcome deficits and take advantage of support services (Abelman & Molina, 2002). The actual beginning of this approach seems to have been located in intrusive advising which was designed with at risk students in mind. At risk students include students from low socioeconomic families, students from ethnic or minority groups, students who were academically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities, cognitive problems, or

psychological issues (Miller & Murray, 2005). In essence, intrusive advising was aimed at intervening with students who had one or more conditions which could interfere with academic success. Intrusive advising was designed to be a proactive, action oriented model (Earl, 1987). However, the model appeared, for a variety of reasons, to mutate into a deficit remediation model that could be applied to the student population at large (Upkraft & Kramer, 1995).

In contrast with developmental advising, the strengths based approach shifts the focus away from the area of needs to the area of motivation. In contrast with a deficit remediation approach to advising, the strengths based approach shifts the focus away from weaknesses to talents and seeks forms of engagement. A student's talents are used as a basis for motivation (Anderson & McGuire, 1997). Strengths based advising helps a student discover her talents by asking questions such as "what do you enjoy doing?" "what are you good at doing?" and "what would you see yourself happy doing?" The next step is to help students gain an awareness and appreciation of their strengths. The third step is to discuss the student's aspirations and help them determine which of their talent themes they want to develop further. The fourth step is to help the student develop an action plan or a personal success plan (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). Another important facet of strengths based advising is teaching students how to transfer strengths from one setting to another (Clifton & Anderson, 2002). In conclusion, strengths based advising has three distinguishing characteristics. First, it is based upon student motivation rather than needs assessment. Second, it is focused upon possibilities rather than problems. Third, it is concerned with capitalizing on a student's talents rather than remediating weaknesses (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005).

### *Academic-centered Advising*

Another approach to academic advising arose in reaction to developmental advising. This approach was championed by Lowenstein (2005) among others and focuses advising exclusively around academic matters. Lowenstein (1999) contrasted what we are designating as academic centered advising with developmental advising by noting that developmental advising centered its attention upon the student's personal growth while academic centered advising focused its attention upon the student's academic learning. One of the characteristics of academic centered advising is to describe itself with a gerund. Lowenstein's (2005) designation is "advising as teaching" and Melander (2005) described his version of the method as "advising as educating." A number of other descriptions were used to describe this approach. These descriptions included "faculty centered advising," "curriculum centered advising," "learning based advising," and "mission centered advising." Another metaphor used was that of a coach/player relationship. A coach has an authoritative position over a player but, at the same time is closely related to the player and interacts with the player. The objective is for the coach to assist the player in utilizing his skills and talents to produce a valuable outcome on the playing field. According to Lowenstein (2005), advisors should teach students the logic of the curriculum which will empower them along the pathway to lifelong learning. As such, academic centered advising is learning based and curriculum focused. The ultimate desired outcome of the academic centered approach to advising is to assist the student in creating personalized meaning out of the curriculum that will fit her goals and desires. Hemwall and Trachte (2005) suggested that the institution's mission statement should be used as a teaching text to help students set their learning goals.

### *Summary*

During the analysis of the theoretical literature, three observations emerged. The first observation concerned terminology. The second observation concerned theory generation. The third observation related to theoretical grounding. Each of these observations played a pivotal role in explaining the state of the research in the field of academic advising. These observations established the points at which this present research endeavor made a significant contribution to the theoretical literature in the field of academic advising.

The initial observation from the analysis of the theoretical literature was that there was a lack of precision in the terminology used by scholars to describe their research findings as well as the research findings of other scholars. Culled from the literature an array of terms was found to describe the products of research in the field of academic advising. These terms included theory, style, approach, method, model, philosophy, and technique. Throughout the literature, these terms were used interchangeably, as though they were synonymous. In reality, these terms are far from synonyms. A philosophy is transformative in the sense that it is intended to advocate a particular way of thinking (Rorty, 1998). A model is a prescriptive guide which arranges tasks to be carried out in the process of engaging in a specific activity (Maxwell, 2005). A theory presents a systematic view of a phenomenon with the purpose of explaining the nature of that phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). The operative word is “explanation.” Philosophies advocate, models prescribe, and theories explain.

Concerning theoretical generation, it was observed that the findings of research in the theoretical literature adopted theories from other fields of scientific inquiry and applied them to the field of academic advising. Developmental advising adopted a variety of theories taken from the field of student development. Strengths based advising adopted an array of theories taken

from the fields of business management and the social sciences. Academic centered advising adopted a number of theories that were developed in the fields of education and psychology. The offerings set forth in the theoretical literature were not theories in the sense that they attempted to explain a phenomenon, in this case the process of academic advising. Likewise, they were not theories in the sense that they attempted to present a neutral, objective, and unbiased explanation of a phenomenon that was free from a priori assumptions.

Concerning theoretical grounding, it was observed that the offerings of the theoretical literature were grounded in theories which were not originally developed to describe or explain the process of academic advising. Instead of theories, the early efforts of research in the field of academic advising have produced models of advising that advocate a specific philosophy of advising as a preferred approach (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972; Lowenstein, 2005; Melander, 2005; Schreiner & Anderson, 2005). The offerings from the field of academic advising were not grounded in data that were collected and analyzed from the field of academic advising. Rather, they were models which were adapted from theories that were generated to explain phenomena that were originally unrelated to academic advising. As a result, there are many inconsistencies in the models which prompt writers in the field to encourage practitioners in the field to use a variety of the models in order to complete the advising process.

Ideally, a consistent model or method should be developed from a theory which was generated within the field of inquiry. This has not taken place within the field of academic advising. Instead, theory has been bypassed and models have been generated from personal observations combined with theories which were developed to explain phenomena that were vastly different from academic advising. It is necessary to conclude that these observations explain the reason why much confusion presently exists in the field of academic advising. It is

also interesting to observe that this assessment of the state of research in the field of academic advising has also been observed by those scholars whose writings have been entrusted with the task of chronicling the progress of research in the field. Creamer (2000) and Frost (2000) both concurred that there were no theories of academic advising that were currently available. Demetriou (2005) saw the need for developing a unified theory of advising and most recently Kuhn (2008) along with Hagen and Jordan (2008) stated that an overarching theory of academic advising was needed but that no such theory existed.

#### Participant Reaction to the Literature on Academic Advising

The models of advising that were set forth in the theoretical literature can be categorized along the following lines: prescriptive advising, developmental advising, deficit remediation advising, strengths based advising, and academic centered advising. A brief description of each advising model was given and each participant was asked to give his or her reaction to each model. This question was followed up with three subsequent questions. The participants were asked which of the extant models best described the advising philosophy of the institution where they worked. Then the participants were asked which of the extant models best described the model they employed in their daily role as transfer advisers. Finally, when the participant's advising model differed from the advising philosophy of the institution where they worked, the participant was asked to comment upon the reasons for the differences (see Appendix F).

The researcher presented the descriptions of the different models in a neutral fashion so as not to influence or prejudice the participants either positively or negatively toward any specific model. In this respect, the researcher's background and practical experience proved to be an advantage for data collection, data analysis, and theoretical integration. The researcher did not have a background in academic advising and had never received practical training in academic

advising. In fact, the researcher was first exposed to the literature in the field of academic advising approximately two months prior to the date when these interviews were conducted. As such, the researcher did not have an emotional attachment to any particular model nor an emotional opposition toward any particular model of advising. The researcher was, in large degree, neutral in the matter. This state of affairs enabled the researcher to describe advising models, ask probing questions, and gather data in a more objective and less prejudicial manner than researchers who had a background in academic advising.

The objective of this line of questioning was to expose the participants to the mainstream approaches of academic advising. The design was to give the participants an opportunity to reflect upon the way advising was being taught to those who were going into the field of academic advising as a career. In this way, the participants were able to reflect more deeply upon their own approach to advising, comparing and contrasting their method of advising transfer students with the commonly received models which were being applied in the field of academic advising. This exercise was intended to assist the participants in the process of articulating their transfer advising model. It also became apparent that the ultimate articulation of the participants' advising model was the most effective way to trace the data back through the tentacles of their thought processes to an underlying theory of advising. Once this underlying theory was discovered it was compared and contrasted with the *influence theory* which had emerged in the previous two rounds of data collection.

#### *Prescriptive Advising*

As previously noted, prescriptive advising was a phrase coined by Crookston (1972) as a foil against which he could present his developmental approach to academic advising. Prescriptive advising is one way communication in which the advisor tells the student what he

needs to do and presumably the student goes out and does it. Crookston (1972) used the metaphor of a doctor/patient relationship in order to describe the prescriptive approach to advising. Lowenstein (2005) observed that even though there was no scholar who developed the prescriptive approach and even though there are no advocates of the approach, there are, nonetheless, numerous practitioners.

The participants in the study were universally negative in their response to prescriptive advising. One participant commented that it was not good for the student “because only the student was capable of deciding what he or she wanted and that what was prescribed by some advisor may or may not end up being what was best for the student.” Another participant used words like “awful” and “horrible” to describe her aversion to the practice of prescriptive advising. A third participant made an astute observation. She noted that a lot of students actually wanted this type of advising. This participant did not view this as a good development but saw it as a reality in her experience. She noted that there were a significant number of students who were looking for someone to tell them what to do. In this way, they did not have to think critically about their situation and, if things did not work out, they could always blame it on the advisor. This was a scenario which O’Banion (1972) had also observed in his research.

The serious objections to prescriptive advising which were registered by the participants can be enumerated under three categories. First, prescriptive advising does not allow or compel the student to engage in critical thinking. A number of the participants viewed critical thinking as one of the primary goals of the advising process that should lead to one of its principle outcomes which is student independence and autonomy. According to these participants, prescriptive advising accomplishes none of this. In fact, several participants suggested that, in many ways, prescriptive advising worked counter to these objectives.

Second, prescriptive advising does not deal with the student holistically. One participant noted that the prescriptive approach does a disservice to the student and another participant was of the opinion that prescriptive advising was insulting to the student. In fact, prescriptive advising was considered to be the opposite of holistic advising. The unanimous verdict was that prescriptive advising did not deal with any of the facets which comprised the student as a whole person and simply treated the student like a robot.

Third, prescriptive advising does not engage the student in the advising process. According to one participant, effective advising should always involve two way communication and prescriptive advising bypasses this crucial element of advising. According to another participant, the advising process should bring the advisor and the student together in a close working relationship where they can explore the student's desires and collaborate on a functional plan to achieve those goals and prescriptive advising short circuits this process. One comment had specific relevance for this specific research project. With respect to transfer advising, it is essential that the student be fully engaged in the advising process. To be successful, transfer advice needs to be customized to each student and, if the student is not fully engaged in the advising process, this customization will be impossible to achieve. In this light, prescriptive advising was seen to find no utility in the transfer advising process.

In summary, the participants were universally negative in their assessments of the prescriptive approach to academic advising. This perception is in agreement with the assessments offered by the theoretical literature. Up until this point in the study, the participants' model of advising was somewhat blurry. However, after reflecting upon the prescriptive approach to advising the participants' approach began to take shape and come into clearer focus.

The participants were able to better articulate their personal approaches to advising as a result of this exercise.

### *Developmental Advising*

As previously mentioned, developmental advising is an approach to advising which broadens the horizon of academic advising to include not only the narrow choices of career and curriculum, but also areas of behavior, rational processes, and cognitive awareness (Crookston, 1972). The design of developmental advising is to assist the student in developing a life plan which encompasses personal values as well as career trajectories. To accomplish these objectives the developmental advisor works closely with the student in a symbiotic collaboration which will eventually conclude with the student discovering his or her path in life as a whole. As such, developmental advising involves a dual line of communication between the advisor and the student which is characterized as a partnership (O'Banion, 1972).

The reaction of the participants to developmental advising can best be described with the word "perplexed." All of the participants in the study were favorably disposed toward developmental advising as a whole or in a general sense. The participants were especially impressed with the fact that developmental advising incorporated two way communications between the student and the advisor. The objective of assisting students in areas beyond the purely academic realm also registered the approval of the participants. The fact that developmental advising promoted student engagement and aimed toward student autonomy as its ultimate goal were two aspects that resonated favorably with the participants in this study. However, something was missing and this missing element was what perplexed the participants.

One participant assented that, of all the models described in this interview, developmental advising was the closest to what he did as an advisor. However, he added that there was a

substantial difference between what he did as an advisor and the developmental approach, but he simply could not articulate what that difference was. Another participant acknowledged that there was nothing in developmental advising that she disagreed with, but hastened to add that she was not completely satisfied with the approach. Even after significant probing, she was still unable to coherently express what it was about developmental advising that caused her reticence or what was lacking in developmental advising that kept her from being completely satisfied with the model.

As the interviews progressed, other advising models were described and then reflected upon by the participants. The process of articulation unfolded, slowly but surely, and the parameters of the participants' advising model began to take shape. As their thinking crystallized, the participants were better able to articulate the model of advising which they employed. At that point, the boundaries between their model and the developmental model eventually emerged. These distinctions were subtle and quite nuanced.

#### *Deficit Remediation Advising*

As was stated earlier, the deficit remediation approach to academic advising is designed to locate areas in which a student has a weakness and then help the student find assistance in overcoming that weakness. Often this involves placing students in remedial courses and directing them to student services so that they can receive tutorial assistance in the areas in which they have a weakness. A more proactive version of this approach, labeled as intrusive advising (Upkraft & Kramer, 1995) actually seeks out students who are likely to have deficits which need remediation.

The responses of the participants to deficit remediation advising fell along four lines. Most saw it as a necessary evil that simply could not be avoided in light of the circumstances that

surrounded their work. Some participants viewed deficit remediation in a positive light, as a key ingredient that made success possible for community college students. Other participants considered deficit remediation as a negative force that served to erode students' confidence and placed an added emotional burden upon students which often caused them to lose hope. Finally, all the participants considered deficit remediation as an incomplete approach which needed to be supplemented with other advising measures.

Most, if not all, of the participants regarded deficit remediation advising as a significant part of what they did as advisers. Several drew attention to the fact that community college students tended to have more deficits that needed to be remediated than students who went straight from high school to four-year institutions. In this light, it was concluded that deficit remediation advising played a larger role in the advising process of community college advisors than it did in the advising process employed by advisors who worked at other types of institutions. Under normal circumstances, deficit remediation advising focuses upon a student's academic weaknesses. However, one participant extended this aspect of deficit remediation advising to cover emotional and social weaknesses as well. In this connection, there was an intersection of a number of theoretical categories. The property of student characteristics in the category of *student factors* intersected with the category of *cultural factors* as a lack of exposure to social events beyond the smaller rural community created social deficits within the student's experience. There was also an intersection with certain *contextual factors*, evidenced in the fact that being a first generation college student with no personal experience and little or no family experience to draw upon, created emotional as well as social deficits in the student's experience. In the end, all the participants saw deficit remediation advising as something that had to be done and as an unfortunate but necessary evil. However, one participant drew attention to the fact that

deficit remediation advising and the actual remediation of academic deficits was something that should not enter into the purview of a transfer adviser's activities. According to this participant, deficit remediation was an issue that should be attended to long before the student reaches the transfer adviser's office.

Two participants had a completely different take on deficit remediation advising. These two individuals had a profoundly negative reaction to the deficit remediation approach. One participant saw the model as basically negative in its orientation and did not see it as appropriate on that basis. She did qualify this position to a certain degree by saying that it might be useful for some advisers in certain circumstances but her personality tended to be more positive and she did not feel that a deficit remediation approach would fit well with her style of advising. A second participant was far more adamant in her opposition and gave a thorough explanation of her reasons for opposing the deficit remediation approach. This participant thought that deficit remediation advising was primarily a negative approach that unnecessarily focused on a student's weaknesses. She observed that this approach had a tendency to demoralize a student and created a negative self-assessment in the student which could produce a self-fulfilling prophecy. This particular participant said that she had witnessed this scenario unfold on numerous occasions in the community college where she worked.

At the other end of the dimensional spectrum, two other participants expressed a profoundly positive opinion of deficit remediation advising. One participant tied deficit remediation to the specific mission of the community college system. She readily agreed that a large proportion of students enrolled at community colleges had large deficits in their academic backgrounds. From her perspective, the community college exists primarily to serve these types of students and to help them overcome their weaknesses. A second participant stated that deficit

remediation advising was the most important thing he did as an adviser. Other participants were reticent to admit that community college students, as a group, were on a lower academic level than other students. However, this particular participant accepted this premise as a foregone conclusion which was beyond debate or argument. He saw deficit remediation advising as crucial, because, from his perspective, most of the community college students who wanted to transfer had huge deficits which, if not remediated, would leave them with no hope of succeeding at a four-year institution of higher learning. This participant exhibited a significant passion with regard to this issue because in his words, “the window of opportunity was small and the stakes were high for these students.”

In conclusion, the deficit remediation model to academic advising provided a very significant tool and played a very important role for those who advise students in the community college system, which was the case with the participants in this study. The reason for this assertion was the virtually universally agreed upon conclusion that community college students have more academic deficits than students who go straight from high school to a four-year institution. Nonetheless, the participants agreed that even though deficit remediation advising was an important facet of their advising approach it was one of many other facets. Deficit remediation was an important piece of the advising puzzle but was not the puzzle. Interestingly, even the two most ardent supporters of deficit remediation advising were not willing to say that it was the core of what they did as advisors.

### *Strengths-based Advising*

As previously stated, the strengths based approach to academic advising (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005) shifts the focus of advising from areas of need to areas of engagement. It is essentially the corresponding approach to deficit remediation. The strengths based approach

operates under the assumption that as students are focused on the areas in which they have natural talents and abilities their confidence levels will be boosted and this, in turn, will motivate them to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for college level achievement. This can also be understood as overcoming any deficits that they might have. The participants in this study voiced a variety of perspectives with respect to the strengths based approach to academic advising. One perspective considered it preferable to the other approaches. A second perspective acknowledged two specific types of students for whom strengths based advising was advantageous. A third perspective drew attention to the potentially negative effects that strengths based advising might have. A fourth perspective considered strengths based advising as an appropriate tool among a combination of other tools.

Three participants thought that the strengths based approach to advising was superior to the other approaches because it was positively oriented. In other words, it focused upon positive aspects about the student rather than negative aspects, such as deficits. One participant noted that she was more comfortable using a strengths based approach because it was more positive in its orientation and her personality was more positive in its orientation. Another participant found that strengths based advising was more successful in getting students engaged in the academic process which she considered the primary goal of academic advising. A third participant viewed strengths based advising as the antidote which would counter many of the difficulties which community college students from rural areas encountered. She mentioned specifically a lack of support from family members, a lack of knowledge concerning the academic process, a weak academic preparation, and a typical deficit remediation approach, all of which converged upon the student to destroy their confidence and engender negative attitudes about themselves. This participant saw strengths based advising as a proper way to counter all of these negatives. She

mentioned that the strengths based approach increased the student's confidence and that on many occasions this was all that was required to set in motion a chain of positive events which spilled over into other areas of their lives, enabling them to overcome many of the deficits that held them back.

Two participants mentioned two specific types of students for whom a strengths based approach would be especially useful. The first type of student was the one who was undecided or confused about what she wanted to do in life. It was common to ask such students what they felt like they were good at doing and what they enjoyed doing. This line of inquiry helped students come to grips with their natural talents and abilities, which would, in turn, direct them into fields in which they would have a greater chance of succeeding. A second type of student for whom a strengths based approach was considered useful included the student who had lost his way and needed to be redirected. For example, one participant gave an account of a student who was hoping to go to architecture school because that was what his mother wanted him to do. However, his GPA was not very high and his grades in math were extremely low. Another participant reported an account of a student who wanted to go to medical school and become a doctor because that was his father's dream for him. However, the student's heart was not in this endeavor and his GPA was so low that his chances of being accepted into medical school were virtually nonexistent. These were the types of students who needed to be redirected into a field where they had natural abilities and a better than average chance of achieving success. Strengths based advising was considered to be an appropriate style of advising to accomplish this goal.

There were two participants who were not proponents of the strengths based approach to advising. One participant simply pointed out that he did not think it was an appropriate method to use with community college students, considering the fact that community college students, as

a general rule, were more over weighted with academic deficits which needed to be remediated. His response was that if a student had weaknesses, as most community college students do, then a strengths based approach was just a panacea. A second participant noted that a strengths based approach to academic advising was a good approach in an ideal world. However, she pointed out that a community college was far from being an ideal world. She explained that in an environment where students have no weaknesses or only a few minor weaknesses, the strengths based approach would be a splendid style of advising. She added that, unfortunately, community college students, as a general rule, have a significant number of weaknesses and, in light of that fact; deficit remediation had to be the dominant approach to advising. A third participant expressed a strong opposition to strengths based advising based upon very specific reasons. He was of the opinion that strengths based advising comes dangerously close to telling a student that the advisor knows what is best for the student. He also considered the strengths based approach to be controlling and bordering upon manipulation.

A final participant experienced what could be described as a eureka moment. This was a momentary flash of enlightenment. She was discussing the strengths based approach and she mentioned some of its advantages and some of its challenges. Then, in mid-sentence, she stopped and after a brief pause, she said, “You know something? Something just dawned on me. There should not be just one approach. There should be a combination of approaches and there should be some type of category that functions like glue to hold all of these approaches together.”

The strengths based approach turned out to be a rather polarizing approach. This was somewhat surprising and unanticipated. As things turned out, those participants who had a high dimension on the property of emotional investment with students were very attracted to the strengths based model and found it very useful. On the other hand, those participants who had a

low dimension on the property of emotional investment with students were not attracted to the strengths based model and did not find it very useful. In fact, two of the participants found the strengths based model to be objectionable. However, in the context of this research, those who were more or less neutral toward the strengths based approach and even those who were positively inclined toward the approach, all agreed that in their specific situations as community college transfer advisers, the utility of the deficit remediation approach outweighed the strengths based approach. The reason for this opinion was that community college students, as a general rule, had more deficits than other students and remediating those deficits held a higher priority than encouraging their strong points.

It was during this line of questioning that two major breakthroughs occurred. The progress of articulating the participants' model of advising took a major leap forward and the core category of the *influence theory* was reaffirmed and given added depth. These breakthroughs became apparent during the participant's eureka moment. During a stream of consciousness type of exercise it was realized by one participant that no particular advising model told the whole story. The complete story would need to be told by a combination of models. The metaphor of a puzzle continued to arise from the data. One participant recognized that rather than using one approach or several approaches used randomly, there would need to be a combination of approaches which were held together by some larger category that functioned as an adhesive. As the researcher reflected upon this overarching category that held the various approaches together it became apparent what this larger category was. The larger category that held the combination of approaches together in each of these participants' models to transfer advising was the student, thus reaffirming the core category of the *influence theory*.

### *Academic-centered Advising*

In contrast to developmental advising, academic centered advising focuses its attention exclusively upon the student's academic life (Lowenstein, 2005). The precise instrument in carrying out this focus varies. For example, there were learning centered, teaching centered, faculty centered, mission centered, and curriculum centered variations of this model (Hemwall & Trachte, 2005; Lowenstein, 2005; Melander, 2005). Some participants in the study chose to make specific comments with regard to some of these variations and other participants chose to reserve their assessment for the model as a generic whole. Once again, the perspectives of the participants spanned the dimensional range with respect to academic centered advising. However, there were certain core agreements that served to further the theoretical integration of the study.

One participant commented upon the mission centered version. She observed that this approach might be appropriate at a religious, military, private, or any other type of institution which had a narrowly focused mission and whose students were attracted to that institution because of that institution's mission. However, according to several participants, the community college did not fit that profile.

Two participants made specific reference to the faculty centered version. One mentioned that the faculty had their hands full with teaching and research projects. Thus, advising was an added burden for them which they did not have time to engage in. Another participant noted that faculty members, in general, were not trained to do advising and most did not have much enthusiasm for it. Therefore, according to this participant, it was better to let people who were trained in advising do the advising and let faculty members who were trained in a subject matter do the teaching.

One participant strongly disagreed with the academic centered model as a whole. Her primary objection was that the approach did not address the student as a whole person. She added that people did not come in neatly packaged segments. She found the academic centered method to be rather impersonal and did not see how it could be implemented in the real world, specifically in the world of the community college where she worked.

Eight of the participants agreed that academic centered advising was important and played a significant role in what they did as advisors. However, none of the participants considered this facet of advising as the core of what they did as advisers. One participant commented that the advising process should not be centered around any of these academic aspects. Rather, according to this participant, the advising process should be centered around the student. The participants did not find any of the extant advising versions to be satisfying, nor did they find the generic category of academic centered advising to represent the core of what they did as advisors. A final clue came to the model employed by the advisers when a participant suggested that academic advising should be student centered instead of being faculty centered, curriculum centered, or academic centered.

#### Institution Advising Philosophy

The next step in the research encouraged the participants to reflect upon the style of advising that was practiced at the community colleges where they worked. Each participant was asked which of the previously described advising models or combination of models best corresponded to the advising model or philosophy that was in place at the community college where they worked. The participants' responses were remarkably uniform. The participants not only responded to the question by describing the advising process as it existed at the community colleges where they worked but also compared the process with the models that had been

presented to them. Additionally, the participants offered explanations to explain why certain models were in place at the community colleges where they worked.

Some of the community colleges were set up as a faculty only advising system in which all advising was conducted by faculty members. Other community colleges where the participants worked employed a split advising system (Kuhn, 2008) in which students with a declared major were advised by a faculty member and students who were undecided with respect to a major were advised by a professional advisor located in a central advising office. All the participants in the study agreed that the prescriptive approach best described the advising philosophy which was in use at the community colleges where they worked. Seven of the participants stated that the prescriptive approach was used in combination with a deficit remediation approach. Two of the participants described the advising style of the community college where they worked as a prescriptive approach used in combination with some form of an academic centered model. One participant succinctly described the approach when she said that placement tests were administered in order to discover the student's deficits and, on the basis of those test scores, the student was placed in a prescriptive set of courses. According to this participant, the test scores were not evaluated to discover why students were weak in certain areas. In the institution where this participant was employed, students were not consulted concerning their educational goals. According to this participant, the placement test was a tool which was used for the purpose of placing students in a predetermined set of courses. When this line of inquiry was followed with other participants there was virtual agreement that this type of system was, more or less, followed at the community colleges where they worked.

A number of participants offered several reasons to explain why this was the established system of advising at the community colleges where they worked. Several explanations pertained

to all community college personnel with specific reference to faculty members and institutional advisors. Some participants remarked concerning the way that community college personnel viewed the community college students. Many participants remarked about certain stereotypes that were in place and continued to be perpetuated. It should be added that many participants, perhaps unconsciously, adopted some of these same stereotypes. The difference appeared to be the response action which these stereotypes evoked in the participants when compared with the institutional advisors. One participant remarked that many faculty members and professional advisors viewed community college students as unprepared, unmotivated, and unskilled. Another participant mentioned that he had heard numerous faculty members remark that if a student were capable, he would not be attending a community college. Instead, the student would be in a four year university or college. In light of this view, the participant remarked that the prescriptive approach to academic advising was the most effective model. Another participant said that the general view from the staff of the community college where he worked was that community college students were, as a general rule, inept and did not know what to do. Therefore, it was best to just tell them what to do.

When the participants were asked to reflect upon why this was the situation and how it arose, they offered two general explanations. One explanation concerned ingrained experience and the other explanation referred to a systemic reinforcing. One participant noted that after a period of time, dealing with hundreds or thousands of students and encountering a significant number who were unmotivated, unprepared, and inept, an advisor tended to become jaded and cynical and these stereotypes developed. This same participant acknowledged that in a year and a half at the community college he found himself developing this same attitude. He mentioned that this attitude gets reinforced and solidified through conversations and other forms of exposure to

community college personnel who had been at the institution for a longer period of time. A second explanation concerned what a number of participants referred to as the system. One participant observed that many of the personnel at the community college where he worked were less motivated themselves and he felt that this spilled over to the students and had a tendency to perpetuate itself among the students and the community college personnel. When asked to explain how this happens, the participant used an assembly line metaphor. He pointed out that there were certain rules and procedures that had to be followed and that there was a certain timing that had to be adhered to. He mentioned that no one was allowed to get ahead and no one was allowed to think outside of the box. He observed that the system was set up in such a way that if someone got ahead or tried to think in original and creative ways it caused the system to malfunction and those who did such things received negative reinforcement instead of positive rewards which was the opposite of the way things happened in the world outside of the community college. His conclusion was that such a system takes the motivation out of people who work within it. There were other participants who shared similar sentiments. Much of what was set forth in this description falls in line with Birnbaum's (1988) description of the community college as the bureaucratic institution.

There were a few comments that were made with specific reference to faculty members. There was virtually unanimous agreement among the participants that faculty members were snowed under with responsibilities. After preparing lectures, teaching classes, grading assignments, and engaging in administrative activities which pertained to the institution, faculty members were left with little time or energy for advising. A second point which received unanimous agreement was that faculty members, as a general rule, were not knowledgeable about the art of advising, and were untrained in the skills necessary for advising. These two

assertions were especially relevant when it came to the type of advising which was required for students who desired to transfer to a four-year institution. The participants shared numerous accounts of students who had taken courses that would not transfer and other students who had been required to take additional courses when they arrived at the four-year institution because their community college faculty advisor had not been familiar with the STARS guidelines and had not accurately understood the transfer requirements of the receiving four-year institution. There was also unanimous agreement among the participants that community college faculty members, in general, did not place a high priority upon advising students. One participant noted that most faculty members at the institution where he worked viewed the responsibility of advising students as a perfunctory obligation and saw it as a necessary evil to be endured rather than as an opportunity to make a difference in a student's life. A similar observation was made by O'Banion (1972) over four decades ago. The majority of the participants were of the opinion that most faculty members demonstrated little interest in advising students. Another participant connected the dots with the statement that when these attitudes are in place, "prescriptive advising is the quickest, easiest, and simplest way out of an obligation that is considered perfunctory."

There was one specific observation which applied to those institutional advisors who were predominantly entrusted with the responsibility of advising students who were undecided with regard to a major. These individuals routinely worked in an advising center with a group of other advisors and a director to whom they were required to report. In keeping with the assembly line metaphor and Birnbaum's (1988) description of the community college as a bureaucratic institution, it was noted by several participants that these advisors had quotas which they were responsible to fill. If the institutional advisors did not fill their quota of advising sessions, they

received negative reinforcement. As one participant expressed the situation, “when filling quotas is what your job is all about, the prescriptive advising model is the simplest and easiest way to get rid of one student and move on to the next.” Many of the participants lamented the fact that undecided students, who needed someone to help them explore their academic possibilities, were simply given a slip of paper with a prescription on it and sent on their way. Several participants stated that they spent most of their energies helping students determine what they wanted to study once they transferred. Regarding this situation, one participant noted quite bluntly that this was a matter that should have been attended to and settled long before the student ever arrived at the transfer adviser’s office. However, according to the participants in the study, due to the preoccupation with quotas and the use of the prescriptive approach to fill these quotas, the institutional advisors were not helping undecided students to explore their career desires and map out their academic options.

A significant number of participants in the study mentioned the preoccupation with quotas, how it pervaded the institutions, and how it contributed to what the participants considered a negative impact on the system as a whole. A number of participants commented that when they met with their supervisors, only slight attention was paid to the quality of their advising or the tangible results of their advising when compared with the attention given to how many students they had advised, whether or not they had met a certain predetermined number of advising sessions, and why they had not fulfilled their quota for the month. Several participants remarked that the quota seemed to govern and control everything that was done at their respective institutions. They observed that the institutional advisors who worked at the community colleges were constantly nervous and worried about whether they were going to make their quota for the month. Some participants mentioned that they were constantly being

reminded by the advising staff that they had a quota to fill. One participant revealed that people who weren't even related to her or her job were questioning her about her quotas.

In spite of the fact that there are no adherents or proponents of prescriptive advising, it appeared to be the dominant approach in the community colleges where the participants in this study worked. Other approaches were utilized, such as the deficit remediation and academic centered models, but only in a fashion that fed into and animated the prescriptive advising approach. According to the participants in the study, there were two reasons for this situation. The first reason was that faculty members were not trained and were not knowledgeable in the field of advising. Furthermore, according to the participants in the study, many faculty members did not place a high priority upon advising, in light of the other more pressing issues that accompanied their jobs. It should be noted that this observation conflicted with the major proponents of academic centered advising (Lowenstein, 2005; Melander, 2005; Hemwall & Trachte, 2005) who argued that the faculty member should be the most qualified individual to do academic advising. A second explanation for why this situation prevailed in community colleges was, according to the participants in the study, that those people who are trained and knowledgeable about advising, the institutional advisors, were held hostage to a quota system which kept them from doing the type of quality advising that would be beneficial to students in a system that rewarded conformity and did not reward creativity and industry.

Several participants offered an alternative approach to advising which arose out of a competing perspective. The participants in the study were close to the students they advised in age and experience. This perspective has been designated as near peer advising. The participants in the study took a completely different viewpoint with regard to the community college student and this led to a completely different approach to advising.

### *Participant Advising Philosophy*

After asking the participants to describe the advising philosophy of the institutions where they worked, they were asked to describe their own personal advising philosophy (See Appendix F). There were three objectives which this line of inquiry was intended to achieve. One objective was to uncover the approaches of the participants involved in the study. A second objective was to determine whether the advising philosophies of the participants were uniform and compatible with each other or diverse and incompatible. A third objective was to discover how the advising philosophies of the participants compared with the advising philosophies of the institutions where they worked. In other words, were their advising philosophies uniform and compatible or at odds with the advising philosophies of the institutions where they worked?

Two elements distinguished the advising approach taken by the participants when compared with the advising approach taken by the institutional advisors and the faculty members at the respective institutions where the participants worked. The fact that the participants were closer in age and experience to the students they advised played a key role in the participants' approach to advising when juxtaposed with the approach employed by faculty members and institutional advisors. Another distinguishing component was the fact that the participants were engaged in the narrower form of transfer advising as opposed to the broader discipline of general academic advising, which occupied the attention of faculty members and institutional advisors.

Seven of the nine participants, without hesitation, described their personal approach to advising as student based, student centered, or student focused. One participant commented, "It is all about the student, their needs, their desires, and their dreams." Another participant mentioned, "We are there to serve the students, and whatever the student needs, that is what we are there to do." A third participant stated, "The student is the core of what we do. It all starts and ends with the student." In comparison with the extant models of advising, one participant

said, “It is not about the advisor, or the institution, or the curriculum, or the mission statement. Our approach to advising is all about the students and their needs.” A final participant stated that the objective of advising, as he understood it, was to establish an advising dynamic in which the student governs the advising process and functions in an autonomous fashion.

The participants mentioned a second dimension that played a key role in their advising model. Several participants said that they employed a number of different advising models depending upon the student they were advising and the circumstances surrounding the advising process. One participant stated that she used a combination of approaches depending upon the needs of the student. On some occasions this called for an academic centered approach, on some occasions it required a developmental approach, under some circumstances it necessitated a strengths based approach, other conditions required a deficit remediation approach, and in some rare circumstances it might be necessary to employ a modified version of the prescriptive advising approach. From this account, it appeared that a student based approach was being elevated to a higher conceptual level than the other models. In other words, the various extant advising models were functioning as pieces of the advising puzzle and the student based approach was functioning as the puzzle, using the metaphor that many of the participants applied to the advising process. In such a scheme the student focused designation served as the model and the other approaches were utilized as techniques in order to contribute to the overall model.

One participant expanded the model beyond the various advising approaches to include even broader considerations. This participant commented, “When I advise a student it may concern, more or less, the academics or the student’s development, depending upon the student, the student’s needs, or the particular situation that the student finds himself in.” For this reason, the participants found it necessary to take into consideration, not only the factors that pertain to

the student and the factors that pertain to that advisor, but also the *contextual factors*, the *cultural factors*, and the *institutional factors* that play a role in informing the advising process.

Two participants said that their model of advising, more or less, fell in line with one of the extant models that were presented to them. One participant labeled his approach as a deficit remediation approach because he felt that deficits were the most pressing issues that community college students had to deal with. However, he felt that it was necessary to extend the scope of the deficit remediation approach beyond the realm of academics. He was of the opinion that many of the students from the rural areas, especially those students who attended the smaller rural community colleges, had emotional and social deficits which needed to be remediated. A second participant commented that her advising style was more in line with the strengths based approach. She mentioned that the strengths based approach was more compatible with her personality. She said that her personality was positive and that she desired to take a positive approach to students. She considered the strengths based approach to advising as the best vehicle by which to accomplish that objective. She also was of the opinion that the strengths based model of advising held greater potential for success than any of the other extant models of advising. However, she wanted to extend the strengths based model beyond the academic and career realms. She felt that the practitioners of the strengths based approach tended to confine the model exclusively to the academic realm. It was interesting to observe that even the two participants who did not initially assert the student as the focus of their approach agreed with the other participants that their adaptations of the extant models should stretch the boundaries of the advising model beyond the traditional parameters of academics and career orientations.

All of the participants appeared to be at various stages in understanding the specifics of what they were doing as advisers. However, no single participant seemed to visualize the process

as a coherent whole. The researcher took the data presented by each of the participants and fashioned it into a composite that would represent the generic whole of what the participants were striving to articulate. In this composite the student was presented as the core or the focus of the advising process. Therefore, the title of the advising model was designated as a student based model of advising. The various approaches employed by the participants were described as techniques rather than models or approaches. This characterization was a development upon the idea articulated in the theoretical literature (Lowenstein, 2005; Melander, 2005; Creamer, 2000; Frost, 2000; Demetriou, 2005, Kuhn, 2008; Hagen & Jordan, 2008) that there was no single overarching approach to advising, but a variety of approaches which needed to be used in combination. According to these research findings, the student based model is the overarching model and the various advising styles that are employed in combination correspond to the techniques that contribute to the model. Another dynamic which pervaded the data was that the participants extended their advising approach beyond the purely academic domain. The one idea which kept reoccurring in the data to describe this theme was the holistic nature of the process. As a result, the title of the model was modified to incorporate this idea. The holistic student based model affirmed all of the categories found in the data. The student was the core category which coalesced in the contributing categories of *adviser, institutional, contextual, and cultural factors*.

### *The Influence Theory*

As the research endeavor progressed, the outline of a theory slowly emerged. In the initial round of interviews, approximately twenty concepts emerged from open coding. Axial coding elevated five of these concepts to the level of categories. The five categories that emerged from

the first stage of the research design were *institutional factors*, *cultural factors*, *contextual factors*, *adviser factors*, and *student factors*.

The second round of interviews narrowed the focus of the research by means of theoretical sampling. The second round of interview questions focused on each of the categories with specific attention being paid to the category of *cultural factors*. During open coding the category of *student factors* began to emerge as a possible core category. The *student factors* category had a close connection and a very special relationship with the other four categories. During axial coding it became apparent that the transfer process with the *student factors* at the center was the recipient of the influences from the other four categories, but was only modestly exerting a reciprocal influence upon any of the other categories. There were also some elements of mutual influence which existed among the four main categories; however, the influences of each of the four main categories were predominantly directed toward the *student factors* category. To demonstrate this mutual influence theory a metaphor of a digital printer was invoked (See Figure 4 on page 75). In a printer when a specific color is desired a certain mixture of four primary colors are mixed, shaken, and filtered into a resulting secondary color. Different amounts of the primary colors are added to the mixture depending on the final color that is desired. In a similar fashion, the individual student is variously influenced by the four main categories in the theory. Each category exerts a variable degree of influence upon each student, which in turn influences the transfer advising process in a unique way and results in a unique advising plan for each individual student.

In the third round of interviews the main theoretical models of academic advising were incorporated into the interview questions. The participants were asked questions which were designed to explore further into the relationships which existed between the main categories and

the emerging core category. Another vein of questions explored the participants' reactions to the primary advising models which are being practiced in higher education. There was an effort to get the participants to assess the extant models of advising. The purpose of this endeavor was to encourage the participants to reflect upon which of these models best described the methods that they employed as well as the models that best described the methods of advising utilized by the institutions where they worked. A further goal was to elicit from the participants, the reasons for the similarities and dissimilarities between their models of advising and the models employed by the institutions where they worked. Open coding revealed that the participants and the institutions where they worked had different approaches to advising. The participants employed a model of advising that was not found in the theoretical literature, yet incorporated many of the ideas mentioned in that literature. The model which emerged from the data was a holistic student based model which incorporated a variety of techniques taken from the extant models found in the theoretical literature. The number and specific types of techniques that were utilized depended upon the specific needs and circumstances that surrounded the individual student who was being advised.

Axial coding affirmed the core category as the *student factors*. The main categories were also confirmed as the *institutional factors*, *cultural factors*, *contextual factors*, and *adviser factors*. The core category was affirmed to be the *student factors* because it was the focus of the process, it was the receptor of influence from other categories, and it was the category which held the other categories together and gave them explanatory depth. The main categories exerted influence upon each other in a mutual but random fashion. The participants used the term "random influence" in order to describe the way in which various properties exerted influence upon each other and then ultimately influenced the core category. When asked to articulate the

random nature of this influence most participants used the word “unpredictable” as a designation to describe the randomness of the influence. Each main category exerted a predominant influence upon the core category and the combined influences of various categories exerted an ultimate influence upon the core category. In the transfer advising process the influence flowed in a unidirectional path from the main categories to the core category with the *adviser factors* functioning as a synthesizer in a dynamic relationship. The conclusion of the fifth stage of the research design resulted in an updated version of the diagram from the previous stage of the research design, which incorporated the dynamic nature of the process along with the synthesizing role of the adviser factors. The updated version of the diagram took the shape of a conical vortex which depicted the mutual influences of the main categories in a dynamic fashion which were filtered down through the adviser to the core category, *student factors*, and then emerged from the advising process to a specific plan of advice.

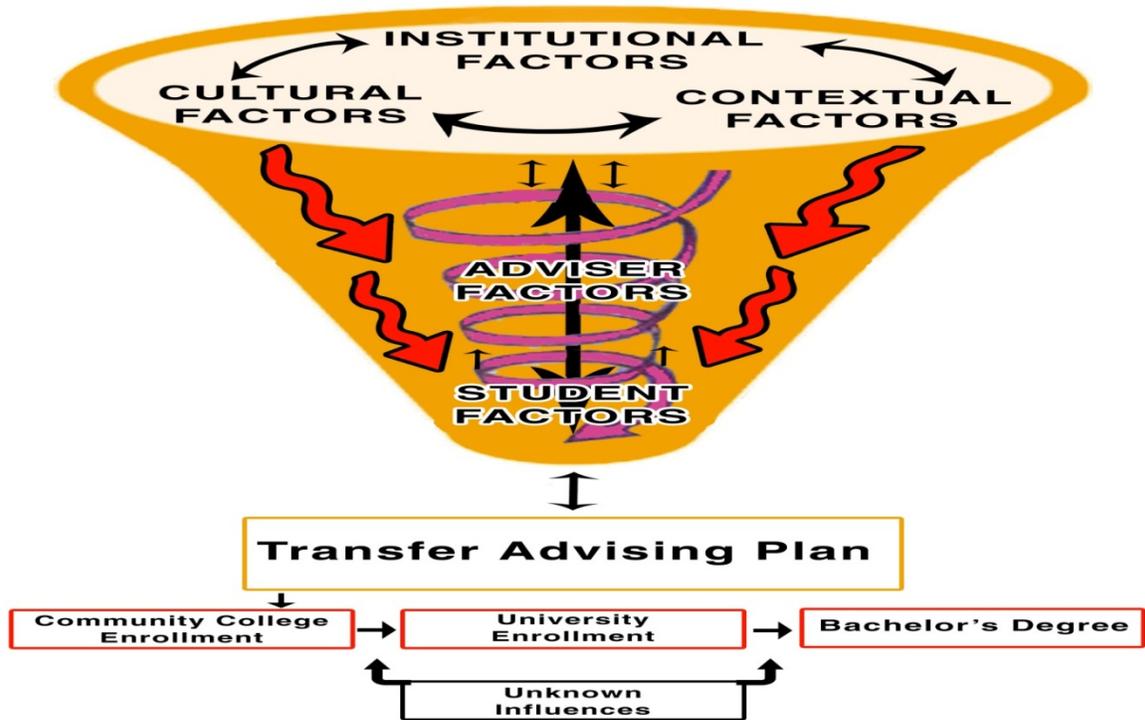


Figure 5. Influence Theory: Integrative Diagram.

## Conclusion

The findings of this research fell into three classes. The initial findings incorporated the main categories which were *institutional factors*, *cultural factors*, *contextual factors*, and *adviser factors*. The core category which held the main categories together and gave them explanatory depth was *student factors*. The second class of findings was process findings. The process analysis clarified 31 constituent properties (See Appendix T) that contributed to the five categories which comprised the *influence theory*. It was also discovered that the properties, individually, and the categories, corporately, exerted influences in a unidirectional fashion which is best described as random and dynamic. All influences, both direct and combined, found their way into the core category which was *student factors*, where they were collected. The third class of findings was theoretical findings. The theoretical analysis uncovered a unique advising model which was employed by the participants in the study. This method of transfer advising was labeled as a holistic student based model of advising. This model was holistic in the sense that it addressed the student as a whole individual, addressing academic as well as nonacademic issues. This model was student based in the sense that the student was the focus of the advising process and that the student was also the agent that governed the advising process. The theory was focused upon factors which influenced the transfer advising process. The *adviser factors* functioned as a synthesizer through which many of the influences were filtered and processed before reaching the core category, the *student factors*, upon which a unique advising plan was developed for each individual student.

## CHAPTER VI:

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, EVALUATION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first round of interviews took place in the third week of December 2009. The interviews were conducted on the campus of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama while the participants were gathered for a quarterly strategy session with the administrators of the ACTAC. The interview questions were broadly open-ended. The purpose was to allow the participants to express the information that they considered important for understanding the transfer advising process. After these interviews were conducted the data was transcribed and analyzed. This corresponded with the first phase of the research design, concept analysis. Approximately 25 properties were isolated from the data in this initial analysis.

A second round of interviews was conducted during the last week of January 2010. The researcher traveled to each of the community colleges where the participants were situated and the interviews were conducted on the campuses of the various community colleges. The interview questions in the second round were more focused and the format was semi-structured. During the initial interviews five issues emerged as potentially significant properties. Those issues related to the role of senior administrators in the transfer process, the participants' personal beliefs, the culture of the community from which rural community colleges students originated, the role of near peer advising, and the nature of partnerships which existed between

four-year institutions and the community colleges where the participants worked. The second round of interviews focused more specific attention upon these issues. A second round of data analysis was conducted in order to develop the main categories of the theory. At this stage, five categories emerged. *Institutional factors*, *contextual factors*, *cultural factors*, and *adviser factors* were designated as main categories and *student factors* was designated as the core category of the theory.

The third phase of the research design, context analysis was conducted during February and March of 2010. The analytic technique known as “paradigm” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to isolate three contextual properties that had emerged from the first two rounds of interviews. Those three properties were educational support, educational preparedness, and educational affordability. A second analytic strategy known as the “conditional consequential matrix” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was utilized in order to discover the reliability of the properties that had been established from the data.

The fourth phase of the research design, process analysis, incorporated a third round of interviews which took place during the third week of April 2020. These interviews were conducted on the respective campuses where the participants worked. At this stage of the research, the theory had begun to take shape. The theoretical literature in the substantive area had been consulted and assessed for its impact upon the present theory on transfer advising. During this series of interviews the participants were asked to give their reactions to the five prominent approaches to academic advising; prescriptive advising, developmental advising, deficit remediation advising, strengths based advising, and academic centered advising. Much of the data collected in this round of interviews was incorporated into the fifth phase of the research design, theoretical analysis.

A fourth series of interviews were conducted during the last week of July 2010. The researcher conducted these interviews on the respective campuses where the participants worked. At this stage of the research, the theory had been developed and was in the process of being finalized. The theory was presented to each of the participants for their reactions. Also, each participant was asked to comment upon each of the 31 properties and to describe the nature of the influence which each of these properties exerted upon the transfer advising process. Much of the data retrieved from these interviews was incorporated into the fourth phase of the research design, process analysis.

The theory of influences upon the transfer advising process in rural community colleges, the *influence theory*, is a substantive grounded theory that explains the factors which influence the transfer advising process as it unfolded in rural community colleges in the state of Alabama. The theory is comprised of five categories which are made up of 31 properties (See Appendix T). The four main categories are *cultural factors*, *contextual factors*, *institutional factors*, and *adviser factors*. The core category is *student factors* because it has a close connection and a very special relationship with all four of the main categories. The *student factors* category is at the center of the transfer advising process and is the recipient of the influences from the four main categories but only modestly exerts a reciprocal influence upon the main categories. The properties of the main categories exert influence upon the transfer advising process in a nonlinear fashion which is best described as random and dynamic. The influences flow in a unidirectional path from the main categories to the core category with the *adviser factors* functioning as a synthesizer in this dynamic relationship.

There are four types of influence which the categories and properties exert upon the transfer advising process. First, individual properties exert a singular influence upon the transfer

advising process. For example, the process analysis revealed that the property of educational preparedness, housed within the category of *contextual factors* exerted the strongest negative influence upon the transfer advising process. On the other end of the spectrum, it was revealed that the property of academic background, housed within the category of *adviser factors*, exerted the strongest positive influence upon the transfer advising process. Second, individual categories exerted an enhanced influence upon the transfer advising process. Once again, the process analysis revealed that the category of *cultural factors* exerted the strongest negative influence upon the transfer advising process. On the other end of the spectrum, the category of *adviser factors* exerted the strongest positive influence upon the transfer advising process. The participants in the study suggested that the cumulative influence of the categories surpassed the sum of their individual properties. For this reason, the term enhanced was used to describe the influence of the categories. Third, certain properties united with each other to exert a combined influence upon the transfer advising process. One particular example of this combined influence was the influence which the property personal perception, housed within the category of *cultural factors*, exerted upon the property of environment, which is housed within the category of *institutional factors*, to exert a combined influence upon the transfer advising process which was negative in its direction. Fourth, certain categories united with each other to exert an influence upon the transfer advising process which is combined and enhanced. The perfect example of this is the reciprocal influence between the category of *contextual factors* and the category of *cultural factors*. All three properties of the category *contextual factors* animate many of the properties of the category *cultural factors* which, in turn, reinforce and strengthen the properties which comprise the category of *contextual factors* and result in an influence upon the transfer advising process which is best described as combined and enhanced. In the remainder of this chapter,

several expanded examples will be described in order to explain and illustrate these four types of influence.

### *Application of the Influence Theory*

The influence theory is designed to explain the properties that exert an influence upon the transfer advising process. The properties, in and of themselves, are neutral in a theoretical sense. When the theory is applied in a specific context and to a specific group of individuals, the properties carry out their influence in specific ways. Individual properties exert a variety of power dimensions along a continuum which runs from strong to weak. Individual properties also exert their influence in a variety of direction dimensions along a continuum which runs from strong to weak. In addition, individual properties combine with other properties to produce a variety of influence types which depend upon the context and the individuals to whom they are applied. What follows is an application of the *influence theory* to the specific context in which this research was conducted; namely the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the experiences of nine participants who were advising community college students in the rural counties in the state of Alabama.

### *Cultural Factors*

The category of *cultural factors* exerted the strongest negative influence against the transfer advising process in the rural community colleges in the state of Alabama. The participants in this study described a certain mindset which was prevalent in the smaller rural communities where their community colleges were located. According to the participants, this mindset displayed an antithetical attitude toward higher education in general and transfer to a four-year institution in particular. The participants offered their hypotheses concerning the origin of this mindset and the means by which it is perpetuated. There was an influence which this

category exerted upon the category of *institutional factors* which enhanced its negative impact. Finally, the data revealed a significant difference between the mindset exhibited in the smaller rural communities and the mindset exhibited in the larger rural communities.

*Explanation of the smaller rural community mindset.* The participants in the study explained the mindset of the smaller rural communities in the following manner. The life in these communities is safe and predictable. It is the only life known to those who have been born into and grown up in this culture. The experience is so predictable that it develops a comfort zone that continually reinforces itself and most people do not want to break out of it. It develops an outsized fear of the unknown which makes it very difficult to risk the consequences of breaking away. The people who live in these communities are insulated with the same people, the same ideas, and the same ways of thinking for their entire lives. Such an experience produces what one participant described as a cocooning effect. All of these elements produce a resentment toward educated people, which contributes to a lack of concern for education and a contentment to remain insulated in the comfort zone and isolated from outside influences.

*Origin of the smaller rural community mindset.* The participants in the study suggested two possible hypotheses to explain the origin of this cultural mindset. The first hypothesis was set forth by a participant who was located in one of the predominantly white Appalachian counties. According to this hypothesis, the mentality went back to the original settlers and their Appalachian roots which were accompanied by an agrarian lifestyle. The mentality became stronger during the era of reconstruction which set in place a very regressive environment with respect to education and economic opportunity. This, in turn, created a lot of “us versus them” situations. Examples such as “black versus whites” and “poor whites versus elite whites” were set forth as evidence.

A second hypothesis was put forward by a participant who was located at a community college in the Black Belt region of the state which was composed of a predominantly African American population. According to this hypothesis, the mentality originated in the civil rights era but was a holdover from what the participant referred to as “the old slave mentality.” According to this idea, African American people felt inferior to all white people, but especially to the elite white male who was from the city, educated, and wealthy.

When these two hypotheses are united, they paint a relatively coherent picture. The initial settlers in the Appalachian region of the state were agrarian farmers who were busy carving out a living. Education, at that time, was looked upon as a luxury created to occupy the time of wealthy people’s sons (Lucas, 1994). From its inception, higher education possessed a built in elitism which discriminated against the lower classes of people and, rightly or wrongly, served to reinforce their inferiority to the elite white males who ran the country, politically and economically. After the Civil War, reconstruction further cemented the divides between African Americans and the elite white males, African Americans and the poor whites, as well as between the elite whites and the poor whites. As history has progressed, some smaller rural communities have grown to become larger rural communities and certain cultural changes have occurred. However, many smaller rural communities located in the Appalachian and Black Belt regions of the state have remained as pockets of the deep racial and social divide which goes back centuries in time. Technology has changed things in many ways. According to the participants in the study, people drive cars, use cell phones, and have the internet in these smaller rural communities today, but the feelings of fear, resentment, distrust, and inferiority toward those outside the community are just as strong if not stronger than they were a century and a half ago.

The negative attitudes toward education, those who are educated, and the perceived evils that education brings still exist in these smaller rural communities.

*Perpetuation of the smaller rural community mindset.* The participants in the study suggested a model to explain the manner in which the smaller rural mindset gets perpetuated. According to this model, the mindset is self-perpetuating. It was also described as a vicious circle which keeps repeating itself. It gets passed down from parents to children. The adults who have always been in the community function as role models to the youth which serves to reinforce the mentality. This way of thinking gets reinforced by leaders in the community. Elected officials, pastors, business people, and even educational leaders all serve as role models who perpetuate this mentality. People who grow up in this environment, adopt the mindset, pass it along to the children, and then the children pass it along to the next generation. And with each passing generation the mindset grows harder and more entrenched. The resentment toward educated people, the lack of concern for education, and the contentment to remain in the same comfort zone gets more and more calcified. As a result, progress in the world outside of the smaller rural communities places the present generation of students who live in the smaller rural communities at an even greater disadvantage than the generation which preceded it. From time to time, one of their offspring goes away and gets a degree in higher education but they do not return to the smaller rural community because there is no motivation for them to return. There are not many jobs which would satisfy their qualifications and there are not many educational opportunities for their children. As a result, the smaller rural communities continue to get more isolated, more insulated, and more entrenched in their opposition to outside forces, one of which is education.

*Influence of cultural factors upon institutional factors.* It was noted that certain *cultural factors* exerted a negative influence on certain *institutional factors* which produced a combined and enhanced negative influence upon the transfer advising process. In particular, there were two properties from the *cultural factors* which exerted this influence. The first influence was economic perceptions. It was observed by the participants in this study that the smaller rural community mentality viewed education in relation to its economic advantages. Since in the smaller rural community, a college education does not enable a person to find employment that pays more money than a person without a college education, a high value is not placed on obtaining a bachelor's degree. According to the participants, this mentality filtered over into the institutions' mindset and expressed itself when community college personnel communicated to community college students that they could make more money by obtaining certain technical degrees.

The second property from the category of *cultural factors* which had a negative effect upon the category of *institutional factors* came under the property of personal perceptions. The participants noted that a large number of the students they advised had feelings of inferiority and sensed that they were not as capable as students from larger cities. According to the participants, this property filtered over into the institutions' perception of students from smaller rural communities. According to many participants, this was manifested when community college personnel exhibited a low estimation of community college students from smaller rural communities and advised them to set their academic and career goals at a low level.

*Negative case: Explanation of the larger rural community mindset.* There was a negative case which revealed a significant difference between the cultural mindset in larger rural communities when compared with the cultural mindset in the smaller rural communities. This

study involved nine participants who worked at ten community colleges. However, some of the institutions had more than one campus. In total there were 14 campuses which housed the participants in this study. The participants in the study perceived that nine campuses were located in smaller rural communities and five campuses were located in larger rural communities. As the data from the larger rural communities were analyzed, it became apparent that there were some significant differences between the cultural mindset which the participants observed in the larger rural communities and the cultural mindset which the participants perceived in the smaller rural communities. According to the participants, the larger rural communities shared many of the same characteristics as those found in the smaller rural communities. However, the participants sensed that these characteristics in the larger rural communities were less intense and seemed to be fading with time.

Most of the larger rural communities were formerly smaller rural communities which witnessed their populations increase due to some catalyst. Most of the larger rural communities are geographically situated in close proximity to an urban area. Seven of the participants in this study grew up in smaller rural communities. Three of these participants worked in community colleges which were located in larger rural communities. These participants were able to compare their previous experiences of growing up in a smaller rural community with their present experiences of living in a larger rural community. According to these participants the larger rural communities were slightly less homogenous, had more options, and presented a greater variety of experiences than the smaller rural communities. These participants observed that students from these larger rural communities tended to set their aims higher and were less emotionally and psychologically tied to the geographical location. These participants also noticed that students from the larger rural communities were less threatened by the outside

world, were better able to navigate new situations which confronted them, and were less intimidated by interactions with strangers.

There was an extremely strong divergence between the culture of the larger rural communities and that of the smaller rural communities. This divergence was observed by two participants who spent the first year of their involvement in the ACTAC program at a community college located in a smaller rural community and the second year at a community college located in a larger rural community. This divergence was confirmed by three other participants who were located on campuses in larger rural communities. These observations gave considerable depth to this study. In smaller rural communities, the participants reported that there was a minority of parents who had college degrees and the majority of parents did not have college degrees. In these smaller rural communities, the parents with college degrees encouraged their children to get college degrees, while it was rare to find parents without college degrees who encouraged their children to pursue a degree in higher education. However, the participants who worked in institutions located in larger rural communities reported a completely different mindset. In the larger rural communities, parents with college degrees encouraged their children to get college degrees. However, parents without college degrees also strongly encouraged their children to get college degrees. The explanation for this divergence was found in the economic advantage that a college degree provides. As noted earlier, a college degree provides little to no economic advantage in the smaller rural communities. There was virtually no job a person with a college degree could get in the smaller rural community which would pay them more money than a person without a college degree. However, in the larger rural communities the situation was completely different. A person who possessed a college degree had a significant economic advantage and a person without a college degree was at a significant economic disadvantage in

these communities. This is an everyday reality and those parents without college degrees in the larger rural communities were acutely aware of this reality. This explains why parents without college degrees in larger rural communities strongly encouraged their children to pursue a degree in higher education.

### *Contextual Factors*

The category of *contextual factors* exerted a strong negative influence upon the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the rural community colleges located in the state of Alabama. Two specific aspects of the contextual influence emerged from the data which were collected in this research endeavor. The first aspect considered the cumulative influence of the properties which were collected under the category of *contextual factors*. The second aspect pointed into the direction of a combined influence which was produced when the *contextual factors* came in contact with several properties which were situated under the category of *cultural factors*.

*Cumulative effect of contextual factors.* The participants in this study articulated three contextual properties, which exerted a strong influence upon the transfer advising process. In the particular circumstances surrounding this study, this influence was negative. It was noted by the participants that each of these properties exerted a strong influence on the transfer advising process in isolation. However, in combination, these three properties exerted a much stronger influence upon the transfer advising process than the sum of their parts. One of the participants referred to the business practice of synergies involved in corporate mergers as a way of describing this influence. The participants explained the compounding effect of the overall influence exerted by the category *contextual factors* using the format of a logical progression which displayed a gathering of momentum.

The first stage of the logical progression involved the assertion that students from smaller rural communities, as a general rule, did not receive a lot of encouragement to pursue higher education. Accompanying that assertion was a second assertion that those students who decided to pursue a bachelor's degree were often without knowledge concerning how to go about pursuing that degree, especially as it related to the transfer process. This situation resulted from growing up in a family in which neither parent had a college degree and in a community which did not place a high value upon education.

The second stage of the logical progression involved the assertion that students who attended community colleges located in smaller rural communities were academically underprepared and, to a large extent, were incapable of performing the caliber of work necessary to complete a bachelor's degree. This state of affairs resulted from the low level of academic preparation which the students received in high schools which were located in smaller rural communities. Lacking knowledge, encouragement, and preparation, most students from smaller rural communities were not in a position to obtain scholarships and were not privy to the information necessary to gain other forms of financial aid.

This state of affairs led logically to the third stage of the logical progression which was encompassed by the assertion that the payment of tuition and other expenses related to attending a four year college or university were left to the student and his or her parents. In light of the economic conditions found in many smaller rural communities, the educational affordability of a four year degree was out of the realm of possibility for most students who live in these communities.

According to the participants in this study, the combined effect of these three contextual properties exerts a strong negative influence upon the possibility of students from smaller rural

community colleges successfully transferring to a four-year institution of higher learning.

Furthermore, the statistical data gathered from governmental, academic, and institutional sources lent credibility to those assertions set forth by the participants in the study (See Appendices J, K, and L).

*Influence of contextual factors upon cultural factors.* The participants in the study noticed that there was a convergence of certain contextual properties upon certain cultural properties and that this convergence had a detrimental effect upon students from smaller rural communities. The participants noted that all of the contextual properties, such as lack of educational support, lack of educational preparedness, and lack of educational affordability, connected with certain cultural properties, such as, a lack of economic opportunity, cultural insulation, and social isolation in order to produce a variety of problems in the students they advised. These problems included the fear of failure and feelings of inferiority. In this connection there was an intersection of a number of theoretical categories. This convergence had a noticeable impact upon the property of student characteristics within the category of *student factors*. Then the convergence of contextual properties with cultural properties manifested itself in the form of a lack of exposure to social events beyond the smaller rural community which created social deficits within the student's personal characteristics. This convergence was also evidenced in the fact that being a first generation college student with no personal experience and little or no family experience to draw upon, created emotional as well as social deficits in the student's personal characteristics.

#### *Institutional Factors*

The category of *institutional factors* served as a neutral influence in the overall scheme of the *influence theory* as it was applied in the context of rural community colleges in the state of

Alabama. Particular attention was given to two specific areas of influence. The first area of influence concerned the institutional advisors who counseled students regarding academic matters. The second area of influence related to the development of online programs and the potential which these arrangements possess for influencing the transfer advising process in the future.

*Weakness of institutional advisors.* The participants in the study suggested that the overall effect of institutional advising was weak when compared with the type of advising that was needed to assist transfer students in negotiating the requirements of transfer to a four-year institution. The participants offered several reasons to explain this weakness. Many of the explanations were sympathetic to the conditions under which the institutional advisors were required to operate. One explanation concerned the large amount of paper work that the community college advisors were obliged to complete, which absorbed a lot of their time and did not leave as much time to devote to students. The participants in the study thought that this placed the institutional advisers at a severe disadvantage. A second explanation was that the number of students which community college advisors were required to see made it difficult to devote very much time to any individual student. A third explanation was that faculty members were not trained to do advising and that anything outside of their field of instruction was beyond their capacity to give advice. It was also added that with their teaching loads, research projects, and other responsibilities, the faculty advisors had little time or energy left over to devote to advising students. A fourth explanation was that most institutional advisors had been trained in a particular advising approach which lent itself toward telling students what they needed to know and what they needed to do and away from inquiring about students' desires and interests. A fifth explanation was that many of the faculty members and institutional advisors at community

colleges were products of a culture which looked at community college students as being less capable than students who went straight from high school to a four year college or university. As a result, the community college advisors tended to treat community college students as somewhat inferior and had lower expectations for them. According to the participants in this study, it was this cultural attitude that ended up getting translated into an advising style that preselected programs for students which led to a low level of accomplishment.

*Positive potential of online programs.* The participants were of the opinion that one institutional property held great potential for exerting a strongly positive effect upon the transfer advising process. However, at the time of this research, the participants felt that this property was not being utilized to its greatest advantage. Online programs which comprise part of the property labeled as partnerships have the potential to overcome some of the cultural negatives which are endemic to smaller rural communities, specifically the stringent ties to the geographical location which are found in most rural communities. The utilization of online programs is an institutional property which holds great promise for overcoming the cultural property of emotional and psychological ties to the geographical location. Many community college students, who are from smaller rural communities, exhibit a strong aversion to transferring to a four year college or university due to the singular fact that it would require them to leave the geographical location. However, with the dawning of online classes and online degree programs, the obstacle of not wanting to leave the community can be overcome for many students. Of course, there are other strong influences that dissuade these students from pursuing a bachelor's degree, but the simple unwillingness to leave the community can be eliminated as a barrier. Simply put, students can have the best of both worlds. If they wish to stay in their community and earn a four year degree, they can now do both by means of one of the many online degree programs.

### *Adviser Factors*

The category of *adviser factors* held a unique position in the overall architecture of the *influence theory*. The process of near peer advising brought a number of positive elements to the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the context of rural community colleges in the state of Alabama. The fit which existed between the participants involved in the study and the students whom they advised served to neutralize some of the negative influences which impinged upon the transfer advising process. Specific mention is made of the properties transfer student, first generation college student, academic background, personal belief system, family background, and home town.

*Transfer student and first generation college student.* All of the participants who were first generation college students felt that these personal experiences were invaluable in their work to help students from smaller rural communities in transferring to a four year college or university. Each participant confided that they were able to supply the emotional support which motivated students to pursue their dream of getting a college education. In addition, all of the participants stated that, by virtue of their experiences as first generation college students, they were able to provide the students they advised with the knowledge they needed concerning the procedures involved in the transfer process. Finally, the participants felt that they were able to impart to the students they advised the psychological encouragement which they desperately needed in order to feel good about themselves and to envision the success which they would ultimately achieve. In the final analysis, the participants in the study considered that their experiences as transfer students and first generation college students were very strong positive influences in assisting rural community college students to successfully navigate the transfer process.

*Academic background and personal belief system.* Many of the participants had strong beliefs that influenced their daily lives and motivated them to participate in the ACTAC program. There were a variety of personal beliefs which were expressed by the participants. Not all the participants were in lock step agreement when it came to their strongly held social, philosophical, political, and religious beliefs. In fact, some of the participants' beliefs were diametrically opposed to the beliefs of other participants. Some participants expressed strong Christian views with phrases like "the Bible teaches" and "what would Jesus do?" Other participants expressed that they were motivated by their views of spirituality but did not wish to tie that spirituality to a specific religious teaching. Other participants expressed a variety of secular social theories as their motivating philosophy. A couple of participants expressed what could be interpreted as a mild disdain for those who were motivated by religious principles. Two participants said that they had no strongly held social, political, philosophical, or religious beliefs that influenced their daily lives or motivated them.

The fascinating part of the research was not so much that the participants were motivated by divergent belief systems which sometimes conflicted with one another, but that there were three very strong commonalities that transcended the divergent motivational complexes. The first common theme which grew out of this portion of the data was that the participants all felt a particular destiny in their lives. One participant stated that everything happened for a purpose and that every person had a destiny in life. Another participant expressed this concept as a belief in what she called a "master plan." Finally, another participant personalized this sentiment with the words, "My involvement in this program is my destiny in life and all the difficulties that I encountered in college were for the purpose of preparing me for this moment." All in all, the participants in this study felt that their personal belief systems motivated them to give a lot of

their energy to helping students negotiate the transfer process. This motivation was considered to be one of the primary features in overcoming some of the negative cultural influences that militated against the transfer advising process.

*Family background and hometown.* The participants in the study isolated three particular advantages that their familiarity with smaller rural communities gave to them. The first advantage concerned an understanding of the cultural mindset which exists in smaller rural communities. One participant described this advantage with the words, “I know exactly what these students are thinking because I grew up in the same way that they are growing up and two years ago I was right where they are today. On many occasions, I know exactly what they are going to ask even before they ask it.” A third advantage involved a solution procedure. The participants in this study were of the opinion that their experience of being born and raised in smaller rural communities equipped them to discover solutions that would enable students from smaller rural communities to overcome their fears and feelings of inferiority and thus, successfully transfer to a four-year institution of higher learning where they would ultimately realize their dreams of attaining a college degree.

#### *Student Factors*

Early in the research process, the category of *student factors* emerged as the core category. Subsequent research affirmed the selection of *student factors* as the core category of the *influence theory*. There were two primary reasons for this determination. The first reason was that every participant in the study strongly insisted that the student was the focus of the entire transfer advising process. In the words of one participant “the advising process begins, ends, and revolves around the student as well as the student’s desires, wishes and goals.” In the words of another participant, “the advising process is controlled and governed by the student.” A second

reason for designating *student factors* as the core category was because *student factors* was the one category that had deep penetrations into all of the other categories and functioned as the theoretical glue which gave adhesion to all five categories in a holistic fashion. Furthermore, the category *student factors* gave explanatory depth to the remaining four categories: *institutional factors*, *cultural factors*, *contextual factors*, and *adviser factors*. Finally, none of the other categories was able to produce the overall theoretical resonance that the category, *student factors*, was able to produce. The *student factors*, as a category, functioned as a receptacle in which the influence of all the other categories collected.

This research study developed a substantive grounded theory which explains the factors that influence the transfer advising process as it unfolded in the experience of nine recent graduates from The University of Alabama who engaged in near peer advising for the purpose of assisting students from rural community colleges who were interested in transferring to a four year college or university. The theory was composed of four main categories which exerted a variety of influences upon a core category in a process which is best described as random and dynamic. The study discovered that the *cultural factors* and the *contextual factors* united to exert singular, as well as combined, influences upon the transfer advising process which were strongly powerful and strongly negative. The category of *institutional factors* held promise for exerting a strongly positive influence on the transfer advising process, but at this point in time are, for the most part, neutral in their orientation. The category of *adviser factors* exerted a strongly positive influence upon the transfer advising process by mitigating many of the negative influences that were exerted by the *cultural factors* and the *contextual factors*. The *adviser factors* also functioned as a synthesizer through which many of the diverse influences were filtered before

reaching the core category. As the core category, the *student factors* operated much like a receptacle in which the diverse influences exerted by the main categories were accumulated.

### Conclusions

Six specific conclusions were reached as a result of this substantive grounded theory into the factors which influence the transfer advising process. These conclusions were revealed through the experiences of nine recent graduates of The University of Alabama who were engaged in near peer advising with respect to rural community college students who were interested in transferring to a four year college or university. These conclusions were reached within the context of ten rural community colleges located within the state of Alabama and should be applicable to similar institutions in similar contexts. The second section contains an evaluation of this present study. The six criteria by which grounded theory studies are assessed (See pp 52-55) for credibility are applied to this particular study. Finally, eight recommendations are made. Three of these recommendations are practical in nature and are designed to improve the transfer advising process as it presently exists in rural community colleges which are located in the state of Alabama. Five additional recommendations are theoretical in their orientation and are designed to advance research in the area of academic transfer advising

The first conclusion identifies the factors that influence the transfer advising process as it was conveyed through the experiences of the nine ACTAC advisers who participated in this study. This study uncovered five categories, composed of 31 properties which exert an influence upon the transfer advising process (See Appendix T). These categories and their properties are as follows: The category of *institutional factors* is comprised of the properties communication, competence, and concern with respect to four-year institutions and the properties of personnel relations, support, environment, organization, senior leadership, and partnerships with respect to

two year colleges. The category of *cultural factors* is comprised of the properties economic perceptions, ties to the location, ties to the past, fears, personal perceptions, and perceptions of outsiders. The category of *contextual factors* is comprised of the properties educational support, educational preparedness, and educational affordability. The category of *adviser factors* is comprised of the properties transfer student, first generation college student, academic background, personal belief system, family background, home town, near peer advising, emotional investment, and training. The category of *student factors* is comprised of the properties goal formation, academic standing, personal characteristics, and background.

The second conclusion is that individual properties influence the transfer advising process in a singular as well as a combined manner. One prominent example of a property that exerts a singular influence is educational preparedness which is housed within the category of *contextual factors*. The large percentage of students from smaller rural communities who are required to enroll in remedial classes during their first semester of community college reveals that the lack of academic preparedness which results from their experience in high school exerts a negative influence upon these students' chances of transferring to a four-year institution of higher education. A prominent example of properties that exert a combined influence upon the transfer advising process is the united influence produced by the properties of personal perceptions and perceptions of outsiders, both located within the category of *cultural factors*. Students from smaller rural communities tend to feel inferior to people from larger communities whom they regard as more educated and more capable in academic matters. Educated people from outside the smaller rural community are also viewed as people who are snooty, selfish, and uncaring. As a result, the combination of these two properties produces a student who is lacking in confidence and also gives that student a ready-made excuse for not attempting to pursue a

degree in higher education. Specifically, a student who lacks confidence can justify his unwillingness to pursue an academic degree by saying “I don’t want to be like those people anyway.”

The third conclusion is that some properties influence the transfer advising process in a nonlinear fashion which can best be described as dynamic with the ultimate influence being deposited in the core category which is *student factors*. The most prominent example of this dynamic influence involves the properties of personal perceptions and fears which are housed within the category of *cultural factors*, the properties of goal formation and personal characteristics which are housed within the category of *student factors*, and the properties of first generation college student and transfer student which are housed within the category of *adviser factors*. In this particular scenario the influence travels the following path. First, the culture of the smaller rural community creates an inferiority complex in the student which results in the student feeling that he cannot compete academically with students from larger communities. This, in turn, evokes fears of failure and ridicule within the student if he attempts to pursue a bachelor’s degree. This influence is deposited in terms of the student’s personal characteristics which are characterized as unmotivated, unprepared, and inept. As a result, the student has low expectations of himself and reduces his goals in life to the level that many would consider low. In a very simplified way, this dynamic explains much of the reason why the transfer rate in rural counties is so far below the national average and also why a cycle of poverty and a lack of education in the rural communities have spiraled downward for over a century. However, the injection of *adviser factors* into this process begins to alter this dynamic. The advisers have confronted these same cultural influences and share two common properties with the students they advise. The majority of the advisers are first generation college students and also transfer

students. As such, the advisers exert three influences upon the students they advise. First, they present to the students an example of someone similar to themselves who overcame the negative cultural influences, successfully transferred to a four-year institution, and completed a college degree. Second, they offer knowledge which will overcome the information gap and ease many of the fears which plague the students they advise. Third, the advisers motivate the students to believe in themselves and set their goals in life higher than they otherwise would. In this manner, the properties of first generation college student and transfer student mitigate the negative influences of personal perceptions and perceptions of outsiders by altering the trajectory of their influence path.

The fourth conclusion is that three categories exert a strong influence upon the transfer advising process. The categories of *contextual factors*, *cultural factors*, and *adviser factors* all register high levels of strength. The category of *institutional factors* exerts an influence that is relatively neutral. This conclusion applies to the application of the *influence theory* as it is applied to the context of rural community colleges in the state of Alabama. If this theory were applied to the California institutions involved in the Serban study (2008) the strength of the *institutional factors* would have been very strong. At this point in time, transfer is not a top priority for the colleges located in the rural communities of the state of Alabama and for this reason; the strength rating of *institutional factors* is neutral to slightly positive. It should be noted that in many grounded theory studies that deal with a process the core category is the category which exerts the most powerful influence upon the process. However, power of influence is not the necessary criterion for a core category. The criteria of a core category are its adhesiveness and its ability to hold all the other categories together in an organic whole (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In many circumstances adhesion incorporates power of influence

but in the *influence theory* the core category, *student factors*, brings adhesion to the other categories by functioning as a receptacle which receives and absorbs the influences exerted by those categories. Therefore, the power of the influence exerted by the *student factors* is predominantly neutral.

The fifth conclusion is that two categories exert a strong negative influence upon the transfer advising process. The two categories which exert the strongest negative influence in the *influence theory* as it applies to rural community colleges in the state of Alabama are *contextual factors* and *cultural factors*. One participant described these two categories as a “two headed snake that is connected.” Both of these categories exert an extremely negative influence and both categories feed into and animate each other. The contextual influences such as a low percentage of adults with college degrees and a lack of academic preparedness animate many of the negative cultural influences such as a lack of economic incentives and a lack of motivation to pursue a college degree. These cultural influences, in turn, feed back into and animate the contextual influences to create what one participant described as an “excruciatingly painful cycle of negativity which continually reinforces itself and recalcifies itself in each generation of those who inhabit these rural communities.” The problems created by the *cultural factors* and the *contextual factors* are the predominant reasons why the transfer rate is dramatically low in the community colleges located in the rural counties in the state of Alabama.

The sixth conclusion is that one category exerts a strong positive influence upon the transfer advising process and that category is *adviser factors*. The *adviser factors* exert this strong positive influence in three specific ways. First, the fact that advisers in the ACTAC program are near peers to the students they advise provides a reference point for the students which they do not have in institutional advisors and faculty members. Having an adviser who is

close to them in age and experience provides students with a beneficial advantage. The dynamic of the near peer advising relationship gives the student an individual whom they can better relate with and, as a result, the student feels comfortable opening up about their desires and aspirations in life. The end product of such a relationship and the influence it exerts is a student who is more focused and assured of the path she wishes to travel in life.

A second positive influence which the *adviser factors* provide is due to the close fit which is part of the ACTAC program. The property of near peer advising provides a strongly positive influence upon the transfer advising process, but that influence is greatly enhanced by the fact that most of the advisers in the program are from smaller rural communities, first generation college students, and transfer students as well. The fact that the advisers share these three properties with the students they advise exerts an enhanced positive influence upon the transfer advising process. One participant referred to himself as a “Christopher Columbus type figure.” In the ancient world everyone thought the world was flat and they were afraid to travel beyond the horizon for fear that they would fall off the edge of the earth. However, when Christopher Columbus sailed to the new world for the first time, he was able to return and assure everyone that it was safe and that there was no rational reason to be afraid. Many of the students from rural communities are gripped with fear just thinking about all the difficulties connected with transferring to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor’s degree. The advisers in the ACTAC program serve not only as role models, but also as pioneers and explorers who can say to the students they advise, “I have been there and it can be done. There is no reason to be terrified.” In this way, the advisers not only allay the fears of the students they advise but also motivate them to pursue their dreams with vigor and confidence.

A third positive influence of the *adviser factors* is realized in the synthesizing function which they play in the transfer advising process. As a synthesizer the *adviser factors* exercise three purposes. First, they serve as a buffer between the students and the negative influences that are emitted from the *contextual factors* and the *cultural factors*. The advisers exercise this function by telling the students that they are aware of these negative influences and by reassuring the students that these negative influences can be overcome. Second, the *adviser factors* function as a deflector of the negative influences which are exerted by the *contextual factors* and the *cultural factors*. The advisers exercise this function by intervening to protect students from some of the negative influences. One prominent display of this function is assisting students in overcoming the information gap, which is a particularly debilitating obstacle for first generation college students who are contemplating transferring to a four-year institution in order to pursue a bachelor's degree. Third, the *adviser factors* function as an energizer which spurs students to set their goals in life higher than they otherwise would. The primary way in which this function is carried out is when advisers motivate students to think about their lives and visualize their futures along lines that they have never considered. The presence of an individual who shares the same background as they do and has accomplished significant things in life inspires students to seek to do the same in their own lives.

### Evaluation

This research endeavor adopted the evaluation metric of credibility which was the evaluation metric developed by the original grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as determining whether the findings of a grounded theory study are “trustworthy and believable.” In the second chapter, Methods, the six criteria of credibility were listed as “fit,” “usefulness,” “conceptual development,” “contextualization,”

“logic,” and “researcher proficiency” (pp. 52-55). Many of the evaluation questions which are associated with these criteria can only be answered by outside parties such as scholars, practitioners, and policy makers who work in the field of transfer advising. Other questions can only be answered at a later date when future evidence has been collected and assessed. However, there are certain evaluative questions which can be addressed by the researcher. In the following paragraphs, the researcher will attempt to give an honest evaluation concerning those questions which relate to the credibility of this research endeavor.

### *Fit*

The first criterion for evaluating credibility is “fit.” Fit is evaluated on the basis of the following questions. Do the findings resonate with the experience of those for whom the research is written? Was the theory validated with the participants in the study (Glaser & Straus, 1967)?

When the *influence theory* was presented to the participants in the study, it received a universally positive and enthusiastic reception. One participant said, “This is exactly what is happening.” A second participant remarked, “This is amazing. This theory describes exactly what we are doing.” A third participant stated, “It never occurred to me to put it in a systematic way, but I think this theory perfectly captures the dynamic of what is going on in the transfer advising process.” From these reactions, it would appear that the *influence theory* does resonate with the participants in the study.

### *Usefulness*

The second criterion for evaluating credibility is “usefulness.” Usefulness is evaluated on the basis of the following questions. Did the study offer new explanations or insights? Do the findings have ongoing significance? Can the findings of this study be used to develop policy, change practices, and add to the knowledge base in the profession (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)?

In terms of usefulness, it can be stated that this research study does offer new insights which will have ongoing significance. A new theory which is the initial attempt to explain a phenomenon based upon data derived from the area of practice should fulfill the requirement for new insights. However, the degree to which this theory can be used to develop policy and change practice will have to be answered at a future date by those professionals who work in the field of transfer advising.

### *Conceptual Development*

The third criterion for evaluating credibility is “conceptual development.” Conceptual development is evaluated on the basis of the following questions. Were there cases that did not fit the pattern? Was the core category selected on the grounds that it was the main theme of the research and was it effective in pulling all of the other categories together into a cohesive whole? Does the theory exhibit explanatory power by going beyond description to explanation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)?

In answer to the first question, there were several cases which did not fit the pattern. The most prominent negative case was the cultural mindset of the larger rural communities which differed from the cultural mindset of the smaller rural communities. This finding deepened the scope of the theory and increased its parsimony. As the core category of the theory, *student factors*, was the main theme which pulled all of the other categories together into an organic whole. Its function as a collector of the influences exerted by the other categories portrays the manner in which the *student factors* accomplished this feat. The theory does exhibit explanatory power which goes beyond description to explanation by indicating which categories exert strong and weak influences, positive and negative influences, as well as combined and enhanced influences. However, it should be noted that the theory is not as robust as it could possibly be.

Data was collected and analyzed from one important agent in the transfer advising process. The theory was developed through the lens of the near peer advisers' experiences. This situation results in a theory which is, of necessity, somewhat tilted. If data had been collected and analyzed from other agents involved in the transfer advising process, the explanatory power of the *influence theory* would have been, in all likelihood, enhanced.

#### *Contextualization*

The fourth criterion for evaluating credibility is “contextualization.” Contextualization is evaluated on the basis of the following questions. Were the research findings placed within their historical, social, and political contexts? Was process accounted for? Did the process assist theory users to explain factors that influence the transfer advising process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)?

The findings of this study were placed within the historical, social, and political context by means of the third phase of the research design which was devoted to contextual analysis. In addition, much of the work devoted to the analysis of *cultural factors* revealed many of the influences that were exerted upon the transfer advising process as a result of the historical, social, and political environments in which the process took place. The process of the transfer advising phenomenon was accounted for by a separate phase of the research design which was devoted to the analysis of process. The findings generated from this analysis will assist users of the theory by informing them of which influences are strong, weak, and neutral along with which influences are positive, negative, and neutral. Furthermore, the findings generated from the process analysis will alert users of the theory concerning which categories unite to exert combined and enhanced influences upon the transfer advising process.

### *Logic*

The fifth criterion for evaluating credibility is “logic.” Logic is evaluated on the basis of the following questions. Were methodological decisions made clear so that the reader could judge their appropriateness for gathering data and doing analysis? Were the questions driving the data collection arrived at through data analysis? Did theoretical formulation guide data collection? Did the categories prove to be representative of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)?

The introduction to Chapter III, Category Findings, contained an extensive description of the theoretical sampling decisions that were made in the first three phases of the research design. In addition, the theoretical sampling decisions which were made throughout the fourth and fifth phases of the research design were interspersed throughout chapters four and five. The material was ordered in this fashion so that the reader could judge whether methodological decisions were adequate and also whether research and interview questions were arrived at through data analysis. Also, copious quotations from participants were sprinkled throughout the document in order to leave a data trail so that the reader could recognize how theoretical formulation guided the collection of data. Finally, a healthy endorsement of the theory by the participants in the study argues in favor of the position that the categories are representative of the data.

### *Researcher Proficiency*

The sixth criterion for evaluating credibility is “researcher proficiency.” Researcher proficiency is evaluated on the basis of the following questions. Did the researcher demonstrate sensitivity to the data? Did the researcher demonstrate a creativity of expression? Did the researcher demonstrate analytical ability? Did the researcher adequately express reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006)?

The ultimate judges of these questions will be the readers of this dissertation. However, upon reflection, the researcher would make the following observations. At the beginning of this project the research context and conditions seemed ideal. The researcher did not have any strongly held opinions or deeply felt emotions with respect to community college issues, transfer matters, or rural community conditions. As a result, the researcher was able to conduct the research in a relatively neutral fashion which was relatively free from bias or tainted by a priori assumptions. However, at the conclusion of the research process it became apparent that the researcher had been moved by the plight faced by rural community college students and had become a proponent of the program sponsored by the Alabama College Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC) and funded by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (JKCF). In the final analysis, it is difficult to determine to what degree the adoption of these perspectives might have affected the findings of the research.

### Recommendations

There are eight recommendations which fall into two classifications. The first classification includes practical recommendations which are designed to improve the transfer rate in rural community colleges in the state of Alabama. The second classification includes recommendations for further research and is designed to assist those individuals who are engaged in academic research into the transfer advising process and related areas.

#### *Practical Recommendations*

It is not generally the purpose of grounded theory to make recommendations for practice. However, the researcher would tentatively suggest recommendations that could be taken in three areas of practice that might improve the transfer rate in rural community colleges in the state of Alabama. The statistics related to transfer are very vivid in the story they tell. The national

transfer rate is 22% and the transfer rate in the state of Alabama is 3.7% (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The community college with the highest transfer rate in the state of Alabama is 8% and the rural community college with the highest transfer rate involved in this study is 6% (IPEDS, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). These figures paint a very dramatic picture that something is amiss when it comes to the transfer process in the state of Alabama, especially in the institutions located in the rural counties. This problem was recognized by the Alabama College Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC) and was articulated in its stated goal for the program which served as the subject for this dissertation. Specifically stated, that goal is “to increase the community college to four-year institution transfer rate in the state of Alabama, with special attention on community colleges serving counties with high rates of rural poverty in Alabama’s Black Belt and Appalachian counties” (Alabama Transfer Advising Corps, 2006). In line with this statement, the practical recommendations will enumerate three strategies that should contribute to the accomplishment of this goal.

The first practical recommendation attempts to give senior administrators the tools they need to improve the transfer rate in their institutions. One of the most effective agents in creating change and, in this situation, enacting policies that will increase the transfer rate, is senior leadership. There are two tools which senior administrators need in order to achieve these results. One tool is knowledge and the other tool is implementation. There are two pieces of knowledge which should be imparted to Presidents, Vice Presidents, Deans, and other senior leaders who are in a position to make a positive impact upon the transfer advising process.

Senior leaders need to be informed of the problem that exists in relation to the transfer rate in the state of Alabama. Specifically, Presidents of community colleges need to be aware of the national transfer rate, the state transfer rate and the transfer rate of their institution. The

second piece of knowledge with which senior leaders need to be acquainted is the Serban (2008) study that outlines the eight characteristics shared by community colleges which have high transfer rates.

The implementation tool encourages senior leaders to develop the three characteristics which are shared by senior administrators at community colleges which have high transfer rates. In particular, senior leaders should be encouraged to incorporate transfer into the mission of the institution which makes transfer a part of the institutional vision and, thus, a top priority of the community college. Senior leaders should also be encouraged to create a transfer culture which produces an environment that keeps transfer in the vision of students on a daily basis, reminding them that their associate's degree is not the end point of their academic lives but the starting point. Finally, senior administrators should be encouraged to produce an environment that views transfer as a responsibility shared by every person at the institution and not exclusively a task assigned to those whose job description focuses upon transfer.

A second practical recommendation is directed toward the advisers who participate in the ACTAC program. It is apparent that the advisers should be acquainted with the factors which influence the transfer advising process. As such, it is recommended that the advisers be given a general understanding of these factors and the ways in which they exert an influence upon the transfer advising process. Chapter III of the *influence theory* could serve this purpose. The contents of Chapter III could be incorporated into the training which the advisers receive prior to entering the field. This type of knowledge would prepare advisers to anticipate many of the problems that they will encounter while advising students from rural community colleges. Furthermore, this knowledge will equip advisers to formulate solutions to these problems.

The third practical recommendation is that the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC) program be continued and expanded. The philosophy of near peer advising has been demonstrated to be successful in accomplishing the goals it established. Due to the work of the ACTAC advisers, students from rural communities in the state of Alabama are encouraged and motivated to set their goals higher than they otherwise would. The advice of the ACTAC advisers enables students from rural communities to overcome the information gap which is one of the most formidable challenges they face in their endeavors to transfer to a four-year institution. The shared experiences of the ACTAC advisers, when imparted to students from rural communities allay the debilitating fears which they face when negotiating the transfer process. Of the five categories which emerged in the *influence theory*, the category of *adviser factors* is the only category that exerts a strong positive influence upon the transfer advising process. The *adviser factors* are the only positive force standing between the students and the negative influences that are exerted by the *cultural factors* and the *contextual factors*. It is considered that the continuation and the expansion of the ACTAC program will contribute in a meaningful way to accomplishing the goal of increasing the transfer rate in the state of Alabama and specifically, in those community colleges which are located in the rural counties.

#### *Research Recommendations*

Based upon the conclusions reached in this substantive grounded theory on the factors which influence the transfer advising process viewed through the experiences of nine near peer advisers functioning within the context of rural community colleges in the state of Alabama, the researcher would like to recommend further research studies in five domains. The first domain concerns replication of the study. The second domain concerns more focused study within the categories which comprise the theory. The third domain concerns studies which would test the

theory using more developed measures of quantitative analysis. The fourth domain concerns a study devoted to enumerating a model of transfer advising. The fifth domain concerns a study that would refine a new analytical process.

Scholarship would be advanced by replicating this research study in a variety of ways. One study could replicate this study within the same context, using similar participants. Such a study would serve to polish the present theory, determine if certain categories and properties should be modified, and give added depth to its findings. A second type of research project could replicate this study within the same context, using a variety of participants. For example, a study could develop a substantive grounded theory concerning the transfer advising process viewed through the experiences of students who are going through the transfer process, faculty members, or institutional advisors. Such studies would give added scope to the *influence theory* by further refining it from multiple perspectives. A third series of projects could replicate this present study within a variety of contexts. These studies could be conducted in community colleges which are located in urban, suburban, and metropolitan areas. The results of such studies would broaden the vision of the influence theory and increase its general applicability.

Scholarship would be advanced by means of a group of studies which focused more narrowly upon certain pieces of the *influence theory*. There are a multitude of studies which could be undertaken in this domain but three will be mentioned. The first concerns an interaction between properties in the category of *contextual factors*. The second concerns the further development of the understanding of near peer advising. The third involves the influence which the *cultural factors* exert upon the *institutional factors*.

One valuable study could focus upon the interaction between the contextual categories. A mixed method study could be constructed to examine the specific interactions between the

contextual properties of educational support and educational affordability. This study could be designed to explore the phenomenon of the information gap. The following questions could be addressed. Do measures of financial aid exist which would mitigate the educational unaffordability with respect to students from smaller rural communities? If so, why are students from smaller rural communities not familiar with these avenues of assistance?

A second study could explore the nature of near peer advising from the perspective of students who are being advised. A qualitative case study could be developed which focuses upon transfer students and their experiences with near peer advising. Such a study could explore the advantages and disadvantages of near peer advising from an important independent perspective. This type of study would enhance the parsimony of the present *influence theory*.

A third type of study could explore the interaction between the influences which *cultural factors* exert upon *institutional factors*. A qualitative study could focus upon community college personnel to gather data relating to their attitudes toward education, society outside the small rural community, and toward students from smaller rural communities who attend community college. This data could be compared with data from the *cultural factors* category to discover what degree cultural attitudes influence institutional attitudes.

These types of studies would further the *influence theory* in three ways. The first benefit would be a further developing of the theory. Findings from these types of studies could bring about changes in the theory if discoveries were made which conflicted with the theory. A second benefit would be a polishing of the theory. The findings from these types of studies could refine the parameters and develop the nuances of the theory. A third benefit would be a deepening of the theory. Findings from these types of studies could yield explanatory power to the theory by filling in gaps and giving added substance to its categories.

Scholarship would be advanced by means of a quantitative study which tested the theory within a similar context. A quantitative study could focus upon all the major participants involved in the transfer process: advisers, students, parents, faculty members, institutional advisers, and senior administrators. A survey could be administered to each of these groups in order to determine how accurately the *influence theory* describes the phenomenon under consideration. Such a study would assist in lending further credibility to the theory, determine to what degree the theory could be verified, and possibly argue in favor of the theory's generalizability.

Scholarship would be advanced by a descriptive qualitative study which enlarged upon the holistic student based model of transfer advising. Such a study could identify and delineate the various elements, stages, and techniques which comprise the model. A second focus of such a study could detail the process by which the model unfolds and is applied in a variety of circumstances. A third focus of such a study could enumerate how this model is logically derived from the *influence theory* which underlies the model. The significance of this type of study would rest in the fact that it would be the first advising model developed from a theory which is grounded in data taken from the field of transfer advising.

Scholarship could also be advanced by an analysis of the data analysis procedure which was implemented in this research study. The data analysis procedure utilized in this study was the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) which incorporated the analytic tools of open coding and axial coding. These analytic tools were supplemented with modified applications of dimensional analysis (Schatzman, 1991) and situational analysis (Clarke, 2005). However, as the research progressed, it became apparent that the actual data analysis procedure which was being used was slightly different from the other

applications. This different approach to data analysis resulted from the format in which the data in this study was presented. The participants in this study presented their data in the form of scenarios or encounters. As a result, the data analysis compared and contrasted these scenarios or encounters in a unique manner that transcended other analytic tools that are commonly used in grounded theory studies. Such a study would be ideally suited for analyzing the holistic student based transfer advising model. This type of study would result in the contribution of an additional analytic tool that could be used in the employment of the constant comparative method.

### *Conclusion*

As we stand on the precipice of the future we can look in three directions. As we look to the past we see the original mission of the community college which was to provide less fortunate students, most of whom were from rural communities, with the opportunity to better their lives and ensure a better future for their progeny by transferring to a four-year institution for the purpose of earning a bachelor's degree. That era was an age of optimism and a time when nothing was viewed as impossible for a young person who had ambition, enthusiasm and a willingness to work hard in order to achieve his or her dreams. A century has passed since that time and we have witnessed a steady erosion of that vision. Various events and policy decisions have slowly but surely reduced the number of students who pursue their dreams by transferring to a four-year institution for a bachelor's degree. In the rural communities three generations of negative cultural and contextual influences have reinforced themselves and become calcified in a fourth generation of young people who presently inhabit those communities. As we look at the present we see a cohort of rural students who are depressed, defeated, and despondent about their futures. We see a culture and a context that offers them none of the enthusiasm and optimism

which characterized the original vision of the first community colleges that dotted the landscape of this great nation. When we cast our eyes to the future our greatest longing is to see a return to that original vision which will replace depression with enthusiasm, supplant defeat with victory, and transform despondency into forward-looking optimism, all of which will restore hope to a new generation of rural community college students, assuring them that they can participate in the American Dream. This vision will only become a reality as programs such as the ACTAC are funded, supported, and allowed to flourish.

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Appendix A  
First Participant Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

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1. Tell me a little about what attracted you to this program?
2. Tell me a little about the training you received?
3. Tell me about the types of students who approach you for advice?
4. What goes through your mind when a student comes into your office and says, “I want to transfer to a four-year institution”?
5. How does the training that you received influence the way you decide to advise a student who is interested in transfer?
6. How do your personal beliefs influence the way you decide to advise a student who is interested in transfer?
7. How do your personal experiences influence the way you decide to advise a student who is interested in transfer?
8. How does your personal assessment of a student affect the way you decide to advise that student?
9. Are there any other factors that influence your decisions on what advice to give to students who are interested in transfer?
10. What factor(s) would you say influence you the most in advising students about transfer?
11. Is there anything else you think I should know in order to better understand your decision making process with regard to advising students concerning transfer?
12. Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

Appendix B  
Second Participant Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

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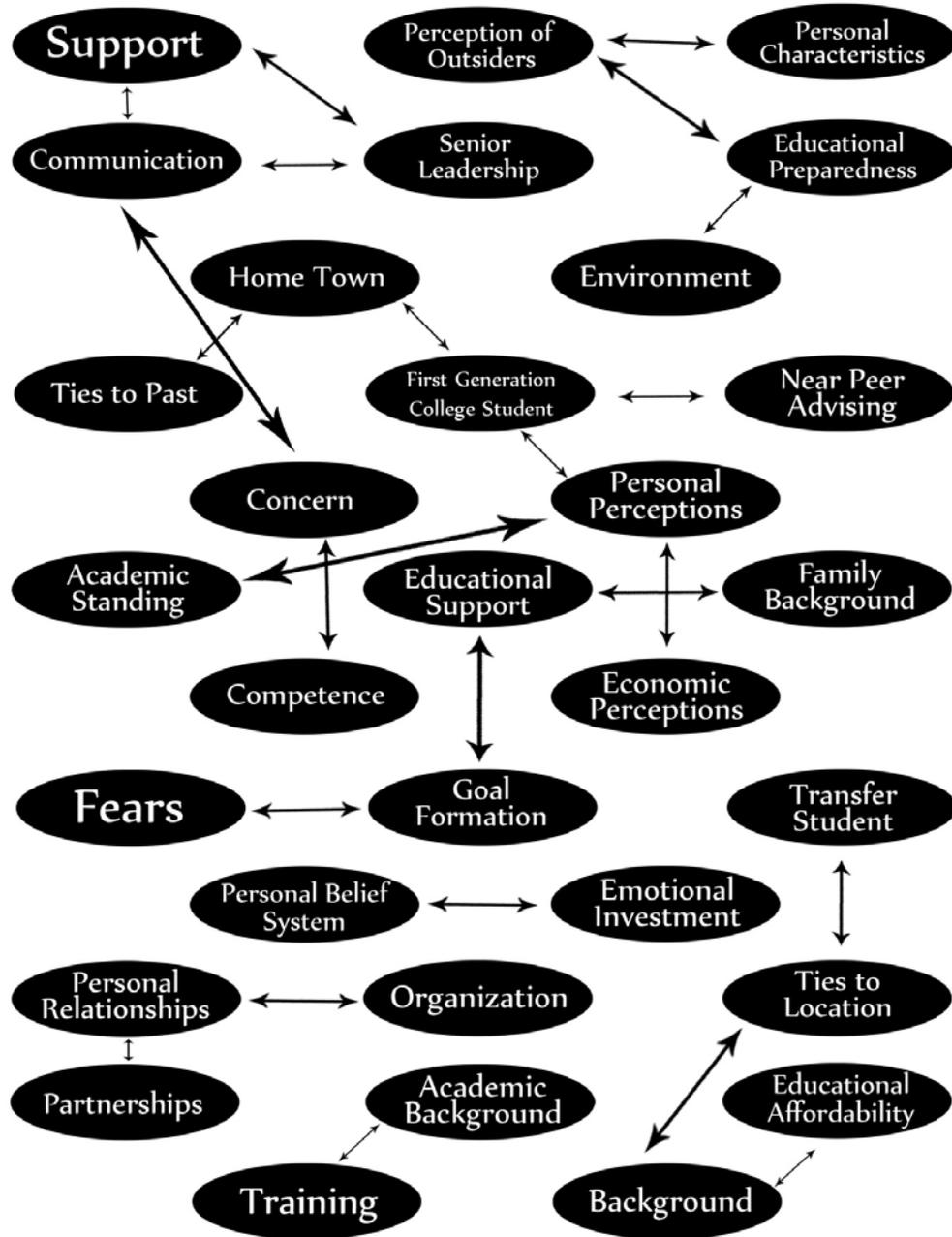
1. What would you say are the top three priorities of the Senior Administration?
  - Where does transfer fit into their priorities?
  - Does any senior administrator seem to have transfer as a priority?
  - What are they doing to improve the transfer rate at their community college?
2. Do you have any strongly held philosophical, social, religious, or political beliefs?
  - How do these beliefs govern, control, motivate, or influence the way you advise students?
3. Describe the culture of the community in which your community is located?
  - How does this culture relate to pursuing higher education?
  - How does this culture relate to moving away from the area to pursue higher education?
  - How did this culture arise?
  - How is this culture perpetuated?
4. Tell me how you think being closer to the student's age you are advising changes the dynamics from an older person?
  - Can you give me some examples?
  - Do you experience the social alienation of "no man's land"?
  - Are there any students who are reticent because you are close to their age?
5. Does your community college have any kind of arrangements or partnerships with four-year institutions?

How does this affect the advising process?  
Are students more inclined to transfer to those institutions?  
Do any of these four-year institutions have an office on campus (JSU at GSCC)?  
Do you view this as a good thing?
6. Does your community college have anyone whose specific job is to advise students concerning transfer?

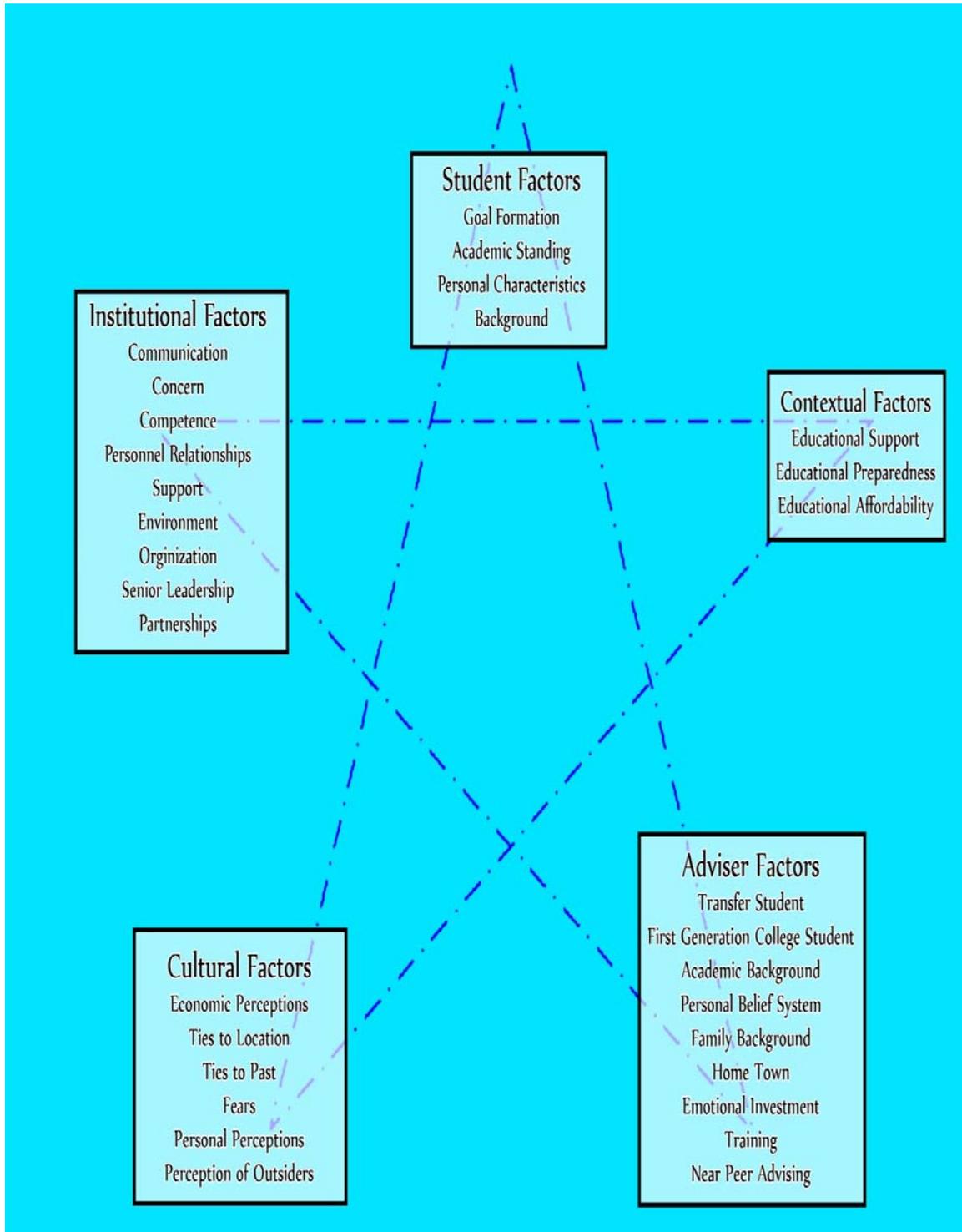
What is your relationship with that person?

How does your work fit in with their overall vision?  
What type of guidance does that person give to you?

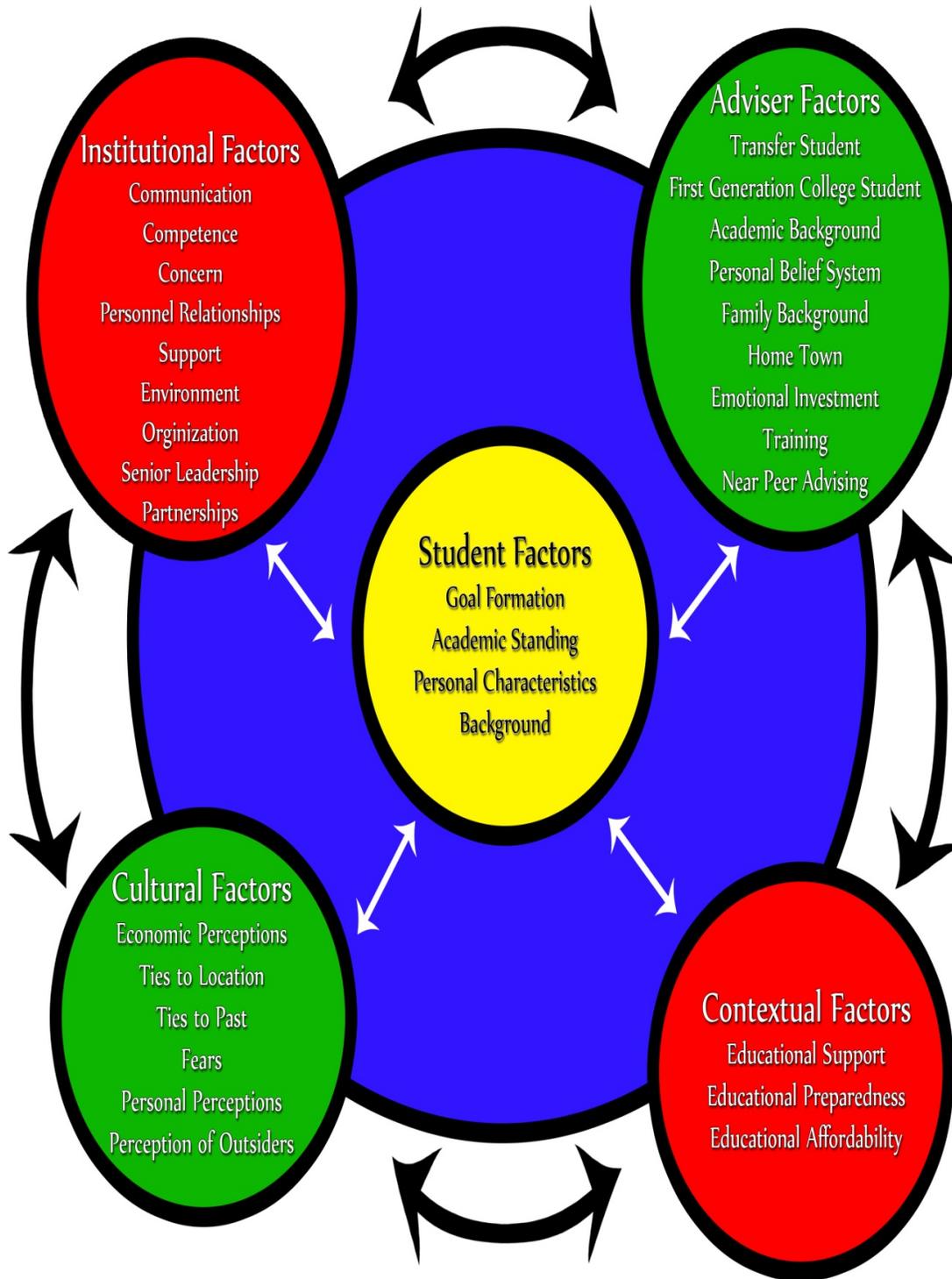
Appendix C  
First Situational Map



Appendix D  
Second Situational Map



Appendix E  
Third Situational Map



Appendix F  
Third Participant Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

---

1. How would you compare what you do as an advisor to another profession?
  - For example, A doctor because I....
  - For example, A Tour Guide because I.....
  - For example, A Plumber because I.....
  - For example, A Coach because I.....
  
2. How would you describe your approach to advising by supplying one word or one short phrase to the following statement, "Advising as...."
  - Advising as teaching
  - Advising as helping
  - Advising as guiding
  - Advising as mentoring
  
3. How do you react when you hear the following phrases?  
Learning Centered Advising  
Curriculum Based Advising  
Faculty centered advising  
Academic centered advising  
Prescriptive Advising  
Deficit Remediation Advising  
Strengths-based Advising
  
4. Which of the previous approaches to advising best describes your ideas about advising? Which ones do you feel most comfortable with? Is there a combination that you would use to describe your ideas? Would you offer a completely different description?
  
5. Which of the previous approaches to advising best describes the approach that is employed at the community college where you work?
  
6. Which of the previous approaches to advising best describes the approach that you take when you advise students concerning transfer issues?

Appendix G  
IRB Protocol Application

FOR EXEMPT REVIEW HUMAN SUBJECTS IN NON-MEDICAL RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY

**Protocol ID:** 1088

**Title:** THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF ADVISERS IN THE ALABAMA  
TRANSFER ADVISING CORPS

**Principal Investigator:** Alan Webb

**Degree:** (MD/PhD)

**Title:** Student

**College and Dept:** Higher Ed Admin.

**Box Number Phone:** 256-312-4248

**Fax E-mail:** webb81357@yahoo.com

**Human Subjects Tutorial Completed?** Y

**Co-Principal Investigator – 1** David Hardy

**Degree:** (MD/PhD)

**Title:** Director

**Dept:** Ed Leadership/Policy/Tech St.

**Box Number Phone:** 205-348-6874

**Fax E-mail:** dhardy@bamaed.ua.edu

**Human Subjects Tutorial Completed?** Y

**Subject Population(s) Checklist Yes/No**

Minor Children (under 19)	N
Pregnant Women	N
Mentally Disabled	N
Decisionally Challenged	N
Laboratory Personnel	N
Healthy Volunteers	N
Students	N
Employees	Y
Other (i.e., any population that is not specified above)	N

**General Checklist Yes/No**

Training Grant	N
Program Project Grant?	N
Cooperating Institution(s)?	N
Federally Sponsored Project?	N
Human blood, cells, tissues, or body fluids (tissues)?	N

Subjects will be paid for participation? N

**Study Location(s) Checklist Yes/No**

University Y  
Local Schools N  
University Medical Center N  
DCH N  
VA (Specify PI at VA) N  
Local Community N  
Other Category (Specify other study locations, including overseas) N

**VA Checklist Yes/No**

When human research activities meet the criteria to be considered VA Research, the IRB must be made aware in order to meet its obligations to protect human subjects. The research recruits subjects at the VAPAHCS, or N

The research involves the use of the VAPAHCSs nonpublic information to identify or contact human research subjects or prospective subjects or to use such data for research purposes, or N

The research is sponsored (i.e., funded) by the VAPAHCS, or N

The research is conducted by or under the direction of any employee or agent of TVAMC(full- time, part-time, intermittent, consultant, without compensation (WOC), on-station fee-basis, on- station contract, or on-station sharing agreement basis) in connection with her/his TVAMC responsibilities, or N

The research is conducted using any property or facility of VAPAHCS. N

**Funding Checklist**

**Funding - Grants/Contracts**

**Funding - Fellowships**

NONE Y

**Gift Funding**

**Dept. Funding**

**Other Funding (e.g., OTL, URO)**

**Non Medical Exempt Review**

Federal regulations state that certain research is exempt from review. However, under University's Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, a research protocol proposing the use of human subjects must be submitted to the Panel to determine if it qualifies for exempt status. EXEMPTIONS DO NOT APPLY TO RESEARCH CONDUCTED ON PRISONERS.

In order to qualify as Exempt, a protocol must be no more than minimal risk AND must only involve human

subjects in one or more of the following paragraphs.

**Select one or more of the following paragraphs:**

1. Y **Research conducted in established educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as:**
  - i) research on education instructional strategies, or
  - ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
  
2. Y **Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), surveys, interviews, or observation of public behavior \***  
UNLESS
  - i) information is recorded with identifiers linked to the subjects AND
  - ii) subjects' responses could place subjects at risk (e.g., criminal or civil liability, financial standing, employability or reputation).
  
3. Y **Research involving educational tests, surveys, interviews, or observation of public behavior is exempt if:**
  - i) the subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or
  - ii) federal statute requires confidentiality of identifiable information to be maintained permanently
  
4. N **Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, or records. Sources must either be publicly available or information must be recorded without identifiers linked to the subjects.**  
**Yes/No**
  - N Are the data and/or specimens pre-existing, i.e., "on the shelf", as of today?
  - N Is it correct that no one (including the researcher) can identify a subject from any information recorded for this research?
  
5. N **Research conducted by or subject to the approval of Federal Department or Agency head, and designed to study or evaluate:**
  - i) public benefit or service programs;
  - ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs;
  - iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs; or
  - iv) changes in methods of payment for benefits under those programs.
  
6. N **Taste and food quality evaluation involving wholesome/safe foods.**

**1. Purpose**

- a) **Provide a 3-5 sentence lay summary of the purpose of the study.**

The purpose of this study will be to understand the decision making process that the Community College Transfer Advisers (the participants in this study) go through when advising a community college student who is seeking assistance in transferring to a four year college or university. Specifically, this study proposes to develop a theory that will explain this decision making process by exploring the thought processes that each Adviser enters into when deciding what specific pieces of advice to give a student who is seeking to transfer.

**b) What does the Investigator(s) hope to learn from the study?**

The investigator hopes to learn what events, circumstances, or individuals influence the decision making process of the participants in this study and also how the participants interact with these influences in order to make a decision concerning the type of advice to give to community college students who are interested in transferring to a four year college or University.

## **2. Study Procedures**

**a) Describe all study procedures.**

The study procedures will involve three face to face interviews with each of the nine participants conducted over a period of approximately six months. Each interview will follow a series of data analysis procedures that will progressively narrow the focus of the study into a theory generating conclusion. Document analysis will also be involved in the study. The documents will include official documents printed by The University of Alabama such as training manuals, policy statements, and recruitment materials. The documents will also include personal documents such as email messages, personal correspondence, and journal entries recorded by the participants in the study. These journal entries originate from the Advisers' end-of-the-year report notebooks from 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 which include journal entries that they have made throughout the year. This journaling is required as part of the Advisers' job with the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps and this study will perform a document analysis on those journal entries. There will be a limited amount of observation which will be conducted while the researcher is on the community college campuses where the Advisers work for the purpose of conducting interviews.

**b) State if audio or video taping will occur. Describe what will become of the tapes after use, e.g., shown at scientific meetings, erased. Describe the final disposition of the tapes.**

This study will include audio taping. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that might be published, it will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file cabinet within a locked office which is located on the second floor of the researcher's residence. No other individual has access to the researcher's house, office, or the filing cabinet in which the research materials will be stored. Only the researcher will have access to these records. The records will include the tape-recorded interview sessions and the transcripts of those sessions. The audio tapes and transcripts will be retained in this filing cabinet with only the principal researcher having access to them for a period of five years after the dissertation has been approved. At that point in time both audio tapes and transcripts will be destroyed by shredding.

## **3. Background**

a) **Describe past findings leading to the formulation of the study.**

A number of studies have chronicled the steady decline of the community college transfer rate that has occurred over the past fifty years. Several studies have also noted the disparity between the national rate which is 23 percent and the rate in the state of Alabama which is 3.7 percent. Finally, many studies have isolated the advising process as a key element involved in the transfer process. Prior studies in this area have focused upon the activities of career advisors. This will be one of the first studies that investigates the activities of advisors who are close to the age of the students that they are advising, known as 'near peer' advising.

#### **4. Subject Population**

a) **State how many subjects will be involved and describe the type of subjects (e.g., students, patients with cardiac problems, particular kind of cancer, etc.) and state the reason for using such subjects.**

There will be nine participants involved in this study. All nine participants are recent graduates of The University of Alabama and were selected for the following reasons. All nine have experience and proven ability in advising community college students concerning transfer matters. Each participant demonstrates a strong commitment to the program and shares a passion to make a positive contribution to the lives of rural community college students. All nine individuals participated in the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC) as an Adviser during the academic year of 2008-2009, which gives each of them the added advantage of one year of experience with and reflection upon the decision making process. In addition, six of the participants are originally from rural areas and attended community colleges before transferring to The University of Alabama. In light of these qualifications, it is considered that these participants will be able to provide the researcher with the thick, deep, and rich data that will prove advantageous in developing a theory that will accurately explain the decision making process that Advisers utilize when advising community college students concerning transfer to a four year college or university.

b) **State the age range, gender, and ethnic background.**

The participants are between the ages of 22 and 25 years of age. There are six male participants and three female participants. Eight of the participants are Caucasian and one is African American.

c) **State the number and rationale for involvement of potentially vulnerable subjects to be entered into the study, including minors, pregnant women, economically and educationally disadvantaged, decisionally impaired, and homeless people. Specify the measures being taken to minimize the risks and the chance of harm to the potentially vulnerable subjects.**

There are no participants in this study that would be designated as "vulnerable".

d) **Describe your recruitment procedures. Attach advertisements, flyers, etc., in Section #10 (Attachments).**

The participants were identified by the administrators of the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC). Each participant is involved in the program and this study is a part of the overall assessment of the project. A script for approaching potential participants is attached in Section 10 of this document. No recruitment from the general public will occur.

e) **Estimate the probable duration of the entire study as well as an estimate of the total time each subject is to be involved and data about the subject is to be collected (e.g., This is a 2 year study).**

This is a one year study. The total time each participant will be involved is estimated at approximately 5 hours each. This will involve three interviews that will last approximately one hour each. In addition, there may be several email exchanges and telephone conversations. The data to be collected about each participant will be the information that they provide concerning their decision making process with regard to advising rural community college students with respect to transferring to a four-year institution of higher education. There will also be the collection of a journal that each participant creates during their participation in the program. This journal is a part of the Advisers' end-of-the-year notebooks which are one of their job requirements for participating in the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps.

## **5. Risks**

a) **Describe risks. Include risks to privacy, confidentiality, etc..**

The risks in this study can be described as minimal. The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in this research study are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

b) **In case of overseas research, describe qualifications/preparations that enable you to estimate and minimize risks to subjects.**

There is no overseas research involved in this study.

## **6. Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality**

a) **Describe procedures protecting the privacy of the subjects and for maintaining confidentiality of data, as required by federal regulations, if applicable.**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that might be published, it will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant and pseudonyms will be used for each participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file cabinet within a locked office which is located on the second floor of the researcher's residence. No other individual has access to the researcher's house, office, or the filing cabinet in which the research materials will be stored. Only the researcher will have access to these records. The records will include the tape-recorded interview sessions and the transcripts of those sessions. The audio tapes and transcripts will be retained in this filing cabinet with only the principal researcher having access to them for a period of five years after the dissertation has been approved. At that point in time both audio tapes and transcripts will be destroyed by shredding.

## **7. Potential Conflict of Interest (Only for Funded Research)**

Please answer the following questions.

a)     N     Do any of the involved investigators or their immediate family (as described below) have consulting arrangements, management responsibilities or equity holdings in the Sponsoring company, vendor(s), provider(s) of goods, or subcontractor(s)?

- b) N Do any investigators or their immediate family have any financial relationship with the Sponsoring company, including the receipt of honoraria, income, or stock/stock options as payment?
- c) N Is any Investigator(s) a member of an advisory board with the Sponsoring company?
- d) N Do any investigators receive gift funds from the Sponsoring company?
- e) N Do any investigators or their immediate family have an ownership or royalty interest in any intellectual property utilized in this protocol?
- f) N Does University have an ownership or royalty interest in any intellectual property utilized in this protocol?

"Immediate family" means a spouse, dependent children as defined by the IRS, or a domestic partner.

If one or more of the above relationships exist, please include a statement in the consent form to disclose this relationship, i.e., a paid consultant, a paid member of the Scientific Advisory Board, has stock or stock options, or receives payment for lectures given on behalf of the sponsor (see sample consent form). The consent form should disclose what institution(s) or companies are involved in the study through funding, cooperative research, or by providing study drugs or equipment (see sample consent form).

If you answer yes to any of the questions above, you must file a CoI disclosure with your School Dean. If you are a faculty member in the School of Medicine, contact Barbara Flynn @ 723-7226, or email [protocol@keyusa.com](mailto:protocol@keyusa.com). <a <http://www.keyusa.com/IRB.htm> .

## **8. Consent Background**

You can add different Consent Forms, Alteration Forms, and Waivers. Provide consent process background information, in the table below, for each Consent Form(s), Alteration Form(s), and Waiver(s).

### **8.1 Consent Form adviser consent form**

**Who is obtaining consent? The person obtaining consent must be knowledgeable about the study.**

The principal investigator is obtaining consent.

**How is consent being obtained?**

Consent is being obtained by means of a written and signed agreement.

**What steps are you taking to determine that potential subjects are competent to participate in the decision-making process?**

The administrators of the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps (ACTAC) have determined that the potential participants are competent to participate in the decision making process. The

researcher will, prior to the commencement of each participant's first interview, review the informed consent form and discuss the study with the participant, giving them opportunity to ask questions about the study.

### **9. Assent Background**

All minors must provide an affirmative consent to participating by signing a simplified assent form, unless the Investigator(s) provides evidence to the IRB that the minors are not capable of assenting because of age, maturity, psychological state, or other factors.

### **16. Attachments**

#### **Document Type Document Name**

Other	FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	12/08/2009
Other	SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	12/08/2009
Other	THIRD INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	12/08/2009
Other	Participant Recruitment Script	12/11/2009
Other	Webb 10-OR-061	03/01/2010

### **Obligations**

Any change in the research protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review prior to the implementation of such change. Any complications in subjects or evidence of increase in the original estimate of risk should be reported at once to the IRB before continuing with the project. Inasmuch as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) include faculty, staff, legal counsel, public members, and students, protocols should be written in language that can be understood by all Panel members. The investigators must inform the participants of any significant new knowledge obtained during the course of the research.

All continuing projects and activities must be reviewed and re-approved at least annually by the IRB. IRB approval of any project is for a maximum period of one year. It is the responsibility of the Investigator(s) to resubmit the project to the IRB for annual review prior to the end of that year. (A "RENEWAL" form [notice to renew protocol] is sent to the Principal Investigator 7 weeks prior to the expiration date of the protocol.)

### **Faculty Advisors will approve students.**

All data including all signed consent form documents must be retained for a minimum of three years past the completion of the research. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. (Policy on Retention of and Access to Research Data, Research Policy Handbook, <a href="http://www.keyusa.com/IRB.htm"><http://www.keyusa.com/IRB.htm></a>)

Y The Principal Investigator has read and agrees to abide by the above obligations.

## Appendix H IRB Letters of Approval

Office for Research  
Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**  
RESEARCH

March 1, 2010

Alan Webb  
Dept. of Higher Education Administration  
College of Education  
Box 870231

Re: IRB#: 10-OR-061 "The Decision Making Process of Advisers in the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps"

Dear Mr. Webb:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on February 27, 2011. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the Continuing Review and Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Cassantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM  
Director & Research Compliance Officer  
Office of Research Compliance  
The University of Alabama

## Appendix I Consent Form

February 21, 2011

Office for Research  
Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**  
R E S E A R C H

Alan L. Webb  
ELPTS  
College of Education  
The University of Alabama

Re: IRB # 10-OR-061-R1 "The Decision Making Process of Advisers in the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps"

Dear Mr. Webb:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application.

Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on February 20, 2012. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



152 Ross Administration Building  
Box 870117  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0117  
(205) 348-8461  
tvc (205) 348-8882  
toll free (877) 820-3966

Carpendo T. Myles, MSM, CIM  
Director & Research Compliance Officer  
Office for Research Compliance  
The University of Alabama

## THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF ADVISERS IN THE ALABAMA TRANSFER ADVISING CORPS: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

### CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study is called "The Decision Making Process of Advisers in the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps: A Grounded Theory Study." This study is being conducted by Mr. Alan L. Webb. He is a candidate for the Doctorate of Education in the Department of Higher Education Administration. This study is in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Education and Mr. Webb is not receiving any salary or financial aid in this project. This study is being conducted by the Higher Education Administration program at The University of Alabama.

#### **What is this study about?**

In recent years the national rate of community college students transferring to four year colleges or universities has steadily declined. The rate of transfer in the state of Alabama is significantly below the national average. A suspected reason for this is the disproportionate number of rural counties in the state of Alabama which are comprised of lower income families that encounter a variety of difficulties in negotiating the necessary steps to attaining a degree in higher education. A program initiated by the Educational Policy Center at The University of Alabama created the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps, and is being funded by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. This program seeks to alter this situation by increasing the transfer rate in the state of Alabama. The means of accomplishing this goal is by placing recent college graduates on the campuses of community colleges located in rural counties for the purpose of assisting rural community college students who are interested in transferring to a four year institution of higher education. The intention of this qualitative study is to develop a grounded theory that will explain the decision making process employed by these guides, designated as Advisers, when deciding how to advise lower income rural community college students who are seeking information about transferring to a four year college or university. You will be asked to describe the various events, situations, individuals, and institutions that influence you in the process of advising students with regard to matters concerning transfer.

#### **Why is this study important? What good will the results do?**

The results of this study will assist future participants in the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps in making clearer and better informed decisions when advising community college students concerning the transfer process. The results of this study will also be of value to those policy makers who are directing the program. Specifically, these policy makers will be assisted in recruiting and training future Advisers in the program.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 2/28/2011  
EXPIRATION DATE: 2/27/2011

**Why have I been asked to take part in this study?**

You have been asked to take part in this study because you are an Adviser in the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps. You have been involved in this program since its inception and have had approximately eighteen months to reflect upon the process of advising rural community college students with regard to transferring to a four year college or university.

**How many other people will be in this study?**

This is a small qualitative study. A total of nine Advisers from the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps will participate in the study.

**What will we be asked to do in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study Mr. Webb will interview you on three specific occasions at a mutually agreed upon time and location. Each interview will last approximately one hour. These interviews will be recorded with audio recording materials and an arranged interview question protocol sheet.

**How much time will I spend in the study?**

Each of the three interviews will last approximately one hour. The total time involved in this study will be approximately three hours.

**What will this study cost us?**

The only cost to you for this study is your time.

**Will I be paid for being in this study?**

There will be no financial remuneration for participating in this study.

**What are the risks (problems or dangers) for being in this study?**

The risks in this study can be described as minimal. The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in this research study are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**What are the benefits of being in this study?**

There are no direct benefits to you. However, your personal experience of working with the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps may encourage donors and Administrators to increase support for this program which will provide increased access to higher education for rural community college students who show exceptional promise but lack financial information and resources.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

You are free to decide where we will visit you so we can talk without being overheard.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 2/28/2010  
EXPIRATION DATE: 2/27/2011

We will visit you in the privacy of your office, your home, or in another place that is convenient for you. Also, you have the freedom to refuse to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

The audio tapes as well as the written transcripts of the interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of the principal investigator which is located on the second floor of the principal investigator's residence. The principal investigator will be the only person who has access to these recordings. The audio tapes and transcripts will be retained in this filing cabinet with only the principal investigator having access to them for a period of five years after the dissertation has been approved. At that point in time both audio tapes and transcripts will be destroyed by shredding. In any type of report that might be published or presented at a scientific conference, it will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study?**

The only alternative to participation is not to participate.

**What are my rights as a participant?**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Alabama Transfer Advising Corps, your place of employment, or The University of Alabama. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. Being in this study is voluntary, it is your free choice. You may choose not to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies) will review study records from time to time. This is to be sure that participants in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Whom do I call if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions about this study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please contact me at (256) 312-4248 or 617 Haralson Avenue, Gadsden, Alabama 35901. You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. David E. Hardy, Director of Research at the Education Policy Center at The University of Alabama and Assistant Professor in the Higher Education Administration Program, in the following manner. Dr. David E. Hardy, at the College of Education, The University of Alabama, 207 Carmichael Hall, Box 870231, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0231 or (205) 348-8038. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study you may contact anonymously, if you wish - Ms. Tanta Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (205) 348-8461 or toll free 1-877-820-3066.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 8/28/2010  
EXPIRATION DATE: 2/27/2011

You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html) . After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Mr. Webb for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.

-----  
Signature of Research Participant

Date

-----  
Signature of the Investigator

Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 2/28/2010  
EXPIRATION DATE: 2/27/2011

Appendix J  
Fourth Participant Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

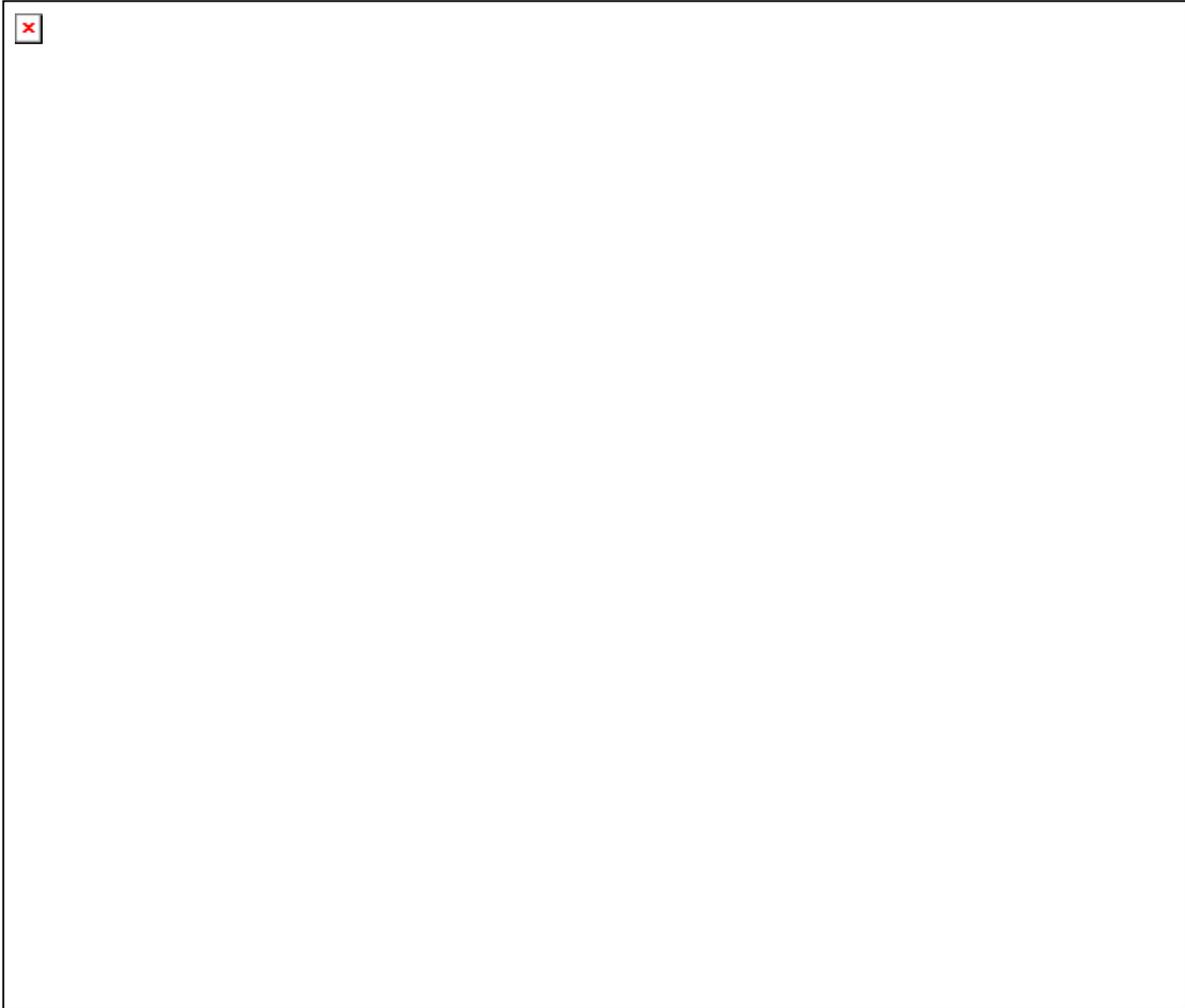
---

The interview included a brief explanation of all 31 properties which comprised the theory. The participants were asked the following two questions with respect to each property.

1. On a scale of 0-10 with 0 being the least strong and 10 being the strongest, how would you rank the power of each of the following properties which comprise the theory?
2. On a scale of 0-10 with 0 being the most negative and 10 being the most positive, how would you rank the direction of each of the following properties which comprise the theory?

Appendix K  
Educational Support

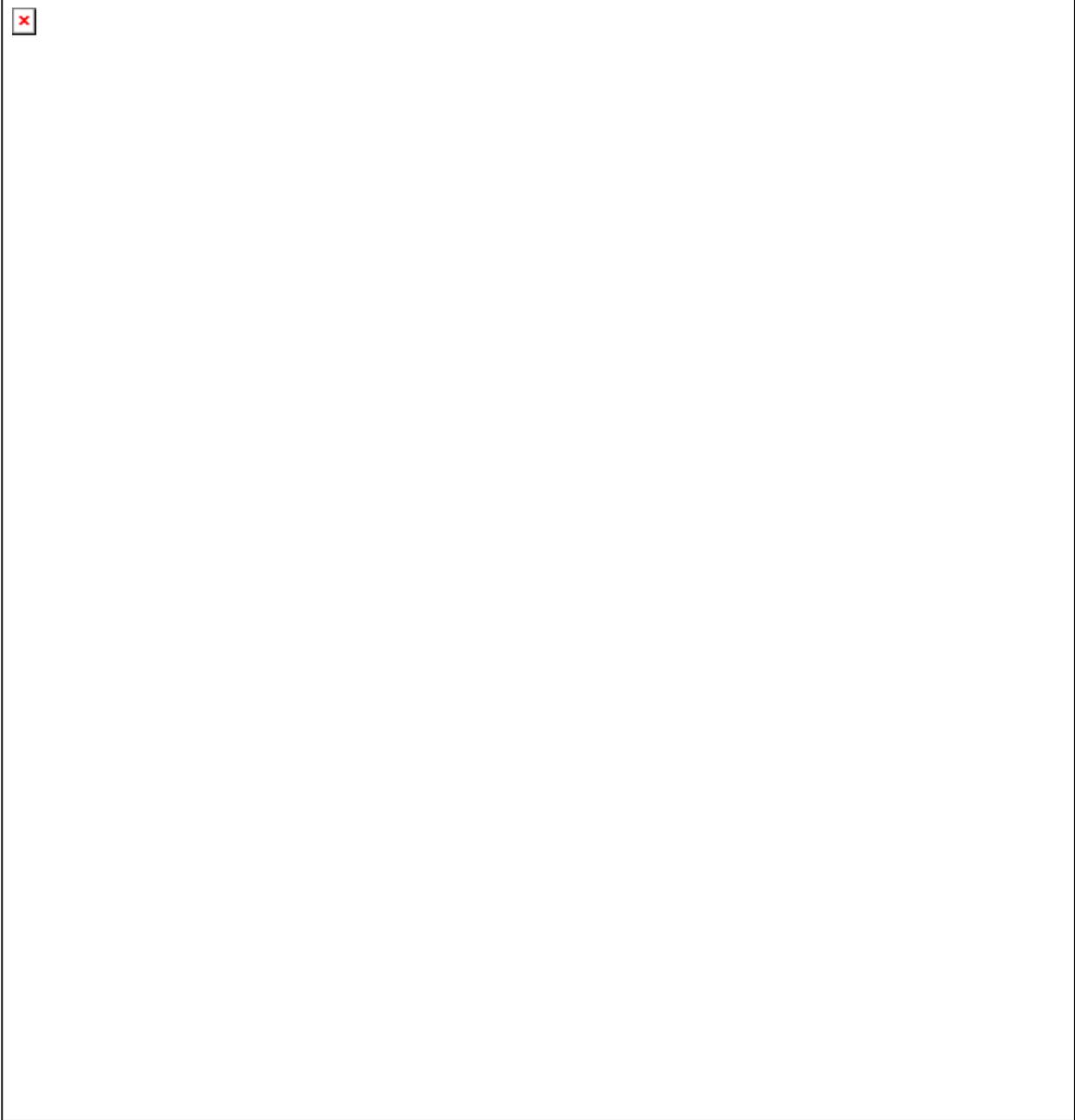




Data Sources: High School Graduate or Equivalent and Bachelor's Degree or Higher: US Census Bureau ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). Spending per Student and System Grade: Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education ([www.alse.edu](http://www.alse.edu)).

Appendix L  
Educational Preparedness

*EDUCATIONAL PREPAREDNESS 2009*





Data Source: The Alabama Commission of Higher Education ([www.ache.alabama.gov](http://www.ache.alabama.gov))

Appendix M  
Educational Affordability

	Median Household Income	Percentage Living Below Poverty Level	Unemployment Rate
United States	\$52,029	13.20%	9.60%
State of Alabama	\$42,586	15.90%	10.60%
Bevill State			
Fayette	\$34,092	19.80%	15.00%
Lamar	\$32,424	18.20%	15.80%
Marion	\$31,602	19.60%	15.30%
Pickens	\$31,053	25.60%	15.10%
Walker	\$36,221	17.40%	11.20%
George Corley Wallace			
Autauga	\$51,622	10.70%	9.50%
Dallas	\$27,992	29.90%	20.20%
Lowndes	\$30,225	25.40%	18.90%
Marengo	\$32,381	22.60%	13.90%
Perry	\$26,513	31.70%	19.60%
Wilcox	\$23,090	30.20%	24.80%
Gadsden State			
Calhoun	\$39,997	17.60%	10.80%
Cherokee	\$38,028	17.70%	10.60%
Cleburne	\$37,742	14.80%	9.60%
Etowah	\$37,264	16.70%	11.40%
St. Clair	\$48,804	12.60%	11%
Jefferson Davis			
Conecuh	\$27,068	24.90%	17.80%
Covington	\$33,773	18.90%	9.70%
Escambia	\$32,009	24.10%	13.10%
John C. Calhoun			
Lawrence	\$40,655	15.00%	12.40%
Limestone	\$46,151	12.10%	9.40%
Madison	\$55,324	11.30%	8.00%
Morgan	\$46,284	12.50%	10.20%

<b>Northeast</b>			
Cherokee	\$38,028	17.70%	10.60%
Dekalb	\$35,377	18.70%	12.80%
Jackson	\$36,597	16.90%	12.30%
<b>Northwest Shoals</b>			
Colbert	\$39,947	12.70%	11.20%
Franklin	\$35,248	19.50%	12.40%
Lauderdale	\$38,592	17.00%	10.40%
Lawrence	\$40,655	15.00%	12.40%
<b>Shelton State</b>			
Bibb	\$41,076	18.50%	16.10%
Greene	\$26,001	30.30%	15.50%
Hale	\$31,091	26.00%	15.20%
Pickens	\$31,053	25.60%	15.10%
Sumter	\$24,221	32.90%	15.20%
Tuscaloosa	\$43,744	17.30%	12.30%
<b>Snead State</b>			
Blount	\$46,086	13.10%	9.70%
Cullman	\$39,276	14.80%	10.00%
Marshall	\$36,981	18.00%	9.80%
Morgan	\$46,284	12.50%	10.20%
<b><i>Wallace State</i></b>			
Cullman	\$39,276	14.80%	10.00%
Morgan	\$46,284	12.50%	10.20%
Winston	\$32,018	18.30%	16.90%

Data Source: The US Census Bureau ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)), 2009

Appendix N  
Power of Influence All Locations

Participants

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mean
<b>Institutional</b>											
Communication	9	9	9	7	6	8	6	7	7	9	7.7
Competence	8	9	6	8	6	7	6	7	7	7	7.1
Concern	7	9	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	5	6.7
Personnel Relations	10	10	10	9	2	7	7	7	7	8	7.7
Support	10	10	9	9	6	10	7	6	8	9	8.4
Environment	10	10	9	8	6	8	6	6	6	6	7.5
Organization	8	10	7	6	6	8	7	6	6	6	7
Senior Leadership	10	10	6	8	1	8	7	5	7	5	6.7
Partnerships	7	0	6	5	5	0	0	5	6	0	3.4
<b>Cultural</b>											
Economic Perceptions	7	9	8	6	7	9	5	5	8	6	7
Ties to Location	9	10	8	9	8	9	5	5	9	10	8.2
Ties to Past	9	10	7	9	7	10	5	5	9	10	8.1
Fears	9	10	7	8	8	10	5	5	8	6	7.6
Personal Perceptions	8	10	7	9	8	10	5	5	8	8	7.8
Perceptions of Outsiders	9	10	8	8	7	10	5	5	8	5	7.5
<b>Contextual</b>											
Educational Support	8	10	9	7	7	8	6	8	9	10	8.2
Educational Preparedness	8	8	10	8	9	8	6	8	9	10	8.4
Educational Affordability	8	7	8	8	9	9	6	8	8	10	8.1
<b>Adviser</b>											
Transfer Student	9	9	10	9	9	8	8	5	5	8	8
First Generation	9	9	5	9	7	8	8	5	8	10	7.8
Academic Background	10	10	9	9	8	7	7	7	9	7	8.3
Personal Beliefs	9	9	9	9	1	6	6	6	6	6	6.7
Family Background	10	10	8	9	7	8	5	6	6	9	7.8
Home Town	9	9	9	9	9	7	7	6	7	10	8.2
Emotional Investment	8	8	8	8	6	7	6	6	6	10	7.3
Training	6	6	6	6	7	6	6	5	6	5	5.9
Near Peer Advising	6	10	10	9	8	9	7	6	10	8	8.3
<b>Student</b>											
Goal Formation	9	8	8	8	6	7	6	5	5	6	6.8
Academic Standing	9	8	8	8	7	8	8	5	5	5	7.1
Personal Characteristics	8	7	9	9	8	8	7	7	5	7	7.5
Background	8	7	9	9	8	8	7	7	5	7	7.5

Appendix O  
Power of Influence Smaller Rural Locations

Participants

Categories	2	3	4	5	6	9	10	Mean
<b>Institutional</b>								
Communication	9	9	7	6	8	7	9	7.9
Competence	9	6	8	6	7	7	7	7.1
Concern	9	7	7	7	7	6	5	6.9
Personnel Relations	10	10	9	2	7	7	8	7.6
Support	10	9	9	6	10	8	9	8.7
Environment	10	9	8	6	8	6	6	7.6
Organization	10	7	6	6	8	6	6	7.0
Senior Leadership	10	6	8	1	8	7	5	6.4
Partnerships	0	6	5	5	0	6	0	3.1
<b>Cultural</b>								
Economic Perceptions	9	8	6	7	9	8	6	7.6
Ties to Location	10	8	9	8	9	9	10	9.0
Ties to Past	10	7	9	7	10	9	10	8.9
Fears	10	7	8	8	10	8	6	8.1
Personal Perceptions	10	7	9	8	10	8	8	8.6
Perceptions of Outsiders	10	8	8	7	10	8	5	8.0
<b>Contextual</b>								
Educational Support	10	9	7	7	8	9	10	8.6
Educational Preparedness	8	10	8	9	8	9	10	8.9
Educational Affordability	7	8	8	9	9	8	10	8.4
<b>Adviser</b>								
Transfer Student	9	10	9	9	8	5	8	8.3
First Generation	9	5	9	7	8	8	10	8.0
Academic Background	10	9	9	8	7	9	7	8.4
Personal Beliefs	9	9	9	1	6	6	6	6.6
Family Background	10	8	9	7	8	6	9	8.1
Home Town	9	9	9	9	7	7	10	8.6
Emotional Investment	8	8	8	6	7	6	10	7.6
Training	6	6	6	7	6	6	5	6.0
Near Peer Advising	10	10	9	8		10	8	9.2
<b>Student</b>								
Goal Formation	8	10	7	7	8	5	8	7.6
Academic Standing	8	8	8	6	7	5	6	6.9
Academic Standing	8	8	8	7	8	5	5	7.0
Personal Characteristics	7	9	9	8	8	5	7	7.6
Background	7	9	9	8	8	5	7	7.6

Appendix P  
Power of Influence Larger Rural Locations

Participants

Categories	1	7	8	Mean
<b>Institutional</b>				
Communication	9	6	7	7.3
Competence	8	6	7	7.0
Concern	7	6	6	6.3
Personnel Relations	10	7	7	8.0
Support	10	7	6	7.7
Environment	10	6	6	7.3
Organization	8	7	6	7.0
Senior Leadership	10	7	5	7.3
Partnerships	7	0	5	4.0
<b>Cultural</b>				
Economic Perceptions	7	5	5	5.7
Ties to Location	9	5	5	6.3
Ties to Past	9	5	5	6.3
Fears	9	5	5	6.3
Personal Perceptions	8	5	5	6.0
Perceptions of Outsiders	9	5	5	6.3
<b>Contextual</b>				
Educational Support	8	6	8	7.3
Educational Preparedness	8	6	8	7.3
Educational Affordability	8	6	8	7.3
<b>Adviser</b>				
Transfer Student	9	8	5	7.3
First Generation	9	8	5	7.3
Academic Background	10	7	7	8.0
Personal Beliefs	9	6	6	7.0
Family Background	10	5	6	7.0
Home Town	9	7	6	7.3
Emotional Investment	8	6	6	6.7
Training	6	6	5	5.7
Near Peer Advising	6	7	6	6.3
<b>Student</b>				
Goal Formation	9	6	5	6.7
Academic Standing	9	8	5	7.3
Personal Characteristics	8	7	7	7.3
Background	8	7	7	7.3

Appendix Q  
Direction of Influence—All Locations

Participants

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mean
<b>Institutional</b>											
Communication	7	7	1	2	2	2	4	3	3	5	3.6
Competence	7	7	3	2	1	3	4	4	3	3	3.7
Concern	5	5	3	5	1	3	4	4	4	5	3.9
Personnel Relations	10	3	10	9	5	6	7	3	0	8	6.1
Support	10	1	9	9	6	9	5	4	0	9	6.2
Environment	10	2	8	9	7	7	4	5	2	4	5.8
Organization	8	8	7	6	6	6	3	6	4	4	5.8
Senior Leadership	10	8	5	8	5	7	3	5	3	5	5.9
Partnerships	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.1
<b>Cultural</b>											
Economic Perceptions	8	1	2	4	3	2	5	5	2	4	3.6
Ties to Location	5	0	2	3	4	2	5	5	2	2	3.0
Ties to Past	5	0	3	2	5	1	5	5	2	2	3.0
Fears	5	0	2	3	1	2	5	5	3	3	2.9
Personal Perceptions	5	0	3	5	3	1	5	5	2	2	3.1
Perceptions of Outsiders	5	0	2	5	2	2	5	5	2	5	3.3
<b>Contextual</b>											
Educational Support	8	2	1	4	5	3	4	8	0	0	3.5
Educational Preparedness	7	3	0	2	1	2	4	8	2	0	2.9
Educational Affordability	8	3	2	3	5	2	4	8	3	0	3.8
<b>Adviser</b>											
Transfer Student	10	10	10	7	8	8	8	5	5	8	7.9
First Generation	10	10	5	8	7	7	8	5	8	10	7.8
Academic Background	10	10	9	8	8	6	7	7	9	7	8.1
Personal Beliefs	10	10	9	9	5	6	6	6	6	5	7.2
Family Background	10	10	6	9	8	8	5	6	6	9	7.7
Home Town	10	10	9	7	8	7	3	6	7	10	7.7
Emotional Investment	7	7	8	8	7	7	6	6	6	9	7.1
Training	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	5.1
Near Peer Advising	7	9	10	9	9	10	5	5	9	8	8.1
<b>Student</b>											
Goal Formation	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.0
Academic Standing	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4.7
Personal Characteristics	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4.7
Background	7	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	4.8

Appendix R  
Direction of Influence—Smaller Rural Locations

Categories	Participants							Mean
	2	3	4	5	6	9	10	
<b>Institutional</b>								
Communication	7	1	2	2	2	3	5	3.1
Competence	7	3	2	1	3	3	3	3.1
Concern	5	3	5	1	3	4	5	3.7
Personnel Relations	3	10	9	5	6	0	8	5.9
Support	1	9	9	6	9	0	9	6.1
Environment	2	8	9	7	7	2	4	5.6
Organization	8	7	6	6	6	4	4	5.9
Senior Leadership	8	5	8	5	7	3	5	5.9
Partnerships	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.0
<b>Cultural</b>								
Economic Perceptions	1	2	4	3	2	2	4	2.6
Ties to Location	0	2	3	4	2	2	2	2.1
Ties to Past	0	3	2	5	1	2	2	2.1
Fears	0	2	3	1	2	3	3	2.0
Personal Perceptions	0	3	5	3	1	2	2	2.3
Perceptions of Outsiders	0	2	5	2	2	2	5	2.6
<b>Contextual</b>								
Educational Support	2	1	4	5	3	0	0	2.1
Educational Preparedness	3	0	2	1	2	2	0	1.4
Educational Affordability	3	2	3	5	2	3	0	2.6
<b>Adviser</b>								
Transfer Student	10	10	7	8	8	5	8	8.0
First Generation	10	5	8	7	7	8	10	7.9
Academic Background	10	9	8	8	6	9	7	8.1
Personal Beliefs	10	9	9	5	6	6	5	7.1
Family Background	10	6	9	8	8	6	9	8.0
Home Town	10	9	7	8	7	7	10	8.3
Emotional Investment	7	8	8	7	7	6	9	7.4
Training	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.0
Near Peer Advising	9	10	9	9	10	9	8	9.1
<b>Student</b>								
Goal Formation	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.0
Academic Standing	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	4.6
Personal Characteristics	4	4	5	5	5	5	3	4.4
Background	4	4	5	5	5	5	3	4.4

Appendix S  
Direction of Influence—Larger Rural Locations

Participants

Categories	1	7	8	Mean
Institutional				
Communication	7	4	3	4.7
Competence	7	4	4	5.0
Concern	5	4	4	4.3
Personnel Relations	10	7	3	6.7
Support	10	5	4	6.3
Environment	10	4	5	6.3
Organization	8	3	6	5.7
Senior Leadership	10	3	5	6.0
Partnership	6	5	5	5.3
Cultural				
Economic Perceptions	8	5	5	6.0
Ties to Location	5	5	5	5.0
Ties to Past	5	5	5	5.0
Fears	5	5	5	5.0
Personal Perceptions	5	5	5	5.0
Perceptions of Outsiders	5	5	5	5.0
Contextual				
Educational Support	8	4	8	6.7
Educational Preparedness	7	4	8	6.3
Educational Affordability	8	4	8	6.7
Adviser				
Transfer Student	10	8	5	7.7
First Generation	10	8	5	7.7
Academic Background	10	7	7	8.0
Personal Beliefs	10	6	6	7.3
Family Background	10	5	6	7.0
Home Town	10	3	6	6.3
Emotional Investment	7	6	6	6.3
Training	5	6	5	5.3
Near Peer Advising	7	5	5	5.7
Student				
Goal Formation	5	5	5	5.0
Academic Standing	5	5	5	5.0
Personal Characteristics	7	5	5	5.7
Background	7	5	5	5.7

Appendix T  
Categories and Properties

**Institutional  
Factors**

**Four Year**  
Communication  
Competence  
Concern

**Two Year**  
Personnel Relationships  
Support  
Environment  
Organization  
Senior Leadership  
Partnerships

**Cultural  
Factors**

Economic Perceptions  
Ties to Location  
Ties to Past  
Fears  
Personal Perceptions  
Perception of Outsiders

**Contextual  
Factors**

Educational Support  
Educational Preparedness  
Educational Affordability

**Adviser Factors**

Transfer Student  
First Generation College Student  
Academic Background  
Personal Belief System  
Family Background  
Home Town  
Emotional Investment  
Training  
Near Peer Advising

**Core Category  
Student Factors**

Goal Formation  
Academic Standing  
Personal Characteristics  
Background