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The Impact of Intensive Advising within TRiO Student Support Services on Good Academic Standing and Student Perception: An Explorative Study

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ABSTRACT

Challenges in bachelor's degree attainment for disadvantaged students (e.g., low income, first generation and disabled) within higher education is a social problem. TRiO SSS, a federal program, has been implemented at a private university in Texas to meet the needs of disadvantaged students and positively influence good academic standing, which would lead to higher bachelor's degree attainment. Intensive advising, which is holistic meetings conducted with participants to meet academic and personal needs, is one intervention utilized in the TRiO SSS program. The purpose of this study is to assess the role and influence of intensive advising by examining whether it has a positive association with historically disadvantaged students' good academic standing. This mixed methods study used deidentified survey responses of a convenience sample of 41 students within the program during the fall 2021 semester and agency data that included both grade point averages and student eligibility of 127 students. The findings show student perception was generally positive while the number of students who were in good academic standing rates was relatively stagnant after implementation of the intervention. Further investigation is needed to validate these findings using a quantitative study with a specific sample (i.e., returning students).

The Impact of Intensive Advising within TRiO Student Support Services on Good Academic Standing and Student Perception: An Explorative Study

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my students in the TRiO SSS program. Thank you for inspiring me to conduct this research and being willing to participate in it, which has allowed me to finish my degree. Watching your persistence and determination, even when the odds were stacked against you, was indescribable. I am forever indebted for all you have taught me.

This first-generation, low-income graduate feels immensely blessed to have worked alongside you all. Thank you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Students with certain characteristics (e.g., low income, first generation, and disabled) have been historically disadvantaged when enrolling and completing degrees in higher education (Alhaddab & Aquino, 2017). This disadvantage leads to further negative consequences given that the attainment of college degree differentiates overall potential earning (Mortenson, 2005; Perna, 2003). The vulnerable and disadvantaged nature and the size of this population (Engle, 2007) suggest the need for societal interventions.

Society must care about this student population because they face barriers in regard to retention and graduation that could cause them to eventually drop out. Many find themselves joining the workforce with few to no skills. To address this social problem, a federal program such as TRiO Student Support Services (SSS), which was established in 1964 through the Educational Opportunity Act, can provide supplementary academic support for this vulnerable population (Alhaddab & Aquino, 2017).

Many universities have applied for the TRiO SSS federal grant and implemented the program. These universities design their programs to suit the needs of students in their community. For example, a university (ACU Institutional Research, Compiled December 16, 2019) conducted a needs assessment to determine eligibility criteria for their specific population of historically disadvantaged students. Additionally, this agency has decided to focus on intensive advising to meet the needs of historically disadvantaged students on their campus and because they have recognized that a major barrier to degree

attainment is that the program may not be effective when recipients do not participate in the planned activities of the program. Requiring a weekly meeting between a coach and a student (which is referred to as *intensive advising* in the logic model) could be a solution to this barrier. Intensive advising has theoretical and empirical support from previous research (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Komarraju et al., 2010). In social work literature, this component is consistent with the concept of case management. In this thesis, the term *intensive advising* will be used because it is a commonly used term in TRiO programs.

Although there is some evidence for the effectiveness of TRiO programs, little is known about why these programs are successful (Mahoney, 1996). Because each program is allowed to tailor its program, it is hard to gather that information. Many programs are left wondering if their implemented components are in fact effective. Although there are some empirical studies supporting the effectiveness of similar programs, more research should be done for a four-year private institution because students may face different barriers if they had gone to a public institution. Although similar programs have been developed and implemented, universities often develop a new program (i.e., with a focus on intensive advising) so that they can address the problem more effectively. In that case, it is not clear which part of the new program is contributing to achieving their planned outcomes.

Present Study

To address research gaps in the previous research, the present study attempts to assess the impact of the newly developed Student Support Services (SSS) program designed to help disadvantaged undergraduate students in a faith-based private university located in an area of Texas. The purpose of this study is to evaluate TRiO Student

Support Services interventions, specifically intensive advising to better understand whether it is impacting students' good academic standing. To fulfill the purpose, this study seeks to answer the following questions: What is the prevalence and extent to which intensive advising is effective? Is there any difference between program participant eligibility and good academic standing? Are students who had more intensive advising services more likely to attain good academic standing? What are students' perceptions of intensive advising? Finally, what is the impact of program interventions based on the perception among the participants of the program?

Such studies would be useful especially for institutions that are new to addressing this problem or are attempting to improve their programs. This study will help those agencies whether their services (i.e., intensive advising) are effective due to the TRiO program with the focus on intensive advising. It is also helpful to the agency to know whether the students perceive case management to be effective, as student feedback may have an impact on whether the students are completing recommended services and showing up to advising meetings. The empirical evidence regarding the program will stabilize the funding for the program in the future.

Definition of Terms

Good Academic Standing: A requirement of most universities for students to have a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA), which is based on their term and cumulative GPAs. A student in good academic standing has a GPA consistent with institutional standards.

TRiO Student Support Services (SSS): A federal program implemented in higher education for historically disadvantaged students to help with graduation, retention, and academic performance.

Historically Disadvantaged Students: Students classified as first-generation, low-income, and/or disabled college students.

Intensive Advising: Also referred to as *coaching* and *case management*, this is an intervention used within SSS to help students achieve good academic standing by improving their grade point averages. This is done by meeting with students on a regular basis to go over academic performance and other needs expressed.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to inform the reader of what historically disadvantaged students means, give an overview of the history of TRiO, introduce the SSS program, and define intensive advising (case management). The goal is to assess the barriers for disadvantaged students, the effects of case management on students and introduce the TRiO Student Support Services program.

Method of Literature Review: Search Strategies

To identify relevant literature, various search engines or databases were used. The sources include Google Scholar and Academic Search Complete from the Abilene Christian University library database, which is a database of peer-reviewed academic journals. Academic Search Complete contains full-text articles from over 4,500 scholarly publications, and abstracts and indexing for nearly 8,000 scholarly journals. Areas covered include social sciences, humanities, education, computer sciences, engineering, language and linguistics, arts and literature, medical sciences, and ethnic studies.

The initial search was made during September 2021. Additional searches were done during the research proposal period as needed. Systematic search procedures were employed. The reviewed materials were found by the combination of different search terms. Search terms were identified by both specialist librarian and the researcher. Terms included “TRiO SSS,” “first-generation students,” “disabled students,” and “low-income students.”

Historically Disadvantaged Students

The population that SSS serves on college campuses is important due to its vulnerable and disadvantaged nature. When delving into the topic of disadvantaged student populations, it is important to recognize how one is classified as such. Disadvantaged students fall under the classification of first generation, disabled, and/or low income.

First according to Davis (2012), first-generation students are identified as those students whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree. Quinn et al. (2019) state that, academically, first-generation students often start college at a disadvantage. However, these students are also more likely to be underprepared and have a high level of academic need (Terenzini et al., 1994). They tend to believe that college is achievable (Dyce et al., 2013) and seem to grasp that higher education is more rigorous than high school.

Quinn et al. (2019) state that "high school counselors often fail to discuss college with potential first-generation students, steer them away from a rigorous high school curriculum, or even discourage them from pursing college" (p. 45). They also report "difficulty with academic adjustment and lack of preparedness for the shift from high school to more rigorous college expectations" (p. 45). Low grade point averages and slow progress in college coursework are also a commonality among first-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Warburton et al., 2001). Pike and Kuh (2005) further emphasize that students categorized as underrepresented and disadvantaged typically need higher levels of motivation, persistence, and support services from institutions of higher education to be successful in obtaining a bachelor's degree. Engle (2007) states that first-generation

college students "represent about one-third of the student population at public four-year institutions and 50% of the population at two-year and community colleges" (p. 45). This means that colleges must adapt to this specific population of students that is enrolling and attending college. Universities that are working with this population must ensure that they are supported in ways that remove barriers impeding success.

Second, students with disabilities face similar barriers in their quest for a college degree. Interestingly, in recent years the numbers of students with disabilities in higher education have steadily increased due to support programs and legislation, such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990), and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004). According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2009), students with disabilities represent 11% of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions in the United States, which means that institutions of higher education must pay attention to this growing population, especially as they face different obstacles that need attention. In spite of a 2% increase in enrolment since 2000 (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011), students with disabilities in higher education are "the most recent marginalized group waiting to gain full access to the American dream" and continue to be confronted with difficulties in higher education—specifically, legal, financial, academic, and institutional obstacles (Gordon, 2004). Research shows that students with disabilities have to manage accommodations along with academic course work (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

Third, low-income students make up a significant portion of disadvantaged students. These students are identified as those whose family income does not exceed the state poverty level. A student's socioeconomic status (SES) bears weight on their

academic performance because of the other environmental factors that students find themselves concerned about. These struggles include maintaining a job to pay for personal expenses as well as worrying about family and their condition. Sirin (2005) states that an extensive body of research has shown that students' SES is one of the strongest correlates of academic performance, including earning lower grades and accumulating fewer credits.

Low-income students are less likely to earn bachelor's degrees than more economically advantaged students. One-third of low-income students complete bachelor's degrees by age 25, compared to two-thirds of more affluent students (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). This further displays the need for extra resources on college campuses to help this disadvantaged population succeed. Low-income students still need to attend university because college education is a key to upward mobility (Brand & Xie, 2010; Torche, 2011).

The population of disadvantaged students is an important societal problem. According to Engle and Tinto (2008), providing these students with additional resources to earn their bachelor's degree is necessary in order to keep the economy competitive and accomplish a national goal of making the United States the nation with the largest percentage of college-educated citizens. Some researchers (Mortenson, 2005; Perna, 2003) claim that the significance of a college degree in America has become increasingly apparent and that the attainment of that degree differentiates the overall potential earning that an individual could receive as opposed to those who choose not to seek post-secondary education. Thus, society can no longer ignore the needs of disadvantaged students due to the effects that it has on the economy.

Institutions meet the issue of academically struggling students with interventions (Barouch-Gilbert, 2016). In this case, good academic standing is important because it helps the institution analyze the effectiveness of the intervention. Good academic standing is a standard used to assess a student's academic progress. The grade point average earned by each student gives an indication as to whether the student is performing well enough in classes to continue in college. Each institution sets its necessary grade point average to be considered in good academic standing. For this specific program, the GPA requirement is a 2.75, which is set by the university.

This is important, as a student who is not meeting academic benchmarks set by the university enters into a process that includes placement on an academic status that is classified as other than good standing (Waltenbury et al., 2018). Not being in good academic standing can lead to students being placed on academic probation. Assessing their academic standing is done to ensure that needs are addressed in ways that show academic progress and push the students toward bachelor's degree attainment is imperative.

Federally Supported Program for Disadvantaged Students

History of TRiO Programs

The Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 was created to increase postsecondary access and achievement of disadvantaged students, including low-income and first-generation college students. The TRiO programs are the primary federal programs providing support services to disadvantaged students to promote achievement in postsecondary education. The number of TRiO programs has since expanded to six and collectively are designed to identify qualified individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, prepare them for a program of postsecondary

education, provide support services for postsecondary students, motivate and prepare students for doctoral programs, and train individuals serving or preparing for service in the TRiO programs (Dortch, 2012).

TRiO Student Support Services (SSS)

Because the issue of disadvantaged students graduating from college and being productive citizens within society is so significant, the federal government created the TRiO Student Support Services (SSS) program. Walsh (2000) refers to TRiO SSS as a program that attempts to meet the needs of students by offering them resources on campus to utilize. According to Coleman (2015), the overall goal of the TRiO SSS program is to increase student persistence and graduation rates among first generation and low-income students. One way the SSS is attempting to reach that goal is by increasing good academic standing. The overall goal of Student Support Services is persistence, graduation and student retention, all of which are attempting to increase good academic standing rates. Leone and Tian (2009) believe that student retention is one of the most pressing issues for higher education institutions and includes the way: students enroll, stay enrolled, complete their degrees, or drop out.

According to Carey et al. in their nationwide study of Student Support Services (2004), disadvantaged college students who participate in SSS programs achieve excellent results. An SSS program in a rural part of Texas has implemented intensive advising to help disadvantaged students on their campus.

Effectiveness

Because of the services offered by TRiO SSS, the population that they serve, and their overall goal of good academic standing, one important aspect to assess is the

effectiveness of the program. According to Childs' study (2013), even though all TRiO programs have the common goal of providing access to postsecondary education for disadvantaged students, the specific functions of each program differ from and address the many levels of student needs. As there is no standard measure of effectiveness, each program tailors their services to meet the needs and concerns of the students. This leaves many questions regarding the interventions implemented for the students and their effectiveness.

Walsh (2000) states that some of the most effective practices of the TRiO SSS program include "helping students gain career clarity; providing intensive academic planning; monitoring academic progress; developing comprehensive transfer services; offering learning enhancements; and recognizing achievements and resources that contribute to student success" (p. 4). Mahoney (1998) states that every national study conducted by the federal government has found the programs effective and claims that they are meeting their goals and serving the populations they are funded to serve.

According to Mahoney (1998), however, TRiO enjoys and boasts about great success, but very little is known about why these programs are successful. This is still true today as TRiO is working, but there is not a clear reason why. The importance of efficacy is foundational in understanding what interventions to implement and how to best implement them and whether this program is truly effecting change in the ways that it claims. Mahoney 1998 claimed the overall effectiveness of the TRiO program but neglected to address specific measurable components implemented that helped display success. Therefore, the individualization of every SSS program brings the effectiveness of the implemented interventions into question.

Federal Requirements of TRiO SSS

Because the TRiO program is a federally funded intervention, there are certain requirements. The first goal of the grant is to only serve students that are disadvantaged. The other goals are based upon the federal government and the program that has accepted federal funds. Through a grant competition, funds are awarded to institutions of higher education to provide opportunities for academic development, assist students with basic college requirements, and motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2022, Program Description section). All SSS projects must provide academic tutoring, advice and assistance in postsecondary course selection, and assist student with information on student financial aid (Carey et al., 2004).

TRiO Advising

Although there are federal requirements for the SSS program, each agency can tailor the components of the program to the needs and wants of their student population, one of which is advising. *Intensive advising* and *Case Management* are both terms used to refer to *intensive advising*. In this thesis, only the term *intensive advising* will be used.

Advising seems to be a good solution for historically disadvantaged students because it addresses the major barriers among this population. Alexander et al. (2007) showed in their research that students perceived they did not receive much-needed individual attention from the administration. According to Tinto (1990), this must be fixed, as students are more likely to retain because they feel valued as individuals due to their feeling connected to faculty, staff, and administration. The individual monthly intensive advising session is an implemented tool to help combat barriers to academic

success. This time is used to speak to the student and give them attention in a way that will help them talk through any barriers they are facing in their education and how the program and university can help combat that.

Komarraju et al. (2010) posit that relationships built between a student and just one faculty or staff member help retention as, students are likely to be content with their college because they have support. Tinto (1990) adds that these interactions have to be intentional, as students need to feel as though they have formed connections with staff that do not marginalize them.

Disadvantaged populations experience hardships within college through which SSS attempts to help them. Within SSS, each student is given a full-time staff member that is designated as their coach to help walk them through the college experience. The importance of coaching is undeniable, as staff members coach students on issues such as academic standing, financial concerns, and motivation give students the confidence to interact effectively with resources. Disadvantaged populations getting access to a full-time staff member that is able to walk alongside them as they navigate college appears to have some type of impact on the student, as explained above. Although coaching has been implemented at many universities, one must wonder about its quantitative effectiveness.

An Advising Model Utilized in TRiO

An intensive advising model has theoretical and empirical support to help historically disadvantaged students and prove its effectiveness. The concept is closely aligned to case management, as both involve similar practice characteristics, such as regular meetings with students garnered around creating emotional and educational

support and numerous sessions that occur over an academic semester with a full-time staff member.

A Theoretical Framework on Advising

Advising could result in better academic outcomes for students, as students who face too many challenges without enough support find college difficult to manage. A framework of continued support helps balance the different challenges that a student may face with intentional advising sessions that can have implications on retention, student identity development, and learning outcomes (Watkins, 2021). One such framework of support, readiness and challenge was found to be beneficial as it emphasized a balance between individual needs based on student characteristics, such as readiness, support and challenge (Sanford, 1966).

Carlson (2013) points toward an objective behind advising efforts that pushes the advisor to be a resource and provide the information needed to all students, particularly underrepresented or disadvantaged students. Mahoney (1998) states that their specific SSS program adopted a holistic model that required counselors to respond to students as whole individuals rather than to students' individual problems. Operationally, this meant that counseling services targeting one area (e.g., academic advisement) could not be separated from their natural connection to other areas such as counseling related to students' personal issues, school performance, and career plans. This program specifically focuses on implementing a model that looks at students' holistic concerns and problems, rather than just their academic problems. The belief is that if the coaches can look at their whole environment and how that is impacting them, they will be able to

meet all student needs, which will effectively create change within the students' overall academic problems.

The Effectiveness of Advising

In addition to the theoretical explanation of advising effectively addressing barriers among historically disadvantaged students, literature provides some empirical evidence for its effectiveness. Bettinger and Baker (2014) believe that student coaching can lead to engagement, learning, retention, and an increased probability of completing a degree. While coaching was taking place during the first year, coached students were about five percentage points more likely to persist in college, which represents an increase in retention. They found that the effect of coaching on persistence does not disappear after the treatment.

Intensive advising is a tool to help address the barriers that face this population. It is important because many other services are either administered or referred out during intensive advising meetings. The purpose behind case management in the program is to meet these historically disadvantaged students once a month to go over their individual situation and address concerns and problems in hopes that they will retain and graduate.

Although some empirical studies suggest the effectiveness of the intensive advising (case management) oriented program, according to Coleman (2015), little is known about the opinion of participants about the impact program services have. Also, according to Coleman (2015), it is critical for the future of higher education, especially faculty, administrators, and researchers, to know how students perceive program services to help them better retain. Challenges impacting a student's ability to persist and earn a bachelor's degree are so diverse that it is important to hear the voices of individual

program participants in order to better understand how the intricacies of the program have impacted their motivation and perseverance. Understanding student perception is helpful as it gives the program feedback on their services.

Implementation of TRiO SSS at a Four-Year Private University

Student Eligibility and Challenges

Abilene Christian University (ACU), a faith-based higher education institution in Texas, compiled research through ACU Institutional Research. Based on the research, ACU was awarded funds through a grant competition to provide intensive advising services through the TRiO SSS program to disadvantaged students. The agency has gone through an evidence-based practice process and has done its due diligence in conducting research over the population of students that are affected and ways to help them. Based on a needs assessment conducted by *ACU Institutional Research* in 2019, about 59% of the total enrolled undergraduate students (N = 3,355) were identified as historically disadvantaged students, who are classified as first-generation, low-income and/or disabled students (ACU Institutional Research, Compiled December 16, 2019). A follow-up study that assessed the needs of students who were eligible for the program identified various barriers that disadvantaged students face. Those challenges include limited "individual assistance with postsecondary course selection," "lack of or limited career planning," "unfamiliarity with the college environment and available supportive services," "lack of or limited graduate school planning and lack of information about financing postsecondary education and financial aid requirements" (ACU Institutional Research, Compiled December 16, 2019).

Table 1 presents the eligibility criteria for the program and a needs survey completed by Abilene Christian University students in Fall of 2019 (Compiled December 16, 2019). The number of students that are eligible for the program is 59%, more than half of the enrollment, which showcases the importance and need for the program.

Table 1

Undergraduate Students Meeting One or More SSS Eligibility Criteria in Total Enrollment of Fall 2018

SSS Eligible Undergraduate Students	Frequency	Percent
Low-Income Only College Students	693	21%
First-Generation Only College Students	182	5%
Low-Income and First-Generation College Students	275	8%
Disabled Only College Students	528	16%
Disabled and Low-Income College Students	301	9%
Total Eligible College Students	1,979	59%

*(*N = *3,355) Source: ACU Institutional Research, Compiled December 16, 2019*

Table 2 presents the academic challenges faced by the number of students eligible for the program (ACU Institutional Research, Compiled December 16, 2019). It is apparent from the high percentage of challenges that SSS eligible students are facing that unfamiliarity with the college environment and available supportive services is a common issue, which intensive advising seeks to address.

Table 2

Non-Academic Challenges Faced by SSS Eligible Students: Fall 2019

Identified Challenges	Percent
Limited Individual Assistance with Postsecondary Course Selection	64%
Unfamiliarity with The College Environment & Available Supportive Services	64%
Lack of or Limited Career Planning & Information	64%
Lack of or Limited Graduate School Planning (4-Year College)	72%
Lack of Information about Financing Postsecondary Education & Financial Aid Requirements	27%

Source: ACU Institutional Research, Compiled December 16, 2019

Goals, Mission, Vision Statement, and Objectives

Based on the studies described above, this agency designed TRiO Student Support Services (SSS), which has been operating since February 2021. TRiO SSS is a tool for first-generation, low-income and/or disabled students to get access to more resources on a college campus to be successful academically and positively impact their academic standing. TRiO SSS is a supportive and inclusive environment that fosters the holistic development of each scholar through exclusive access to tutoring, educational workshops, and other success-driven services. This program provides services for students that are not in good academic standing, one service which is intensive advising. The program at was designed to provide opportunities for academic development, assist students with basic college requirements, and motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education.

The goal of TRiO SSS at ACU is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants, not their grade point averages. The program does recognize that grade point averages determine good academic standing which influences whether a student is able to retain (return) and graduate. Much of the language included in the program description is regarding the TRiO Student Support Services program that is implemented within many colleges and universities across the country. Its program services are offered to current undergraduate students throughout the year per the Federal guidelines within the Department of Education.

The TRiO SSS program mission, vision statement and objectives for how to achieve student support is centered around historically disadvantaged students. TRiO Student Support Services at Abilene Christian University strives to see the academic

success of students who are first-generation, income-eligible, and/or students with disabilities. The program envisions that students will have the knowledge, resources, and confidence to excel academically and therefore retain and graduate from the institution. The program is attempting to reach their mission and vision that they must obtain every year that they report to the Department of Education.

According to ACU Institutional Research, the mission of this program is to empower scholars to:

1. **Develop** positive skills, knowledge, and attributes needed to complete a bachelor's degree.
2. **Achieve** their potential for academic success and career readiness.
3. **Graduate** as well-rounded, skilled, and self-actualized professionals ready to lead and serve in global society.

The TRiO program set more specific objectives to achieve the mission. Based on the studies, the program found that good academic standing among historically disadvantaged students has been a major issue among two-year colleges and four-year universities. Good academic standing in regard to this specific program is a 2.75 GPA. To address the good academic standing issue among disadvantaged students, institutions across the nation have implemented similar programs. The program objectives are to provide exclusive services to a maximum of 140 scholars each year, supporting their efforts toward academic success, persistence, and graduation by reaching for:

1. 73% of all participants served persisting from one academic year to the beginning of the next academic year or will have earned a bachelor's degree at ACU during the academic year,

2. 75% of all participants served will maintain good academic standing at ACU, and
3. 42% of new participants served each year will graduate from ACU with a bachelor's degree or equivalent within six (6) years.

Logic Model

Table 3 is a logic model that the agency used to helped explain to the Department of Education what the outcomes of said interventions would be.

Table 3

TRiO Logic Model

Inputs	Intervention	Outputs	Outcomes		
			Short -Term	Intermediate	Long Term
SSS Eligible Students	Freshmen Activities and Workshops	# of Freshmen returning for the 3rd semester.	Increase in freshmen retention rates	73% of participants will persist to the next academic year	Higher education attainment for low income & first-generation college students
Federal TRiO Funding	Academic Tutoring and Student Success Seminars	# of students ending semester in good standing.	Improvements in GPAs and & Good standing rates.	75% of participants will be in good academic standing	Skills and knowledge required for employment in In-demand industry jobs.
Project Personnel	Intensive advising and Academic monitoring	# of students receiving assistance with course selection.	Increase in # of required SSS services students receive	42% of participants will graduate with a bachelor's degree within six years.	Building personal financial understanding & responsibility.
Institutional commitment and partnerships	Postsecondary course selection assistance.	# of students receiving career & in demand industry job information.	Improvement in career & In-demand industry knowledge & financial & economic literacy		
Campus personnel and Departments	Career & In-demand industry job knowledge & skills.	# of students participating in financial literacy awareness activities.	Increase in FAFSA completion rates		
Supportive Institutional Climate	Financial and economic literacy	# of students completing FAFSAs	Increase in # of students applying for graduate school		
Formative and Summative Evaluation	Financial Aid Information & FAFSA Assistance.	# of students applying to graduate school & graduating with bachelor's degrees.	Project services rated as "Very Favorable" by participants.		

Conclusion: Implications of Literature Review for New Research

The literature review suggests that students with certain characteristics have been disadvantaged in higher education, and SSS is an intervention to help said students receive the necessary services to be successful academically and personally. Although there are variations in TRiO programs, a practice model that prioritizes holistic intensive advising appears to be theoretically and empirically promising to help this vulnerable population. A lack of recent literature regarding disadvantaged populations suggests a need for new research.

A lack of rigorous evaluation studies on the TRiO SSS with the focus on intensive advising suggests a need for new research that examines the impact of intensive advising. This study will be specifically helpful for universities who have introduced the TRiO SSS program recently and therefore have not conducted an evaluation study because the results will inform whether intensive advising is actually effective in helping historically disadvantaged students. The literature review also has found a lack of research on the impact of TRiO SSS services based on the opinions of participants about Intensive advising services. To bridge the research gap, the study will attempt to explore the impact of intensive advising in a TRiO SSS program using both objective outcomes (i.e., academic performance) and subjective perceptions of participants on the program.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents information regarding research methods to help meet the purpose of this study by exploring the impact of Intensive advising meetings implemented by the TRiO SSS program. When assessing academic standing in this project, there are two categories that students are placed in. Students that are in good academic standing must have a cumulative GPA of 2.75 or higher. Students that are not in good academic standing have a GPA below a 2.75.

Research Designs

To meet the purpose of this study and examine the impact of the program, this study used mixed methods. The impact of the TRiO program will be assessed both with quantitative data and qualitative data. Quantitative data include secondary data collected by the TRiO Office in a faith-based university in Texas. Because this agency provided the program to a group of students without any control group involved and measured the outcomes of each participant before and after a semester-long program, the research design used in this study will be a pre-experimental pilot study (i.e., the one-group pretest-posttest). The unit of analysis will be individuals. According to a research method textbook (Rubin & Babbie, 2016), a pre-experimental design that does not involve a control group has limitations in addressing various threats to internal validity. Therefore, even if this study finds the improvement in outcomes after the program, the improvement can be attributed to factors other than the program. Qualitative data were collected by

asking the program participants to respond to a survey regarding the intensive advising and its impact. The results from both data was used to draw conclusion about the impact of intensive advising.

Sampling

The study population is historically disadvantaged students in the US. If one wants to know if the TRiO program is effective in helping this population using a sample study, a better option is to have a list of such population and draw a parametric sample from the sampling frame. Instead, the sample used in this study is the participants of a TRiO SSS program at a faith-based university in Texas during fall 2021 (August 2021 to December 2021). Based on the eligibility of the program in this agency, the participants include students with the following characteristics: first-generation, low-income and/or disabled students within Texas that have applied and been granted admission into TRiO Student Support Services. Given the comparison of the sample with the study population, the sampling method used in this study will be a convenience sampling. According to a research method textbook (Rubin & Babbie, 2016), this sampling method has a limitation in representing the study population and therefore one needs caution in overgeneralizing. Rubin and Babbie (2016) claim that it is a relevant method for knowledge and opinions which is the case in this study.

Intervention in the Agency

The major social problem to be explored within the paper is that historically disadvantaged students are struggling with good academic standing on a private university within the State of Texas. They have been identified by the school to have additional barriers in comparison to their counterparts and are struggling to obtain the

resources needed for them to retain and graduate. This agency attempted to address the problem by implementing TRiO SSS, a federal grant program. The program targets historically disadvantaged student by offering them additional services. This agency has chosen to use the program with a focus on the intensive advising. They have utilized intensive advising as the major intervention to impact retention and graduation rates through meeting good academic standing rates.

The SSS Project Director recruits all eligible students, so that they do not discriminate on gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age. SSS Project Director currently recruits freshmen heavily during the summer by sending out information through the admissions team. During the school year, the SSS program director leaves the application open and accepts responses on a rolling basis. The SSS Project Director is to select, reject, or place applicants on the waiting lists. The SSS Project Director currently selects participants demonstrating the greatest need for the project services on a first-come, first-served basis. If a student has little to no need, alternative resources are offered, or they are placed on a waiting list. The planned activities are provided to the participants for a semester, and the GPA of the participants from the university are collected at the end of the semester to assess the outcomes.

The TRiO SSS program provides participants with comprehensive and consistent educational and support services that are grounded in evidence-based strategies: academic tutoring and advising; information on financial aid programs; assistance in completing financial aid applications; financial literacy; and support for applying to graduate school programs. Intensive advising is implemented by having the Success Coaches currently send out monthly calendar invites for students to sign up for meetings.

Case management is based on good academic standing and need. Students below a 3.0 GPA are required to sign up for two meetings a month. Students who are in good academic standing are required to meet once a month. Students who have temporary additional needs are encouraged and allowed to sign up for additional meetings that occur between the monthly meetings.

Regardless of student need, all participants within the program are required to meet once a month with their student success coach. During the program implementation process, participants are consistently assessed, monitored for their progress, and provided support for their diverse academic and non-cognitive needs to ensure that they persist, succeed, and graduate by meeting good academic standing.

Measurement

Outcomes

The outcomes of the participants will be measured by using their GPA scores. Based on the records of the agency, *f* is necessary to understand the data. "Beginning GPA" refers to the overall grade point average the student had before the start of the semester. "Cumulative GPA" refers to the grade point average the student received for that specific semester. "End Cumulative GPA" refers to the overall grade point average that the student has had since admission to the university.

The major outcome of the program is measured by the Good Academic Standing (GAS). The SSS program at this university defines "GAS" as an End Cumulative GPA of 3.0 by the end of every semester. A program participant will be considered successful if they are in good academic standing at the end of the semester coinciding with the time they have entered and begun participating within the program. This binary outcome will

be measured by two values: 0 (non-GAS) versus 1 (GAS). This outcome has been used in an evaluation study of the effectiveness of TRiO (Nixon, 2014) for an established objective.

Another outcome will be measured by the change of Beginning GPA (pretest) and End Cumulative GPA after the program (posttest). If there is an increase from the pretest to the posttest, the participant will be considered improved. This binary outcome will be measured by two values: 0 (no improvement) versus 1 (improvement).

Independent Variable: Intensive Advising

Independent variables include any program-related information that is expected to impact the outcomes described above within the program. Because the agency expects the intensive advising to increase the outcomes, the independent variable of this study will be the amount of intensive advising. The agency computer system reports the number of activities in which a participant was involved during the semester. This study will use the total number of the "intensive advising" activities, which indicates how many times a student showed up for their advising sessions that semester.

Control Variables: Student Demographics

Because some student characteristics impact academic performance, demographic information will be measured as control variables. Three eligible criteria regarding the historically disadvantaged students include: 1) low income, 2) first generation, and 3) disabled. Given the criteria, the database of the program provides categories of student information as the following:

- Disabled
- Disabled and Low Income

- First-Generation only
- Low Income only
- Low-Income and First-Generation

Student Perception of the Program

Students' perception of the program was collected by conducting a survey. The agency collected qualitative outcomes based on student perception of how favorable the services rendered for the year have been. The SSS grant application states that one of the qualitative outcomes will be "Participants, faculty, & campus departments surveyed will rate the project's services as 'very favorable' by the end of each academic year" (ACU Institutional Research, 2019, p. 52). This survey will be developed by similar questionnaire items that have been adapted from a similar survey conducted by Pike and Kuh (2005).

Data Collection and Ethical Consideration

This study will use secondary data collected by the agency. To explore the impact of the program, program-related data and outcome variables for each participant of the program for Fall of 2021 will be used. TRiO SSS at the university has collected data for each participant of the program using their computer software database, Student Access, since its formation. In addition, the agency conducted a survey of the program participants to assess student perception of case management at the end of Fall 2021.

Based on this survey, the goal is to receive feedback from program participants about intensive advising services and its correlation with good academic standing. The data being collected are coming from an online survey that was sent out in an email to all participants within the program.

The anonymous survey data was collected by the executive director and distributed with deidentified data to the director and staff members of the program. All data utilized by the program and institution was stored in a password protected computer that is connected to Qualtrics, an institution database. Identified data will be only accessible to the executive director. All deidentified and identified data are collected for reporting purposes and can be utilized by the Department of Education, the overseer of TRiO, for evaluation or other purposes.

Data will be provided to the researcher after excluding identifiable information. The Executive Director of the TRiO SSS will retrieve the information listed under the measurement section from the agency's database, de-identify the cases by deleting the ID numbers, and provide the data set in a Microsoft Excel file to the researcher. The director also will provide the survey data as well. The data sets will be shared only with the chair of the thesis committee. Given this data collection method, this research has been approved as Non-Human Research by the ACU Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See Appendix for the approval letter).

Data Analysis

The data analyses will be conducted using a statistical software; the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Descriptive analyses will be used to present information of the characteristics of the sample of the program participants and the sample respondents of the survey on the perception of the program. Descriptive analyses will be also used to present major quantitative information regarding the program. A regression analysis will be conducted to examine the statistical significance of the factors of the cumulative GPA after the program semester by including the following predictors

in the model: the number of sessions of intensive advising, beginning cumulative GPA, the number of TRiO eligibilities, and the level of needs based on the needs assessment at the beginning of the semester. For qualitative data in the survey, the student responses were assessed by the researcher through a comparative analysis of consistent use of similar words.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The study sought to answer the following questions through data collection: Is there any difference between program participant's eligibility and good academic standing? What is the prevalence and extent to which intensive advising is effective among freshmen and returning students? Are students who had more intensive advising services more likely to attain good academic standing? What is the impact of program interventions based on the perception among the participants of the program? And, what are the student perceptions of intensive advising? This study collected data from two sources: 1) agency data regarding the services and outcomes during the Fall semester and 2) survey of program participants.

Findings from Agency Data

Intensive Advising Data among Freshmen and Returning Students

Table 4 reflects student eligibility, amount of advising services and pretest/posttests GPAs, to answer the question: What is the prevalence and extent to which intensive advising is effective among freshmen and returning students? Freshmen students had the value of 0 for pretests because they did not have GPA scores at the beginning of the semester. The sample was split into two parts: freshmen (n = 52) and returning students (n = 75). The study participants in the returning students' sample were mostly low income and first generation, which presented at 52%. The most frequent

advising service for freshmen students consisted of them participating twice a month, accounting for 34.7%.

Out of 75 returning students, the percentage of students who were in good academic standing at the start of the fall semester was 78.7%. For the returning students (n = 75), the overall GPA has decreased after the academic year from 3.30 to 3.16, and the difference was statistically significant, t = -3.507, p = .003. Note that 40.9% of the sample (n = 52) were freshmen and did not have a GPA at this point. At the end the fall semester, academic performance data were available for the whole sample including freshmen (N = 127). About 72.4% of the program participants were in good academic standing. The overall GPA of at the end of the semester was 3.04. Although there were changes in the academic performance, no analysis was performed because there was a difference in the data due to the missing pre-test score for freshmen.

Table 4

*Characteristics of the Sample Included in Quantitative Data (*N *=127)*

Variable	Category or Range	Freshmen (n = 52)		Returning students (n = 75)	
		N/M	*%/SD*	*N/M*	*%/SD*
Eligibility	Disabled	1	1.9	1	1.3
	Disabled & Low Income	3	5.8	1	1.3
	First-Generation only	13	25	25	33.3
	Low Income only	14	26.9	9	12
	Low-Income &First-Generation	21	40.4	39	52
Intensive	0	11	21.2	23	30.7
Advising	1	17	32.7	13	17.3
Service	2	17	32.7	26	34.7
	3	7	13.5	10	13.3
	4			1	1.3
	5			2	2.7
	M and SD	1.38	0.97	1.45	1.24
Pretests	Overall GPA			3.30	0.53
	Not in good standing			16	21.3
	Good standing			59	78.7
Posttests	Overall GPA	2.87	0.78	3.16	0.56
	Not in good standing	18	34.6	17	22.7
	Good standing	34	65.4	58	77.3

Factors of Academic Performance after the TRiO Program

A logistic regression was performed to examine which predictors influence the likelihood of the event (i.e., being in good standing at the end of the Fall 2021 semester). It was assumed that the pretest scores (i.e., overall GPA at the beginning of the semester) would be a strong predictor of the posttest scores (i.e., overall GPA at the end of the semester). Freshmen pretest scores would have been included in the logistic regression model if data had been available.

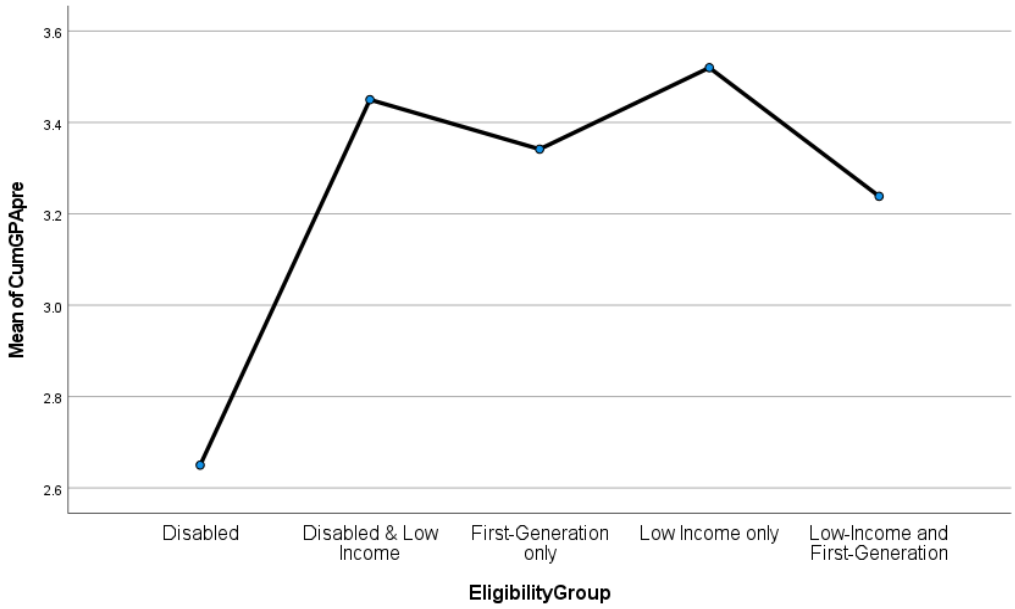
Due to missing data for some participants, a preliminary analysis was performed to explore whether a certain group of students were vulnerable in academic performance. A one-way ANOVA analysis was performed for students who had pretest scores (n = 75).

The difference in the pretest scores between the eligibility groups that is presented in Figure 1 was not statistically significant ($F = .951$, $p = .44$). However, the examination of the pattern shows that low income only seemed to correlate with better academic performance. Because the number of students in certain groups was very small, no information is presented in a table.

Figure 1 was created to assess the research question: Is there any difference between program participant eligibility and good academic standing? A binary variable (i.e., disability) was created and the researcher examined to assess the difference in the pretest scores between the two groups. An independent samples *t*-test revealed that there was no statistical difference between two students with disability and seventy-three students without disability. No detailed information is presented due to the small number of a group. Since students with disability in this sample seemed to be the most vulnerable to low academic performance, this predictor was included in a logistic regression model. To maximize the valid case number for this analysis, the pretest scores (i.e., overall GPA at the beginning of the semester) were not included as a predictor. Therefore, this analysis used all cases ($n = 127$) including freshmen for whom the pretest scores were missing.

Figure 1

Pretest Score of Grade Point Averages of Non-Freshman Program Participants



Tables 5 and 6 show the students eligibility and amount of advising services to answer the research question: Are students who had more case management services more likely to attain good academic standing? Table 5 shows the likelihood of achieving good academic standing status based upon the amount of intensive advising services the student has received. Model 1 examines the effect of the level of intensive advising (from 0 times to 5 times), and Model 2 examines the effect of having intensive advising (0 = no intensive advising versus 1 = having at least 1 intensive advising). According to Model 1, the amount of variance in the likelihood of good academic standing that is explained by the logistic regression model was statistically insignificant, $\chi^2(2, N = 127) = 4.586$, $p = .101$.

Another indicator of the model fit (i.e., the Hosmer and Lemeshow test) shows this model has acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(4) = 0.820$, $p = .845$. Model fit shows that this model was acceptable: Nagelkerke R^2 was .051. However, when it comes to the effect of

individual predictors, disability was statistically significant, *Wald*=4.025, *p*=.045. Students with disability were 83.4% less likely to be in good standing based on the posttest scores (i.e., overall GPA higher than 2.8). The level of intensive advising that students received was not a significant factor. Even when the continuous predictor (i.e., the level of intensive advising services) was replaced with the binary predictor (i.e., whether the students had intensive advising services or not), the results (i.e., statistical significance) did not change.

Table 5

*Binary Logistic Regression Analysis of Likelihood of Good Standing (*N = *127)*

Predictor	*B*	*S.E.*	*Wald*	*p*	*OR*
Disability (0/1)	-1.793	0.894	4.025	0.045	0.166
Intensive advising Service	0.114	0.183	0.387	0.534	1.120
(Constant)	0.909	0.322	7.995	0.005	2.483
Model Chi-square			4.586	0.101	
Hosmer and Lemeshow			0.820	0.845	
Nagelkerke R Square			0.051		

Table 6

*Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) Model of Overall GPA-Post (*N = *75)*

Model 1				Model 2			
Predictor	*B*	*t*	*p*	Predictor	*B*	*t*	*p*
GPA-pre	0.744	8.620	<.001	GPA-pre	.733	8.549	<.001
Disability (0/1)	-0.089	-0.312	0.756	Disability (0/1)	-.092	-.328	.744
Advising (0~5)	0.055	1.488	0.141	Advising (0/1)	.189	1.929	.058
R Square		0.523				0.532	
F		25.91	<0.001			26.93	<0.001

A multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the effect of intensive advising on academic performance at the end of the semester after controlling for other potential factors of the outcome variable (i.e., GPA at the beginning of the semester and disability status). Table 6 presents the results of two regression models. Model 1

examines the effect of the level of intensive advising (from 0 times to 5 times), and Model 2 examines the effect of having intensive advising (0 = no intensive advising versus 1 = having at least 1 intensive advising). Model 1 significantly statistically explained the variance of the outcome variable.

The results indicate that the overall regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.523$, $F = 25.908$, $p < .001$) explaining the variance in depression by 52.3%. In this model, only Overall GPA-pre was the only significant factor, Beta = 0.709, $t = 8.620$, $p < .001$. Students who had had a higher GPA before the semester had a higher GPA in the end of the semester. The intensive advising did not explain the variance of the overall GPA after the program. Even when the continuous predictor (i.e., the level of intensive advising services) was replaced with the binary predictor (i.e., whether the students had intensive advising services or not), the results (i.e., statistical significance) did not change.

Survey Results

The survey results of the open- and closed-ended questions were assessed below to answer the research questions: What is the impact of all program interventions based on the perception among the participants of the program? And, what are the student perceptions of case management specifically? For the survey, 127 of students were asked to participate. Out of 77 students who initiated the survey, about 46.75% ($n = 36$) did not answer most of the questions. The working sample included 41 cases.

Closed-Ended Questions

Table 7 presents the responses to the following question: “What services offered by TRiO’s SSS program are you not utilizing? All that applied.” Because the respondents

were asked to select all items that were applied, the sum of the percentages exceed 41 cases (or 100%). The items are presented in the order of the most frequently selected items. The responses show that career center is the service area that the students were utilizing the least. Intensive advising (i.e., monthly meeting with coach) is the most used service.

Table 7

*What Services Offered by TRiO SSS Program Are You Not Utilizing? (*n = *41)*

Category	Frequency	Percent
Career Center	24	58.5%
Tutoring	23	56.1%
Graduate School Trips	23	56.1%
Writing Center	22	53.7%
Student Lingo	20	48.8%
Pop up Chats	16	39.0%
LASSI	16	39.0%
Workshops	13	31.7%
Hangout Events	6	14.6%
Monthly Meetings (with Coach)	1	2.4%

Table 8 presents the responses to the following question: "What specific service(s) offered by TRiO's SSS program do you feel have significantly contributed to your good academic standing? All that applied." Because the respondents asked to select all items that were applied, the sum of the percentages exceed 41 cases (or 100%). The items are presented in the order of the most frequently selected items. The responses show that intensive advising is the program that the students identified as the service that students feel most contributed to their good academic standing.

Table 8

*What Specific Service(s) Offered by TRiO's SSS Program Do You Feel Have Significantly Contributed to Your Good Academic Standing? (*n = *41)*

Category	Frequency	Percent
Monthly Meeting (with Coach)	37	90.2%
Workshops	16	39.0%
Tutoring	15	36.6%
Hangout Events	15	36.6%
Career Center	10	24.4%
Writing Center	9	22.0%
LASSI	6	14.6%
Pop up Chats	5	12.2%
Graduate School Trips	4	9.8%
Student Lingo	3	7.3%

Table 9 presents the responses to the following question: "What specific service(s) offered by TRiO's SSS program do you feel had the least impact on your good academic standing? All that applied." Because the respondents asked to select all items that were applied, the sum of the percentages exceed 41 cases (or 100%). The items are presented in the order of the most frequently selected items. The responses show that LASSI [a learning and study strategies inventory which gathers information about learning, study practices and attitudes] was the service area that the students thought had the least impact on their good academic standing. Only 7.3% students selected intensive advising as one of the service areas with the least impact on their academic standing.

Table 9

What Specific Service(s) Offered by TRiO's SSS Program Do You Feel Had the Least Impact on Your Good Academic Standing? *(*n = *41)*

Category	Frequency	Percent
LASSI	17	41.5%
Pop up Chats	12	29.3%
Student Lingo	9	22.0%
Hangout Events	8	19.5%
Graduate School Trips	6	14.6%
Writing Center	5	12.2%
Tutoring	3	7.3%
Monthly Meetings (with Coach)	3	7.3%
Career Center	3	7.3%
Workshops	3	7.3%

Table 10 presents the responses to the following question: "What is your satisfaction with monthly meetings? The responses show that this group of students feel satisfied with their Intensive advising sessions (M = 8.95, SD = 1.70) given the 10 indicating strong satisfaction. The rating for willingness to attend the recommended services given by their success coach was high (M = 8.73, SD = 1.55). The ratings for their willingness to attend the next meeting set up with their coach was also high (M = 9.41, SD = 1.50).

Table 10

Satisfaction with Monthly Meetings (Intensive Advising)

Question	Range	M	SD
What is your satisfaction with this semester's monthly meetings?	1~10	8.95	1.70
How likely are you to attend services recommended during the monthly meetings?	4~10	8.73	1.55
How likely are you to attend the next meeting with your coach?	3~10	9.41	1.50

Open-Ended Questions

The TRiO SSS survey provided to the program participants included three open ended questions. These questions centered upon intensive advising services and student perception of its impact on good academic standing. During the content analysis of the questions, summarization was utilized to give an overview of the participant responses.

The first question asked was "How would you describe the services provided by TRiO's SSS program?" Out of 41 students, 4 participants described the program as "supportive," 20 described it as "helpful," and 15 described it as a "great resource" for gaining access to additional services needed to be successful in college.

The second question was "What did your success coach talk about that was helpful this semester?" The student responses were centered around a plethora of resources (time management, goal setting, and internship help), graduate school help and academic grades.

The third and fourth questions were **"**How would you describe what helps you achieve/walk towards good academic standing?" and "Does TRiO have anything to do with that?" Out of the 41 students surveyed, 39 stated that they felt TRiO had a "positive impact" on their academic standing due to the specific resources and support that they received. These students found that the TRiO environment allowed them to seek out additional help and get their needs met. The survey also found that the services TRiO offers and the idea that someone is there to talk too and answer any questions that they have is integral to the students' perception of achieving good academic standing.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Discussion of Major Findings

The data presented in Chapter IV showcase a mixed-method study that analyzes quantitative and qualitative data regarding whether the intensive advising intervention within the TRiO SSS program has an impact on good academic standing. Table 1 showcases the percentages of students within the program who are within good academic standing and not in good academic standing. The quantitative data from the agency (displayed in Table 1) show that returning students entered the program with an average GPA of 3.30 and left with an average GPA of 3.16. The quantitative data from the agency show that freshman students within the program did not enter with a GPA and left with an average GPA of 2.87. Both groups are averaging above the GPA requirement for good academic standing (2.75), which means the majority of students are within good academic standing.

Hypothesis one stated that the quantitative data would show a rise in GPA from the beginning of the semester to the end with the implementation of intensive advising. In regard to returning students, the hypothesis was not supported, as the findings did not show a positive correlation between intensive advising and GPA. The percentage of returning students who were in good academic standing before the intervention was around the same percent, showing that there was no change in good academic standing after implementation of the intervention. However, the data also show that students who

had received intensive advising at least one time had a higher GPA at the end of the semester after controlling for the pretest scores and another control variable, $t = 1.929$, $p = 0.058$ compared to other models (its effect on the likelihood of good standing, and the effect of the number of intensive advising on GPA). This means the effect of intensive advising could be higher and another study with a bigger sample size might have a significant effect. Since all programs are funded differently, it is very possible that this same intervention implemented within that program could produce different results. This shows that neither of the quantitative data hypotheses were supported.

In regard to freshman students, the hypothesis was not supported, as the good academic standing rate for eligible students not in the program compared to students in the program was at 65% for both groups. However, freshman students within the program had a higher GPA compared to eligible freshman students not in the program. The overall institutional data conducted through university research show that SSS eligible students who were not served by the program achieved good academic standing at a rate of 65%, while non-eligible students at the institution achieved a good academic standing rate of 78%, and only 19% of SSS eligible students (not served) achieved good academic standing (ACU Institutional Research, Compiled December 16, 2019). Students whom were in the program and received the intervention (65%) showed no difference in GAS compared to those not in the program and receiving no intervention (65%).

Hypothesis two was that student perception would be positive toward the program and its services. The hypothesis was proven, as survey data show that student perception of the program was generally positive. Students believe that the program is helpful and its services, especially intensive advising, positively influence their academic standing. The

third hypothesis, which hypothesized that student perception would be positive, also showed students would perceive the resources offered by TRiO would positively impact their academic standing. Thus, the intervention of intensive advising has had a positive impact on students' academic standing and student perception.

Implications of Findings

Implications for Practice

These results showcase that the students perceive the program as successful and helpful. This means that there may be other services the program offers that contribute to the rise in students' good academic standing, retention and graduation. Other programs should also ensure that the services being offered to students are not just geared towards solely working on intensive advising. Instead, taking a holistic approach to the needs of students and offering them multiple resources to help with their good academic standing rates is a practice that needs to be implemented within a program.

Implications for Policy

The data indicate that the students find the program effective. The qualitative data support this, and as TRiO is a federally funded program, this study would be helpful for the federal government when introducing new regulations, policies, and more funding for current programs as well as for more institutions of higher education to implement this program. When looking at student perception, it would be helpful for the government to know how the students perceive the program. Student perception matters, and the qualitative data point to the importance of this, as the relationships between student perception, intensive advising, and good academic standing will allow conversations about TRiO programs to continue regarding certain interventions that should be

implemented to assess effectiveness. While the federal government touts the belief that this program is successful and helpful in retention, graduation and academic standing rates, it is still important to continue assessing if there are other interventions that also impact the program's success. This research will inform certain implementation strategies and regulations that they place on each program, which would hopefully allow them to finally recognize what makes TRiO effective.

Implications for Research

There are several limitations to this research. First, self-reported data collected through qualitative analysis are rarely able to be independently verified. The accuracy of the study can be influenced by personal biases and other potential outside factors. The qualitative data from the survey cannot guarantee 100% accuracy of what people said, whether in interviews, focus groups, or on questionnaires, at face value. One such bias that can become apparent in self-reported data is attribution, the act of attributing positive events and outcome to one's own agency but attributing negative events and outcomes to external forces.

Another limitation is the use of GPA data as a dependent variable, which meant that a percentage of program participants (entering freshmen) did not enter the university with a GPA and could not be calculated into the pretest data collection. This also meant that at the end of the semester, entering freshmen GPAs were added into the overall data set and impacted the overall GPA. For future research, data collection should include a way to consider freshman GPAs appropriately to not influence the overall GPA significantly. Additionally, a thorough analysis would factor in the freshman class's

GPAs separately or only consider returning students GPAs, to have pretest and posttest scores.

Limitations of This Study

There are some limitations of this study. Rubin and Babbie (2016) identify seven prominent threats to internal validity including history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, statistical regression, selection biases and ambiguity about the direction of causal influence. Internal validity refers to the confidence that the results of a study accurately depict whether one variable is or is not a cause of another (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). This study used a pre-experimental study to assess the impact of the program. The concern about the ambiguity regarding the direction of causal influence was addressed in this study because any improvement from pretests to the posttests in this longitudinal data suggests that the program may cause the change in the outcomes rather than the other way around. However, there are some concerns about the internal validity of this study. According to Rubin and Babbie (2016), this research design is limited in attributing the outcome of the study to the program and ruling out other alternative factors. The researcher could not have a control group because of the nature of the creation of the program which required full interventions to be implemented for all students. Although the researcher recognized these limitations, they could not be addressed due to feasibility issues. The researcher has access to data for Beginning, End and Cumulative GPA.

This study also has limitation in external validity. External validity refers to the extent to which we can generalize the findings of a study to settings and populations beyond the study conditions (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). This study used a convenience sample of students who participate in the TRiO program in a university during (Fall

semester, 2021) to generalize the results to the study population (i.e., historically disadvantaged undergraduate students in the US).

The data analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Descriptive analyses were used to present information of the characteristics of the sample of the program participants and the sample respondents of the survey on the perception of the program. Descriptive analyses were also used to present major quantitative information regarding the program. A regression analysis was also conducted to examine the statistical significance of the cumulative GPA after the program semester by including the following predictors in the model: the number of sessions of intensive advising, beginning cumulative GPA, the number of TRiO eligibilities, and the level of needs based on the needs assessment at the beginning of the semester.

One limitation is that the data included both pending and active students. Active students have received acceptance into the program and completed a service that semester. Pending students have received acceptance into the program but have not yet completed a service that semester. Inactive students, who were not included in the data set, have received acceptance into the program but have identified that they will not/cannot participate in a service for the semester. Although pending students have completed an intake meeting, they were not considered active in the program at the time of data collection but were included in the data set.

Another limitation is that the data are only from one semester, which does not adequately give a full view of the students' academic performance. Normally, tracking of academic standing would be conducted over a full academic year (Fall and Spring) to see

how the student's GPA and grade point average fluctuates. It is difficult for a student to raise their GPA after one semester and thus can only give a short view on the impact of intensive advising. The last limitation is the bias of the author by hypothesizing that good academic standing should raise good academic standing rates, compared to the idea that the program as a whole could positively influence students and their ability to achieve good academic standing.

Conclusion

Based upon the research, intensive advising has no effect on good academic standing. Students' grade point averages did not rise overall, and neither did the number of students who became in good academic standing after participating in intensive advising. Student perception trended in the opposite direction and showed that students believe Intensive advising to be helpful and have a direct correlation to their good academic standing and bachelor's degree attainment. Since both research findings have concluded differently, future research should still be conducted to assess whether other interventions have any impact on good academic standing, by changing the method of data collection. The qualitative data do not exclusively conclude that intensive advising has a positive correlation with the qualitative data.

The basis of this research shows how important this research is. The SSS program has implemented an intervention (intensive advising) to positively influence students' academic standing due to the lower academic performances of disadvantaged students at institutions of higher education. Research found that multiple interventions from the logic model can be implemented with this population successfully, one of which is Intensive advising. This research study has confirmed only one hypothesis while also highlighting

some of the limitations that occur when doing research within this population. Further research with a concise methodology on student classification is recommended before the studies original hypotheses are considered fully accepted.

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APPENDIX

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

December 7, 2021

Mariesha Shaw
Department of Social Work
ACU Box 27866
Abilene Christian University

Dear Mariesha,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "The Impact of An Intensive Advising Model of TRiO Student Support Services on Good Academic Standing and Student Perception of Intensive Advising: An Explorative Study"

(IRB# 21-191)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects as:

☐ Non-research, and
☑ Non-human research

Based on:

* The research does not involve interaction or intervention with living individuals, and the information being collected is not individually identifiable [45 CFR 46.102(f)(2)]

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs