5-2019

Exemplar Advisors Fostering a Sense of Mattering within Undergraduate Students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

Nicole Michelle Smith
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, nicole.smith@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, and the Higher Education Commons

Smith, Nicole Michelle, "Exemplar Advisors Fostering a Sense of Mattering within Undergraduate Students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources" (2019). Educational Administration: Theses, Dissertations, and Student Research. 301.
https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss/301

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Administration, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Administration: Theses, Dissertations, and Student Research by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
EXEMPLAR ADVISORS FOSTERING A SENSE OF MATTERING
WITHIN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE COLLEGE OF
AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND NATURAL RESOURCES

by
Nicole M. Smith

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Studies
(Educational Leadership and Higher Education)

Under the Supervision of Professor Elizabeth Niehaus

Lincoln, Nebraska
May, 2019
EXEMPLAR ADVISORS FOSTERING A SENSE OF MATTERING WITHIN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Nicole Michelle Smith, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2019

Advisor: Elizabeth Niehaus

The purpose of this study was to identify what CASNR professional advisors are and could be doing to foster a sense of mattering within the undergraduate student population, which ultimately could impact retention and graduation rates. There was a need to understand the variance of advising experiences of undergraduate students and how exemplar professional advisors foster a sense of mattering in undergraduate students of CASNR. The focus of this research was to decipher if and how professional advisors foster a sense of mattering with undergraduate advisees. The problem of practice was that advising can impact retention and graduation rates through fostering mattering within the undergraduate advising experience, yet professional advisors may not all be fostering this sense of mattering in undergraduate students of CASNR. There were three main research questions. How do exemplar advisors in CASNR describe their advising skills and practices that foster a student’s sense of mattering? How do undergraduate students of CASNR perceive the relationship between advising and their sense of mattering? How do undergraduate students of CASNR describe their advising experience?

Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) theory of mattering was the foundational theory used for this study. This theory of mattering included four
components of attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence. A multiple case study methodology was used to explore the skill sets and professional practices of three exemplar advisors. There were multiple forms of data that were collected. Those forms of data included interviews with advisors, interviews with students, observations of advisors and students, and observations and photographs of advisors’ offices. There were three themes found that all three advisors had in common. Those themes were investment in the whole student, wealth of information, and meeting students where they are. The last theme varied among the advisors but included utilizing soft skills, humanizing the advisor, and meeting the demands of today’s students.
Table of Contents

**Chapter I: Introduction** .......................................................... 1
  Problem of Practice .......................................................... 3
  Context for the Study ......................................................... 6
  Purpose Statement/Research Questions ................................ 8
  Definition of Terms ........................................................ 9
  Overview of Methods ....................................................... 10
  Delimitations ................................................................. 13
  Limitations ................................................................. 14

**Chapter II: Literature Review** ............................................. 15
  Mattering ................................................................. 15
  Sense of Belonging ....................................................... 18
  Overview of Academic Advising ........................................ 34

**Chapter III: Methods** ....................................................... 54
  Introduction to the Problem .............................................. 54
  Purpose Statement/Research Questions ................................ 54
  Theoretical Framework .................................................. 55
  Methodology ............................................................... 57
  Data Collection ........................................................... 63
  Data Analysis ............................................................. 66
  Trustworthiness ............................................................ 68

**Chapter IV: Research Findings** .......................................... 71
  Within-Case Findings ..................................................... 71
List of Tables

Table 1: Data Collection Connection to Mattering………………………………………64
List of Figures

Figure 1. Strayhorn’s model for sense of belonging in higher education..................20
Figure 2. Maura’s word cloud from both interviews............................................72
Figure 3. Kyle’s word cloud from the interview....................................................73
Figure 4. Stella’s word cloud from both interviews.............................................83
Figure 5. Emma’s word cloud from the interview...............................................84
Figure 6. Angelina’s word cloud from both interviews.......................................94
Figure 7. Belle’s word cloud from the interview...............................................94
Figure 8. Venn diagram from all three cases......................................................105
List of Appendices

Appendix A. NACADA Competencies.................................................................132
Appendix B. ACPA/NASPA Competencies..................................................134
Appendix C. Questionnaire..............................................................................137
Appendix D. Observation Protocol.................................................................140
Appendix E. Interview Questions.....................................................................142
Chapter One: Introduction

To which degree do we, as individuals, matter to one another? Or to a specific person? Do we count in someone else’s life? Do we make a difference to another person? Are we an object of concern to someone? These are all questions that Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) explored in defining mattering. Mattering is different than being significant in someone else’s life; as Rosenberg and McCullough explained, “The conviction that one matters to another person is linked to the feeling that: (a) one is an object of his attention; (b) that one is important to him; and (c) that he is dependent on us” (p. 163). Elliott, Kao, and Grant (2004) further stated that if people do not connect with others on more than just a surface level and listen to them, then they have to come to the realization that they do not matter. Mattering is an essential component of society because society helps individuals with social bonding and integration (Elliot et al., 2004). In conclusion, mattering is the feeling that you make a difference to others and are significant to others who are also significant to you (Schlossberg, 1989).

At the postsecondary education level, mattering may take on a more specific definition. University mattering, specifically, is the feeling that one makes a difference and is significant to one’s university’s community (France & Finney, 2010). By knowing who and what affects students’ sense of mattering during their undergraduate careers, higher educational professions can better serve them. A construct related to mattering is the sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is a fundamental need of humans to maintain positive and significant relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In relation to the higher educational environment, sense of belonging and mattering can affect many aspects of a student’s experience including academic achievement, involvement,
retention, persistence, satisfaction, mental health, and happiness in life (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Dey & Hurtado, 1995; O’Keefe 2013; Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2012).

Within higher education, one place that students may feel they matter is within the relationship with their academic advisors. Academic advising, according to Kuhn (2008), is defined as a situation in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter. The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach. (p. 3)

These advisors may be faculty or professional staff advisors. This particular study examined the relationship of students and their professional exemplar advisors, not the relationship of students and faculty advisors. Exemplar advisors, for the purposes of this study, are those advisors who establish a sense of mattering within undergraduate students and are a model for other advisors. The relationships students have with their advisors are often the strongest ties students have to the university, in comparison to the relationship they have with any other educator on campus (Vianden & Barlow, 2015).

Advisors are resources for students, providing information on the institution’s rules, procedures, and policies and information about professional schools, career opportunities, employment outlooks, and job market trends. Academic advisors serve as advocates for students in terms of navigating the bureaucracy of institutions and campus procedures. They serve as advocates in communicating with professors, administrators, and staff. Advisors also serve as referral agents for students, not only for campus
resources but also for community resources. Lastly, advisors can be friends and trusted sources of information for students as well. As Petress (1997) stated,

Students typically enter college fearful, lonely, away from home, confused, in a strange environment, and in need of an anchor, their advisor, to provide stability, assurance, consistency, an outlet for frustrations, someone to hear them out and to answer questions, and a source of confidential guidance, affirmation, and support. (p. 60)

Advisors have many roles across the board, not simply helping students select classes for the next term. In fact, their overarching role is helping students navigate their collegiate career in and out of the classroom.

**Problem of Practice**

According to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Fact Book 2017-2018, the 1-year retention rate for the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) was 84.6%, and UNL’s retention was 82.8% for the year 2016 (Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics, n.d.). Prior to that, in 2015 the retention rates for CASNR and UNL were 86.2% and 83.8%, respectively. CASNR’s 6-year graduation rate is currently at 75.4%, whereas UNL’s overall graduation rate is 67.9%. The previous year, CASNR’s 6-year graduation rate was 76.4%, while UNL’s overall graduation rate was at 67.5%. As it is stated, CASNR’s retention rates as well as graduation rates are higher than those of UNL. Many factors could contribute to CASNR’s retention and matriculation success, including the College’s commitment and the model of student advising.
Research has shown that advising can increase retention and graduation rates through fostering a sense of mattering within the undergraduate advising experience (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014; McClure, 2011; O’Banion, 1994; Petress, 1997; Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Within CASNR, there are multiple models of advising undergraduate students. Depending upon the degree program, the advising model may be faculty advisors, professional advisors, or a combination of the two. The problem is that the advising provided at CASNR that has fostered a student’s sense of mattering has not been investigated. The focus of this research was to decipher if and how undergraduate professional advisors fostered a sense of mattering with their advisees. Within this dissertation, the goals were to address the roles of professional advisors and what they were doing for undergraduate students to foster a sense of mattering within CASNR that could ultimately impact graduation and retention rates.

The College is one of eight colleges at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and is home to 30 undergraduate programs (CASNR; “CASNR Difference,” n.d.). CASNR strives to make a difference in the lives of their undergraduate students. CASNR offers a program called “Ensuring Your Future” which guarantees every CASNR graduate a job offer within the first six months following graduation. CASNR also provides almost 40% of students with college or departmental scholarships to enable a more affordable education. Other programs that enrich undergraduate students’ lives are Dean’s Scholars in Experiential Leadership, Morrill Scholars, Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship, and learning communities within CASNR degree programs. It is through these programs and more that CASNR strives to foster students’ sense of mattering.
The College’s fall enrollment in 2017 was 2,333 with 83.7% White students, 7.2% non-resident students, 3.6% Hispanic students, 1.24% Asian students, 0.73% African American students, and 3.3% other minority or unknown students (Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics, n.d.). Males are 52.7% of the undergraduate population in CASNR with females representing 47.2%. Sixty percent of the population is between the ages of 20 and 25, while 35.9% is under 19 and 3.8% is over the age of 25. There are 24% freshmen, 19% sophomores, 26% juniors, and 29% seniors. Lastly, Nebraska residents make up 73% of the population (Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics, n.d.).

Another program that has furthered the sense of mattering within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) is CASNR Caring Attitudes and Respect for Every Student (CARES; “CASNR CARES,” n.d.). This program offers a contact for not only students but also faculty, staff, and parents with questions or concerns about college or aspects of college that affect a college experience. Students, faculty, staff, and parents call the CASNR CARES coordinator and explain their concerns about a student. The coordinator then contacts the student and sets up an appointment. At that appointment, the coordinator gathers more details and makes appropriate referrals for campus resources. All referrals are confidential. Follow-up appointments are also made to ensure students’ needs are being met, and a plan is created based on the needs assessment of the referral. This program is not only utilized by students, but also by faculty and staff as a resource to discuss these situations and utilize the CASNR CARES Coordinator as a referral agent. For example, if a student were to encounter a health emergency, the program would communicate with professors or if a student were
struggling with transitioning to college, the program would work with the student to connect them with campus resources (CASNR CARES, n.d.).

**Context for the Study**

Every college campus environment differs in its own way. Environments can impact mattering, but before one can understand how an environment can impact students’ mattering, it is important to first understand the physical campus environment. Next, the study college will be explored to grasp the various intricacies that make it unique. Finally, the advising structure of the study college will be surveyed.

At the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, there are three campuses: City, East, and Innovation Campuses. East Campus will be the focus of this study at which the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) is located. It is intentional that the institution studied was not protected under a pseudonym. This college provides a unique environment with programs that directly impact student success. CASNR is housed under the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR; “About IANR,” n.d.). The Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resource reports directly to the chancellor of the university. CASNR is the one of two colleges at the institution that has this unique reporting structure and is completely located on a different campus. CASNR’s mission is focused on the university’s commitment to being a land-grant institution:

The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) has provided opportunities for students to develop personally, intellectually and professionally, to meet the challenges of their era. CASNR fosters a student centered learning environment where diverse basic and applied natural, life, earth and social sciences are integrated into the context of a global society and
environmental stewardship. Our goal is to prepare students as leaders for a future in which demands on food, energy and water systems will challenge sustainability. The areas of study are broad and span animal, plant, and human health and well-being, earth systems analysis, agricultural production and processing, global climate change, agricultural market structures, water resources, and land-use change. The College also has the responsibility for the coordination of all agricultural sciences and natural resources programs in higher education within the State of Nebraska. (Mission, Annual Reports & Service Commitments, 2013, n.p.)

The mission covers a broad range of areas that students can study. There are also expectations for students inside and outside of the classroom. The mission upholds the land-grant values by offering these programs for Nebraska students.

The advising structure within CASNR is composed of both faculty and professional advisors within the departments (“Individualized Advising,” n.d.). Traditionally, the advising model has been comprised of individualized advisement by faculty; however, it now includes individualized guidance offered by many professional advisors. Further more, CASNR stated

The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources has a rich heritage of individualized undergraduate student advising by faculty. While CASNR’s traditional advising model has evolved to include very talented professional advisors, the commitment to personalized advising (academic as well as non-academic, personal, as well as professional) remains a hallmark of the College. “Individualized Advising”, n.d., para. 1.
These advisors are committed to making each advising experience personal for students including addressing personal, professional, academic, career, and other nonacademic needs (“Individualized Advising,” n.d.). Advising differs from degree program to degree program.

**Purpose Statement/Research Questions**

Considering the importance of mattering in higher education (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Dey & Hurtado, 1995; Finn, 1989; Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Hatcher & Stubbersfield, 2013; Ionta & Scherman, 2007; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007; O’Keefe, 2013; Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2012) and the role of advisors may play in fostering students’ sense of mattering (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014; McClure, 2011; O’Banion, 1994; Petress, 1997; Vianden & Barlow, 2015), there was a need to understand the variance of advising experiences of undergraduate students and how exemplar professional advisors foster a sense of mattering in undergraduate students of CASNR. The purpose of this study was to identify what CASNR professional advisors are and could be doing to foster a sense of mattering within the undergraduate student population, which ultimately could impact retention and graduation rates. Specifically, I explored the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** How do exemplar professional advisors in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln describe their advising skills and practices that foster a student’s sense of mattering?
- **Research Question 2:** How do undergraduate students of College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of
Nebraska–Lincoln perceive the relationship between advising and their sense of mattering?

- Research Question 3: How do undergraduate students of College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln describe their advising experience?

**Definition of Terms**

- Academic advising: According to Kuhn (2008), “Academic advising is defined as a situation in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter. The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach” (p. 3).

- Mattering: “Mattering is defined as a motive, a feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension who exercises a powerful influence on our action” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165).

- Sense of belonging: A sense of belonging is “a basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior. In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers).” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3)
Overview of Methods

A multiple case study methodology was used to explore the skill sets and professional practices of three exemplar professional advisors who served as individual cases. Multiple forms of data were collected through interviews with advisors, interviews with advisees, observations of advisors and students, and observations and photographs of advisors’ offices. Though the study does not mask the identity of the institution and college, the professional advisors’ and students’ identities were protected by pseudonyms.

Data Collection

The interim dean of CASNR emailed students from a list received from the college, asking them to complete a questionnaire about mattering and their experiences with their academic advisors. I contacted the professional advisor with the highest mean score from the ratings the students provided about if their advisors have fostered a sense of mattering to explain the purpose of the study and the role he or she would play as a participant and invite the selected advisor to participate. I repeated this process with the second highest scoring advisor and so on down the list until three advisors consented to participate in the study.

From each of the three select groups of questionnaires, I randomly selected one group for each of the participating advisors, one student who rated the advisor a 5 on the mattering scale from the questionnaire and invited them to participate further in the study. When the respondent did not consent to participate further, the interim dean of CASNR first randomly selected another respondent who rated the advisor a 5 to fully ensure an unbiased selection and then invited the respondent to participate. The interim dean of
CASNR repeated this process until three students who rated one of each of the participating advisors a 5 agreed to participate further in the study.

I conducted three interviews with each of the three professional advisors. The questions pertained to their advising philosophy, advising practices, and ways in which they foster a sense of mattering with students within the advising capacity. After I interviewed the advisors, I documented my observations in my researcher’s journal and took photographs of each of the advisors’ offices. I photographed articles on the wall, the arrangement of the office, the specific place they met with students, the books they had as resources for the students, personal items in the office, and any other advising related objects.

I attended a scheduled advising session in which each of the participating advisors advises one of the participating students who rated the advisor a 5. The observations that I documented in this session were how the advisor prepared for the meeting, how the opening interaction occurred, the integration of the advising skills and practices into the session, and key connections between the advisor and participating student. I met with students after the observations of their advising sessions. I delved deeper into the interaction that took place in the observed advising session. Questions in this interview pertained to how the advisor fostered the student’s sense of mattering and how the advisor had gone above and beyond their duties to accomplish this.

I met with the advisors following the interviews with the students. I inquired as to how the advisors believed they had impacted their students’ sense of mattering and through what skills/practices they were able to foster that sense of mattering in their meetings with the particular student I just observed as well as all students. I did not have
to conduct follow-up observations or take additional photographs of the advisors’ offices, as I got the information needed to analyze through interviews and observations during the data collection period.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from the case was inputted into a secured file (Stake, 2010). The pictures of the professional advisors’ offices were organized, arranged, and put into documents for each case. The interviews were all recorded and then transcribed into Word documents (Gillman, 2000). Observations of advisor and advisee interaction were recorded and transcribed into a Word document. As information came through the various stages of interviews and observations, I also documented data in my researcher’s journal to keep data together as I moved along through the process of data collection.

The interviews and observations for each case were entered into a data analysis system called MAXQDA. The data was analyzed from the ground up as Yin (2014) states. The data (interviews and observations) were read through multiple times, highlighting key words/phrases that came up, concepts between interviews, and/or descriptions. For the photographs, I analyzed the photos taken to see what the potential commonalities of these advisors’ offices were. The photographs were further evidence for the larger codes found within the interviews and observations (Gillham, 2000).

According to Stake (2010), “Coding is sorting all data sets according to topics, themes, and issues important to the study” (p. 151). The highlighting of concepts allowed potential relationships or themes to be seen within the data as it was explored. These categories were the codes that created the overall themes (Gillman, 2000). The interpretation of the observations and photographs are based on the researcher’s
perceptions. Coding was done for each case alone. Key words and descriptions were analyzed and grouped together in larger themes from the coding of the data sets. The coding took place within MAXQDA. After that, themes were illustrated in diagrams for each case as well as case summaries were written (Yin, 2014).

After within-case analysis was complete, I did a cross-case analysis and synthesis. I took the themes that was previously found from each case analysis (within-case analysis) and compared and contrasted the themes with each case. I looked for more patterns within the various cases as I conducted the synthesis (Yin, 2014). I created graphs/tables to signify similarities and differences from the three different case studies that came from the data analysis. There was also picture analysis of the similarities and differences within each case and comparing the cases. There were comparisons of advising skills, characteristics, and professional practices between cases. Lastly there were also comparisons between cases of the fostering of sense of mattering. I completed these comparisons in MAXQDA and Excel.

**Delimitations**

As with every study, there are delimitations. The findings of this study may not be transferable to all institutions. There are many characteristics about the setting (alternate campus from the main campus), college, and the population that made this study unique. It was appropriate to include only professional advisors in this study and not faculty advisors as professional advisors could have the most impact on the college’s retention and graduation rates. This was a case study that focused only on exemplar advisors so the findings may not be transferable to all advisors. Even though this study was conducted at a large Midwestern university, it was focused on only one of the colleges within the
university. For this reason, the results may not be transferable for the rest of the study institution.

**Limitations**

There were also limitations within this study. For students, they did at times have difficulty recalling specific times that their advisor contributed to their sense of mattering. More times than not, students recalled specific details about the most recent meeting or when they first met their advisor. Advisors discussed ways they felt they contributed to a student’s sense of mattering but often stated that was from their point of view. Advisors stated that they would want more confirmation that this was how the student felt. When advisors responded in member checking, they did state it was nice to see how the student’s viewed the relationship. During the observations, neither parties seemed nervous and the meeting went smoothly. In some instances, advisors may focus more on scheduling of classes and not have a lot of depth besides that because they have so many students to see.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the theories of mattering and sense of belonging. This framework will provide a foundation of the theories to better understand how professional advisors can foster a sense of mattering through their relationships with their advisees. I will also explore advisors’ roles on undergraduate campuses. Next, I will give an overview of advisor competencies proposed by two national organizations and their importance to advisor functions and professionalism. Lastly, I will address the gaps in the literature regarding mattering, mattering and advising, and undergraduate advisors’ roles and competencies.

Mattering

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) first developed the theory of mattering in 1981 to explain how and why people feel significant. Rosenberg was a New York City native who was a sociologist as well as a professor of sociology (“Rosenberg Forum”, n.d.). Rosenberg wrote many books related to sociology, self-image, and the mind (“Rosenberg Forum”, n.d.). McCullough was a doctoral student who worked with Rosenberg at the University of Maryland (McCullough, 1978). Rosenberg and McCullough stated, “The conviction that one matters to another person is linked to the feeling that: (a) one is an object of his attention; (b) that one is important to him; (c) that he is dependent on us” (p. 163). Furthermore, there are four components of the original theory of mattering. Those components are attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence.

Attention is the first component of the theory of mattering and the most basic form of mattering. Attention means another person acknowledge one’s needs. One
example might be the attention that one roommate (Sarah) pays to another (Emma) by recognizing her physical, emotional, or environmental needs. Were Emma to have an anxiety disorder, needing to follow a routine to function best, Sarah could be aware of her needs—be attentive—by ensuring she does her best to not disrupt Emma’s routine. This could entail not coming home extremely late at night. This could also include ensuring that their room is kept clean as stated in their roommate contract. All of these situations are in which Sarah is ensuring that she is aware and attentive of Emma’s needs, Emma is able to function fully and be successful. In this example, Sarah’s attentiveness demonstrates that Emma matters within Sarah’s daily world.

Importance is the second component of mattering. Importance is the feeling that one is cared for and valued by another person (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) stated that mattering is independent of approval, though. If one is criticized by another, then one matters a great deal, as the critical individual wants the one who matters to be better and be the best he or she can truly be. As in the roommate example used previously, Emma might notice that Sarah has not been upholding her end of the roommate contract in regard to keeping the room clean. There might also be some concerns on Emma’s part that Sarah is spending more time on her social life instead of her academics. Emma might first address their well-being with respect to living together. Secondly, Emma might also express concern for Sarah’s future and education. Emma could then discuss her concerns and potentially establish a healthier lifestyle and habits for Sarah. Now, through her actions, Emma has shown the importance and value she has placed on Sarah and Sarah’s well-being, which ultimately leads to Sarah’s sense of mattering.
Ego-extension is the third component of mattering. Ego-extension is the ability to empathize with the good and bad within people’s lives (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Empathy, being able to share in the feelings of another, enables one to be a part of someone else’s life. Thinking back to the roommate example, if Emma were to go through a difficult breakup during college, Sarah would feel empathy for her and share in those emotions that Emma would experience, by being there with Emma through the tears, anger, frustration, and sadness. In this example, Sarah’s empathy for Emma, further enhances Emma’s sense of mattering.

Dependence is the fourth component that Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) discussed in their theory of mattering. Dependence is the extent to which one’s actions rely on others or the extent to which relying on others influences one’s behavior. Rosenberg and McCullough found that not only does relying on others influences our behavior but “our actions are equally governed by their dependence on us” (p. 165). Overall, our behavior is influenced by our reliance on others and their reliance on us. Dependence on others has multiple facets. There is a negative aspect of dependence as well. Unfortunately, too much dependence on another is not beneficial. If one consistently relies on someone else to make all daily decisions, then when that person is no longer available, one will not be able to function. Consider a situation in which Emma is not doing well in school because of her routine of late night partying. Sarah, as an attentive roommate, could have an intervention with her, wanting the best for her. Sarah could show her how her actions could lead her down a road to academic probation, as her grades suffer. Sarah could offer her expertise in academics and also managing her time well. Emma could be dependent on Sarah to tutor her in subjects in which she is not
doing very well. Emma’s actions and routine might change based on the extent to which Sarah can help her with her studies. This would hopefully be beneficial to Emma, which would only be evident by test scores and her overall grades at the end of the semester. As for Sarah, she could be compensated for tutoring Emma, which would then be beneficial for Sarah as well. In this example, Emma could become dependent on Sarah to improve her academics, and Sarah could become dependent on the compensation received for tutoring Emma. In this situation, their sense of mattering by feeling the reliance of others on themselves as well as relying on their roommate help would increase.

Authors Elliot, Kao, and Grant (2004) offered another perspective on mattering. Elliot et al.’s “elements of mattering” include awareness, importance, and reliance. Awareness is characterized as “I am the object of other’s attention” (Elliot et al., 2004, p. 343). With respect to this component, it is important to be known, noticed, recognized, remembered, and the object of attention. Importance is portrayed as “I am an object of other’s concern” (Elliot et al., 2004, p. 343). Investing in another’s life, being attentive, supportive, and caring is also important under this element. Reliance is distinguished as “Other chooses/looks to me” (Elliot et al., 2004, p. 343). Concerning this element, it is also important to seek advice, support, resources, and trust (Elliot et al., 2004, p. 343). In conclusion, the elements of mattering include awareness, importance, and reliance.

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is a construct closely related to mattering. Strayhorn (2012), professor and founding CEO of Do Good Work Educational Consulting LLC (“Bio: Terrell Strayhorn”, n.d.) defined sense of belonging as
a basic human need and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior. In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). (p. 3)

The need to belong is something that is within all individuals (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), although to various degrees and intensities. How people may go about satisfying or conveying their need to belong also varies. Baumeister and Leary (1995) stated satisfying the need to belong has two main features. The first one is that people need to have frequent contact with others. The contact should be positive and void of conflict as much as possible. The second feature of satisfying that need to belong is an intimate relationship that has stability and a future. This allows for the relationship to be more fruitful. Overall, this need to belong is satisfied when people feel they are genuinely appreciated. This relationship also should be mutual and more than just an intimate attachment.

Strayhorn (2012) developed a model for sense of belonging within higher education that is similar to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (see Figure 1). This model is presented as a pyramid. As students move up the pyramid, they satisfy their need to belong and are rewarded with positive outcomes (e.g., involvement, happiness in life, achievement, and retention). On the contrary, student who do not move up the pyramid have negative outcomes (e.g., depression and suicide). At the base of the pyramid is physiological needs followed by safety, belonging, esteem, and, lastly, self-actualization. The social space and contexts are based on classrooms, residence halls, academic
departments, and the campus at large. This model shows how students navigate various environments to satisfy their sense of belonging at various levels and the possible outcomes.

![Diagram of Strayhorn's model for sense of belonging in higher education]

**Outcomes:**
- Positive: Involvement; Happiness in life;
- Achievement; and Retention
- Negative: Depression and Suicide

**Social Spaces and Contexts:**
- Classroom; Residence Hall; Academic Department; Campus at large

*Figure 1.* Strayhorn’s model for sense of belonging in higher education.

Although this study is focused on mattering, there has been little research that has focused on mattering and higher education. Therefore, sense of belonging and higher education were examined to further expand the understanding of mattering. The following sections provide a rationale for why sense of belonging matters within higher education, identify who does (and does not) feel they belong, and highlight what influences students’ sense of belonging.

**Why Does Sense of Belonging Matter in Higher Education?**

There are many reasons that sense of belonging matters within higher education. Two key areas are retention and persistence and mental health.

**Retention and persistence.** Sense of belonging relates to retention and persistence on many levels. O’Keefe (2013) stated, “Developing a ‘sense of belonging’ is
critical to the success of college students, particularly for the retention of students who are considered to be at risk of non-completion” (p. 607). Students who tend to be at risk of not completing are part-time students, students less connected to campus, first-year students, and students who have more familial responsibilities (O’Keefe, 2013).

In a study relating sense of belonging and retention, Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) found a positive relationship between sense of belonging and students’ initial status of intention to persist. Over the academic year, there was a small, statistically significant decline in students’ sense of belonging. Those items that were positively related with institutional commitment ranged from peer interaction and support, parental support, and sense of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2007).

In another study, Morrow and Ackermann (2012) explored first-year undergraduate students’ intentions to persist while also looking at motivation and sense of belonging. Students completed an online Sense of Belonging Scale (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002–2003) that measured their sense of belonging within their current college environment. The scale included measures of perceived peer support, classroom comfort, isolation, and faculty support. Morrow and Ackermann discovered that students who had more support from a faculty member or peers, indicating a higher sense of belonging, had higher levels of persistence.

To further illustrate the relationship between sense of belonging and retention, Soria and Stebleton (2012) specifically explored the academic engagement and retention of first-generation students. Academic engagement was defined as “frequency with which students interacted with faculty, contributed to class discussions, brought up ideas from different courses during class discussions, and asked insightful questions in class” (Soria
& Stebleton, 2012, p. 673). Students completed the Student Experience in the Research University (University of California Berkeley, n.d.) survey, which included four thematic areas: academic engagement, community and civic engagement, global knowledge and skills, and student life and development. Soria and Stebleton found that sense of belonging was positively associated with academic engagement. Overall, first-generation students had lower retention rates than their peers, but first-generation students can increase their retention rates by increasing their sense of belonging and academic engagement.

**Mental health.** While many factors can impact retention of students, mental health can also impact students’ overall experiences. Mental health is a growing concern within the college student population. Suicide is one of the top causes of death for people ages 15–44 (Hatcher & Stubbersfield, 2013). It is also the second leading cause of death for people between the ages of 10–24, which includes many college students. Suicide rates have also increased by 60% worldwide since 1970. Suicide and sense of belonging are related, as those who attempt or do commit suicide often do so because they feel they are not connected to others (Hatcher & Stubbersfield, 2013). Other mental health consequences for not feeling a sense of belonging within a community include social isolation, lack of goal setting, and lowering of one’s expectations for oneself (Ionta & Scherman, 2007). Students who feel like they do not belong may also feel more anxiety and depression and may not perform as well in the classroom as those who experience a strong sense of belonging (Finn, 1989; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007).

In a study involving mental health and undergraduate students, Fink (2014) explored predictors of mental health, using Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-
Flourishing, as defined by Keyes (2002), “is to be filled with positive emotion and to be functioning well psychologically and socially” (p. 210). In Fink’s study, sense of belonging positively predicted positive scores on the MHC-SF in both student groups, from two different sample groups in different years. One of the strongest predictors of student mental health was sense of belonging. Fink suggested universities further flourishing (closely related to sense of belonging) among students by promoting mental health through high-impact practices, such as learning communities, living and learning programs, and student engagement programs.

In another study involving the relationship between mental health and sense of belonging, Stebleton, Soria, and Huesman (2014) explored first-generation students’ use of mental health services and how that compared to that of non-first-generation students through a survey administered to roughly 58,000 students at six large public research institutions. For both groups of students, non-first-generation students had a higher sense of belonging on campus than first generation students. There was a negative relationship between sense of belonging and mental health for both groups of students, where students’ sense of belonging explained 8.6% of the variance in mental health (e.g., depression, stress). Stebleton et al. concluded that as students feel a greater sense of belonging, they are less likely to be stressed and depressed.

Who Feels Like They Belong (Or Not)?

When looking at sense of belonging, it is important to see who feels like they belong and who feels like they do not belong within higher education. First-generation students, racial minority students, and students within the science, technology,
engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields are groups that will be discussed regarding their sense of belonging within the higher educational system.

**First-generation students.** First-generation students, as defined by Stebleton et al. (2014), are students whose parents have not earned a bachelor’s degree. As this population continues to increase, it is important to take notice of their unique needs within the community of higher education (Stebleton et al., 2014). First-generation students may not have the knowledge that their counterparts have of what to expect from college, which may lead to a lower sense of belonging (Stebleton et al., 2014). Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, and Serrata (2016) found that first-generation students in their study often felt they had to learn rules in and out of the classroom, meaning they felt lost and often marginalized. First-generation students with a lower sense of belonging may encounter challenges related to family, culture, and social and academic transitions (Hsiao, 1992). They often times have to be a scholar at school, but then balance the pressures of family at home, which often leaves them feeling like they do not belong to their life at school or life at home (Hsiao, 1992). For this group of students, the greater the sense of belonging, the more successful they will be within the higher educational setting (Stebleton et al., 2014). Furthermore, when first-generation students feel they are successfully integrated and contributing to a community, feel needed and valued, their sense of belonging is positively impacted (Stebleton et al., 2014).

In an additional study involving first generation students, Strayhorn (2012) conducted a study on sense of belonging, involving first-generation students in a summer bridge program. The participants’ sense of belonging was measured throughout the first 5 weeks of the summer bridge program, and a majority of the students had a high sense of
belonging. However, sense of belonging was not maintained over time. As the semester continued, students felt more isolated and not as supported. Strayhorn stated, “The longer students are enrolled in college, the more sensitive their sense of belonging to various factors and the greater the likelihood that sense of belonging has shifted a bit” (p. 58).

There were many factors that positively affected the students’ sense of belonging: involvement in social and leadership activities, positive interactions with diverse peers, and academic achievement. Despite the negative factors that can impact first-generation students prior to beginning their academic careers within a higher educational institution, if students can get connected and maintain a strong sense of belonging, they will increase their chances of success.

**Racial minority students.** Just as first-generation students can be experience challenges in belonging, so can racial minority students. Experience with racism can affect academic and social experiences of students as well as negatively affect their sense of belonging (Chang, Egan, Lin, & Hurtado, 2011). However, when prejudice is counteracted, students report a higher sense of belonging, more success in the classroom, strong parental involvement, and more involvement on campus (Chang et al., 2011).

Strayhorn (2012) examined Latinx students and their sense of belonging. In an interview of students, Strayhorn found that Latinx students had a lower sense of belonging than White students at a predominately White institution. Positive and frequent interaction with diverse peers has been shown to be helpful for Latinx students in terms of their sense of belonging. For students from lower/working class, working 20–25 hours per week to support their families can prevent them from seizing other opportunities as well as detract from time to complete homework assignments. Students’ overreliance on
financial aid and Pell grants and the pressure to return home to work to help their families can also undermine their academic pursuits. Strayhorn discovered through interviews that these challenges negatively affected students’ sense of belonging.

Unlike Strayhorn’s (2012) study involving Latinx students’ sense of belonging, Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) examined the frequency of cross-racial interactions of Black and White college students and the influence of those interactions on students’ sense of belonging. Black students were found to have significantly more frequent discussions with peers of other races. In fact, 24% of White students reported to never have a discussion with students outside of their own race, while 13% of Black students never had a discussion with peers outside of their own race. Black students also reported having more peers of a different race than White students. To be clear, 40% of Black students reported to interact very often with peers of a different race while the percent for White students was 23%. Sense of belonging and cross-racial interactions were found to have a positive relationship for both Black and White students. The frequency of cross-racial interactions does differ among Black and White students. These interactions outside one’s predominant with respect to each individual’s race increase one’s sense of belonging. The consequence of not interacting outside one’s race is felt more by Black students than it is by White students (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014).

In another study, Tachine, Cabrera, and Yellow Bird (2017) examined Native American students’ sense of belonging during their first year of college. Three themes, isolation, disconnection, and marginalization that inhibit the sense of belonging were discussed. For Native American students, identity is shaped by connections to nature, the land, and others. Native American students, during stressful times, often rely on their
families; yet, when they are away at college, families are not nearby to help them during those difficult times. Those stressful times occur throughout the entire school year, not just during the first couple of weeks of school, when the lack of belonging is even more present.

The second theme identified by Tachine et al. (2017) was disconnection and separation from cultural traditions. Native American students in their study reported being restricted in practicing their traditions that are sacred to them. These restrictions further pushed these students away from their worldview and identity.

Tachine et al.’s (2017) third theme was marginalization and racialized encounters. Unfortunately, many Native American students in the study had racial encounters on campus that caused them to be further isolated. Tachine et al. (2017) stated, “When peoplehood is attacked or demeaned, it can culturally suppress and disrupt Indigenous people’s survival” (p. 796). For other students, family did have a way to create a sense of belonging through the language of encouragement. By providing encouragement, families can instill a sense of belonging even if a student is away from home. Native American students who had developed a familiarity with a city or institution had a stronger sense of belonging than those who had not. Those who had a support system, such as another family member or friends, also had a stronger sense of belonging on campus. Students at campuses that had a Native student center had a stronger sense of belonging because they had a place to connect, belong, and be themselves. The Native student center was their home away from home. Most student experiences at the Native student center were positive. However, students who go against the Native American community are likely to have negative experiences. Overall, Native American students
have a large connection to culture and family and have to strive for balance while attending a university and simultaneously trying to attain their sense of belonging (Tachine et al., 2017).

A different study that included Asian American and Pacific Islander community college students focused on the interactions of social divisions and college processes as well as the complexities of race (Orsuwan & Cole, 2007). The ethnic groups that were included in this study were White, Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian, and Filipino. Academic integration, opportunity structures, and sense of belonging were factors that significantly and positively contributed to educational satisfaction. Furthermore, academic integration, which influences student satisfaction, can be affected by race. For Japanese students, the relationship between sense of belonging and satisfaction was significant and positive, yet when combined with education satisfaction, the sense of belonging decreased. For Hawaiian students of a low socioeconomic status, a sense of belonging and academic integration were negatively related. In other words, these students felt a greater sense of belonging when they were not academically integrated. Japanese students were less impacted by academic integration and sense of belonging. Chinese students from a higher socioeconomic level tended to be less satisfied than those from a lower socioeconomic level. Overall, academic integration and sense of belonging were positively and significantly related to educational satisfaction (Orsuwan & Cole, 2007).

**Students in STEM fields.** The STEM field includes science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. In a study by Hurtado et al. (2007) in which factors that impacted transition within the STEM field were explored, ways were found to improve retention based on the challenges students face. One way to overcome attrition is to
address the underrepresentation of minority and underrepresentation of female students. Another way is to cultivate domain-specific belonging. STEM field departments can provide role models for students who come in at risk. At-risk students often have difficulties developing a strong sense of belonging but providing them a role model could increase their sense of belonging. The departments can also cultivate teacher-student relationships to build domain efficacy. Lastly, Hurtado et al. (2007) suggested building self-efficacy/self-confidence within the students to help improve their retention as well as sense of belonging within STEM fields. The behaviors that positively impacted a students’ sense of belonging were interacting with graduate students or teaching assistants, getting advice from an upper-class student, and interacting with students from diverse racial backgrounds.

In another study, Bonous-Hammarch (2005) found that institutions have not helped in aiding students’ retention within the STEM fields due to a lack of diversity represented within the field. This lack of diversity has resulted from the competitiveness within those disciplines. Students within STEM fields may not have support from their community, which could make their success even more challenging. Students within STEM fields also believe that they cannot achieve or persist in the STEM field, which can make their outlook even more negative.

A program that has been shown to aid STEM undergraduate students improve their sense of belonging is the “Professors Program Hierarchical Mentoring Model” (Wilson et al., 2012). Programs like this will help students connect within their majors and, thus, improve the retention rate. Wilson et al. (2012) found that, by enrolling high school STEM students (with GPAs within the range of 2.5 and 3.0 and a strong interest in
STEM) into this program, these students can be retained at a higher rate within the college setting. Students are not just selected by GPA; there are also written essays, interviews, and letters of recommendation required for enrollment in this program. It was found that six factors played an integral part in these students’ retention and success within the STEM field. Those factors are realization, honest commitment, changes in mindset, committing to work, following through on their commitment, and continuous improvement.

The realization factor, identified by Wilson et al. (2012), was defined as the realization of many first-year students that what they did in high school may not always work in college. The students in the Professors Program Hierarchical Mentoring Model have to learn to study difficult subjects and attend workshops on how to study. The second factor of honest commitment involved identifying what was not working within their plan. This step is not done independently, but often with the assistance of an academic advisor. It might begin with a harsh realization that classes that are not going as planned and continue with a discussion on how to improve. The goal is to find resources on what will change what is potentially not allowing students to be successful as they had anticipated within the collegiate setting. The third factor of changes in mindset is acknowledging that the difficult subject matters and refusing to allow the difficulty of the subject to scare them away. Again, they are pointed to available resources that will help them to be successful. The fourth factor is being able to commit to their plan to use support resources. Each plan is individualized based on a student need and could include academic workshops, tutoring, study hours, etc. The fifth factor is following through on their commitment to do whatever it takes to be successful in this STEM field. This
requires checking in with support staff to ensure that new study habits are still being practiced and resources are still being utilized. The sixth factor is continuous improvement and involved sustainability, which are driven by pride and celebrating successes (Wilson et al., 2012). Among all of these factors, Wilson et al. (2012) also found that including students in undergraduate research right away was critical to their success as well. Inclusion in research not only helped acquaint students with other professionals but also helped in the formation of their identity within the field. Other factors that helped with success and retention included mentoring and career exploration (Wilson et al., 2012).

Through surveys conducted with undergraduate students, Strayhorn (2012), furthermore, found that sense of belonging is important to underrepresented minorities in STEM who have difficulty finding connections within STEM. Students who left the STEM field or changed their majors underscored the importance of sense of belonging. Students in STEM need to feel like they belong within their degree program, which means that their need to belong was unmet. Strayhorn found that mattering to a faculty member within these programs was significant to these STEM students. Sense of belonging and academic success are highly relational with students in STEM fields. Success within this particular study was synonymous with student satisfaction, academic achievement, and intentions to stay within the STEM field.

In another study of African American students within the STEM fields, Lancaster and Xu (2017) found that it was important for these students to have unique experiences to foster their sense of belonging and retain these students within the STEM field. The academic culture first did not support these students in their program of studies.
Furthermore, African American students felt that the instructors were disengaged and did not allow for teacher–student relationships to be created, which could have supported them. In this particular study, lack of access to faculty members, large classroom structures, and limited additional assistance contributed to students’ failure to develop a sense of belonging. Factors that aided in their sense of belonging were the provision of informal and formal mentors who offered advice in all realms of their college experience. Regarding their experience beyond the classroom, getting involved in organizations also aided African American students in the STEM field in building a sense of belonging. Furthermore, getting involved within a STEM organization improved their retention within the major as well as increased their resources and expanded their network within the field. To aid in the retention of African American students within the STEM field, Lancaster and Xu suggested universities train instructors to be more student focused within the classroom as well as understand retention on a higher level. Lancaster and Xu recommended smaller classes, more one-on-one advising, and more frequent offerings of core classes. Lastly, they encouraged STEM fields to form learning communities to establish relationships and build community within the major.

**What influences a sense of belonging?** There are many things that can influence students’ sense of belonging. Some of those predictors that impact the sense of belonging are institutional commitment, social cohesion, social class, student involvement, and social integration.

Institutional commitment was found to be positively associated with sense of belonging by Hausmann et al. (2007). Morrow and Ackermann (2012) found that
students who have support from faculty members or peers had higher sense of belonging levels and were more likely to persist.

In another study, Nunez (2009) used surveys to investigate Latinx students’ sense of belonging across nine campuses. The surveys asked students particularly about sense of belonging and social cohesion with the campus community. The greatest predictor of sense of belonging was faculty members’ interest in the students (Nunez, 2009). Hausmann et al. (2007) and Maestas, Vaquera, and Zehr (2007) also found that interactions with faculty members predicted a greater sense of belonging.

Ostrove and Long (2007) analyzed social class and sense of belonging and, thus, found predictors for sense of belonging. The factors that predicted sense of belonging were access and a life of ease. Access included access to resources and opportunities. Life of ease was characterized as the extent to which students lived a life of ease. In conclusion, social class substantially predicted sense of belonging.

Students’ involvement can have a large impact on their feeling of belonging. Involvement creates relationships between all on campus, whether student, staff member, or professor (Schlossberg, 1989). It is through involvement in activities and relationships that a sense of community on campus is created. Students who get involved in activities or outside of the classroom are more vulnerable to forming additional relationships on campus and, thereby, develop a stronger sense of belonging (Schlossberg, 1989). Nunez (2009) also found that community service participation, giving back to the community, to be a positive predictor of students’ sense of belonging. Maestas et al. (2007) found involvement in activities, such being a member of a Greek community or having a leadership position within a student organization, was also a strong predictor of sense of
belonging. It is then more important that institutions create opportunities for growth and leadership not just for students but also for all who work at the institution because these opportunities can increase a student’s mattering (Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009).

Brooman and Darwent (2014) measured various factors that can impact students during their first year of college. Those factors included self-efficacy, autonomous learning, and social integration. Social integration was measured on sense of belonging, relationship with staff, and relationship with old friends. Questionnaires were administered to their participants at two different times. Sense of belonging and relationship with staff did increase over the 4 weeks. Students who lived off campus scored lower in relation to sense of belonging but after the second testing their sense of belonging did increase. Brooman and Darwent discovered that students who were aware of the available support, integrated into the university with greater success than that of their counterparts. Overall, tasking small groups of students with creating a poster of the available support across campus not only heightened their awareness of the support available but also helped students meet people and, thereby, develop a sense of belonging within the cohort and the university (Brooman & Darwent, 2014).

Overview of Academic Advising

Now that the foundation of mattering and sense of belonging has been laid out, academic advising will first be defined as well as the purpose of advising. Next, the role of academic advisors in higher education will be introduced. After the role of advising has been introduced, the importance of academic advising will be discussed. Next, various approaches to academic advising will be presented. Finally, the skills and competencies needed to be an academic advisor will be detailed.
Kuhn (2008) defined academic advising as direction or guidance an institutional representative provides to a college student with respect to academics. “The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach” (p. 3). The definition will be further expanded with various activities associated with academic advising.

The role of academic advisors is very important as advisors can serve as advocates, referral agents, trusted resources, and informants for students. They are assigned to advisees for usually one year or longer (Vianden & Barlow, 2015) and are often the strongest tie the students have to the university in comparison to the tie students have to any other educator on campus (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). Advisors are resources for students, as they provide information on the institution’s rules, procedures, and policies (Petress, 1996). Advisors need to be able to provide information about professional schools, career opportunities, employment outlooks, and job market trends. They serve as advocates for students in terms of navigating the bureaucracy of institutions and campus procedures. They are advocates when communicating with professors, administrators, and staff. Advisors also serve as referral agents for students, not only for campus resources but also for community resources. Lastly, advisors can be friends or trusted confidants. As Petress (1996) stated,

Students typically enter college fearful, lonely, away from home, confused, in a strange environment, and in need of an anchor, their advisor, to provide stability, assurance, consistency, an outlet for frustrations, someone to hear them out and to answer questions, and a source of confidential guidance, affirmation, and support. (p. 60)
Advisors have many roles across the board, which are not just helping students select classes for the next term. One of the advisors’ roles is to help students navigate their collegiate career in and out of the classroom. Next, the importance of academic advising will be explored.

**Importance of Academic Advising**

As mentioned, the purpose of academic advising is widespread just as is the definition of academic advising. It is also imperative to understand the importance of academic advising. Academic advising is important as it affects many areas such as student retention and senses of belonging, mattering, and community. Academic advising can impact students’ retention by creating intrusive, genuine, impactful relationships with students (Hoover, 2015; Metzner, 1989; Torres & Hernandez, 2009). Academic advisors can also impact the senses of belonging, mattering, and community by being advocates, fostering relationships, and creating inclusive environments (McClure, 2011; O’Banion, 1994; White, 2015).

**Student retention.** Hoover (2015) posed that retention is a growing concern for institutions; however, by connecting students with additional advising, student retention can improve. Advisors furthermore can affect retention positively by being mentors to students (Torres & Hernandez, 2009). Advisors have an opportunity to help the institution achieve its goals in regard to retention.

In a study conducted by Swecker, Fifolt, and Searby (2013), the relationship between advisor meetings and student retention was analyzed. The study took place at a 4-year institution and included data from first-year, first-generation, full-time students. There was a strong positive relationship between the number of meetings with advisors
and retention. The data showed that the more students met with their advisors, the greater the likelihood the students would be retained. To be more exact, for every meeting with an academic advisor, overall for first-year, first-generation, full-time student retention increased by 13%. Swecker et al. (2013) stated, “Advising appointments may be one of the few institutional mechanisms that consistently connect students to the academic institution in meaningful ways” (p. 49). They concluded that advisors have the ability to impact retention by establishing relationships with students.

Barker and Mamiseishvili (2014) conducted a qualitative study at a public research university to explore college of arts and sciences undergraduate students’ experiences during a transitional time of an academic advising model. These participants had experienced a transition from a centralized advising system to a decentralized advising system. Students who had a relationship with their advisor reported a positive difference in the overall college experience and an increase in satisfaction in collegiate experience as they were able to develop a deep and meaningful relationship with their advisor, which further aided their successful transition into the higher education environment.

Barker and Mamiseishvili (2014) found that advisors can be impactful by connecting with students on campus, while Torres and Hernandez (2009) found similar results in their study involving Latinx college students. Torres and Hernandez found that Latinx students whose advisor or mentor helped them through the collegiate years also helped make a difference in various constructs related to persistence. Those constructs included cultural affinity, encouragement, and institutional commitment (Torres & Hernandez, 2009). Overall, Torres and Hernandez concluded that building a relationship
with an advisor/mentor is one of the interventions that could help institutions improve students’ institutional commitment.

In another study involving undergraduate students majoring in psychology at a Midwestern institution, Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, and Hawthorne (2013) explored experiences of advising and their impacts on academic success. This study showed that meeting with advisors had a positive effect on student success, which was defined by the students’ GPA. The meetings with advisors allowed students to feel a sense of responsibility, increased self-efficacy, study skills, and perceived support. Advisors were able to give students the assistance necessary as well as the resources needed to be successful, which led to academic success (Young-Jones et al., 2013). It was through those meetings with academic advisors that the advisors had opportunities to reach out to students at times when they were going through crises. Advisors were further able to connect students with necessary resources to keep students in college and aid their success (Young-Jones et al., 2013).

**Sense of belonging, mattering, and community.** There is little to no empirical research on the connection between advising and sense of belonging, mattering, or community. However, many professionals in the field have argued that this relationship does exist (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014; McClure, 2011; O’Banion, 1994; White, 2015). White (2015), a past president of National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), stated that advisors could engage students to be involved in their campus community. White called on universities to focus more on student development and empowerment. White characterized advising as being central to students’ decision-making processes, graduation rates, and community, and argued that these advising
experiences could impact students’ sense of belonging, mattering, and community.

As Barker and Mamiseishvili (2014) found, connecting with at least one significant person on campus positively impacted students by allowing them to have a more positive experience. White (2015) argued advisors have the ability to engage students at a level that may not be possible in other areas. Through this relationship, advisors could instill confidence in their advisees to embrace their future. Advisors can also encourage students to take an active part in this relationship by taking ownership of their education. Students need to be ensured they are making the right decisions in majors, institutions, and overall goals. However, they do not have to do this by themselves, they have their advisors to aid in this process (White, 2015). Advisors should also have an appreciation for diversity and worth and believe there is potential in all students, which should then, in turn, create a unique, inclusive environment for students to feel welcome (O’Banion, 1994). McClure (2011) believed advisors are able to foster a greater sense of belonging with the more intimate relationships they are able to create with students. Furthermore, advisors can recognize the needs and diversity of the campus. Lastly, McClure (2011) also believed academic advisors were key to connecting students to other offices on campus such as involvement, financial aid, and success coaches.

White (2015) further discussed a vision, where universities focus efforts on educational goals and purposes outside of learning and includes more on student development and empowerment. White went on to say, “Academic advising is core to this vision, continuing the more-than-a-century-old notion that students of higher education should not proceed through their educations unassisted” (p. 271). Finally,
White concluded that academic advisors have the capability to communicate with all their students, which allows advising to be a component of students’ lives.

**Approaches to Academic Advising**

Now that there is a foundation for academic advising and the importance of it has been determined, the various approaches to advising will be explored. The approaches from the advisor’s trainings/skill sets will first be presented. Then, the students’ preferences and experiences with the various approaches will be discussed.

**Advisor approaches.** There are many different approaches to advising for academic advisors. The main approaches include prescriptive (Crookston, 1994; Winston & Sandor, 1984), developmental (Crookston, 1994; Gordon, 1994; Polson, 1994), integrated (Fielstein, 1994; Lowe & Toney, 2000), and intrusive (Earl, 1988; Varney, 2012). Other approaches include advising as teaching (Lowenstein, 2005), learning-centered (Dey Huggett, 2004; Tacha, 1986), appreciative (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008), strengths-based (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005), advising as coaching (McClellan & Moser, 2011), and full-range (Barbuto, Story, Fritz, & Schinstock, 2011). There are pros and cons of each advising approach. Additionally, some approaches work more effectively with some groups of students than with others.

**Prescriptive advising.** Prescriptive advising is characterized as the traditional advising relationship between the advisor and the student (Crookston, 1994). This relationship is more authoritative, and the advisor has the control of the relationship. In a prescriptive advising approach, the advisor is seen only as the teacher and the student is seen only as the learner. Crookston (1994) argued that these students are seen by the advisor to be lazy. The student does receive benefits from the relationship with
prescriptive advising: grades and credit for courses taken by the student. Lastly, the relationship is only based on status, and there are low trust levels between the advisor and student.

The most noticeable con of prescriptive advising is students are not really involved in the decision-making process (Crookston, 1994). The other disadvantage is that there is little collaboration between the student and advisor, as stated previously, this relationship is authoritative (Crookston, 1994).

There are populations that would benefit from prescriptive advising. Brown and Rivas (1994) stated that students who value clear, directive expectations would appreciate prescriptive advising. One other advantage of this approach is it takes less time to establish a relationship than a developmental approach (Winston & Sandor, 1984).

**Developmental advising.** Developmental advising is characterized as a relationship in which the advisor and the student engage in developmental tasks (Crookston, 1994). As Crookston (1994) described, “These developmental tasks include reaching an agreement on who takes the initiative, who takes responsibility, who supplies knowledge and skill and how they are obtained and applied” (p. 6). It is through various tasks that both the advisor and the student learn. Within developmental advising, students are active and striving. The rewards here are through mastery, acceptance, and recognition. Lastly, the relationship is based on tasks as well as high trust levels between the advisor and student.

Gordon (1994), a past president of NACADA, noted several cons of developmental advising. Some of the reasons this type of advising may not be implemented might include a limited number of advisors have the expertise to carry out
developmental advising and funding is not available to adequately train advisors in developmental advising (Gordon, 1994). One aspect of developmental advising is a regular meeting with an advisor. Without those meetings, students may not progress as they need to or know the expectations of an advising relationship. However, if advising meetings were required, these guidelines could be established as well as the necessary support could be given to the student.

Adult learners, or nontraditional students, is one group of students that can benefit from developmental advising, according to Polson (1994), who has been an academic advisor and professor for over 30 years and has won local and national awards for her outstanding advising. Nontraditional students would meet with their advisors more than just during registration time, which would allow conversations to talk about transition, study skills, and additional resources, based on Polson’s experience. Overall, nontraditional students could benefit from developmental advising.

**Integrated advising.** Fielstein (1994), Academic Advisor and Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and Counseling at University of Central Arkansas, described integrated advising as a combination of prescriptive and developmental advising and argued that advising can be a mix of both. This advising model marries the strengths of both prescriptive and development advising. Fielstein developed a questionnaire that was completed by students of various majors from a land grant institution; students were asked to rank certain prescriptive and developmental advising activities as not a priority, a priority, or a high priority. It was found that 50% of the students rated four of the nine prescriptive advising activities as a high priority. Those activities included explaining graduation requirements, registration procedures and
course selection and assisting with planning a course of study. Even though prescriptive advising can be seen as traditional, it is still essential to advising. Furthermore, even though advisors may lean toward developmental advising because of the deeper relationship with the student, Fielstein found that not all students wanted a deeper relationship with their advisors. In fact, 17% of Fielstein’s participants reported that they did not want a deeper relationship with their advisors. Ultimately, Fielstein concluded that one model is not necessarily better than another but an integrated model that incorporates the best of both prescriptive and developmental advising is better than either of the two distinctive approaches.

Consistent with Fielstein’s (1994) finding of a balanced role between prescriptive and developmental advising, Lowe and Toney (2000) found similar results by surveying students on the most important responsibilities of an advisor. Additionally, five advisors offered their perceptions on advisor’s responsibilities. Students rated communicating degree and graduation requirements highly. Undergraduate students reported that establishing a caring relationship with their advisors was somewhat important. Students also reported that advisors should help students become orientated to the campus. Furthermore, students stated that discussing scholarships, internships, and learning styles were also valued responsibilities of advisors. Seniors stated that advisors should help students identify academic problems whereas lower classmen did not rate this as important. Lastly, students ranked listening to students’ problems high as well. Advisors felt it important to make appropriate referrals on campus and help the student establish personal and educational goals.
Winston and Sandor (1984) conducted a study to determine whether students preferred prescriptive or development advising. The researchers found that students wanted advisors to keep them informed of academic policies and program requirements. However, the students did not want the advising process to be prescribed; they wanted the advising process to be more collaborative. Overall, it was found that students wanted to be a part of the advising process while maintaining a balanced relationship with their advisors.

**Intrusive advising.** Earl (1988), first the Director of Academic, Advising, Testing, and Orientation at Old Dominion University and then moved into a licensed therapist role with more than 20 years of experience working with college students, described intrusive advising as “deliberate structured student intervention at the first indication of academic difficulty in order to motivate a student to seek help” (p. 28). Earl claimed this type of advising overcomes the issue of developmental advising, which relies on students to self-refer. Varney (2012), based on 10 years of academic advising experience, stated that intrusive advising would be better labeled “proactive advising,” as proactive alludes to the positive nature of the approach.

Varney (2012) further stated that intrusive advising blends all of the positive aspects of prescriptive advising, such as advising experience, awareness of the students’ needs, and the structure, as well as the positive aspects of developmental advising such as the advisor–student relationship with the overall student needs. Earl (1988) identified a con of intrusive advising as not all students, especially upperclassmen, would be responsive to this type of advising. Lastly, intrusive advising could positively impact
retention by the nature of the model and by better trained advisors who could respond to student difficulties.

Intrusive advising would be effective when students are first starting out in the college setting (Earl, 1988). Research has shown that first-year students are impacted more with intrusive advising than upperclassmen. With intrusive advising, remedial actions could be taken earlier in the semester rather than at the end of the term when nothing can be done to rectify the situation.

**Other approaches.** There are many other approaches that advisors may use when working with students. These approaches will be briefly introduced to inform the reader of the large breadth of approaches that are available to advisors. Those that are discussed below are advising as teaching, learning-centered advising, appreciative advising, strengths-based advising, advising as coaching, and full-range advising.

*Advising as teaching.* The approach of advising as teaching is based on the foundation of developmental advising (Lowenstein, 2005). This approach is different than teaching, in that the advisor is focused on the entire curriculum, not just one course like a teacher would be. Advisors can teach many things to students. They can teach finding the true meaning of the students’ education, why students are taking certain components for their degree, and how to take advantage of all learning opportunities around them (Lowenstein, 2005). Furthermore, this advising approach is to be seen as collaborative, active, and transformative (Lowenstein, 2005).

*Learning-centered advising.* This approach focuses on the students’ experiences through learning and development (Dey Huggett, 2004). Dey Huggett (2004), who has been in higher education administration for over 20 years, described the model in relation
to advising high achieving students such as those within an honor’s program.

Furthermore, Tacha (1986) described eight goals of learning-centered advising. Those are “challenge and enrichment, integration of knowledge, diversity of contacts, exposure to new interests, academic achievement, development of future teachers and scholars, recruitment, and development of leaders” (Tacha, 1986, p. 54–55). These goals enable the advisor and student to take all opportunities, both in and out of the classroom, and ensure that the student is enriched personally and professionally.

Appreciative advising. Appreciative advising consists of six stages: disarm, discover, dream, design, deliver, and don’t settle (Bloom et al., 2008). The disarm stage involves meeting the student and setting the stage in an inclusive environment to make the student feel welcome. In the discover stage, the advisor gets to know the student by asking open-ended questions and, most importantly, listens to the student’s responses. When the advisor moves into the dream stage, the advisor and student look at what the student wants to become, specifically the student’s personal and career goals. In the design stage, the advisor helps turn some of those dreams into reality, setting achievable goals with the student. In the deliver stage, the student is out working towards those goals, yet may come back when assistance in needed, which may require the readjustment of some of the original goals. Lastly, the don’t settle stage is that in which the advisor pushes the student to make sure they are reaching the goals and pushing themselves but also offers positive support (Bloom et al., 2008).

Strengths-based advising. The approach of strengths-based advising starts with analyzing the student’s talents, as described by Schreiner and Anderson (2005), who each have almost 30 years of experience working with college students. Advisors may utilize
certain assessments to identify the student’s strengths, but this is not necessary. Advisors may ask questions that will lead to students’ identify their own strengths naturally. Next the advisor and the student work collaboratively to discuss the strengths in depth. That conversation is about the overall awareness and appreciation of the student’s strengths. The student may be asked to reflect on the strengths with which they most identify. Following this, the conversation typically moves to talking about dreams, goals, and how to develop them further. This is when the connections between the strengths and goals are made. The student will then develop a realistic plan, with the help of the advisor, to accomplish these goals. Overall, strengths-based advising enables students to heighten their focus on their own strengths in a different light and find the motivation to continue their success in their collegiate career (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005).

*Advising as coaching.* McClellan and Moser (2011) use the acronym ADVISE when referring to the advising coaching model. McClellan has been in an Associate Professor at Frostburg State University and advisor for 10 years; Moser has been working within higher education for almost 20 years, most currently at Utah Valley University. The first stage of advising as coaching is active listening. Active listening, in this first stage, allows for a connection to be made between the advisor and student. The next stage is determine, desire, dream, and problem. In this stage, the student may express what he or she would like to achieve during the meeting. The advisor is likely to ask open-ended questions about goals and aspirations, as well. The stage associated with V in the acronym ADVISE calls for the evaluation of what has been done so far. This evaluation is done between both the advisor and the student. In the next stage, options are identified, in that the advisor inquires of the actions the student has taken to move closer to his or
her desire or dreams or solve a problem. This information informs the advisor on how best to move forward in advising the student. The next stage calls for the student and advisor to select options and develop a plan. At this stage, the advisor and student may be creative in discussing options that are available to the student. This could include campus and community resources and referrals. After the options are discussed, it is important to make a plan that includes an outline of steps for the student. The last stage is known as engage and evaluate. In this stage, the advisor discusses the student’s progress and offers motivation and encouragement to the student. The advisor and the student also should take time to reflect on the experience, as well.

*Full-range advising.* Full-range advising is focused on three groups of behaviors (Barbuto et al., 2011). Those groups are laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational. Advisors may exhibit all three of these types of behavior at some point during the advising of a student but tend to focus more in one of the groups of behavior. Laissez-faire is known as the more hands-off leadership. A laissez-faire advisor would be independent and inaccessible. A transactional advisor is likely to be characterized as problem solving and reactive, rather than proactive. Transactional advisors would get involved after a student makes a mistake. These advisors are seen as rule enforcers and focus on fixing mistakes versus actively guiding students. Lastly, a transformational leader is considerate, futuristic, and more of a role model. A transformational advisor would allow students to succeed as they both focus on the future and goals. Transformational advisors build trusting relationships with their advisees (Barbuto et al., 2011).
**Student preferences/experiences with different types of advising.** There is some research that has been conducted on student preferences and experiences with the various types of academic advising. However, that research is fairly limited regarding the types of styles studied. A majority of the studies have focused on the most common styles, which are prescriptive and developmental advising.

In a study conducted by Weir, Dickman, and Fuqua (2005) about student preferences for academic advising styles, the authors found that advising preferences between prescriptive and developmental styles are dependent upon students’ needs. Weir et al.’s participants completed Parts 3 and 5 of the Academic Advising Inventory, which measured satisfaction with advising as well as preferences for advising style. The style of advising was entirely dependent upon the nature of what a student needed to discuss. Therefore, a preference between prescriptive and developmental advising styles could not be determined.

Along the same lines, Fielstein (1989) found that 83.3% of students in a study of 90 undergraduates from a land-grant institution stated it was a priority for an advisor to be acquainted with them. There were personal aspects that students felt needed to be outside of the advising relationship. Almost all, 98.9% of the students, stated that having regular office hours and being accessible was also a high priority. Overall, Fielstein found that students preferred their advisors vary their style to accommodate the need of the student (Fielstein, 1989).

Students will have various needs as times change. Furthermore, advising styles will continue to change, as new styles will be adapted to accommodate students’ needs and new styles will emerge with the changes in technologies. Advisors will need to
continue to be flexible and remain open to training to learn new skills and further professional development.

**Skills and Competencies Needed**

McClellan (2007), who has over 10 years of advising and teaching experience, argued that one of the most important needs of academic advisors is effective training. The training can reinforce retention, assessment, and evaluation; it is still imperative to have the foundation to be an effective advisor. The training should begin with nurturing core competencies that have been identified by professional associations. Those competencies include those identified by National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA).

**NACADA competencies.** There are certain competencies that have been identified by national organizations to clarify advising roles and responsibilities as well as uphold advising standards within the profession. National Academic Advising Association, NACADA, (n.d.) is the “association of professional advisors, counselors, faculty, administrators, and students working to enhance the educational development of students” (“About Us,” About NACADA section, para.1). The Professional Development Committee developed NACADA’s Academic Advising Core Competencies Model at the request of the association’s leadership starting in the summer of 2015 (NACADA Academic Advising, n.d.). In October of 2015, an initial plan was created and, from October 2015 to April 16, the framework was established. Then, from April 16 to December 2016, a draft was created, followed by solicitation of feedback from members between January 2017 and February 2017. On March 4, 2017, the Board of Members
approved the Advising Core Competencies. The purpose of the list of competencies was to “identify the broad range of understanding, knowledge, and skills that support academic advising, to guide professional development, and to promote the contributions of advising to student development, progress, and success” ("NACADA Academic Advising," n.d., para. 1).

The competencies have been grouped into three categories, which are conceptual, informational, and relational (see Appendix A). The NACADA Academic Advising (n.d.) described the competencies:

Conceptual competencies are ideas and theories that advisors need to understand to do their job. Informational competencies are knowledge (also institutional knowledge) that advisors must have to advise/guide students. Relational competencies are skills that advisors must have to be able to then give both concepts and information to students. (para. 4)

These competencies are in place to which advisors should adhere to ensure professional guidelines are followed as well as to sustain positive student outcomes. This is one professional organization that is specifically for academic advising. Next, a different set of competencies will be explored.

**ACPA/NASPA competencies.** Two other national professional organizations that have also set competencies but on a broader level that encompass more than just advising, are ACPA College Student Educators International and NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. NASPA is the “association for the advancement, health, and sustainability of the student affairs profession” ("About NASPA," n.d., para. 1). The mission of NASPA is “to be the principal source of leadership, scholarship,
A professional development, and advocacy for student affairs” (“About NASPA,” n.d., para. 3). ACPA “is the leading comprehensive student affairs association that advances student affairs and engages students for a lifetime of learning and discovery” (“Who We Are,” n.d., para. 1). ACPA and NASPA jointly developed “Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators” (Johnson Eanes et al., 2015). These competencies cover a broader area than those put forth by NACADA, as the ACPA/NASPA competencies cover areas beyond academic areas, such as social justice, technology, ethics, and law.

The ACPA/NASPA describe the Advising and Supporting Competency as the competency that “… addresses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to providing advising and support to individuals and groups through direction, feedback, critique, referral, and guidance” (Johnson Eanes et al., 2015, p. 36). For advising, there are three component areas, which include foundational outcomes, intermediate outcomes, and advanced outcomes (see Appendix B). Johnson Eanes et al. (2015) described the foundational outcomes as listening, establishing rapport, communicating, problem solving, critically thinking, referring appropriately with students, organizations, colleagues, and the college environment. For the intermediate outcomes, those involve decision-making, assessing needs, strategic thinking, identifying behavior, managing/mediating conflict, implementing programs, advocating for/with students, organizations, colleagues, and the college environment (Johnson Eanes et al., 2015). The advanced outcomes, Johnson et al. (2015) explained, are engaging in research, leading responses post crisis, collaborating, establishing liaisons with students, organizations, colleagues, and the college environment.
These professional competencies, whether from NACADA or ACPA/NASPA, are imperative for advisors to follow as guidelines for carrying out their job duties and responsibilities to ensure they are providing the support, knowledge, and skills necessary for students.
Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction to the Problem

The 2015 and 2016 retention rates for the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) were higher than those for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), according to the UNL Fact Book 2017-2018. Furthermore, CASNR’s 6-year graduation rate was also higher than that for UNL. In addition to CASNR’s commitment to student success, the models of student advising are suspected to have contributed to student success.

Research indicates that an increase in a student’s sense of mattering is correlated with increases in retention and graduation (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; O’Keefe, 2013). Furthermore, undergraduate advising has been shown to increase a student’s sense of mattering (Barker & Mamiseishvili, 2014; McClure, 2011; O’Banion, 1994; Petress, 1997; Vianden & Barlow, 2015). With this in mind, I sought to investigate the advising provided at CASNR that undergraduate students characterized as increasing their sense of mattering. The aim of this study was to examine the roles and practices of professional advisors who had cultivated this sense of mattering in undergraduate students.

Purpose Statement/Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify what CASNR professional advisors are and could be doing to foster a sense of mattering within the undergraduate student population that could ultimately affect the graduation and retention rates of undergraduate students. The research questions that were answered through this investigation are:
● Research Question 1: How do exemplar professional advisors of College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln describe their advising skills and practices that foster a student’s sense of mattering?

● Research Question 2: How do undergraduate students of College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln perceive the relationship between advising and their sense of mattering?

● Research Question 3: How do undergraduate students of College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln describe their advising experience?

Theoretical Framework

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) developed the theory of mattering. The theorists noted that the underlying focus of all research involving human observation is the extent to which those being observed matter. Rosenberg and McCullough stated, “The conviction that one matters to another person is linked to the feeling that: (a) one is an object of his attention; (b) that one is important to him; and (c) that he is dependent on us” (p. 163). Furthermore, there are four components of the original theory of mattering. Those components are attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

Attention is the first component of the theory of mattering and is the basic form of mattering. Attention refers to the act of acknowledging one’s needs. One of the powerful
statements Rosenberg and McCullough made about attention is that the only thing worse than dying without people mourning is to die and have no one notice.

Importance is the second component of mattering. Importance is the feeling that a person cares and values another person (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Rosenberg and McCullough noted that mattering is independent of approval. If one is critical of another, it does not follow that the object of the critique does not matter to the critic. On the contrary, the object of the critique must matter a great deal to the critic, whose desire is to help the other improve.

Ego-extension is the third component. Ego-extension is the ability to empathize with the good and bad in people’s lives. This feeling is that one is able to be a part of someone else’s life; one is able to share in the feelings and experiences of the other.

Dependence is the fourth component that Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) included in their theory of mattering. Dependence is the extent to which one’s actions rely on others and the extent to which this reliance on others can influence one’s behavior. “What is much more mysterious is why our actions are equally governed by their dependence on us” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165). As one can tell, dependence on others can have various outcomes. There is a negative aspect of dependence as well. Unfortunately, too much dependence on someone is not beneficial. If one has to consistently rely on another to make day-to-day decisions, in the absence of the other, one will not be able to function. In summary, the components of Rosenberg and McCullough’s theory of mattering include attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence.
However, Elliot, Kao, and Grant (2004) later described three elements of mattering. They characterized mattering as including awareness, importance, and reliance. Awareness was depicted as, “I am the object of other’s attention” (Elliot et al., 2004, p. 343). Under this component, it is important to be known, noticed, recognized, remembered, and paid attention to for one to feel one matters (Elliot et al., 2004). Importance was represented as, “I am an object of other’s concern” (Elliot et al., 2004, p. 343). Having another invest in one’s life and be attentive, supportive, and caring is also important to develop a sense of mattering under this element. Reliance was expressed as, “Other chooses/looks to me” (Elliot et al., 2004, p. 343). Within the element of reliance, it is important that another seeks one’s advice, support, and resources and another trusts one (Elliot et al., 2004, p. 343).

**Methodology**

This study was a qualitative research study. There were multiple forms of data collected throughout the study. The qualitative methods in the study called for me to take into account the natural setting of the college campus (advising offices of the advisors), pose open-ended questions to the participants, and magnify participants’ voices throughout the study. Throughout the data analysis, I looked for themes that arose from participants’ experiences through advising as well as patterns (Creswell, & Poth, 2018).

**Epistemology**

I came to the research with a social constructivism framework. Within this framework, each participant has his or her own meaning; in this particular multiple case study design, each participant brought their own meaning to the research study. I accomplished bringing their own meaning by providing participant quotes to gain the rich
understanding of participant’s experiences. Under the social constructivism approach, as the researcher I also used the participants’ experiences to find themes and make generalizations, which was fitting for this case study design. I wanted to understand how the world operates as well as give it meaning. To accomplish this, I focused on my participants’ views of student advising, the phenomena under investigation. One implication for this framework was the reliance on participants’ disclosure of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Researcher Positionality**

It is important to understand my background and how it relates to this particular research topic. First, I should disclose that even though I come with close to four and one-half years of experience working within CASNR, this is about the extent of my background within the agricultural field. I do have prior experience within the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that connects me with student success initiatives but my title as Student Development Coordinator has provided me the most in-depth understanding of students than any of my previous positions on campus.

I am a first-generation student who had an extremely invested advisor; this advisor was not just invested in my academics but also in my overall life. I went to a private, liberal arts college, which allowed my advisor to be my professor for multiple courses in my degree program as well as an advisor for an organization in which I was involved. He was able to foster a large sense of my mattering in many aspects of my life, though I may not have seen that impact at the time. I acknowledge that I have this interest because of my own experiences with my undergraduate advisor. If it were not for him, I
might not have finished my undergraduate career, would not have pursued my master’s
degree and, therefore, would not be here today.

As I have come to the position I am in currently in CASNR, I noticed that
mattering is almost engrained within the college in many aspects of programming,
academics, and culture. I do acknowledge that these experiences are my own. I know that
they may have influenced the research setting. However, I strived to keep my personal
experiences out of the research. To ensure that my biases did not affect the research, I had
participants review their statements for accuracy. The research underwent multiple peer
reviews.

**Case Study Methodology**

According to Creswell (2018), a case study is qualitative design where the
researcher examines phenomenon in depth collecting details through various data
collection procedures. This multiple case study was conducted within a bounded system
(Yin, 2015). The skill set and practices of each professional advisor were an individual
bounded case. The bounded cases were the skill sets and practices of the exemplar
advisors within CASNR at UNL. There were multiple forms of data used in this case
study: questionnaire, observations and photographs of advisors’ offices, interviews with
advisors, interviews with advisees, and observations of advisors and advisees.

**Multiple case study methodology.** The methods used for this study are
consistent with case study methodology. Multiple forms of data were collected. This was
a multiple case study that involved three professional advisors as well as three of their
advisees (one advisee per advisor).
Rich information that was gathered on each case informed me of the extent to which each exemplar advisor potentially fostered mattering within his or her undergraduate students. Specifically, the questionnaire asked all CASNR students, “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: My academic advisor has positively contributed to my sense of mattering at this institution.” CASNR students responded to this question on a 5-point Likert-type scale. They then identified their academic advisor from a drop-down menu that included all advisors within the college. Questionnaires in which faculty were identified as the advisors were excluded from analysis, as the focus of the study was restricted to professional advisors. Questionnaires were grouped per professional advisor. The mean of the scores of the student responses for each professional advisor were then totaled. The three professional advisors with the highest means were contacted and invited to participate in the study. Advisees of these three exemplar advisors who rated the advisor a 5, indicating the advisor had fostered their sense of mattering, were also contacted and invited to participate in the study. Three students, one per exemplar advisor, consented to participate in the study. Detailed steps are outlined later.

**Data Collection Steps**

Descriptions of each of the data collection steps are detailed. Tracking the steps in each stage was imperative to success of the study. The steps include administer questionnaire to students, select three advisors, select three associated students, interview advisors, observe and photograph advisor’s office, observe the student and advisor interactions, interview the students, and interview the advisors.
**Case selection.** The selection process included a criterion and intensity sampling for the CASNR (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Criterion sampling requires that each respondent meet a specific criterion to be selected. In this case study, criterion sampling was based on being a professional advisor as well as earning a high student rating on the mattering survey. Intensity sampling requires that each case contain rich information about a phenomenon; for this case study, the advisors who fostered a sense of mattering were each a case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each case (advisor) was selected based on the questionnaire and the mean score associated with the advisor. The goal of the study was to include three different cases.

**Questionnaire to students.** Since the study was focused on CASNR students, I requested a list of all currently enrolled CASNR students from the CASNR Dean’s Office. The information I requested was their names and email addresses. After the list was sent to me, I went through the list and excluded first-year students, as they would have only had minimal contact with their advisors at New Student Enrollment. I then took the list and sent it to the interim dean of CASNR. Once received, the interim dean of CASNR emailed 1,788 CASNR students the link to a questionnaire (see Appendix C), asking them to complete the questionnaire about mattering and their experience with their academic advisors. This questionnaire was completed through Qualtrics to ensure confidentiality. To maximize participation, I informed all potential participants that those who completed the questionnaire and provided their name and email address would be included in a drawing for one $20 Visa gift card (odds were 1 in 200). Names and email addresses of those who indicated a desire to be included in the drawing were kept in a separate Excel spreadsheet, which was used only for the gift card drawing. A total of 499
responses were received over a 3-week period at the beginning of the academic year 2018–2019.

Selection of three advisors. The student questionnaires were sorted based on the type of advisor the student identified. For the purpose of this study, to investigate the advising skills and practices of professional advisors who had fostered a student’s sense of mattering, I was only interested in the questionnaire responses of students whose advisors were professional advisors. The mean of the scores of the student responses for each professional advisor was calculated, and those means were used to identify the top three advisors—those with the highest mean scores. I then reached out to the selected advisors and briefed them on the study before inviting them to participate in the study. All top three professional advisors agreed to participate, and I was able to proceed with the selected advisors. I also calculated the overall mean of all student responses (students who had been advised by professional advisors), which was 1.3365. The top three means of the highest professional advisors were 1.769, 1.676, and 1.558.

Selection of top three associated students. Students were invited, in the questionnaire, to participate further in the study. Yet, not all students who indicated a willingness to participate further were invited to do so. In fact, only the students who were advised by the three advisors were considered for interviews. Those groups of questionnaires were then sorted into three groups, one group for each of the top advisors. From each of these smaller groups of questionnaires, the interim dean of CASNR chose at random one student (to ensure an unbiased opinion), who scored his or her advisor a 5 on the mattering scale. I contacted these randomly selected students by email to invite them to further participate in the study. At this stage of the study, I used random and
criterion purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was criterion purposeful sampling because these were students who rated their advisor high on the mattering scale. This was random sampling because the interim dean of CASNR randomly selected one student from each group (one group for each professional advisor). Three students indicated a willingness to participate further.

**Data Collection**

Table 1 relates each data collection step to Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) stage of mattering, Elliot et al.’s (2004) elements of mattering, and Schlossberg’s (1989) definition of mattering. The “X” under Schlossberg’s definition of mattering means that the data collection step does relate to the definition of mattering.
Table 1

*Data Collection Connection to Mattering*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire to students</td>
<td>Attention Importance</td>
<td>Awareness Importance</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of top three advisors</td>
<td>Attention Importance</td>
<td>Awareness Importance</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of three student advisees</td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>Awareness Importance</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with advisors</td>
<td>Attention Importance</td>
<td>Awareness Importance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe/Photograph the advisor’s office</td>
<td>Attention Importance</td>
<td>Awareness Importance</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe the student–advisor interaction</td>
<td>Attention Importance</td>
<td>Awareness Importance</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with the students</td>
<td>Attention Importance</td>
<td>Awareness Importance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with the advisors</td>
<td>Attention Importance</td>
<td>Reliance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Interviews with advisors.* I went to the advisor’s office and recorded my interviews with each of them. There were three interviews each with three different professional advisors. The questions revolved around their advising philosophy, advising practices, and fostering a sense of mattering with students within the advising capacity.

Please see the Appendix E for actual interview questions. Once the interview was
complete, I asked each advisor if he or she had any additional questions for me or wanted to give me additional information to understand their position more.

**Observe and photograph the advisor’s office.** Following the interview, I took some time to observe and photograph the advisor’s office to capture the overall feel of the office. The photographs allowed for more validation of the interviews and observations. I took pictures of articles on the walls, how the office is set up, how they position themselves when meeting with students, books they have as resources for the students, personal items in the office, and any other advising related things. I took pictures to include in the write-up of findings and to inform the analysis of other data. The observations consisted of looking for how advisors’ offices connected them to students, what type of environment the offices are, resources available within the office, and the overall feeling portrayed by the office. Please refer to Appendix D for observations I documented.

**Observe the student–advisor interaction.** I attended an advising session that was set up between the professional advisor and the advisee to observe the advisor–advisee relationship. This allowed me an opportunity to see how the advisor might have fostered a sense of mattering through these types of interactions. I audio recorded the session between the two. I observed this interaction and was not an active participant. I also took notes during the session to follow up later. The specific observations I noted at this time were details of the advisor’s preparation, the opening interaction, integration of advising skills and practices in the advising session, and key connections between the advisor and advisee. See Appendix D for a list of items I documented during the observation of interaction.
**Interviews with the students.** I met with the students after the observation of the advising session. I met with them at a different location than their advisors’ offices. I recorded this interview as well. I interviewed them based on the previous interaction to find out more information and how the advisor had potentially fostered a sense of mattering from the students’ perspectives. Questions in this interview surrounded how their advisors had developed a sense of mattering and had gone above and beyond their duties to accomplish this. See Appendix E for a list of questions.

**Interviews with the advisors.** I met with the advisors following the observations of the advising session. I met with the advisors in their respective offices and recorded the interviews. I interviewed them based on the advisor–advisee interaction to find out more information about fostering a sense of mattering as well as other roles they may have played to foster that sense of mattering outside of the advising experience. Questions pertained to how the advisors believed they had impacted their students’ sense of mattering and through what skills and practices they had been able to foster that sense of mattering through meeting with students. See Appendix E for a list of questions.

**Data Analysis**

**Case Study Database**

I entered the data collected into a secure file (Stake, 2010). The pictures of the advisors’ offices were organized, arranged, and put into documents for each case. After audio recording the interviews, I transcribed the recordings into Word documents (Gillman, 2000). I transcribed the observations of advisor and advisee advising session into Word documents. Throughout data analysis, I compiled data from across sources. As information was gathered through the various stages, as I observed and interviewed
participants, I compiled data into my researcher’s journal to keep data together as I moved along through the process of data collection.

**Data from “ground up.”** “Coding is sorting all data sets according to topics, themes, and issues important to the study” (Stake, 2010, p. 151). As Gillman (2000) stated, coding starts with substantive statements and then moves to taking these statements and reading them again to come up with a list of categories.

I analyzed the data from the ground up, as Yin (2014) recommended. I analyzed the photos taken to see the potential commonalities of these professional advisors’ offices. The photographs were further evidence for the larger codes found within the interviews and observations (Gillham, 2000). I entered interview transcripts and observation notes for each case into a data analysis system called MAXQDA. I read through the data (interviews and observations) multiple times, highlighted key words/phrases that came up, and noted concepts between interviews and/or descriptions. Coding was utilized as an analysis for both the interviews and observations. The highlighting of concepts allowed potential relationships or themes to be seen within the data as it was explored. I assigned highlighted statements to a category based on best fit. These categories were the codes that created the overall themes (Gillman, 2000). I carried out coding for each case, independently. I grouped together key words and descriptions into larger themes from the coded data sets. I compared and analyzed these larger themes as well. After that, I illustrated these themes in a diagram and wrote a case summary for each case (Yin, 2014).

**Cross-case synthesis.** After within-case analysis was complete, I then did a cross-case analysis and synthesis. I took the themes that were from each case analysis (within-
case analysis) and compared and contrasted them with each of the other cases. I looked for more patterns within the various cases as I conducted the synthesis (Yin, 2014). I created graphs and tables to signify similarities and differences from the three different case studies. During the data synthesis, I was able to create qualitative word clouds for each case. The word clouds were generated from data from the interviews with advisors and students. Overall, there were two word clouds for each case. I also created a Venn diagram of the similarities and differences for the cross-case analysis. I conducted a comparison of advising skills, characteristics, and professional practices between cases. Lastly, I conducted a comparison between cases of the fostering of sense of mattering.

**Trustworthiness**

Gillman (2000) stated that to establish trustworthiness within research, qualitative research requires interpreting data, and this interpretation requires the researcher to create a true picture for readers. To ensure the trustworthiness of this research project, I conducted member checks, triangulation, and external auditors.

**Member Checks**

I had all participants go through a member checking process where they read their individual case summary from the within-case analysis and gave me feedback. In a second member check, I asked participants for feedback on the summary of my results. Participants agreed with the findings as well as the summaries. There were minor changes of clarification until each participant was satisfied (Stake, 1995). Those changes included updated numbers for students advisors served as well as a student making a word change on one quote.
Triangulation

The purpose of data triangulation is to corroborate the data (convergence of evidence; Yin, 2014). Data triangulation was carried out by using multiple forms of data, including observations of offices, interviews of advisors and advisees, and observations of advisor–advisee interactions. This also helped strengthen construct validity through multiple forms of data as well as having participants review final reports (Yin, 2014). This was important to ensure that the data was accurate and measured what the data set out to measure (Yin, 2014).

Results of the External Audit

I had two external auditors review the data to ensure that they could follow the chain of evidence in the data collection as well as through data analysis. These two auditors had no connections within the research. Each auditor reviewed the data as well as the findings. Each auditor agreed with the findings while also provided a few opportunities for clarification of the data.

Dr. Deepak Keshwani was an Associate Professor of Biological Systems Engineering. Within his appointment, he also served as an academic advisor, and his areas of research and professional interests are bioprocess, biosystems modeling, optimization, student success, and retention. Dr. Keshwani served as a faculty fellow within the CASNR Dean’s Office. Dr. Keshwani had no supervisory capacities or conflict of interest with academic advisors. Dr. Keshwani and I were colleagues within CASNR, and he had been interested in my educational goals and dissertation work since I started my position. He wanted to be involved, in some aspect, with this process. We discussed
that, with his knowledge of the inner workings of the advising relationships within CASNR, serving as an external auditor was a great way for him to be involved.

Dr. Matthew Mims was an Associate Professor for the Counseling and School Psychology Program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He also served as the coordinator of the online Student Affairs Master’s Program and academic advisor for students enrolled in the Student Affairs Program of study. Dr. Mims was one of my advisors through my master’s program and continued to be a mentor of mine since I graduated in 2010. Since starting my dissertation, I included him on ideas, challenges, and successes. Dr. Mims offered an outside perspective, as he was not familiar with the structure of advising within CASNR nor CASNR at all. He also did not know any of the individuals involved and provided an unbiased perspective of the data.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify what College of Agricultural and Natural Resources (CASNR) exemplar advisors’ skills and practices fostered a sense of mattering among undergraduate students within CASNR, that ultimately could impact retention and graduation rates. This multiple case study was comprised of three cases, three exemplar advisors, who were identified in a survey provided to CASNR undergraduate students who rated their advisors on fostering a sense of mattering. This chapter will include a description of each participating advisor, the findings of each case, and the findings from the cross-case analysis.

Within-Case Findings

This study included three cases of exemplar professional advisors and what they had been doing with undergraduate students to foster a sense of mattering. A survey was sent out to CASNR undergraduate students inquiring to what extent they believed their advisor had fostered a sense of mattering within their undergraduate career. The advisors with the highest mean score of mattering participated. I first interviewed three advisors and then observed an advising session of each. I interviewed three students who scored their advisor high on fostering a sense of mattering and then conducted a second interview with their respective advisors. The findings of each case are summarized below. The names of all participants have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of each.

The three advisors within this study had collectively over 48 years of advising experience within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. Two of the three advisors worked their entire careers at UNL. All three professional advisors
were involved in training when they first started at the university. The trainings involved both university training and college specific training. Lastly, all three advisors’ job descriptions have been modified to include more (teaching, advisor for student organizations) since they first started their roles as advisors.

**Maura Findings**

Maura was the Advising Coordinator within one of CASNR’s 32 degree programs. She served as the advisor of over 300 students. She co-facilitated an internship course within that degree program as well. Maura facilitated advising, internships, study abroad and involvement and provided resources to students. An advisee of Maura’s, whom I observed and interviewed, was Kyle. Kyle was an out-of-state sophomore, enrolled in the honors program.

Figure 2 is a word cloud that shows the words most frequently spoken by Maura in my interview with her. Some of the top words that came up repeatedly in the interview were *know, think, help, can, year, stuff,* and *say.* Maura’s word choice shows that she was action-oriented when it comes to working with her students, while also understanding each one of her students’ stories.
Figure 2. Maura’s word cloud from both interviews.

Figure 3 shows the most common words in Kyle’s interview. It portrays words that suggest Maura put the student first as well as action-oriented words such as *think, going, talking,* and *know.* This word cloud also shows the importance of careers, the advisor’s office, and each student is an individual or one.

Figure 3. Kyle’s word cloud from the interview.
**Fostering a sense of mattering.** All advisors were able to discuss their skills and practices they use and enact in hopes of fostering a sense of mattering within their undergraduate students. Maura specifically described her advising philosophy and how it relates to mattering. She characterized herself as the following: advisor, listener, resource, career counselor, pusher, cheerleader, realist, collaborator, and lifelong learner. Through these skills, she believed she has been able to treat each student whom she advised as an individual. Maura stated,

Mattering to me means that they are an individual and they matter to me, they matter to the university, and they have a place within this university. They are not just another number like a lot of small universities like to say. I care about them as an individual; I care about their success and, hopefully, that translates to these students.

Along with listening, asking questions to get to know who they are was important to Maura. She said,

Sometimes body language can tell you something—the way they light up when they start talking about something, the way they may shut down when they start talking about another thing. I think just making sure that I’m listening, observing, then making decisions based on that one student.

Maura valued being able to carry out many roles for her students and foster that sense of mattering in those roles.

Kyle believed that Maura was able to affect his sense of mattering at the institution very much. He discussed how having Maura know him and his story had made a difference with his sense of mattering. She had been able to recall specific details about
his life but also within the advising realm. She had remembered things about his scheduling preferences, traveling home on weekends, and enjoying football season. Kyle stated, “It’s just like I know I matter to her. She values my input, and she wants to make a connection with me.” Kyle had observed that this relationship was not unique with him, but Maura intentionally connected with each of her students in this way. He characterized the way Maura connected with all of her students as “top-notch.” He had seen that other students had great relationships with her and that she worked incredibly hard to know each of her students on an individual level.

Maura described her role in career development: “I’d say it’s almost an equal part of my job, because the whole point of this is the next 30 years of their life, not just the four that they are here.” Maura discussed internship opportunities with Kyle in their advising appointment. She encouraged him to take advantage of a position at the local zoo, as it would give him information about the work in his discipline, which would help him know if he was pursuing the right major. Maura offered to write a letter of recommendation to accompany his application to improve his chances of being accepted into the internship program. Maura stated, “In this field, and I know it’s different in other fields, but in our field, career internships, volunteer activities, hands-on activities are vital to students getting jobs.” Maura enjoyed seeing the cycle go full circle—a graduate of the program advises a current undergrad, the undergrad comes to intern with them, and then the program provides a full-time employment opportunity upon graduation.

**Investment in the whole student.** Maura discussed the long-term success that she witnessed with each student. She stated, “I’m not just here to make sure they graduate and then never see them again. I feel like we develop these lifelong connections with
some of our students.” She worked hard to understand the students and get to know them individually. She wanted to know their goals, passions, stories, and ultimately what made them unique. Maura also stated, “Asking them what the most important things are, because sometimes what I think they might want to talk about is not what they really want to talk about.” Maura strived to remember those details through emails and system notes about advising, all to recall that information when meeting with a student. Maura had recalled important details about Kyle’s family, girlfriend, and preferences in their advising meeting. This helped Kyle feel like he does not have to constantly reintroduce himself to Maura. Kyle stated,

Even though I don’t see her, I only see her maybe twice a semester or so, I feel like she knows who I am and my story, which is pretty cool, considering I only see her a couple times a semester.

Maura believed it was imperative that students find success in their individual own way, regarding changing majors, leaving the institution, transferring institutions, working full-time, or joining the military. She stated,

You usually can tell those conversations are coming. And I, a lot of times, pull [from] examples of my husband or people that have found success in different ways. I think that’s part of my philosophy is that college is not always the answer for every student, and their success doesn’t always mean a degree.

Maura had been able to connect with students to find out what they desire in life, realizing that it was not always an educational path.

Through Kyle’s experiences, he had seen how Maura was able to help with life issues too. Maura stated, “Sometimes when advising appointments take a different curve,
I don’t necessarily want to get them back on track because sometimes there’s really important things that come out of that.” Kyle had recently asked Maura about connecting him with someone within the community. Maura had recommended someone to him, and it turned out to be a great experience. He stated that Maura is always the first person he contacts for anything. He has found comfort in her wisdom and has felt comforted by each interaction (no matter if it was face-to-face or email or phone) he has had with Maura.

Maura’s office was also an important investment to her students. She had worked to show that she is invested in her job by posting thank-you notes from students. She also had various posters and pictures that relate to the degree program in which she advised. Maura believed it was important to be able to show students a glimpse into her story as well. This was shown through family pictures and children’s artwork in her office. Kyle stated, “She definitely loves what she does. She has posters that relate to her field. She has CASNR stickers everywhere. I know that she loves what she does.” Kyle was able to see that Maura’s office told a story about her passions.

One aspect that was imperative to the majors that Maura advised is gaining experience through internships. Maura worked to connect students with employers, various agencies, or organizations based on students’ interests and career goals. Maura does not solely focus on the students’ interests and career goals, though. She stated, I want students to be successful when they leave here because it’s more than just a degree. I do a lot with internships. I will try and match students with employers or different agencies, organizations based on their individual interests and their career goals.
She was consistently out in the community meeting with potential employers to find out what their needs were as well. Her hope was to help organizations formalize internships while building bridges between students and employers. She believed this will ultimately help employers know what type of students this program produced, which could lead to more hiring opportunities in the future.

**Wealth of information.** Maura stated, “I kind of see myself as the one-stop-shop. That’s what I tell students a lot.” Maura was able to answer questions and give referrals for students interested in studying abroad, career development, internships, volunteer experiences, recognized student organizations, parking, and buses. Maura stated, I get that I might not be an expert in all of the areas, but I at least want to scratch the surface. To me, I’m not doing the students justice if I am not able to talk about all of those things.

Her experience was not limited to working for the university; at the time of writing, she was also a student at the university. Being a student enabled her to relate to students and understand what they might be facing. She wanted students to understand that when they do not know where to start, go to her first. Her hope was that students see her as their resource within the department and that they had a person on campus they can go to for anything. Kyle saw Maura just as that. He stated, “The way that she goes above and beyond is like there’s no size limit to the problem that you have with school or even person. If I need anything, she’s always the first person that I can contact.” Maura’s experiences enabled her students to feel confident in going to her for any of their needs.

Maura also stated that she saw herself as being a support system for students. She strived to be a nonjudgmental, safe place for students to go to, whether students had a
problem that was personal, academic, professional, or a combination of these things. She believed in treating each student as a person and getting to know each of them for whom they are. She stated, “I try and let students know, ‘I’m not going to judge you in my office; I’m going to support you. I’ll work to find the best connection to whatever you are doing.’” She served as a support system in writing students reference letters for professional school, organizations, internships, scholarships, or jobs.

Kyle saw his advising experience with Maura as more than just advising for classes. Kyle stated, “She is so good at helping with any problem that you could think of. Even if it’s big or small, she could figure it out.” Kyle mentioned that Maura was always able to address each one of his needs or questions, oftentimes before he was even able to ask them. He said he came prepared to advising appointments with a list of things he wanted to cover. Maura seamlessly transitioned from one topic to another. It was through her ability to recall details about him that really impacted his mattering. Kyle said,

That’s just another testament to how much she cares. Because you can have an advisor that can help you and be amazing, like the best advisor ever, but if they don’t know and remember who you are and what you’ve gone through and your story, it’s just not as good.

Kyle recalled his time at New Student Enrollment when he did not meet with Maura. He felt that if she had been the one helping him, he would not have stumbled on so many challenges or felt overwhelmed by the experience of that day. He felt he would have been more confident entering into his first year at the university, knowing what a resource he had in Maura. His first interaction with Maura was during his first semester at the university. He approached her to talk about how things were going and that he felt really
overwhelmed. Maura was able to calm his fears, be a word of encouragement, and overall just listen to him. He felt that he was able to figure things out a bit more and understand his options with his degree program after meeting with Maura. Overall, Kyle affirmed that his experience with Maura significantly had impacted his sense of mattering. Her ability to focus on him as an individual, to care more about him than academics, and to be a resource made her an exemplar advisor.

Meeting students where they are. Maura stated she understood the various needs of students and the importance of addressing more than just the advising needs. When she does meet with students even in the advising realm, she stated,

I start off the sessions with asking them how they are and how the semester is going. I take five minutes to focus on them. I think that’s really important in showing that I actually care about them as a person, not just an advisee.

She has served in various roles for students. She has been seen as an advisor, teacher, study abroad leader, and career services developer. Maura shared one way she did this:

I went into the first-year seminar course and reminded the students where my office was. Again, let them know we’re happy they’re here and remind them that I’m their advocate and that if they have questions, issues, they don’t know where to go, they don’t know who to start with, come into my office.

Maura emphasized the importance of being adaptable. Kyle stated,

Even if you don’t really have a problem or any specific question, you can schedule an appointment with Maura and give her the details. She will calm you down. She’s like a therapist to me; I can go in there and when I leave, I am like “Ah, I got this.”
There were other times when she had a full schedule, and a student dropped by unexpectedly. Maura stated, “I sometimes have to just be able to drop everything when it comes to a student that’s struggled and had issues. I’m going to prioritize. I feel like my other students would understand.” At such times, she had communicated with her other students to assure that they were still important to her, but she had to take care of the struggling student. She stated that a majority of her students had been okay with her jumping in to help a student because they want to be treated the same if a crisis comes up in their lives. Maura believed that being able to communicate that students were important to her an imperative to the relationship. She also wanted to be there to support them through as much as possible.

**Soft skills of advising.** Maura described her soft skills of advising to include listening, empathy, and time management. Maura stated that she listened without judging, which she believed allowed trust to be built in the advising relationship. She has worked to avoid making assumptions about students or their experiences. She also had an open-door policy for students. She believed that being able to see students regularly, as well as in a crisis, is imperative for making students feel they matter.

Maura was empathetic with her students. She shared with me her experiences as an undergraduate at the university as well as the knowledge she had gained from being an employee of the university. Maura believed that it is crucial to be able to say,

“They’ve been in your shoes. I’ve been a student here.” Hopefully, they can still see me as a student a long time ago. I know it’s tough. I think that’s probably one of the things that has connected me to my students the most, the fact that I can relate to what they are going through.
Maura has shared with her students the good and bad experiences she has had to humanize herself and demonstrate empathy for their experiences. Maura has been able to relate to students on various levels.

The last soft skill Maura discussed was time management. Having a large caseload, Maura had to find balance with her job duties. She mentioned that being able to find a few minutes for herself each day was helpful. Something she did regularly was take a walk with a colleague. She said, “One, it gets me out of the office, but two, it’s nice to have another adviser to bounce questions, ideas off. Sometimes it’s just venting to someone that gets it. I think that helps.” Maura has spent time, often outside of office hours, to ensure that students were well. There have been emergencies that she had to prioritize or follow up. Maura believed that these skills have made a difference in working with her students.

Stella Findings

Stella was the Program Coordinator and Advisor in a different degree program in CASNR. She has served as an advisor for around 180 students who were either majoring or minoring within that department. She was teaching a seminar course in the degree program at the time of the study and was the advisor for a recognized student organization. Stella also facilitated advising, internships, study abroad, and involvement and provided resources to students. One student in this degree program, whom I observed in an advising appointment as well as interviewed, was Emma. Emma was a sophomore, a double major in CASNR, and an out-of-state student.
Figure 4 described the interviews with Stella. Some of the common words included *going, work, think, need, know, can,* and *time.* Stella saw her students as kids and had a strong desire to see them consistently reflecting on their experiences.

![Stella’s word cloud from both interviews.](image)

*Figure 4.* Stella’s word cloud from both interviews.

Emma focused on how her advisor made her feel like she matters. She believed that her advisor was open, approachable, and cared about her overall wellness. Some of the commonly used words within Emma’s interview included *going, feel, think,* and *always.*
Figure 5. Emma’s word cloud from the interview.

**Fostering a sense of mattering.** Stella believed that she had been able to foster a sense of mattering through knowing her advisees individually. She stated,

I am in a little department. I can know them individually, and I know that’s not something everybody can do on campus. Knowing them, asking them, and knowing what they’re about, and things they’re facing and dealing with is a big deal.

Stella was able to connect with Emma in the advising appointment by asking questions in regard to her fall break with her siblings. Emma stated, “It makes me feel definitely like I matter. I feel like I shouldn’t use that word but it’s accurate. It makes me feel like she cares a lot and that’s really awesome.” Emma stated that Stella has affected her sense of mattering by recalling details and knowing what matters the most to her. Emma stated,

Stella makes everyone feel really valued. I feel like she learns people’s names so quickly. She’s always going to say “Hi” to you every time she sees you. She’s
always asking about my siblings and stuff like that. She knows they mean a lot to
me.

Emma’s sense of mattering was fostered by a series of specific actions her advisor took.

Stella worked within a smaller department where she had about 180 students each
semester who major or minor in that department. Stella approached advising with an
informal philosophy and more of a sociocultural approach. She believed that her
Midwestern culture as well as her maternal instincts have aided her in developing a sense
of mattering within her students. Stella had a child who was in college at the time of
writing. She stated, “That’s the approach I take to these students, as though they were one
of my children.” She wanted them to be treated as she wished her daughter to be treated.

Emma stated,

It goes back to how she knows so much about me and what classes I’ll like or
which ones I’ll have trouble with, which ones I’ll be fine in. She knows all of the
extracurricular activities I’m in and stuff like that. So, I think all those combined
is something that she does that affects my mattering.

Stella was able to take Emma in just as she was one of her own children, which affected
her mattering in a positive way.

Another aspect that Stella believed aided in fostering a sense of mattering was
teaching students to be independent and owning their own experiences. She strived to
teach students to do a majority of the work themselves and how to find answers. She
stated, “Teaching them how to do the work themselves, and getting them to own their
experiences. Sometimes that also means, sitting down and giving the hard line with my
expectations.” Stella said those conversations are natural to her, and she had told those
students that she knew they could do better and that those actions were not what they should have been doing. Students have responded to her really well and oftentimes knew the conversation was coming. Stella recalled that one student with whom she had had a difficult conversation had come back after graduation to thank her for putting things into perspective. Stella often has had students reflect on why they were taking certain classes and why they were exploring specific internships or research opportunities. She wanted students to connect those experiences to their passion. One example of this was when Stella and Emma were talking about summer opportunities. Emma was not sure where she wanted to be located over the summer. Stella said to Emma,

Let me know what you are thinking on that when you can. Make another appointment in November if you want. Otherwise, we can hold off a little bit, but I do want you to find something this summer that suits you, keeps you healthy, because I know you were pretty stressed after this past summer.

Stella was able to give Emma more options for her to consider for the future to ensure she remained happy and well.

**Investment in the whole student.** Stella focused on the long-term health and success with all of her students. Stella stated,

Really trying to make sure they’re healthy long-term and what that really entails is: yes, we are signing up for classes, but what are the students trying to get out of these classes? What skill set do they need? Often, we backtrack to identify what they are passionate about.

She wanted to ensure that each aspect connects to a larger picture for students. Stella has done this by giving students the information necessary to make the best decisions for
their life and experience at the institution. Stella stated in her advising meeting with Emma that her overall wellness was important. Stella wanted to ensure Emma’s experiences over the summer kept her healthy and not overly stressed to start the academic year. This was an demonstration of starting with what students are passionate about, pulling in classes and internships that would be about those passions and, ultimately, leading up to a career that they would see more as a passion than work. Stella stated, “I want my students to wake up every morning and say, ‘I can’t believe I get paid to do this.’” Finding a career that aligned with the student’s passion was important to Stella.

For Stella, her job was more than selecting classes. It was ensuring students have experiences to be successful in life. Stella has helped build skills for her students to be successful not just in a career but also in life. She has worked to get to know the whole student personally, academically, and professionally. Stella has pushed to ensure that their goals were lined up with what they are doing at the institution or by providing more of those experiences that aid in students being successful.

**Wealth of information.** Stella served as an information source for her students. She has referred students consistently to campus resources. Those resources include career services, CASNR CARES, counseling, professors, and faculty. Stella has also worked to ensure that students were connected with jobs and internships. She has accomplished this by networking within the community and her field.

Stella had a keen awareness of overall student’s health but especially mental health. She stated,
It was a very long time ago that I was their age but working in the environment is a constant reminder of the things I dealt with and I dealt with a lot. I think that I feel I can relate a bit even though I am the same age as their parents. I do less well with mental health issues, and that’s generally where I look to the resources on campus because I don’t have a lot of training in that other than some prevention. But realistically, that’s not my area of expertise.

She knew that it was important that students have at least one person on campus they can go to for anything. At the beginning of each semester, Stella sent out an email to every student within the degree program, telling them that they were important and she cared about them. She offered them on-campus resources for mental health but also encouraged them to come see her if there was a need to talk. Stella wanted to ensure that students had someone there if they need it. Emma recalled this email; it gave her an extra vote of confidence and reassured her that people do care about her overall wellness. She said, Stella works so hard to make sure that all of her students, all of her advisees, are doing well and succeeding. She is willing to do so much to ensure that. She’s more flexible than any of the advisors I have just because she’s so willing to make sure that we’re doing well.

Stella served as more than just an advisor for her students; she has been able to direct them to many more resources and people both on and off campus.

**Meeting students where they are.** Stella has been able to see students in various capacities, whether advising, student organizations, or the teaching realm. She was serving as a recognized student organization advisor for a group within her degree program. Through this, she has been able to see students outside of her office, interacting
with other students. Stella has been a professor for a few classes. She has been able to see students in the academic classroom. She has been in contact with students on a weekly basis throughout the semester. This has given her an opportunity to get to know students better. One way Stella was able to get to know Emma so quickly was that Emma had worked in her office her first semester. Emma and Stella had seen each other on a weekly basis, if not more, for an entire semester. They were able to get to know each other by having conversations outside of their advising meetings. This aided in building trust between the two of them, while bonding over a common goal. Emma mentioned how approachable Stella was right away. Emma recalled fears about getting lost or being just a number at a larger institution. However, Stella had been able to put those fears to rest in their conversations.

Through getting to know students’ goals, Stella has been able to individualize their degree program and experience. Stella has worked to advise students to take courses that would help them explore various options in the degree and also further an interest area. Stella stated that one of the most important aspects was to get students to reflect on their experiences. This included experiences with a certain class, an internship, or even involvement. Stella explained,

I think so many students sit and compartmentalize, and they don’t connect what job they’re choosing and where they’re working is also going to affect their school work. They know it kind of, but they don’t actively think about it and reflect on: “How could I make this situation different? How can I take ownership of this situation?”
She has encouraged students to get out of their comfort zone and try new things. She has held students accountable by ensuring they follow up on things they discussed. Stella has been able to direct students down a very individualized path, once they had discovered what interest area they wanted to pursue. This then aligned well with potential career options or graduate school interests.

Emma put her trust in Stella when it came to advising. She believed that her advisor knew her passions and goals, which enabled them to discuss what courses would align well with her interests. Emma did look at courses to take but allowed the advising appointment to be an opportunity to explore what she wanted to do within her program of study. She knew Stella would push her to take challenging classes but would also give advice on how to be successful within those classes. Emma believed that, because Stella knew her goals as well as her extracurricular activities, she would be able to formulate a plan for each semester. Emma was nervous about attending a larger institution, but she believed having an advisor like Stella made the institution seem smaller, less intimidating, and more like home to her.

Emma was in the process of deciding whether to continue to pursue two degrees or change one of her majors into a minor. Stella was very open about the idea. They went through options together, discussed the time to graduation if she continued to pursue two degrees and how much sooner she could graduate if she were to declare one of her majors a minor. Emma left the meeting with more information to make the best decision, without leaving Stella upset that she might not be majoring in this field. Stella was very accepting of the situation and provided her with more resources to further explore. Emma also felt no pressure in making a decision that day. Stella gave her a timeline of 6 months to
decide as well as meet with others to ensure she would make the best decision for her. Stella stated, “I think she appreciates that I can recognize that she’s going to do good things no matter what she ends up deciding.” Stella had a firm belief in Emma’s passions and wanted to ultimately ensure that she got to where she needed to be with all the resources to be successful.

**Humanizing the advisor.** It was important to Stella that her students see her as a person. She believed that it was easier to relate to experiences and obstacles if they see her more as a person. Stella prided herself on being transparent with students. She stated, “I make myself a human first when meeting with students. Then, I wait until I can see a connection moment and see how they respond. Then, we go from there.” She shared her experiences and challenges she had faced, not only as a student but also within her field of work. Stella said,

I work to humanize myself with stakeholders as well. It really helps. I want people to know that I am not some random scientist but a person that is passionate about this path. It makes a difference in my relationships.

She talked about her children and her daughter who was currently a student. Stella preferred students are on a first name basis with her and works to avoid titles. She believed this has helped her relate to students.

One thing that Stella mentioned that she does struggle with is balancing all of her duties. She explained that the advising role is just a small portion of her job. She was also teaching, working on research, serving as a member of committees, and has administrative responsibilities. She stated, “I’m also learning to manage how many committees I’m on and how many different things in terms of the administrative part that
I’m doing, cutting back a little bit.” She had worked hard to say “No” to things that she felt she was able to, but there was always something more added to her responsibilities. Stella has brought work home with her often but has tried to leave the bigger projects at her office. She has worked to do things for herself when she could but sometimes those self-care items got pushed aside. Stella elaborated,

In this type of position, these people are asked to give a lot more in terms of responsibility than someone who’s maybe just teaching or just advising or just doing administrative support. But they’re paid at the level of someone who’s just doing one of those things. I think in that way, you see someone in my position having maybe some financial stress when they’re qualified to do more but they want to do well in this position.

Even so, she did not allow this stress to interfere with her relationships with students.

Stella’s office told her students a lot about her life. Within her office, she had pictures of her family as well as her adventures across the world. Stella had books that related to her field of research and books that helped students reflect on their experiences. Stella had inspirational quotes about perseverance and graduation for students. Her office told a story about who she is, what is important to her, and ultimately the passion she has for her work. Emma described,

The door’s always open when she is there. There’s been a lot of times where I just walked in there without an appointment to talk to her about something, and she’s always willing to take a break from what’s she doing to help. Her just being there is often what I need.
Another thing that Emma pointed out was how her experience with Stella was not all that unique. She saw that other students in the program valued Stella and what she did for them. Emma believed that Stella wanted all of her students to be well and succeed, and affirmed that Stella went to great lengths to ensure their success.

**Angelina Findings**

Angelina was the Director of Program and Recruitment in another one of CASNR’s 32 degree programs. She served as an advisor to over 230 students in that department. She taught multiple courses and was the advisor for a recognized student organization. Angelina facilitated advising, study abroad, and involvement and provides resources to students. Angelina has traveled abroad numerous times with students on study abroad trips. Belle was a student in this degree program. I was able to observe Belle in an advising appointment and interview her. Belle was a senior, in-state student and, at the time of the study, was deciding what was next after graduation.

Figure 6 shows the commonly used words from both of Angelina’s interviews. Angelina pushed her students to consistently think about why they were doing various things or taking various classes. She encouraged them to ponder the bigger picture. Some of the most common words she used are *think, know, talk, advising, things, need*, and *different*. These words illustrate how Angelina feels about her role within advising.
Figure 6. Angelina’s word cloud from both interviews.

Figure 7 represents Belle’s interview conducted about advising. Belle focused on classes, people, academics, think, and want. She saw the connections between her academics, internships, and careers and how her advisor has affected all of those.

Figure 7. Belle’s word cloud from the interview.

**Fostering a sense of mattering.** Angelina believed in connecting with students to foster a sense of mattering. She stated that it is a university-wide effort to make sure
students feel like they matter. This has been accomplished by having students believe that what they do, who they are, and what they contribute is important. Angelina conveyed her philosophy for advising as,

For every student that comes in here, first of all, I believe in them. It makes me really sad to hear faculty say, “They’re just lazy in class. They don’t do things,” because I don’t think that’s the story. I think there’s a lot more stories behind what makes students struggle. So, “Believe in them.” I want to hear their story. I want to understand them and be able to help them learn to guide themselves. I want to be an advocate for them when needed.

This was evident in observing Angelina’s advising appointment with Belle. Angelina went through many different options that Belle was considering post-graduation and ensured her that she had a foundation to work from to be successful in whatever she decided to pursue.

Belle saw her relationship with Angelina as extremely close and half jokingly stated they were best friends. She shared,

I think it goes a lot beyond just academic advising and helping me figure out classes but more into what I actually see as my career goals, what kinds of classes I’m going to take, what kinds of experiences I need in order to get me best prepared for those future career goals.

For Belle, the relationship started with they first met at New Student Enrollment. She was certain from the first interaction, she knew there was a great connection and Angelina would be someone she would trust. Belle recalled an impactful moment she had had with her advisor. Belle stated, “She was one of the very first people who told me, “You can do
anything. You’re smart. You’re capable.’” That meant a lot to Belle’s sense of mattering, not just academically but also personally. Belle looked forward to going and talking with Angelina about problems to gain a new perspective. Belle explained that Angelina did not just fix things, but she helped her take a step back and look from multiple perspectives. Angelina understood that for each student the way to foster a sense of mattering is different, but with Belle,

"It’s taking interest in what she’s doing. It’s also talking with her about and asking about how those experience have changed her idea of what she wants to do, what she felt she got out of them, and what she’s giving back."

Angelina has found what was important to each student and then worked to build upon that to foster a sense of mattering.

Angelina believed the recruitment process is crucial to the start of relationships with students. At that point, she gets to know not only the students but also their family. Oftentimes, Angelina already knows the family because she was established within the community or the student has had an older sibling attend the institution. This foundation then carried from New Student Enrollment into the advising relationship. Angelina saw the role of advising as “providing a safe and supporting environment for students to develop academically, professionally, and personally, so they can be successful in life and be happy, and self-fulfilled”. Angelina believed that all she does is for the betterment of students. Belle stated,

"It makes me feel really valued as a student, that I’m more than just another graduate passing through. She actually cares about where my career is going or where my life is going. I feel like, a lot of the times, with bigger institutions,
students tend to get passed along. You are just another person to graduate.

“Congrats, here’s your degree.” But I feel like because my advisor, who’s also been my instructor and a mentor, takes the time to get to know me, it makes my education more worthwhile and more valuable than I think it would have been.

Belle was greatly affected by her advisor’s actions.

**Investment in the whole student.** Angelina insisted that by investing in the whole student, the student is able to develop more. She worked to ask questions that help her get to know students outside of academics. She has a desire to know her students personally, professionally, and academically. Angelina confessed,

I ask lots of questions. I would start the conversation with, “How are things going for you?” I try to know what’s going on with them, not personally, in the semester, that kind of stuff. But, it can be that sometimes. But, if they’ve had internships, “How did that go?” Some cases, I know, it didn’t go as well as they had hoped. It might have changed their career direction, but it’s a learning process. It’s also talking about how they feel about those things, what it means for them as far as finding other directions for them, which is what one of my students is struggling with right now.

Belle concurred,

She asked really detailed questions to get to know me and what I wanted. I also wasn’t just giving her, “I don’t care. What classes are going to be easy?” But, “What’s going to challenge me in my academic career? What’s going to help me personally and professionally to get to these kinds of places?”
Belle realized that the conversations needed to be mutual and that she had to reflect on what she wanted as well. Angelina wanted all of her students to have long-term success in life. She was committed to following up with students with whatever their needs might be.

One goal Angelina has had with her students is to discover what their passions are with life. She has worked to understand students’ needs and goals. Once she finds out those goals, she connected students with resources that will help them develop more. Angelina wanted to ensure that students are achieving great things while in school but also long-term. Angelina showed this when working with Belle in discussing what Belle wanted to do post-graduation and connecting her with resources to further help her explore. Belle stated,

She’s just a good person to go to for honest, unbiased advice as far as what’s going to work, what’s not going to work for different clubs or organizations or things that aren’t really working with interactions with faculty and classes or things like that. Definitely way beyond her job descriptions, I’m sure.

Belle reported that Angelina helped her stay focused on the bigger picture and challenged her in as many ways a possible to grow as an individual.

Belle also mentioned how Angelina was extremely knowledgeable within the industry and had a lot of life experiences from which to draw on. Belle stated, “She definitely knows a heck of a lot about campus and about the industry in general. She’s always saying, ‘You need to talk to these people.’ She’s very well connected.” Belle believed her advisor always has someone with whom to connect students no matter what the experience students desire. Belle said, “She gives a lot of good advice that’s not super
general, but very specific to my situation.” This has helped Belle feel like she mattered greatly to her advisor.

**Wealth of information.** An important aspect of being an advisor is being able to be resourceful for students. Angelina referred students to many on-campus and off-campus resources. She referred them to career services, faculty, program directors, professors, health center, CASNR CARES, department chairs, and the dean. Angelina has referred Belle to multiple people throughout their advising appointments. Whether it was for exploring graduate school or working with a professor on a research project, she has referred her to specific people. Angelina also encouraged students to reach out to their parents/guardians. She stated,

A lot of times, talking to parents about these kind of things that you need to be doing and, “Here’s why you see yourself doing it.” If it’s a rough discussion, “How can we put it in a way that makes sense for you?”

She felt those conversations were important to have with the students’ support system, especially when it was a big or difficult decision.

Angelina believed she is an advocate for students in places where they are not always able to have a voice. Angelina stated,

They can trust me and that they understand that what they tell me is confidential, but then, if they feel like they need help with matters that they can’t affect, that I’ll be willing to go to bat for them.

She recognized the value in creating connections within the community, which benefits students. A few key places that she has worked to ensure the student’s voice was heard was within the department, meetings with individual faculty members, and in faculty
meetings. She has met with many students and heard common issues that have came up during those meetings. Angelina said, “In meetings that we have with other faculty and staff, I think it’s important to be able to still be a voice for them based on what you hear from them.” She felt it is important to be able to bring those concerns to places where change can happen. One component that she strived to build in all relationships with students was that she believes in them. It is more than just telling students that she believes in them; it is helping, taking action, and listening to their needs.

**Meeting students where they are.** Angelina has worked in various roles in addition to being an advisor. Angelina served as the club advisor for a recognized student organization. Angelina stated, “I have a unique position where I teach and I take students on study tours and I do recruitment.” Angelina believed that serving in all of these capacities has allowed her to establish relationships with students early on as well as to see students in different experiences. She likes to first be able to see how students perform academically and then determine how best to advise them. She stated,

All the different roles that I play, I interact with them in a different way than just advising, but still advising is part of all of that, too. In the back of my mind, I keep asking myself, “How do we help the student develop academically, but also in leadership?”

Persistent reflection on that question has allowed her to further develop a sense of mattering with students. Belle stated,

I think she works way too hard, but it has benefited me. I think she does a wonderful job. I can’t speak to everyone’s experience, but from what I’ve heard with interactions from other students who’ve been [advised] by her, it’s not just
with me that she takes this individualized approach. She really gets to know all of her advisees. She somehow moves mountains.

Angelina has worked to take special interest in each of her students’ goals and has helped them to achieve those goals.

Another area that Angelina has helped students is by tailoring their degree program to their needs. This was accomplished by working to find out students’ passions and career goals to best align the courses and a degree program to match those. Angelina stated,

It’s being really interested in how they’re developing personally and also professionally and keeping in mind that it’s the whole person I’m advising. It’s not just nuts and bolts advising. It’s not where they are today or just the next semester. It’s looking longer term where they will be so self-fulfilled and be in a career that they actually love, a job where they’re not worried to get up to every day in the morning, then finding what energized them, what feeds them, the self-satisfaction that they need.

Belle and Angelina discussed in detail what Belle had remaining for her degree. Angelina followed up with questions about what Belle wants to get out of her final semester and how to make the courses she wanted to take work in her program of studies. Angelina has had students reflect on all they were doing. She has encouraged them to think long-term and how each experience would affect their bigger picture. Angelina stated, “Those conversations are far more important than just talking about last semester classes and those kinds of things.” Angelina also pushed students to get involved and to have a breadth of experiences. She believed that this has aided students in finding other passions.
and has encouraged balance within their lives. Angelina has consistently asked Belle what she wants her college experience to be like. Belle has spent a lot of time reflecting on the “whys.” She has thought about how these courses would ultimately help form her into whom she wants to be or challenge her to think differently.

Angelina’s office has offered a few pieces about her personal life. She had work-related awards hung up as well as trinkets that she had collected during her time abroad. Angelina had a lot of academically-related books for her and student use. Belle stated, 

It feels comfortable in the sense that it’s not super organized to a T all of the time. Sometimes she’ll leave papers. She has a life, too. I just think that people who have a clean desk 100% of the time and no messes whatsoever are crazy. I just feel like everyone has stuff going on outside their life, and it’s nice to see that. I work better in an environment where it seems like people actually live there and can be comfortable.

Angelina’s office felt comfortable for Belle to come in and share not just academic-related needs but also personal needs.

**Meeting the demands of today’s students.** Angelina mentioned many times how she believes that the advising role has changed. Angelina saw the need for more professional development for advisors. One of her biggest challenges has been finding the time in her busy schedule to make it happen. The institution has offered a lot of professional development, but student appointments often overrode it. She stated that she would benefit from attending conferences through NACADA, NASPA, or ACPA. Time and financial support has kept her from attending these conferences. Angelina stated,
I’m always thinking about the students who are beyond the nuts and bolts of advising. It’s the students that come in who aren’t prepared to be in college or different issues that come up. I need to be doing more professional development for those things.

Her population of students has typically had a strong stigma for mental health, and she would love to see mental health better received so students could get the help they need. She stated,

My ease at having these conversations has been acquired as I’ve come along. I’m much more comfortable now talking about some of the more uncomfortable subjects like mental illness or learning disabilities, because I’ve had different responses from students. I’ve learned that I need to talk about “Where do you want to be?” and “How are you going to get there if you have some of these other things going on right now?”

It is through her years of experience that Angelina has met the needs of an ever-changing student body.

One other area of professional development that she had before was having a mentor. She missed that in her current environment because her mentor retired. Her mentor was able to provide a lot of insight while also having experience in meeting with students on a daily basis. She stated, “I think the supporting environment for advisors is something that also helps us be better at what we do.” This mentor would serve as a sounding board or someone with whom to brainstorm new ideas. Angelina mentioned that she knows a lot of people on campus who could serve in this capacity, but are often were not readily available.
Through Angelina’s perspective and experience, she believes there has been a change in expectation with advising. She stated, “I think there’s a rich sense of accountability right now.” She felt that she was being asked to do more with students. This expectation came with changes in tools available to the campus. There were places to monitor where students go and with whom they meet. There are more resources that are available to students to ensure their success. The number of students is growing, and the expectation is that the number will continue to grow, but there are fewer personnel to work with students. Angelina has been able to get help with her advising duties but still sees challenges in the changes of expectations.

**Cross-Case Analysis**

The purpose of the cross-case analysis was to see the various themes each case presented while comparing and contrasting the findings. It was completed to also see the patterns across all three of the cases. These comparisons looked at advising skills, characteristics, and professional practices while also looking at fostering a sense of mattering. The themes that came up were fostering a sense of mattering, investment in the whole student, wealth of information, and meeting students where they are. The last theme varied among the three cases. The varied themes were utilizing soft skills, humanizing the advisor, and meeting the demands of today’s students.

Figure 8 shows the similarities and differences of all of the cases involved in this research project. Some of the things that all cases had in common are the personal connections, follow up for individuals, referrals, and discovering students’ passions.
Figure 8. Venn diagram from all three cases.

Fostering a Sense of Mattering

All three professional advisors have similar skills that they believe help them foster a sense of mattering. It was evident that each advisor utilized the soft skills of advising to foster this sense of mattering in their advisees. Angelina’s foundation was built on believing in her students while also working to understand their stories and experiences that make them individuals. Maura ensured that each student was seen as an individual. She strived to make students’ experiences unique while also having them tailored to each student’s needs. Stella worked to help students take control of their experience and be mindful of the choices they made.

The students were able to share their stories with their advisors while they also believed their advisors to be confidants/mentors. It was noticeable that students felt comfortable enough to also bring in personal matters to their advisors. They saw their
advisors as an overall first place to go with everything. The students also mentioned how
the advice they received was related directly to their needs. All three advisors stated that
advising is more than just selecting classes for students. Going above and beyond their
job description/duties is important.

Advising was not the only way that advisors were able to foster a sense of
mattering. These professional advisors all have various roles and job descriptions. Two of
the three advisors were advising in the area of career development as a part of their job.
Those students stated it was nice to have their advisors to connect them to specific
workplaces that aligned with their passions and interests. Two out of three advisors were
also in the classroom teaching. The students enjoyed being able to see their advisors in a
different capacity while the advisors also enjoyed being able to see students
academically. Not all advisors have the opportunity to see what their students are like in
the classroom.

The students had similar experiences with developing a relationship with their
advisors. They each described how their advisors fostered a sense of mattering within
their relationships. Belle described how having her advisor encourage her ideas and belief
in her really impacted her sense of mattering. Emma described her experiences starting
college a little bit fearful but her advisor was able to make her feel at home. Kyle stated
that Maura was his go-to person for everything, as he was an out-of-state student. Each
student stated how impactful it has been to have someone on campus (their advisors) to
go to for any questions or situations.

All advisors started the advising appointment by connecting back to something
the student was doing since the last meeting. They were able to do this by reviewing
notes they had taken from previous appointments. Angelina followed up with Belle about the career fair. Stella asked Emma about her fall break and family. Maura asked Kyle about his experience with his fall break course. The students all were encouraged by how well their advisor knew them outside of academics. The students’ thought that their advising experience has been impacted in a positive way because of the details their advisors were able to recall within the appointments. Belle mentioned, “It makes me feel really valued as a student, that I’m more than just another graduate passing through.” Kyle stated, “That’s just another testament to how much she cares” in relation to how Maura remembered those details. Emma said, “It makes me feel definitely like I matter. I feel like I shouldn’t use that word, but for sure, it makes me feel like she cares a lot, and that’s really awesome.” Each student had a different advising experience but believed their advisors had positively affected their sense of mattering.

**Investment in the Whole Student**

Even though their primary role was advising, these advisors saw their role as so much more than picking out classes. They all stated that it is important for each student to have an individual experience. The advisors discussed the importance of overall student wellness. Each advisor has their own comfort level in addressing mental health issues but also sees how mental health affects their student body. Each advisor has gone through general trainings that relate to mental health. The advisors’ philosophies include a component about getting to know their students. Through advising and other roles, they had discovered their students’ passions and how to connect those with their degree programs and career goals. Each advisor stated that they always want the best for their students even if that included the student not continuing within that program because
there was a better fit for the student. When that was the case, the advisors worked to connect students to a person with expertise within that area. Because of the advisors’ ability to get to know the students individually, the students felt they were not just a number at the institution but that they mattered.

All three professional advisors realized they could not do their job without working with the larger campus. They consistently referred students out to various resources available on campus. In each advising meeting with the students, there was some sort of referral made. There were referrals to other advisors, professors, graduate programs, honor’s program, and peers. Students believed that having someone who can also direct them to important resources has been helpful.

In each advising meeting, each case had some aspect to on which to follow up. After Belle connected with a faculty member to discuss opportunities for research, she returned to Angelina to discuss her options. Angelina was also going to submit paperwork for course substitutions in Belle’s degree program. Emma needed to follow up with her advisor after meeting with a different advisor to decide if she wanted to change her major. Kyle needed to decide what course he would take for honors in the spring. Maura was going to submit paperwork to declare his option as well as a substitution form. These actions not only prolonged the relationship throughout the semester, but also kept the advisor and student invested in the relationship.

Each advising relationship was unique, shaped by the comfort of the advisee. The way each advisor and advisee developed his or her relationship was similar. The students all met their advisors early on in their undergraduate career. All students either met their advisors over the summer at New Student Enrollment or within the first few weeks of
classes. This enabled the relationship to flourish over time. The advisors stated that the relationship is not just about the 4 years they were here, but the success over their lifetime.

**Wealth of Information**

Students went to their advisors because they saw them as people who knew a lot about campus or community. The advisors utilized campus resources differently. Stella and Maura did more with career development than Angelina did. Angelina referred students to a person in career services. Advisors utilized campus resource referrals when students had a need they were not comfortable addressing. One area in which all advisors felt inadequate was that of mental health needs. The advisors preferred to utilize the experts in the counseling center when students stated they needed help in that area. Oftentimes these advisors referred students to CASNR CARES program for additional help within the college. Each student came with various needs, and the advisors saw the value in being familiar with campus resources to further aid in students’ success. Furthermore, advisors preferred to direct students to a particular person within offices or departments. They all valued being connected to others on campus.

Each professional advisor had multiple roles and strived to find balance within those roles. Each advisor had been involved in one or more activities outside of advising. The students all mentioned that they knew their advisors held multiple roles. The advisors discussed what their duties were within each role and the changes they had experienced over recent years. They had been asked to do more with fewer resources, and it felt overwhelming at times.
Each student prepared for their advising appointment in different ways. Kyle came to the meeting with a lot of preparation in regard to writing down questions ahead of time. Belle spent time on reviewing classes that she would like to take so the conversation could focus more on post-graduation plans. Emma did not do much planning in regard to selecting classes. Her time was spent more on deciding whether she wanted to change her major. Advisors had to be prepared for all types of students. Conversations did not always focus on academics; thus, advisors had to be ready for the conversation to turn more personal or be ready to offer solutions or referrals.

**Difference Within Cases**

The final theme within each case differed. Maura’s theme was how she utilized soft skills within her advising appointments. This enabled her student Kyle to feel like he had been heard as well as his story mattered. Stella’s theme was humanizing the advisor. She felt that by being transparent to her students, she could relate more with them. She was open about the experiences she had and worked to be approachable and flexible with her students. Through this, Stella was able to get to know her students and affect their mattering. Angelina’s theme was meeting the demands of today’s students. Angelina felt that there had been a shift in expectations of advising duties while also more resources available to keep track of students. This allowed her to really see students on a new level while also pushing her to utilize resources available for her. Angelina worked to be current with student trends but felt that she could use more professional development. Despite the changes in her Angelina’s role, Belle felt that Angelina was able to really individualize her advising and serve as a mentor for her.
Conclusion

Each case varied in the experiences of both the advisor and student. There were three themes that came out in all cases, regarding the fostering of a sense of mattering. Each advisor described her own philosophy and approach for fostering a sense of mattering with students. No one single approach was better than the other. Each advisor worked hard to ensure she knew her students and was able to give them the information they needed to be successful. These professional advisors were seen to go above and beyond their job descriptions from the students’ perspective. Students felt they were important to their advisors but also that all of their advisors’ students were important. Students’ sense of mattering was affected in various ways through their relationship with their advisors.
Chapter Five: Discussion

Summary of Findings

Overall, there were four main themes that were found in all three cases. Those themes were fostering a sense of mattering, investment in the whole student, wealth of information, and meeting students where they are. The last themes that varied across each case were soft skills of advising, humanizing the advisor, and meeting the demands of today’s students.

This study aimed to discover how exemplar professional advisors within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources described their advising skills and practices that foster a sense of mattering. Advisors fostering a sense of mattering within students was a theme that was present through all of the case studies. Maura described the practice of getting to know her students individually, fostered their sense of mattering through the use of soft skills (listening, empathy, and time management). Stella described that her advising style fostered a sense of mattering through knowing her students individually. She stated that she worked to get to know not just what their academic goals were, but also personal and professional goals. Stella stated she pushed students to also be independent and own their own experiences. Stella encouraged a lot of reflection on why students took particular classes or pursued various internships. In Angelina’s case, connecting with each and believing in each of her students, built the foundation for mattering. In addition, she believed that it was a university-wide effort to ensure that students did feel like they matter. All three advisors described a connection with their students and worked to know them individually.
The perception of the relationship between advising and undergraduate students’ sense of mattering was described in similar ways. Each student felt their advisors affected their sense of mattering. Kyle stated that Maura affected his mattering by consistently listening to his story and recognized what was important to him. Kyle went to Maura for problems that were not necessarily connected with academics but found she was able to offer advice or connected him with people that could further help him. Emma stated that because Stella was open, approachable, and consistently cared about her overall wellness, she felt like she mattered within the relationship. Emma stated that through Stella’s actions as an advisor, she felt more comfortable with the institution and it became more like home to her. Belle stated that her advisor significantly affected her sense of mattering. Belle recalled early on in her relationship with Angelina that Angelina was one of the first people to tell her that she believed in her. This was extremely valuable to Belle. Belle put her trust into the relationship and sought out advice from her advisor consistently. Each student had a different story, but ultimately because the advisors knew their students individually and helped them meet their overall goals was what truly affected the students’ sense of mattering.

Lastly, this study was to understand how students in CASNR described their advising experiences. The stories on how the students described their advising experiences were very similar. Each student saw that their advisors went above their job duties. The students all recognized that their advisors were involved on campus and served as a resource or starting point for everything. These students also mentioned how their experiences was not unique to themselves. They understood that each advisor treated all of their students like they were treated. The students found the advising
relationships extremely valuable to their collegiate experience and ultimately one of the aspects that affected their sense of mattering.

**Discussion**

Advisors have the opportunity to be one of the strongest ties to the university (Vianden & Barlow, 2015). The advisors in this study served as advocates for students and often had to help navigate the bureaucracy of the institution. Advisors served also as referral agents for campus and community resources. Advisors were furthermore seen as trusted confidants for their students. Lastly, advisors helped navigate class schedules but also their career opportunities. Barker and Mamiseishvili (2014) found connecting with one significant person on campus positively impacted students by allowing them to have a more positive experience. The students of this study stated their experience had been more positive by connecting with their advisors.

**Connecting to the Theories of Mattering**

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) developed a theory of mattering, which included the components of attention, important, ego-extension, and dependence. The advisors in this study fostered a sense of mattering in various ways. Through the component of attention, advisors focused on the student individually and through acknowledging the students’ needs. This entailed focusing the advising meeting on what the student was most concerned about and not just focusing on classes. In the importance component, advisors spoke about how much they did care about each and every one of their students. Not only did the advisors care, but they ultimately wanted the students to be successful in all areas of life. It was present in the data that these advisors wanted the students to be the best they could be. They offered advice, resources, re-directing to their
students to ensure this. In the ego-extension component, the advisors had the ability to empathize with their students. Often, the advisors mentioned their experiences as students and were able to help navigate feelings that surrounded the situation. Lastly, the dependence component was seen in the relationship of students and advisors. These students went to their advisors first for most things. It was a positive dependence, where their daily decisions did not rely on their advisors but they sought their advice or even resources the advisors connected them with.

Elliott et al. (2004) had a similar definition for mattering but referred to the components as elements. These elements involved awareness, importance, and reliance. All of the previously mentioned examples of awareness and importance can be applied to this definition. In regards to reliance, the students were able to get advice and support from their advisors. In all three elements of this definition, the advisors and students exhibited many examples to foster a sense of mattering.

In the present study, students had support from their advisors. Students mentioned that support of their advisors had affected their sense of mattering. One student stated that the relationship with her advisor made a large institution seem smaller and more like home. In a similar study, Morrow and Ackermann (2012) found that students who had more support from faculty and peers indicated a higher sense of belonging and had higher levels of persistence. Huasmann et al. (2007) found that institutional commitment was found positively associated with sense of belonging. In this particular study, advisors had the ability to foster a sense of mattering through their relationships.

The advisors in the present study helped ensure their students had opportunities that would aid in students’ overall growth and leadership. This was seen when Maura
encouraged Kyle to apply for an internship with a local organization. Angelina encouraged Belle to explore research opportunities and graduate school. In a similar study, Tovar, Simon, and Lee (2009) found that leadership opportunities aided in increasing a student’s mattering. In other similar studies, advisors were found to have the opportunity to affect sense of belonging, mattering, and community through advocacy, relationships, and creating an inclusive environment (McClure, 2011; O’Banion, 1994; White, 2015). Advisors within this study discussed how affecting students’ sense of belonging was important to them through developing relationships and advocating for students.

**Theme Discussions**

Each professional advisor within the study had three themes in common. Those themes included investment in the whole student, wealth of information, and meeting students where they are. These themes will be discussed in relation to various literature or previous studies that can strengthen the findings.

The theory of mattering according to Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) contained four main components. Those components are attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence. Through various actions, the advisors and their students of this study have displayed these components while also fostering a sense of mattering.

**Investment in the whole student.** Each advisor within this study invested in the whole student. Their actions in doing this may have differed slightly in the way they invested in their students but each advisors’ actions went past scheduling classes. Those actions included thinking of the long-term health and success of students, connecting
with internships and experiences outside the classroom, discovering goals, and knowing students individually.

The theme of investment in the whole student reflects Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of attention through how each of the advisors invested in all details of the student’s needs, experiences, and degree programs. The advisors in this study were also attentive to each student’s individual story. The advisors were able to get to know the entire student by asking details about their story, following up with questions, and having a deeper relationship with them. The students felt that through their advisors gave specific attention to them, meeting their specific needs, and their sense of mattering was positively affected.

Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of importance was also reflected through advisors investing in the whole student. The advisors were able to focus on each student at the time of the appointment. The advisors ensured that the students were shown that they were important. Advisors did this through ensuring their needs were met, they were connected to various resources on campus, and ultimately that the students knew they were valued by the advisors. From the students’ point of view, because they came back to the advisors often, they showed that their advisors were also important in this relationship. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) stated that this type of relationship aids in promoting an overall sense of mattering for both involved in the relationship. The students trusted their advisors and were often the first place they went to for most of their needs.

Next, Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of ego-extension was prominent within the investment of the whole student. Ego-extension is the ability to
empathize with the good and bad in someone’s life (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Advisors were able to empathize with their students. This empathy was present when discussing difficult classes as well as life outside of academics. Students appreciated the ability to talk to their advisors about personal and professional things going on as well.

Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of dependence was also reflected within the theme of investment of the whole student. The advisors gave so much to the students that they relied on them for more than scheduling classes. The students came to the advisors for personal, academic, and professional advice, help, or referrals. The advisors knew so much about the students, that they were able to also help with many other things outside of the advising realm. Through the students relying on their advisors for all sorts of information, they were dependent on their advisors to ensure they were progressing through their college experience.

In addition to reflecting these components of Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) theory of mattering, the theme of investing in the whole student also reflects effective advising. McClure (2011) found advisors were able to foster a greater sense of mattering as the relationships became more intimate. The advisors in this study knew great details about their students and the students felt very comfortable in sharing details of their lives with their advisors. Students who are being advised to get more involved on campus are more apt to forming more relationships on campus and furthermore develop a stronger sense of mattering (Schlossberg, 1989).

**Wealth of information.** Advisors were seen as being a wealth of information for students. The advisors were seen as referral agents to many campus and community
resources. The students also saw their advisors as advocates and caring about their overall wellness.

The theme of wealth of information reflects Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of attention. The advisors were able to give the attention to the students’ needs and direct them to where they needed to go next. Advisors took time in understanding students’ needs and figuring out the best resource or person to refer them to next. Often times, this included campus resources but also people and organizations in the community too. Through the advisors giving students attention, they were able to discover what their needs were while also then addressing what they needed at that point in time. Furthermore, the advisors followed up on if the student’s needs were met.

As advisors were a wealth of information, Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of importance was also present in meeting with students. The advisors did not shy away from understanding that a student may come in with a different agenda than initially planned for. The advisors saw their needs and agenda as important within the process as well. The students felt that their needs were important and were able to be addressed by their advisors. The advisors were seen as important when students invested themselves into the relationship. The students in this particular study could have easily only gone to their advisors just for classes but they saw their advisors as so much more. The students saw how important their advisors were to them while also recognizing that not all students in their point of view had the luxury of such a committed advisor. This relationship was able to benefit both the advisor and the student which further allowed the sense of mattering to further develop and the relationship to go more in depth. On the other side, the advisors saw the students as being very important. This was not about job
security, but the advisors in this study strived to ensure the students were set up for success after college, not just getting the students to graduation.

Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of ego-extension was reflected in wealth of information. Advisors were able to understand where students were coming from and find ways to assist that students may not have even known about. Advisors were connected into the community so well, that they were able to understand the needs of students and connect them to what they needed. Advisors were also established in the community or field that they could often connect students there as well. The advisors were able to have that ability to empathize what was going on in the students’ lives and be able to help them move forward with the best resources available to them.

Lastly, Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of dependence was reflected within the theme of wealth of information. Students were able to establish the advisors as being a valuable resource. The advisors often pushed students to reflect, own, and be foreword thinking about their experiences they had as well as wanted for the future. This helped ensure that students did not become solely dependent on the advisors, yet the students were able to still rely on their advisors for information and use what their advisors suggestions to make decisions.

In addition to reflecting all of the components of Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) theory of mattering, reliance, which is a component of Elliot et al.’s (2004) theory of mattering, was also be reflected in this theme. Students saw the professional advisors as people they could go to for resources and really relied on the information that the advisors provided. The students were able to trust that their advisors were giving them the best information possible.
In addition to reflecting the components of mattering (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981), there is also research that reflected advisors serving as a wealth of information and the importance to students. In a study comparing students who were aware of support versus those whom were not made aware of support, Brooman and Darwent (2014) found that students who were aware of support were integrated into the institution with greater success. The advisors in the present study served as great resources for the students. If the advisors did not know who to refer a student on to, the advisors found that information alongside the student. McClure (2011) stated academic advisors were key in connecting students to other offices on campus. Furthermore, advisors serve as referral agents for students for campus and community resources (Petress, 1996). Students often need that person to provide stability and someone who is a constant support for them (Petress, 1996).

**Meeting students where they are.** Advisors worked to meet students where they were through various settings and roles. This also meant that advisors work to meet students where they are mentally too. Advisors accomplished this through the various roles that they each had. Some of those roles included being an advisor, teacher, facilitator of studying abroad, club advisor, and recruitment.

The component of *attention* (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981) was reflected in meeting students where they are through advisors understanding where the students were physically, mentally, and emotionally. By recognizing things the students stated or watching body language, the advisors were able to prioritize the needs of that meeting. Furthermore, the advisors were able to smoothly transition into concerns or potentially bringing up a concern that the student may not be fully aware of yet. Advisors were able
to discover what the needs of their students were and discuss what was really going on in their lives.

Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of importance was reflected within this theme as well. By being able to adjust and see students where they might be more comfortable, advisors were able to again prioritize what the students needed. Students may appreciate being able to see their advisors outside of their typical office environment and be more open about things. One advisor in this study was able to tell her student that she knew she needed to be in a good mental place for her next internship and stated that it was important that she be comfortable with her summer plans. Another advisor believed that all of her students needed to be told that she believed in them and that they mattered.

The component of ego-extension (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981) was reflected through advisors being open about their own personal experience and empathetic about what students were also going through. Advisors were selective on when they shared their experiences and how much they shared, but all expressed empathy. The advisors mentioned the importance of being empathetic to what students were going through which allowed their relationship to be stronger.

Lastly, Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) component of dependence was reflected in the theme of meeting students where they were. Students were dependent on their advisors being able to see them in various capacities. Students were able to get their needs met even outside of the advising sessions. Students were exposed to their advisors being present in the classrooms, abroad, at organizational meetings, and in the
recruitment processes. Students relied on their advisors being available to meet their needs in these various capacities.

In addition to reflecting the components of mattering (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981), there is also research reflect that advisors meeting students where they are at also impacts their sense of mattering. In a study, Scholssberg (1989) found that students who were more involved on campus were vulnerable to additional relationships on campus which then lead to a stronger sense of belonging. The advisors in the present study all had experiences of meeting their students in a different capacity other than advising. The advisors discussed how they always encouraged students to be involved in other areas outside of the classroom. Advisors often pushed students to specific experiences that may saw as aligning with passions or career interests. The students also noticed that their advisors did more than advise. The students saw the advisors in the classroom, student organizations, and also networking on campus. The advisors ultimately fostered a sense of mattering by doing these things they saw as a part of their job.

Advising Approaches

In addition to reflecting on the various components of theories of mattering, the findings in this study also mirror the literature on approaches to academic advising. There are a variety of approaches that advisors can utilize. Some of the approaches include prescriptive (Crookston, 1994; Winston & Sandor, 1984), developmental (Crookston, 1994; Gordon, 1994; Polson, 1994), integrated (Fielstein, 1994, Lowe & Toney, 2000), and intrusive (Earl, 1988; Varney, 2012). In this particular study, the advisors did not use one particular style over another. The advisors each used a mix of advising approaches that suited the needs of the student as well as based on their experiences and training.
Maura used a combination of developmental advising and learning-centered advising. Developmental advising was present through the tasks that were assigned within the meeting (Crookston, 1994). Kyle needed to explore opportunities for his internships and discuss contracting an honor’s course. Maura gave Kyle specific things that he needed to do for the next meeting. Kyle was working on applying for internships for the coming spring which would allow him to develop more personally and professionally. Through this task, he would be able to decide if this area is really where he wanted to work for a job post-graduation. Through developmental advising, students are able to progress in many aspects such as personally, professionally, and academically as long as they are attending advising meetings (Gordon, 1994). Learning-centered advising focused on students’ experiences through learning and development (Dey Huggett, 2004). Maura was able to focus on opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom that enabled students to learn and develop. Maura knew that Kyle wanted to focus on a specific internship and as a sophomore, she also realized that he needed to be pursuing an internship sooner versus later. In Maura’s experience, gaining the out of the classroom experience enabled students in her field to have a job offer sooner than those who did not pursue internships. Through this type of advising, students were able to be enriched personally and professionally (Tacha, 1986).

Stella’s particular appointment focused on thinking about future internship but really what classes the student needed to enroll in. Stella utilized integrated advising. This approach included prescriptive and developmental advising (Fielstein, 1994). The advisors who utilized this approach strive to have a deeper relationship with their students (Fielstein, 1994). In this approach, Stella was able to discuss registering for
classes and possible major changes, while also encouraging her student to take a part within the relationship. The prescriptive advising was apparent when looking at specific courses and Stella telling Emma how to move forward. Emma stated that she allowed Stella to do that for her because she trusted that Stella would make those decisions well based on what she knew about Emma. Stella was able to balance between prescriptive and developmental through the appointment. In regards to developmental advising, Stella pushed Emma to consider all options she had in front of her, while also pushing her to gain more information to make a decision. Stella did not push her one way or the other when making a decision in regards to her major. Stella and Emma worked collaboratively to discuss internships and careers.

Angelina utilized developmental advising within her meeting with Belle. Developmental advising was described as a relationship in which the advisor and student engage in developmental tasks (Crookston, 1994). Belle was close to graduation and had been meeting with Angelina more often to discuss options for after graduation. They were both invested in the relationship and established trust early on in their relationship. This approach focused on tasks which were present in the meeting with Angelina and Belle. The tasks included reaching out to other resources, meeting with potential graduate opportunities, research opportunities, and applying for jobs. Angelina consistently asked questions that pushed Belle to reflect on pros and cons of each opportunity in front of her. This encouraged Belle to develop academically, personally, and professionally. The goal of developmental advising is to have the student active and striving which was the case with Belle (Crookston, 1994).
Implications

As with all studies, there are implications based on the data collected. Some of the implications found were new technology that changed advisors’ duties, connecting students to resources on campus, encourage advisors to be open about personal experiences, support for the entire student, and lastly implications for CASNR and the institution.

One of the implications is for advisors to utilize and be encouraged to use technology in ways that helps advisors connect more personally with students. One component of that new technology was a system wide note taking system. This system also included when students met with various resources on campus such as First-Year Experience and Transition Programs, Scholarships and Financial Aid, or subject specific resource centers. The advisors utilize this system to document appointments with student as well as send copies of those notes to students for their records as well. This technology allowed advisors to connect with their students more on an individual level. Advisors within this study mentioned going back to review notes to ensure they could follow up on previous appointments. This is one area that allows advisors to get to know students individually. The students all discussed at great length how incredible their advisors were because they knew them. At an institution where often, the case load of the advisors is high, taking time to review notes to connect back to previous appointments can affect a student’s experiences. This system that is available to all advisors can make remembering student’s experience more manageable and further affect a student’s sense of mattering. Institutions should encourage use of this type of system and advisors should be taking
advantage of this system to document appointments and see how they can best serve their students.

Another implication of the findings from this study is the importance of advisors connecting students to various campus resources. Not only does this help individual students succeed, but also strengthens the overall campus community. This was seen in the data as advisors being a wealth of information and seen as a go to person for students. Advisors in this study ensured they knew the resources available to students on campus and how to best connect students to them. When students come to advisors with questions, students are being directed by advisors to the right office/resource that the students need. Advisors do not always have the time to get to know everyone in every office on campus, but knowing what resources are available and being able to direct students to them would be helpful. Advisors can also ensure that they are being supportive of students’ decisions. This may include deciding not to major within that specific department, but does not mean that the advisor should take it personally. Advisors should want the best for all students not be working to benefit personally. Advisors can further support by helping the students connect with other advisors. Furthermore, these type of actions on the advisor’s part, can potentially create a stronger community on campus as well.

Another implication based on this study is to encourage advisors to be open with their students about their experiences as they are comfortable and in ways that are beneficial to the relationship with the student. In this study, I found that when advisors were able to share their personal experiences with students, the students were able to see them more as a person and felt more comfortable that they were not alone in what they
were experiencing. The personal touch on each of the advisors’ offices varied a great deal. However, students all felt comfortable in their advisors’ offices. There was not one certain personal item in the offices that allowed students to be comfortable, it was more students knowing that their advisor was always open to them coming to see them even if that meant it was unplanned. Often times, advisors brought in personal experiences that aided to an experience that the student was going through. Advisors can often help students through a difficult time through empathy. Advisors may be able to relate to students’ experiences and offer advice or just a listening ear that may make students feel more confident that they are not the only ones who have went through this.

The last implication for advisors is to support and invest in the entire student. In this study, advisors were able to get to know their students on an individual level and discuss academics, internships, extra-curricular activities, and careers. The students appreciated this attention as it made them feel like they mattered and were not just a number passing through. The main duty of an advisor is to ensure students get the courses that progresses them through their degrees. However, by investing in the entire student, advisors can affect students’ sense of mattering. Advisors can ask questions about student’s goals, passions, and interests. This investment can add depth to an advising relationship because it is not just focused on classes for the next term or addressing a current problem. The students each explicitly stated that by their advisors knowing them as individuals, it positively affected their sense of mattering. Advisors can ask questions about their students or follow up on a previous meeting and affect sense of mattering by taking those small steps. Through this investment, advisors can also direct students to
various resources on campus, activities, internships, or careers that would be of interest to
the student.

When looking at implications for CASNR, there are many opportunities to take
away from this study. CASNR can further support advisors through ensuring advisors are
being trained in technology offered through the institutions and offering networking
opportunities across campus to fully understand what resources are available on campus
for students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While there are many implications for this study, there are many opportunities for
future research based on this study. There would be opportunities to study this particular
college more in depth, gaining other view points and experiences that were not included.
There are also other opportunities to study the entire university system as well. Then
there are opportunities to study cases at other institutions to see what similarities and
differences arise.

This study focused on those students whose advisors positively affected their
sense of mattering. A follow up study could be done on those students who did not feel
their advisors affected their sense of mattering. Another suggestion for future research
would be to focus on exemplar faculty advisors. Faculty advisors also have an
opportunity to foster a sense of mattering and the findings may differ than exemplar
professional advisors. There could be research completed on faculty members not
fostering a sense of mattering. This study focused on the College of Agricultural and
Natural Resources. The same research could be done in all of the colleges at the
university to see if there are any differences and/or similarities based on professional advising.

Another component for future research is to focus only on the student experience. Studies could be done on students who do not feel like they matter. This would go into why they feel that way and the affect that it has had on their collegiate experience. A study could be done on the students who do feel like they matter greatly to the campus community and the affects that has had on their collegiate experience as well. For more of a longitudinal study, research would follow students through their college years and check in at various points to see what their level of mattering is at and why is affecting the level of mattering.

In a similar way, analyzing how faculty and staff also matter to the institution could be insightful as well. This could entail focus groups or interviews with various faculty and staff to gauge their perspective. This might also be important to building a stronger community while also finding out what matters to faculty and staff.

The advisors in this study mentioned their comfort level of discussing mental health concerns with students. The advisors had a level of confidence talking to students but were more likely to refer onto campus resources. Hatcher and Stubbersfield (2013) stated that suicide was the second leading cause of death for people aged 10-24 which includes many students in college. The students involved in this study did not disclose serious mental health issues. This could be something utilized in a future study to see how advisors may impact their sense of belonging related to serious mental health concerns.
When looking at other institutions, colleges of agriculture could be a focus area for a future study. This could be done by having case studies at multiple institutions in the Mid-West and future research opportunities for other institutions where demographics may vary a bit more.

Lastly, there could be research including graduate students, minority students, at-risk students, and graduate advisors. The study could include also compare various colleges as various institutions to see if there are better practices available to the advising community. This study has many opportunities to be adapted to many different studies that could provide feedback to a college and an institution.

**Conclusion**

This study was able to focus on what advisors are and can be doing to foster a sense of mattering within undergraduate students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. The advisors in this study fostered a sense of mattering in their students by ensuring they were treated as individuals. The advisors focused not just on the years they were in school but also success after graduation. There are many opportunities to build on this study to analyze different aspects of the college and effects of mattering.
Appendix A

NACADA Competencies

Conceptual: ideas and theories that advisors need to understand to do their job include understanding of:

1. The history and role of academic advising in higher education
2. NACADA’S Core Values of Academic Advising.
3. Theory relevant to academic advising
4. Academic advising approaches and strategies.
5. Expected outcomes of academic advising
6. How equitable and inclusive environments are created and maintained

Informational: knowledge (also institutional knowledge) that advisors must have to advise/guide students include knowledge of:

1. Institution specific history, mission, vision, values, and culture.
2. Curriculum, degree programs, and other academic requirements and options.
3. Institution specific policies, procedures, rules, and regulations.
4. Legal guidelines of advising practice, including privacy regulations and confidentiality.
5. The characteristics, needs, and experiences of major and emerging student populations.
6. Campus and community resources that support student success.
7. Information technology applicable to relevant advising roles

Relational: skills that advisors must have to be able to then give both concepts and information to students include the ability to:

1. Articulate a personal philosophy of academic advising.
2. Create rapport and build academic advising relationships.
3. Communicate in an inclusive and respectful manner.
4. Plan and conduct successful advising interactions.
5. Promote student understanding of the logic and purpose of the curriculum.
6. Facilitate problem solving, decision-making, meaning-making, planning, and goal setting.

(n.p.)
Appendix B

ACPA/NASPA Competencies

Foundational Outcomes

- Exhibit culturally inclusive active listening skills; Establish rapport with students, groups, colleagues, and others that acknowledges differences in lived experiences; Recognize the strengths and limitations of one’s own worldview on communication with others; Facilitate reflection to make meaning from experiences with students, groups, colleagues, and others; Conscientiously use appropriate nonverbal communication; Facilitate problem-solving; Facilitate individual decision-making and goal-setting; Appropriately challenge and support students and colleagues; Know and use referral sources, and exhibit referral skills in seeking expert assistance; Identify when and with whom to implement appropriate crisis management and intervention responses; Maintain an appropriate degree of confidentiality that follows applicable legal and licensing requirements, facilitates the development of trusting relationships, and recognizes when confidentiality should be broken to protect the student or others; Seek opportunities to expand one’s own knowledge and skills in helping students with specific concerns as well as interfacing with specific populations within the college student environment; Utilize virtual resources and technology to meet the advising and supporting needs of students; and Know and follow applicable laws, policies, and professional ethical guidelines relevant to advising and supporting students’ development (p. 36).
Intermediate Outcomes

- Perceive and analyze unspoken dynamics in a group setting; Facilitate or coach group decision-making, goal-setting, and process; Assess the developmental needs and students and organizational needs of students groups; Strategically and simultaneously pursue multiple objectives in conversations with students; Identify patterns of behavior that may signal mental health or other wellness concerns; Manage interpersonal conflict between/among individuals and groups; Mediate differences between/among individuals or groups; Mentor students and staff; Demonstrate culturally-inclusive advising, supporting, coaching, and counseling strategies; Initiate and exercise appropriate institutional crisis intervention responses and processes; Develop and implement successful prevention/outreach programs on campus, including effective mental health publicity/marketing; Utilize communication and learning technology to address students’ holistic wellness issues; Provide advocacy services to survivors of violence; Develop and distribute accurate and helpful mental health information for students, faculty, and staff; Develop avenues for student involvement in mental health promotion and de-stigmatization of mental illness; Consult with mental health professionals as appropriate; Provide and arrange for the necessary training and development for staff to enhance their advising and helping skills; Develop virtual programs and initiatives to meet the needs of students with limited access to campus services (p. 37)

Advanced Outcomes
• Engage in research and publication of holistic student wellness issues; Assess responses to advising and supporting interventions, including traditional campus-based as well as virtual interventions; Coordinate and lead response processes as they relate to crisis interventions; Collaborate with other campus departments and organizations as well as surrounding community agencies and other institutions of higher education to address students’ holistic wellness needs in a comprehensive, collaborative way; Provide mental health consultation to faculty, staff, and campus behavioral assessment teams; Provide effective post-traumatic response to campus events/situations, collaborating with other appropriate campus departments; Develop liaisons with community providers and support systems to ensure seamless and coordinated holistic care. (p. 37)
Questionnaire:

I am conducting a research study on what CASNR advisors are and can be doing to foster a sense of mattering within the undergraduate student population.

Mattering is feeling of being significant and/or to others.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:

My academic advisor has positively contributed to my sense of mattering at this institution.

SCALE:

5 4 3 2 1

Strongly Agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

My advisor is: _________

{Drop down menu of all advisors}

I am looking for volunteers to participate further in this study that will involve being observed in an advising session with your advisor as well as being interviewed on how your advisor has impacted your sense of mattering. If you would like to further participate in this study, please self-identify by writing your contact information below.

Name:

Email:

Please note this participation would only occur if your advisor is also selected for this study and if your name is then randomly drawn for participation.
Thank you for participating in the survey. If you want to be entered into the drawing for a $20 gift card (1 in 200 odds), please enter your information below. This contact information will be stored separately from your previous responses. The winner will be contacted via email.

Name:

Email Address:
Appendix D

Observation Protocol

The following will be questions to think about when observing students and advisors.

**Observe/Photograph the advisor’s office:**

What connects the advisor to students?

Does the advisor have “things” in their office that make them more real to students?

What in the office would make students feel comfortable in the environment and be willing to come back?

What is the culture of the office?

Is the office warm/inviting or cold/uninviting?

Are there resources available for students? If so, what type? Academic, personal, etc.

What story does it tell about the advisor?

**Observe the student/advisor interaction:**

How does the advisor open the session?

Does the advisor connect to previous advising session?

What types of questions does the advisor ask? Open/close ended?

How does the advisor integrate advising skills into the session?

How does the advisor navigate multiple needs from the student (if applicable)?

What is the body language by both the advisor and student?

Are there follow up questions throughout?

How does the advisor implement action for the student?

How does the session close? Is there follow up needed? Who takes action?
Appendix E

Interview Questions

The following are breakdowns of the interview questions with each participant that were asked within each interview.

Interviews with Advisors (prior observation):

You were identified as an exemplar advisor within CASNR that has fostered the sense of mattering for undergraduate students. How does that first make you feel as an advisor?

When you hear the term mattering or fostering a sense of mattering within your work with students, what does that mean to you?

Tell me about your advising philosophy.

What other practices within your work with students help foster that sense of mattering with students?

How do you build relationships with students?

What outside of meeting with students do you see as your role?

Interviews with the students (post observation):

Briefly tell me about your relationship with your advisor.

How has your advisor impacted your sense of mattering during your time within CASNR?

How do you prepare for your meeting with your advisor? How does that impact your meetings?

Are there things specifically about their office that impacts your sense of mattering?

How do you believe your advisor goes above and beyond their advising duties that impact your sense of mattering?
What, if any, role do you see your advisor playing outside of scheduling classes?

Tell me how it felt to have your advisor remember your last interaction and recall your personal situation and ask for an update on that.

Tell me how you felt to talk more about academics? Does that affect your sense of mattering with your advisor?

**Interviews with the advisors (post observation):**

Briefly tell me about your relationship with your advisee.

How do you believe you have impacted their sense of mattering through advising?

How do you prepare for each advising meeting?

Through which advising skills and practices do you feel you have fostered that sense of belonging?

Your student came with more than just classes, tell me how that took your direction of the meeting?

Tell me how you feel talking with students or this student in particular about more than academics?

How do you keep that sense of balance with students?
References


doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.86.2.0176

Longwell-Grice, R., Adsitt, N. Z., Mullins, K., & Serrata, W. (2016). The first ones:

*Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 2*(2), 93–108. doi:10.2190/D5FD-D0P8-N7Q2-7DQ1


doi:10.1353/rhe.2007.0028


doi:10.1080/13562517.666735


doi:10.1177/0748175609344091

University of California Berkeley. (n.d.). *Student Experience in the Research University.*
Retrieved from https://cshe.berkeley.edu/SERU


University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. (n.d.). *About IANR.* Retrieved from https://ianr.unl.edu/about-ianr

University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. (n.d.). *CASNR cares.* Retrieved from https://casnr.unl.edu/casnr-cares

University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. (n.d.). *CASNR difference.*
Retrieved from https://casnr.unl.edu/casnr-difference

University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. (n.d.). *Individualized advising.*
Retrieved from https://casnr.unl.edu/undergraduate-student-resources

University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. (2013). *Mission statement.*
*CASNR service commitments.* Retrieved from https://casnr.unl.edu/mission-statement-annual-reports-service-commitments


