ACADEMIC ADVISOR RETENTION

at Baylor University

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Leadership and Learning in Organizations

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Part I: Organization Context

Baylor University Overview

Baylor University (or Baylor) is a private Christian university located in Waco, Texas and founded in 1845. The mission of the university is "to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community" (Mission Statement, n.d.). With an undergraduate student population of 15,213 and graduate student population of 5,757 (Facts and Figures, 2023), Baylor aims to recruit students who desire the benefits and resources of a large institution with a "small-school atmosphere."

In November 2018, approximately one year after the appointment of the university's first female president, Dr. Linda Livingstone, Baylor launched a five-year strategic plan called Illuminate (Illuminate Forward, 2018). The foundation of the plan consisted of four pillars: Christian Environment, Transformational Education, Research and Scholarship, and Arts and Athletics. Five academic initiatives were identified that would facilitate collaboration among faculty and expand research initiatives: Health; Data Science; Materials Science; Human Flourishing, Leadership, and Ethics; and Baylor in Latin America. While the university aimed to continue providing an excellent undergraduate educational experience, there was a noticeable shift in priorities to focus on advancing research and graduate programs. This university-wide effort to elevate research and graduate education led to Baylor receiving R1 designation in December 2021.

Academic Advising

In conjunction with these efforts to increase focus on research and graduate programs, university leadership identified academic advising as a way to reallocate faculty resources.

Around 2010, the Office of the Provost initiated a shift in the structure of academic advising. At that time, most academic units relied primarily on their faculty to perform advising functions, with some support from administrative staff. As it became more critical for faculty to spend their time advancing research and publications, the Provost led an effort to gradually hire and install professional staff advisors within all academic units. After approximately five years, all undergraduate students had an assigned staff advisor, while faculty shifted to assuming a mentoring role. A few exemptions were granted for majors in which academic advising from a faculty member was deemed most appropriate, such as Music, Art, and certain Honors programs.

As university leadership navigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, there was an increased reliance on academic advisors to assist with the engagement of students. While students were living at home with their families, spending a significant amount of time in isolation, or taking online courses, advisors were asked to increase communication with their assigned students as a way to retain as many students as possible. Advisors were not compensated for this increased workload, and since the 2021, advisors have continued to be relied on to contribute toward retention efforts in a significant way.

A decentralized academic advising structure has been highly effective in many ways. Advisors are housed in each of the academic units and report directly to Assistant/Associate Deans so they can be involved in advancing the priorities of their school/college. One advising office was not embedded within an academic unit, formerly called University Advisement (UA) and recently renamed Major & Exploration Success Advising (MESA). The Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Operations and Advising, Dr. Chad Eggleston, oversees MESA and coordinates monthly meetings of Advising Directors from all undergraduate schools and colleges. The group of advising leaders forms the Advising Leadership Council (ALC) and

provides a space to facilitate collaboration across academic units and encourage consistency in policies and practices.

Positionality Statements

Ida Jamshidi

One member of our Capstone team, Ida Jamshidi, has earned two degrees from Baylor (B.A., 2009; M.S.Ed., 2011) and has worked as a full-time staff member since May 2011, currently serving as Assistant Dean of Student Services in the School of Engineering & Computer Science (ECS). As part of her role, she serves on the ALC and supervises the academic advisors in ECS. Some portions of the organizational context provided and the following analysis of the problem of practice are from her personal knowledge and experience as an 18-year member of Baylor's community.

Sara Lozano

The other member of our Capstone team, Sara Lozano, has seventeen years of experience in higher education, specifically within academic affairs, where she served as faculty, department chair and now as an academic dean at a community college in Texas. Her advising experience is rooted in the public community college setting and through the lens of academic affairs.

Part II: Problem of Practice

When Dr. Eggleston assumed his role in the Provost's Office in 2021, he entered an advising culture that was characterized by many advisors as toxic, which some attributed to previous leaders who left the university around the time Dr. Eggleston was hired. Advisors expressed feelings of being underappreciated, overworked, and underpaid, and many staff who left their advising roles at Baylor cited these challenges as their reasons for leaving. While anecdotal evidence was provided by Dr. Eggleston and other advising leaders regarding the

challenges in retaining academic advisors in their roles at Baylor, Human Resources was not willing to share employment data to confirm or disprove these speculations.

Dr. Eggleston implemented various initiatives to attempt to improve the retention and general job satisfaction of academic advisors across campus. For example, Dr. Eggleston recently partnered with Human Resources to update an advising career ladder, referenced as the Advising Qualifications and Salary Guidelines (see Appendix A), to more clearly articulate advancement opportunities for academic advisors. Another recent development occurred in February 2024 after Human Resources conducted a market analysis of advising positions and determined that salary adjustments were appropriate for advisors of all levels of the career ladder. These adjustments were made effective immediately (as of March 1, 2024), and Dr. Eggleston has heard very positive feedback from advising leaders about the impact to their job satisfaction.

Despite these recent efforts, there is no data available to understand the value advisors place on various elements of their work experience when determining whether to continue serving in their roles at Baylor. As such, the problem of practice we aim to investigate examines the extent to which certain institutional factors impact advisor retention. Acquiring information on these institutional factors – benefits, commitment to mission, opportunities for advancement, salary, supervisor effectiveness, and work modality – will not only better equip leadership in the Provost's Office in the oversight of academic advising, but it will aid Human Resources and members of the Advising Leadership Council in retaining talented staff and providing continuity in advising services for their students.

Part III: Review of Literature

Institutions of higher education are tasked with providing support services to guide students through their education journey. Fulfillment of this goal requires committed faculty and staff who have direct connections and influence on students. Retention of these employees that work directly with students, such as academic advisors, ensures institutions can execute their work effectively and positively impact student success with minimal interruption. Understanding the factors that impact employees will support efforts to increase retention.

Our initial literature review examined factors that contribute to employee retention at organizations to identify preliminary influences. Intrinsic factors such as motivation, fulfillment, and job satisfaction were frequently identified as factors that led to retention of employees (Croteau & Wolk, 2010; Manchester, 2012; Spencer et al., 2016). Extrinsic factors such as compensation and benefits, work environment and culture, work modality and flexibility, and career planning were also found to contribute to employee retention (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Bryant & Allen, 2013; Spencer et al., 2016; Tillman, 2013). Employee retention relies on intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact the individual and the organization.

Fulfillment of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (see Appendix B) posits that human needs can be arranged in a pyramid, where humans are motivated by meeting their most basic needs and progressing through the hierarchy's five levels until reaching the top of the pyramid in which self-actualization needs are met (Maslow, 1943).

Benson and Dundis (2003) shared the alignment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in an organizational context. The lowest level on the pyramid is physiological needs, which would be satisfied in an organization by looking at fair pay and perception of pay to ensure all other basic

needs are met. Level two includes safety needs, which in the workplace can be met by ensuring physical and mental safety needs are met, such as training employees to fulfill their responsibilities. The third level on the pyramid is belongingness and love needs, which refers to ensuring a supportive work environment and positive relationships. Meeting the esteem needs at the fourth level includes achieving responsibilities that bring confidence to the employee. Lastly, the final step in the pyramid is self-actualization, which in an organizational context means the employee finds fulfillment from commitment to the organization (Benson & Dundis, 2003). These individual needs impact the organization as employees align their personal motivation with the organization's commitment.

Employee motivation, job satisfaction, and work fulfillment have been found to have a positive relationship with employee retention. Vui-Yee and Paggy (2020) studied the relationship between job characteristics and employee retention, finding that "intrinsic motivation and internalized extrinsic motivation in the workplace" lead to work fulfillment and employee behavior, resulting in higher retention rates (p. 10).

Baumann and Marcum (2023) recommended for organizations to offer flexibility in terms of location and schedule, while maintaining reasonable expectations and fairness across employees. Various workplace practices, such as flexible work schedules, and sabbaticals, help recruit new employees and retain existing ones, as it is seen as an investment in the autonomy of employees. However, some flexible work practices, such as remote work, are dependent on the individual employee to determine if they actually contribute to employee retention (Onken-Menke et al., 2018). Supervisors also have a unique responsibility in contributing to employee retention, as they are in positions to communicate on behalf of the organization; when

this communication is favorable, this can result in employees remaining committed to the organization (Panaccio et al., 2023).

Investing in the Individual

Various factors at the individual level have been studied in relation to their impact on retention. Croteau and Wolk (2010) used human capital theory to identify succession planning as a key factor in retention, as it demonstrates the organization's investment in their own staff's professional growth. Similarly, Manchester (2012) used human capital theory to argue that even the perception of an organization's investment in its employees can increase the likelihood of the employee to remain at that organization. Investments in employee benefits packages, such as tuition reimbursement for employees to attend their own institution, offers colleges and universities a unique opportunity to get a return on their investment (Manchester, 2012). This type of investment in human capital is a relatively low cost and has been shown to be beneficial by having employees demonstrate a greater commitment to their work and intention to stay at the organization (Manchester, 2012; Spencer et al., 2016).

Focusing on creating a supportive work environment also helps organizations demonstrate their commitment to the individual. Yusliza et al. (2021) found that retention is improved when there is a supportive work environment where academic staff feel connected to the organization. This was studied by examining social exchange theory as a way of understanding human capital, and the results of this study indicate that there is "a significant connection between SWE [supportive work environment] and employee retention" (Yusliza et al., 2021, p. 208).

Prioritizing human capital, organizations should be prepared to invest in appropriate career advancement for their employees because succession plans offer even more benefit to the

organization when there are critical leadership roles that need to be filled (Croteau & Wolk, 2010). Naz et al. (2020) found that supportive work environments resulted in employee retention when opportunities for positive relationships were considered and valued by human resources offices. Developing a supportive work environment with opportunities for professional growth requires policies that are not just good for the employee but also have a financial benefit to the organization. Boushey and Glynn (2012) found that there was a significant cost to losing employees, and organizations spend about one-fifth of the employee's salary to replace them.

An employee's ability to recognize their own potential and identify avenues for upward mobility brings up both challenges and opportunities for organizations. While some organizations may see this as a challenge because investing in general human capital gives employees the ability to transfer those skills elsewhere (Becker, 1964), more recent studies indicate that they should not shy away from the opportunity to invest in their employees. Tillman (2013) argued that employees in today's work environment look for organizations that offer assistance services, wellness programs, various work modalities, and voluntary benefits options that demonstrate the organization's commitment to its employees.

This sentiment is also evident in research by Sánchez-Manjavacas et al. (2014), showing that individuals who demonstrate potential to improve their skills and develop themselves professionally to increase their "internal employability" have higher levels of participation in the organization, commitment to the organization, and greater job satisfaction (p. 16). This presents an opportunity for organizations to become involved in the developmental process for their employees, which will also increase their loyalty and lower their intention to quit (Sánchez-Manjavacas et al., 2014).

Benefits that Matter

Supportive work environments and succession plans promote retention, but human capital theory also affirms that retention can be credited to a combination of reasons related to pay: compensation structure, procedures, the type of compensation, perceived fairness and equity, and actual compensation and benefits (Bryant & Allen, 2013). Offering a healthy benefits package is an essential component in an organization's efforts to retain employees (Evans & Chun, 2012; Galinsky et al., 1996; Spencer et al., 2016; Tillman, 2013). Higher education has been faced with budget cuts in recent years, yet they are still expected to invest in the recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and administrators in order to remain competitive. Evans and Chun (2012) proposed strategically utilizing human resources to effectively recruit and retain employees in their institution. Galinsky et al. (1996) found that extending beyond the traditional fringe benefits to include adjusting the characteristics of the job and workplace environment contributed to better retention of employees.

Organizations that invest in strong benefits packages improve retention of employees; employees interpret this investment as an indication of the employer's commitment to them, and if they are satisfied with their benefits package, they are "six times more likely to stay with their employers than those workers who were dissatisfied with their benefits programs" (Tillman, 2013, p. 29). In addition to pay, perception of pay and respect of their colleagues promoted employee retention (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Bryant & Allen, 2013; Spencer et al., 2016). Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) found that perception of pay and respect of their colleagues led to job satisfaction and retention of faculty, staff, and administrators. Results of a study by Spencer et al. (2016) showed the intention of faculty and staff to stay at an institution was related to how high or low the salary was and the number of dependents the employee had. Spencer et al. (2016)

noted that "the lower the salary, the lower the intent to stay; and the higher the number of dependents, the greater the intent to stay" (p.10).

Mission and Values

An intersection exists between individual and organizational factors influencing retention when considering the mission and values upheld by colleges. Missions of organizations, specifically faith-based institutions of higher education, must demonstrate a clear articulation of their commitment to stewardship, the public good, and to their faith (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016; Ganu, 2013). Although colleges and universities are situated ideally to affirm their faith and commitment to the greater good, they must distribute the message of their mission across the organization in order for others to execute this mission (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). Transparency and effective communication further emerge as significant elements impacting employee retention.

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Part IV: Conceptual Framing & Project Question

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Our conceptual framework uses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a foundation from which we build upon. In an organizational context, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is important because it describes how employers are able to support their employees to achieve commitment and loyalty through the levels of needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Leadership and management scholars have proposed frameworks that are derived from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and aligned to a pyramid of employee needs. Benson and Dundis (2003) summarize Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as it relates to businesses and organizations, maintaining the pyramid structure but aligning the employee needs with Maslow's levels.

While the pyramid and hierarchy make sense in describing Maslow's theory, looking at Human Capital Theory offers another perspective on the individual and their intention to stay with an organization. Becker (1964) argued that Human Capital Theory incentivizes the individual because it is an investment in their education, upskilling, and reskilling to improve their position. Organizations may invest in human capital through a variety of ways, including offering incentives, promotions, and a healthy compensation and benefits package. When an organization invests in their own employees by seeing them as human capital, the employee's loyalty and dedication to the organization is realized through the different levels in Maslow's hierarchy.

Human capital is seen as the investment that an organization makes into its people. An organization can invest in things like a generous benefits package, aligning personal goals with organizational goals and succession planning, and creating flexibility in the workplace. These extrinsic factors have been found to contribute to retention of staff. On the other hand, intrinsic factors that could lead to retention include motivation, job satisfaction, and fulfillment.

The extrinsic and intrinsic factors that impact individual commitment to the organization are not layered evenly in a pyramid, nor are they always aligned progressively. The framework we developed for understanding academic advisor retention at a private, faith-based institution like Baylor became one of merging and overlapping needs in alignment with Maslow's hierarchy. It has become what we refer to as the Merging Needs Framework (see Appendix C). This framework has helped to inform our final project question: To what extent do institutional factors impact the retention of academic advisors within the undergraduate schools and colleges at Baylor University?

Defining Institutional Factors

After a careful review of the literature and in-depth conversations with Dr. Eggleston to learn more about the university's culture, six institutional factors were identified to analyze the extent to which they impact retention of advisors at Baylor. We refer to these as the "Six Factors of Retention" for the purpose of this project, and they include benefits, commitment to mission, opportunities for advancement, salary, supervisor effectiveness, and work modality.

Benefits

The benefits offered by an organization play a critical role in an employee's decision to remain in their positions (Tillman, 2013). While Baylor offers many of the same benefits found at other institutions of higher education, the scale and level of those benefits may vary. A comprehensive list of benefits can be found on HR's website, but the office highlights some of these on their main "Benefits & Advantages" home page: health insurance (medical, dental, and vision), retirement, time off, and tuition remission (Benefits & Advantages, n.d.).

Commitment to Mission

The mission of Baylor is "to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community" (Mission Statement, n.d.). While Baylor is a faith-based institution, students are not required to sign a statement of faith or belong to a particular religion or denomination. However, faculty and staff are questioned about their faith during the hiring process and required to prescribe to either the Christian or Jewish faith. Because the mission of a faith-based institution can impact the behavior of its employees (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016), we seek to understand how an academic advisor's commitment to Baylor's mission, informed by their faith, can impact their decision to continue working at the university.

Opportunities for Advancement

One way to increase an employee's likelihood to stay with an organization is to provide opportunities for upward mobility and professional development (Sánchez-Manjavacas et al., 2014). In 2014, the Office of Human Resources (HR) worked with advising leaders at Baylor to develop a career ladder that supervisors could use as a resource when evaluating advisors for promotion opportunities. Over the course of the last 10 years, this resource became outdated, so a representative from HR was tasked with working with the Advising Leadership Council to revise these advancement guidelines. The new chart outlining advisor qualifications and compensation was developed throughout the 2023-2024 academic year and published for advisors in April 2024 (see Appendix A).

There were minimal changes between the 2014 and 2024 versions of the advancement guidelines, including minor adjustments to the title of positions and the years of experience required and preferred for some of the roles. One notable change is the elimination of the word "ladder" from the 2024 guidelines. In a meeting to advising leaders, the HR representative described that this intentional removal was meant to signal that advisors are not entitled to receive a promotion to the next level in the chart, even if they meet the education and experience required for that title. Instead, their ability to advance would depend on the needs of their office and their supervisor's decision to advance an advisor into a higher-level role.

Salary

Similar to benefits, pay and perception of pay play a role in employee retention (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). In addition to the changes to advisor titles and qualifications, pay bands were made public in April 2024 to correspond with each level of the advancement guidelines. The release of these pay bands aligned with a university-wide assessment of

compensation levels for all staff in February. Advising roles were among the staff categories that received pay adjustments, effective March 1, 2024. This resulted in a salary increase for almost all academic advisors. Experience and education were not considered as part of these adjustments, so all advisors under the same title had their salaries adjusted to the minimum amount on the corresponding pay band.

Supervisor Effectiveness

For this institutional factor, we sought to better understand the impact of an advisor's supervisor on their decision to continue in their role. Encompassed within this factor is the office culture that is created by the supervisor and other leaders, which has been shown to impact employee retention (Panaccio et al., 2023). At Baylor, most Advisors, Senior Advisors, Coordinators, and Managers report to either an Assistant Director, Associate Director, or Director. Depending on the size of the advising unit, there may be up to three levels in the supervising structure. Directors and/or Senior Directors within the unit typically report to an Assistant Dean or Associate Dean that oversees undergraduate programs for the school of college, and this individual reports directly to the Dean. Depending on the reporting structures, advisors may recognize more than one leader (beyond their supervisor) as influencing the culture and policies within their advising unit.

Work Modality

The literature demonstrated that providing autonomy to employees, particularly by allowing them flexibility to work remotely, can play a role in employee retention (Baumann & Marcum, 2023). When the majority of faculty and staff at Baylor shifted to working remotely in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, several new policies, practices, and processes were initiated to accommodate remote and hybrid work styles. However, as university

operations returned to pre-pandemic norms in Fall 2022, the Office of the Provost made it clear that all advisors should be reporting to work in person and advising students in person. Leaders in each of the academic units have discretion to approve short-term exceptions, depending on the time of the semester or an advisor's individual circumstances. However, the Provost has reiterated as recently as January 2024 that advisors are expected to be available on campus to provide face-to-face support for students during normal operating hours and that all formal advising must take place in person.

Part V: Project Design

A mixed-methods study was conducted, utilizing minimal quantitative data collected from a Qualtrics survey and extensive qualitative data collected from a combination of focus groups and individual interviews. Questions asked of participants sought to learn more about their perceptions of each of the Six Elements of Advisor Retention and to what extent each element has impacted their decision to continue working at Baylor in an advising role.

Data Collection Plan

Participant Selection

At the time the data collection process was initiated for this study in March 2024, there were 65 academic advisors and directors working within the nine undergraduate schools and colleges at Baylor.

Two academic units were excluded from the study: the School of Music and the School of Engineering & Computer Science (ECS). The School of Music was excluded because this unit only uses faculty advisors, as opposed to professional staff advisors, who are the focus of this study. The School of Engineering & Computer Science has five academic advisors, but they were excluded because Ida Jamshidi currently serves as Assistant Dean of Student Services in ECS

and supervises these advisors. All remaining advisors and directors, 65 individuals, were invited to participate in the study.

Public websites were reviewed to compile a list of all academic advisors, directors, and Assistant/Associate Deans who oversee advising units into a spreadsheet. The university's online staff directory was then accessed to verify job titles and contact information. This spreadsheet was reviewed by Dr. Eggleston for accuracy, and after minor edits, it became the finalized Participant Contact List (see Appendix D). Prior to the launch of the data collection process, Dr. Eggleston provided all advisors and directors with an overview of the project goals and timeline via e-mail; he also expressed his support for the study and encouraged participation. When sending this message to advisors and directors, Dr. Eggleston included the Assistant/Associate Deans who oversee advising units within each school and college to make them aware of the study.

Two additional offices at Baylor were contacted prior to the data collection phase. A high-level leader in Human Resources was notified of the project and expressed her support, as well as her office's interest in reviewing results and recommendations upon completion of the project. A Senior Research Compliance Specialist in Baylor's Office of the Vice Provost for Research was also made aware of the project and sent a copy of the letter we received upon seeking Vanderbilt IRB approval. This individual also expressed support for the project and anticipated no issues moving forward with the data collection process.

Data Collection Tools

Two different data collection tools were utilized during this mixed-methods study: surveys and focus groups. Each served a specific purpose, and the collection dates were timed intentionally based on the typical workload level of advisors during the spring semester. We

explored the possibility of conducting private interviews as a third tool but decided against this option due to the high interest in focus group participation.

Qualtrics Survey

An initial Qualtrics Survey (see Appendix E) was sent via e-mail to 65 advisors and directors on March 13, 2024 and they were asked to complete the survey by March 28, 2024 (11:59 PM). A reminder e-mail was sent on March 25, 2024 to individuals who had not yet completed the survey.

The survey was created to achieve three main goals. First, demographic information and job-related data were collected to better understand the profile, workloads, and salaries of advisors at Baylor. Inclusive language was used when framing questions related to race and gender to allow individuals to have flexibility with their responses. The majority of the advisor population at Baylor is White and female. While the focus of this study is not to analyze the relationships between advisor retention and race or gender, it felt appropriate to consider these characteristics during the data collection stage to allow for incidental findings and disaggregation of the data across these categories.

The second goal of the survey was to perform an initial pulse check of how advisors viewed the Six Factors of Retention. Advisors were asked to rank these factors (benefits, commitment to mission, opportunities for advancement, salary, supervisor effectiveness, and work modality) in order of the impact on their decision to continue working in their role at Baylor. Brief definitions were provided for some of these terms to ensure clarity of understanding during the ranking process. For example, the mission of Baylor "to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and

Christian commitment within a caring community" (Mission Statement, n.d.) was defined to guarantee all participants were familiar with the university's mission statement.

      The final goal of the survey was to ask about the willingness of advisors to participate in focus groups and/or individual interviews. Participants were given the option to express interest in *only* a focus group, *only* an interview, or *either* a focus group *or* interview. Because focus groups were scheduled to be held on April 15, 2024 and April 16, 2024 during business hours, they were provided with a list of one-hour time slots to indicate their availability throughout each of these days. Participants who selected interest in an interview received a message that they would be contacted after April 2, 2024 to discuss their availability if they were selected for an interview.

      The survey instrument contained 12 questions, outlined in Table 1. The purpose and type of each question were considered in the survey formation process to ensure relevance to the main project question.

Table 1: Qualtrics Survey Instrument

#	Question	Survey Question Type	Question Purpose
1	First and Last Name	Open-ended	Demographic
2	Academic Unit/Advising Office	Multiple-choice	Demographic
3	Which race or ethnicity best describes you?	Multiple-choice	Demographic
4	Which gender best describes you?	Multiple-choice	Demographic
5	How many years have you worked at Baylor University in an advising role?	Multiple-choice	Demographic
6	Approximately how much is your annual salary?	Multiple-choice	Demographic
7	Approximately how many students are assigned to you for advising for the Spring 2024 semester?	Multiple-choice	Demographic
8	Do you have supervisory responsibilities?	Closed-ended	Demographic
9	Please indicate your willingness to participate in a focus group and/or private interview.	Multiple-choice	Focus Group Participation

	Note: Advisors will be grouped based on their position titles for focus groups, and no advisors will be placed in a group with their direct supervisor.		
10	In preparation for your focus group or interview, please take a moment to rank how the factors below impact your decision to continue serving as an advisor at Baylor. (1=most influential factor; 6=least influential factor)	Rating	Project Question: Initial assessment of institutional factors
11	Focus group interviews will take place on April 15 and April 16 during business hours. Please indicate your availability to attend a one-hour focus group on either of these days. You will receive an Outlook meeting request by April 2 with the exact date and time of your focus group.	Multiple-choice	Focus Group Participation

Focus Group Interviews

A conference room was reserved for focus group meetings on Monday, April 15, 2024 and Tuesday, April 16, 2024 on the first floor of the Hankamer/Cashion Academic Complex. This building is located near the center of Baylor's campus, which was intentionally chosen to be as convenient as possible for participants. Light refreshments were provided to promote a relaxed and comfortable environment. Overhead lights were also adjusted to slightly dim the harshness of the fluorescent lighting. Ten comfortable chairs were arranged around a long, rectangular conference table, with each of us (Ida Jamshidi and Sara Lozano) seated at the heads of the table and up to four participants seated on each side of the table.

We composed focus groups strategically with the goal of helping participants feel as comfortable as possible. By using the responses from the Qualtrics survey and the contact list we formed using the Baylor Online Directory, we were able to determine whether participants had leadership and/or supervisory responsibilities. We were careful not to group participants with their supervisors and ultimately formed three separate categories for focus group assignments:

low-level (Academic Advisors and Senior Academic Advisors), mid-level (Coordinators, Managers, Assistant Directors, and Associate Directors), and high-level (Directors and Senior Directors). Based on the interest in focus groups we were able to gauge from the Qualtrics survey, we scheduled four interviews for low-level advisors, one for mid-level advisors, and one for leaders. Between five to eight participants were invited for each focus group for a total of 41 advisors; six advisors were unable to attend their assigned focus group due to an unexpected conflict or sudden illness, so the total number of participants was 35 for an attendance rate of 85.3%.

A formal protocol was developed by referencing best practices for designing and conducting focus groups (Krueger, 2002). Focus Group Interview Questions, illustrated in Table 2, centered around the Six Factors of Retention and were developed by considering relevant literature. They included an introductory question, questions related to each of the six factors, and three closing questions. The question related to opportunities for advancement was adjusted slightly depending on the group being interviewed (lower-level advisors, mid-level advisors, or directors). Questions were designed intentionally to fulfill one of two purposes: to ask participants to prioritize and compare the six institutional factors and to understand the connection between institutional factors and the Merging Needs Framework. Special attention was paid to the sensitivity of some questions, such as salary and supervisor effectiveness.

Table 2: Focus Group Interview Questions

#	Question	Question Purpose
1	What initially attracted you to the academic advising role, and has that motivation evolved over time?	Prioritize and compare institutional factors
2	What is your perspective on the benefits Baylor offers for academic advisors and staff in general? For example, do benefits	Conceptual Framework Connection: **Safety**

	like retirement, health insurance, tuition remission, the time off and holiday schedule, or any others contribute to your decision to continue working at Baylor?	**Needs**
3	Baylor is a unique place that aspires to be a leading research university while also maintaining a mission to integrate academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community. Does Baylor's mission make the advising role more attractive? Or do you think you'd be just as likely to pursue an advising position at a public university?	Conceptual Framework Connection: **Self-actualization**
4	For Advisors/Senior Advisors: Do any of you aspire to hold more responsibilities and transition into an advising leadership role one day? If so, do you feel there is a path for you to reach that goal at Baylor? For mid-level advising professionals: You all have some supervisory responsibilities, and your positions include more than strictly academic advising. Was that opportunity important to you, and has that impacted your decision to remain in an advising role at Baylor? Do any of you aspire to hold even more leadership responsibilities and do you feel there is a path for you to reach that goal at Baylor? For advising leadership: Tell me about your rise to leadership within the advising community. Did you step directly into your leadership role when you came to Baylor or did you work your way through advising roles at Baylor?	Conceptual Framework Connection: **Self-esteem**
5	We are all likely aware that, effective March 1st, salary adjustments were made across all advising positions, which resulted in a salary increase for most advisors. Thinking about the role salary plays in your decision to continue working as an advisor at Baylor, can you describe your perspective on compensation for advisors, both before and after the salary adjustments were made.	Conceptual Framework Connection: **Basic Needs**
6	Understanding that this question may be sensitive for some, we would like to learn more about your relationship with your supervisor and the impact that relationship has on your decision to continue working as an advisor at Baylor. Are there leadership	Conceptual Framework Connection: **Love and Belonging**

	characteristics that your supervisor displays that contribute toward that decision, either in a positive or negative way, or opportunities for your supervisor to increase their effectiveness?	
7	Understanding that the standard for most advising positions is to work on campus (not remotely), do you feel like you have the flexibility to work outside of the office as needed? And is that important to you as you think about your decision to continue working in an advising role?	Conceptual Framework Connection: **Love and Belonging**
8	Have there been moments when you've considered leaving your role as an academic advisor? If so, what factors contributed to those feelings, and what ultimately kept you in your position?	Prioritize and compare institutional factors
9	When you think about the six institutional factors that we've discussed specifically today (benefits, commitment to mission, opportunities for advancement, salary, supervisor effectiveness, and work modality), are there one or two factors that rise to the top in your consideration to continue in your role? Or are there other institutional factors not mentioned that are important to you?	Prioritize and compare institutional factors
10	Can you describe any changes or improvements you would like to see in the academic advising system or your role within it that would contribute to your decision to remain in your advisor role?	Prioritize and compare institutional factors
11	Are there any questions that I can answer before we end the session?	Not Applicable

Ida served as the main facilitator by asking questions and guiding conversation; Sara operated the audio recording device, observed the tones and energy of participants, and took relevant notes on her laptop. All focus groups were scheduled for one hour, and all of them were completed within ten minutes of the allotted hour. Question #10 was omitted for some focus groups when time was limited.

Timeline

The data collection and analysis process began in early March 2024 and ended by mid-June 2024, for a total of 14 weeks:

- Weeks 1-2:
    - Received IRB approval from Vanderbilt University and shared confirmation letter with Baylor
    - Received approval from Baylor Human Resources to conduct study
    - Developed survey questions and created Qualtrics survey
    - Compiled list of participants and contact information (see Appendix D), with assistance from Dr. Chad Eggleston, Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Operations and Advising
- Week 3-6:
    - Launched Qualtrics survey to participants via e-mail
    - Developed focus group interview groups and created Focus Group Protocol (see Appendix F)
    - Sent reminder e-mail to participants about Qualtrics survey
    - Scheduled focus group interviews and sent Outlook meeting requests to participants
- Week 7-10:
    - Conducted focus group interviews on Baylor's campus
    - Began data management and first stage of analysis
- Week 11-14:
    - Conducted quantitative analysis on Qualtrics survey data

○ Conducted qualitative analysis on focus group interview data

Part VI: Data Analysis

Data Management

Due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions posed in the survey and focus group and the extensive data included within more than six hours of audio recordings, we developed a comprehensive plan for securing and handling the data we collected.

Qualtrics Survey

To prevent access to data by unauthorized users, we ensured that the results of the Qualtrics survey were password protected. Data visualizations were accessible through the Qualtrics software for a quick view of participants' demographic information and survey responses. While participants were asked to disclose their names in the survey, no names or other identifiable information were included in the data analysis process.

By the March 28, 2024 deadline, 45 participants (69.2%) had submitted the survey. Out of the 45 advisors who submitted the survey, 41 individuals indicated that they were willing to participate in a focus group interview; one individual responded that she would be on maternity leave during the time frame in which the focus groups were offered and would reluctantly not be able to participate; and three individuals indicated they would prefer not to participate in a focus group.

Focus Groups

In accordance with the established Focus Group Protocol (see Appendix F), all audio from focus groups was captured using a voice recording software on an iPad. A separate audio file was created for each of the six focus groups. All files were stored securely under password protection and subsequently uploaded to Trint, a web-based transcription and editing platform.

The original transcriptions were then exported to Microsoft Word for editing to ensure accuracy before the coding process. We each edited three of the transcriptions and then reviewed the work performed by the other so that each transcript was reviewed by two people. Edits included correcting proper nouns or Baylor-specific references and acronyms that were incorrectly transcribed by the software; re-labeling speakers as Researcher 1, Researcher 2, Advisor 1, Advisor 2, etc.; inserting appropriate punctuation marks; and correcting other minor errors to ensure alignment of the transcriptions with the corresponding audio recordings.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved a mixed methods approach: quantitative methods for the survey data and qualitative methods for the focus group data.

Quantitative Analysis

Demographic and job-related data were analyzed for the 45 advisors who submitted the Qualtrics survey. The frequency and corresponding percentages for each data point was recorded in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics: Frequency and Percentage

Race/Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Black or African American	Hispanic	Multiracial	White/ Caucasian	Self-response
	1 (2.22%)	1 (2.22%)	3 (6.67%)	2 (4.44%)	38 (84.44%)	0

Gender	Male		Female		Self-response	
	13 (28.89%)		32 (71.11%)		0	

Advising Experience	Less than 1 year	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-10 years	10+ years
	8 (17.78%)	12 (26.67%)	4 (8.89%)	7 (15.56%)	14 (31.11%)

Salary	Less than $40,000	$40,000- $49,999	$50,000- $59,999	$60,000- $69,999	$70,000- $79,999	$80,000 or more

	2 (4.44%)	2 (4.44%)	25 (55.56%)	5 (11.11%)	6 (13.33%)	5 (11.11%)

Spring 2024 Student Caseload	No caseload	Less than 50 students	50-149 students	150-249 students	250-349 students	More than 350 students
	3 (6.67%)	1 (2.22%)	11 (24.44%)	21 (46.67%)	9 (20.00%)	0

Supervisory Responsibilities	No	Yes
	28 (62.22%)	17 (37.78%)

Advising Unit	College of Arts & Sciences	School of Business	Honors College	College of Health & Human Sciences	Major Exploration & Success	School of Education	School of Nursing	School of Social Work
	10 (22.22%)	10 (22.22%)	8 (17.78%)	8 (17.78%)	4 (8.89%)	2 (4.44%)	2 (4.44%)	1 (2.22%)

The primary purpose of gathering this data was to provide us with context for the work environment that academic advisors operate within at Baylor. This background information allowed us to better understand the profiles and experiences of participants as we interacted with them in the focus group setting. Based on this data, we understood that our population was primarily White/Caucasian and female. The majority of participants earned a salary in the $50,000-$59,999 range, and almost all of the advisors in our study carried a student caseload, meaning they had students assigned to them for required academic advising. While 31.11% of our participants had more than 10 years of advising experience, nearly half of the advisors (44.44%) had less than three years of experience. While there was the most participation from advisors in the College of Arts & Sciences, the Hankamer School of Business, the Honors College, and the Robbins College of Health & Human Sciences, we found that representation from advising units was fairly proportional to the size of each unit's student population.

In addition to demographic and job-related data, we analyzed the rankings each participant submitted to indicate the extent to which the six institutional factors have influenced

their decision to continue in their advising role. Table 4 illustrates the percentage of participants that ranked each factor in their two most important factors.

Table 4: Percentage of Participants Ranking Each Institutional Factors in Top 2 Most Important

Institutional Factor	Percentage of Participants that Ranked in Top 2
Benefits	66%
Salary	49%
Commitment to Mission	33%
Supervisor Effectiveness	24%
Work Modality	16%
Opportunities for Advancement	11%

Qualitative Analysis

Deductive qualitative analysis was the primary approach used to study the focus group data. By establishing the six institutional factors in advance, we were able to maintain focus on our research question while implementing content analysis methods to categorize the data according to six predetermined codes that coincided with each factor. The frequency with which these codes appeared in our data is noted in Table 5.

Table 5: Frequency of Codes

Institutional Factor	Number of codes
Work Modality	81
Benefits	89
Supervisor Effectiveness	126
Opportunities for Advancement	126
Salary	132
Commitment to Mission	148

Commitment to Mission, including phrases related to office culture and institutional culture, were mentioned the greatest number of times with 148 codes recorded. Salary, Opportunities for Advancement, and Supervisor Effective followed closely behind with 132, 126, and 126 codes recorded, respectively. Benefits and Work Modality were coded the least frequently at 89 and 81 recordings, respectively.

The coding results were not exclusively relied on to rank the importance of each institutional factor because a single person could reference some factors multiple times. Words, phrases, and themes were assigned to their respective factors without differentiating between advisors. We intentionally chose not to exclude any code based on the speaker or its frequency, recognizing the significance of the effort advisors made in emphasizing their statements.

Inductive analysis techniques were also used during the coding process by noting themes that surfaced that appeared to be unrelated to the six institutional factors. Identifying these themes prompted us to revisit our literature review and conceptual framework to better understand potential connections between these themes and our research question. The two seemingly unrelated codes that emerged were culture and work/life balance. However, after further analysis, we determined that these themes were closely related to one or more of the six institutional factors and did not warrant recognition as a separate category.

Culture was often referenced in the context of Supervisor Effectiveness and the leader's contributions toward setting or maintaining a particular culture in the office. Culture was also brought up frequently in discussing Commitment to Mission, especially the role that the university's faith-centered mission played in reinforcing a unique culture. Work/life balance was also brought up in relation to Supervisor Effectiveness, understanding that the office leaders played a critical role maintaining (or disrupting) this balance. However, this theme was most

often discussed when referencing Work Modality to emphasize that the level of flexibility granted to work remotely greatly influenced an advisor's perception of work/life balance.

By incorporating both deductive and inductive strategies, we were able to maintain alignment with the six institutional factors that were established in conjunction with our research question while also allowing new themes to emerge as we made sense of the data.

Data Reliability and Validity

Some participants noted changes between how they ranked institutional factors on the initial Qualtrics survey and how they prioritized factors in the focus group discussion. As participants processed the importance of each factor and reflected further on their opinions in a group setting, several indicated that they would have ranked the factors differently if presented with the survey again. While this was not a formal measure of test-retest reliability, we felt confident that results of the Qualtrics survey may have differed slightly if participants were asked to rank institutional factors for a second time after the focus group discussion. This phenomenon speaks to the validity of both the Qualtrics survey data and focus group data and reinforces our decision to perform a mixed-methods study so that both forms of data could be utilized in the formation of project findings and recommendations.

Internal validity was considered through the ways in which participants were invited to participate in the study. For example, advisors in the School of Engineering & Computer Science (ECS) were excluded from the study due to Ida Jamshidi's close connection in overseeing the ECS Undergraduate Programs Office. We felt that responses from ECS academic advisors were likely to be influenced with the knowledge that their supervisor (or supervisor's supervisor) would be reading and listening to their statements, so we avoided the potential bias their involvement would bring. Related to this concern, we were intentional about separating

supervisors from the direct reports within each focus group, even hosting different sessions for mid-level leaders and high-level leaders to ensure that advisors could speak as openly as possible about topics like supervisor effectiveness, opportunities for advancement, and general office culture within their unit.

Regarding external validity, we recognized that the unique profile of Baylor as a Christian research institution may prevent the findings of this study from being applied to academic advisor populations at public institutions or private, non-faith-based institutions. Due to the powerful role that commitment to mission played throughout the study and in the project findings, there may be opportunities to generalize results in settings like faith-based colleges and universities, as well as faith-based organizations outside of higher education.

Part VII: Findings and Recommendations

Project Question Findings

For the purposes of this study, we determined the Qualtrics survey results provided sufficient quantifiable data for us to rank these factors in the order participants found most important to least important in impacting their decision to continue in their roles. The institutional factors and their associated findings are listed within Table 6 based on that order.

Table 6: Institutional Factors and Related Findings

Institutional Factor	Findings	
Benefits	1a: Benefits received the highest praise from advisors with children and advisors who had a partner with an additional income.	1b: While benefits were seen as a way to offset a lower salary, advisors were still unaware of all benefits available to them.
Salary	2a: Role and value of advisors has evolved, but advisors feel pay is not aligned.	2b: Advisors often rely on second income (spouse, second job, etc.).
Commitment to Mission	3a: The mission was seen as facilitating meaningful work and providing opportunities to develop	3b: The majority of advisors viewed the integration of faith and work as a motivator, but tension existed

	students holistically.	between mission and salary.
Supervisor Effectiveness	4a: Supervisors that were inclusive, communicated well, and were genuinely interested in developing their staff were considered effective.	4b: Some advisors expressed a disconnect between immediate supervisor and upper-level administration.
Work Modality	5a: Flexibility allowed advisors to feel seen as humans and valued as trusted employees.	5b: Inconsistency exists among units with regards to flexibility.
Opportunities for Advancement	6a: Two different groups emerged: those who were content in their roles and those who desired advancement opportunities.	6b: Career Ladder established by Human Resources was seen more as a hindrance than a help in facilitating advancement.

Benefits

Benefits ranked highest on the Qualtrics survey, with 66% of advisors listing it as one of their top two institutional factors that impacted their retention at Baylor. In the focus groups, however, Benefits was ranked in the bottom half of the factors, below Commitment to Mission, Salary, and Supervisor Effectiveness. When comparing overall benefits at Baylor, such as the tuition remission program and employer retirement contribution, as well as "perks" like access to sporting events and free parking, advisors felt they had a greater advantage than many of their peers at other higher education institutions, whether or not they benefited directly from the benefits offered.

Two key findings were identified during the focus groups. First, Benefits received the most positive feedback from advisors with families, specifically those who could take advantage of the tuition remission program (Finding 1a). Many of the advisors who saw benefits as a top factor contributing to retention were also not the primary or singular source of income in their household. Still, the tuition remission program was one of the most important benefits that advisors felt contributed to their high ranking of Benefits.

The second key finding emerged as some advisors discussed their lack of awareness regarding the benefits available to them and how to utilize them (Finding 1b). Although Benefits as a factor was sometimes viewed as a way to compensate for lower salaries, advisors did not seem to have knowledge of all the benefits. Despite this gap in understanding, there was still a sense of gratitude, as Baylor's benefits were considered significantly better compared to those at other workplaces.

Salary

Salary was ranked second on the Qualtrics survey, as 49% of advisors listed it as one of their top two factors for retention. When reviewing the qualitative data from our focus groups, Salary overlapped with other factors such as Commitment to Mission, Opportunities for Advancement, and Supervisor Effectiveness. Many advisors cited Salary as a factor when discussing the need for flexibility to provide a better work/life balance. While this overlap existed, two main findings rose to the surface.

The first finding for Salary was related to the evolving role and responsibilities of advisors at Baylor. As advising responsibilities have changed, advisors have adapted and feel they hold more value for the university than what is reflected in their pay (Finding 2a). It's important to note that additional roles and responsibilities were seen as positive for another factor, Opportunities for Advancement. In other words, individuals appreciated the work as it exposed them to unique opportunities to get involved in areas outside of their regular duties, but they expected their pay to increase to align with the complexity of these new responsibilities. Advisors also described themselves entering this role as a starting point in their career, rather than the expectation that they were closer to retirement. They believed that Baylor should invest in the retention of advisors by ensuring fair pay. They referenced the mission of Baylor and the

university's commitment to the greater good as what should drive leadership to take care of their own people.

Our second finding for Salary was regarding the large dependence on a second income. Although the salary was recently adjusted and many advisors received a substantial increase, the shared sentiment was that this salary range was long overdue (Finding 2b). Taking into consideration the cost of living and inflation, many advisors mentioned they still relied on their spouse's income or additional income they earned from a second or third job to make ends meet. Even individuals who did not have any dependents commented that they were lucky to be in a single-income household because their income could not support others beyond themselves. Compensation was tied closely to the perception of how Baylor values the role of advisors and whether they truly understand their impact.

Commitment to Mission

As a faith-based university, Baylor's mission is "to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community" (Mission Statement, n.d.). Through the focus groups, the idea of community and culture came up regularly when referring to Commitment to Mission. In the Qualtrics survey, we found that 33% of advisors listed Commitment to Mission in their top two factors contributing to retention, ranking it third behind Benefits and Salary. However, in the focus groups, Commitment to Mission was referenced frequently even when discussing the other institutional factors and was often coded in combination with at least one other factor.

Many advisors felt strongly that Commitment to Mission was synonymous with commitment to the student and commitment to the greater good through meaningful work. This Commitment to Mission brought on a sense of safety for advisors that they could be open and

integrate their faith while doing their work of advising. This brought us to our first finding for Commitment to Mission, which stemmed from the commitment to facilitate meaningful work within the advising role by allowing staff to express and incorporate their faith (Finding 3a). The opportunity to develop students holistically was noted as a critical part of their experience and a reason advisors wanted to continue working at Baylor.

While most of the feedback related to Commitment to Mission was positive, our second finding came from the sentiment that some advisors felt that their loyalty to the mission was sometimes misused by the university as justification for offering lower salary (Finding 3b). Several had the perception that administrators who do not know and understand the day-to-day work of advisors expect that their commitment and service to students will overshadow their desire for higher pay.

Supervisor Effectiveness

Based on the Qualtrics survey, 24% of advisors ranked Supervisor Effectiveness in their top two factors contributing to their retention. This fell fourth in the rankings on the survey but dominated conversation significantly during the focus groups. Advisors mentioned the importance of physical proximity to their supervisor occasionally but mainly when describing the culture that the supervisor creates for their unit. Advisors from a couple of units noted that there was sometimes confusion among the staff regarding the actual leader of the office. In some cases, the highest-ranking leader (for example, Senior Director) was not as connected with the staff, and the Director and/or Associate Director were viewed as the leaders who set the culture and supported lower-level advisors. Supervisor Effectiveness was also merged often with Opportunities for Advancement, as many advisors said they relied on their supervisor to advocate for their professional growth

Our first major finding for Supervisor Effectiveness came from the way an effective supervisor was described. Advisors described their supervisor as "inclusive", which they defined as including everyone's voice and making individuals feel like colleagues, rather than creating a hierarchical separation between administration and staff (Finding 4a). Some discussion centered around the level of investment from their supervisor in developing the staff. While there was some mention of the need for improving communication in certain units, the majority of staff used "trust" as a descriptor of an effective supervisor, explaining that they felt motivated to stay in their roles when they knew their supervisor trusted them to do their jobs. They also used the word "trust" in the opposite direction; for example; they appreciated when they could trust their supervisor to advocate for them and provide a level of "protection" in their roles.

The "protection" several advisors felt brought us to our second finding. While there seemed to be a generally positive attitude toward the immediate supervisor's effectiveness, there was also a disconnect between upper administration and entry-level advising staff (Finding 4b). This was not consistent in all units, but many expressed concern that their supervisor's supervisor was not aware of what they did in their advising roles and that the flow of communication, or lack thereof, contributed to a lack of transparency. In other words, the supervisor's desire to "protect" advisors from higher-level bureaucratic or political issues prevented advisors from understanding the full context and justification for some of their responsibilities, leading to frustration.

Work Modality

Work Modality ranked second to last on the Qualtrics survey, with only 16% of advisors ranking this as their top two factors impacting retention. During the focus groups, Work

Modality overlapped with several other factors and was used synonymously by advisors with words and phrases like "flexibility" and "work/life balance".

Our first finding related to the Work Modality factor was that advisors felt trusted to manage their time appropriately, which in turn made them more effective in their role (Finding 5a). Flexibility felt important as it related to work modality, and many referenced personal reasons for needing this flexibility to work from home if and when it was necessary. This contributed to advisor retention, but it was always in combination with other factors. For example, one advisor mentioned work modality as important, especially when considering their lower salary. Supervisors also need to understand that flexibility is needed with work modality. When supervisors demonstrated flexibility, it gave advisors the perception of being valued and trusted as employees and humans.

According to some advisors, the challenge with this flexibility is having consistency across all units. This led to our second finding. As beneficial as it was for some advisors to have flexibility in their Work Modality, some felt like they were unable to access this flexibility in an equitable way (Finding 5b). They commented that the decision to determine the type of Work Modality that is best for each unit should be left to the leader of that unit, but often decisions come from upper-level administrators, who may not fully understand an advisor's roles and responsibilities. Empowering supervisors to make these types of decisions would also ensure that advisors could meet their needs and the needs of their students.

Opportunities for Advancement

Opportunities for Advancement ranked lowest for advisors on the survey. While a healthy amount of discussion took place in the focus groups, much of the discussion was centered around the communication about the career ladder that Baylor created in 2014 and modified in 2024 as

the Advising Qualifications and Salary Guidelines. Not all advisors were aware of the opportunities that were afforded to them as part of the career ladder, and many felt there had not been enough time devoted to explaining these options. Additionally, Opportunities for Advancement was often referred to as "opportunities for growth" and the timing was largely dependent on which staff were leaving the unit, either through retirement or their own advancement, in order for others to advance to higher-level roles.

Our first finding for this factor came after we identified two different groups of advisors that had distinct feelings about their Opportunities for Advancement (Finding 6a). One group of advisors were satisfied in remaining in their current roles with no desire to advance, either because they were already toward the end of their professional careers or because they were primarily working to utilize the tuition remission benefit to support their college-age or near-college-age children. These advisors were also typically not the primary income earner in their household. The second group of advisors were mainly those individuals who saw their role in advising as a career. These advisors were eager to climb the ladder and increase their responsibilities and salary, but not all of them felt there was a clear path for them to do so.

This brought us to our second finding related to Advancement, which was that the Advising Qualifications and Salary Guidelines established by Human Resources was seen as more of a hindrance than a help in facilitating advancement (Finding 6b). The required education and experience associated with each position sometimes did not align with the needs of the advising offices and created limitations in promoting advisors who were seen as deserving of more responsibility. Advisors mentioned the guidelines often served as a ceiling that prevented growth rather than one that facilitates advancement. They attributed this limited access to advancement of staff to the lack of autonomy unit leadership had in making the most appropriate

promotion decisions for their office. Lastly, some advisors mentioned their willingness to take on additional roles, such as adjunct teaching, in order to supplement their work and pay, but they were often met with resistance and told they could not pursue additional work that would distract from their primary advising job.

Additional Findings

While our research question focused on very specific institutional factors, there were two additional findings that emerged, and it is important to address them. Our first additional finding centered on the role that social identity plays in the retention of advisors at Baylor. Of the 45 advisors who participated in our study, 32 advisors (71%) are women. While we had not intended to study the role of social identity, we found that many advisors saw it as an underlying reason for feeling less valued and getting paid less. The role of advising aligns with the role of caregiver, which is assumed to be a role held by women. There was a reference in a focus group discussion to advising as a "pink collar job" to indicate that women dominated this profession.

Culture and sense of community overlapped enough institutional factors to serve as an additional finding. Advisors spoke specifically about the uplifting environment that existed among their colleagues at Baylor and that even extended up to university's president. This was a big motivating factor for recruitment and retention of advisors. When some advisors shared that they had considered leaving for other jobs outside of Baylor that paid more, the Culture at Baylor was seen as a foundational component for staying. Supervisors were acknowledged for their ability to create a culture in their unit that supported the mission of Baylor, and these leaders were appreciated when they invested in their team's growth. The right work/life balance was important for many, as they saw that as a way to make up for less-than-desired pay. The right Culture was needed in order to establish a good work/life balance that was beneficial for each

advising unit. At the same time, this Culture of "niceness" posed challenges by sometimes making it difficult to have honest conversations, to make tough decisions, and to hold everyone accountable to the same standards.

Recommendations

Our analysis revealed how the findings for each of the six institutional factors impacted advisor retention. Three key recommendations emerged from this analysis, deriving from the findings and aligning with our Merging Needs Framework. Table 7 shows how each recommendation corresponds to several findings and also corresponds to the Merging Needs Framework.

Table 7: Recommendations, Findings, and Framework Alignment

RECOMMENDATIONS	CORRESPONDING FINDINGS	FRAMEWORK CONNECTION
1: Prioritize Communication Enhance clarity, context, and communication between advisors and administrators across all levels of the organizational hierarchy.	**1b**: Lack of awareness of benefits available. **4a**: Supervisors who are inclusive, communicate well, develop staff. **4b**: Disconnect between supervisor and upper administration **5b**: Inconsistency among units. **6b**: Career Ladder was seen as hindrance.	*Love and Belonging* *Self-Actualization*
2: Foster Inclusivity Supervisors can foster inclusivity by considering their staff's input regarding work practices that meet their individual needs.	**1a**: Benefits valuable to advisors with children. **2a**: Advisor role no longer aligned to pay. **3b**: Tension between mission and salary. **4a**: Supervisors who are inclusive, communicate well, develop staff. **5a**: Flexibility made advisors to feel valued/trusted **5b**: Inconsistency among units.	*Love and Belonging* *Self-Esteem* *Self-Actualization*
3. Evaluate Responsibilities Conduct an analysis of advisor responsibilities across all units and develop a model to compensate and incentivize advisors who are asked to perform duties beyond their job descriptions.	**2a**: Advisor role no longer aligned to pay. **2b**: Advisors rely on second income. **3b**: Tension between mission and salary. **4a**: Supervisors who are inclusive, communicate well, develop staff. **4b**: Disconnect between supervisor and upper administration **6a**: Two groups emerged.	*Safety Needs* *Basic Needs* *Self-Esteem*

Prioritize Communication and Transparency

Our first recommendation is to enhance clarity, context, and communication between advisors and administrators across all levels of the organizational hierarchy. This involves creating a culture of transparency and guiding supervisors on effectively sharing important information with their staff. Advisors sought more context to understand decisions made by administrators outside their unit and want to ensure communication is reciprocal, so higher-level administrators are aware of their work and support their needs. Improved communication about the Advising Qualification and Salary Guidelines and tuition remission benefits is also essential, as many advisors lacked awareness of updates and changes. Advisors viewed increased communication and opportunities to provide feedback from supervisors as signs of trust and respect.

This recommendation addresses several key findings: the need for better awareness of benefits to offset lower salaries (Finding 1b), the need for supervisors to be more connected and aware of their staff in order to support their development (Findings 4a and 4b), inconsistencies in flexibility among units (Finding 5b), and understanding the implications of the Career Ladder (Finding 6b). Implementing this recommendation also aligns with the Love and Belonging and Self-Actualization components of our Merging Needs Framework, ultimately contributing to increased retention at Baylor.

Foster Inclusivity

Our second recommendation is for supervisors to promote inclusivity by considering staff input on work practices. When supervisors allowed advisors to share ideas and feedback, advisors indicated they felt that leaders were contributing toward a positive work environment. For instance, recognizing that certain benefits are especially valuable to advisors with children

(Finding 1a), supervisors might be more inclined to offer the necessary flexibility to accommodate these needs.

Advisors believed that supervisors played a crucial role in creating a supportive work environment and fostering a culture where all team members feel heard. When supervisors sought their input in the midst of organizational changes, they felt valued. Inclusive leadership will require a commitment from the organization and the supervisors but will also address the following findings: the role and value of advisors has evolved, but pay is not aligned (Finding 2a); the majority of advisors viewed the integration of faith and work as a motivator, but tension existed between mission and salary (Finding 3b); supervisors that were inclusive, communicated well, and were genuinely interested in developing their staff were considered effective (Finding 4a); and flexibility allowed advisors to feel seen as humans and valued as trusted employees (Finding 5a).

The recommendation to provide advisors with opportunities to contribute to the team fulfills their Love and Belonging Needs of connection and positive relationships; their Self-Esteem Needs to feel respected and recognized in the workplace; and their Self-Actualization Needs to provide a sense of purpose and commitment to their roles at Baylor.

Evaluate Advisor Responsibilities

Advisors felt that shifting responsibilities of their role had resulted in inconsistent advancement practices, limiting their growth and development. Our final recommendation is to conduct an analysis of advisor responsibilities and workloads across all units and develop a model to compensate and incentivize advisors who are asked to perform duties beyond their job descriptions. This might also involve teaching, as several advisors expressed their willingness to participate but faced obstacles that made it difficult to get approval. Some advisors felt

encouraged to take on projects that were outside of their scope of work, both because they saw a

need for that project to be fulfilled and because they knew this could benefit them in the future.

However, their pay was often not adjusted to align with the added workload.

By reviewing advisor responsibilities and determining a proper pay structure that aligns

with each advisor's role (Finding 2a), this may reduce the number of advisors who need a second

or third job (Finding 2b). Advisors shared that a closer relationship with their supervisors, who

support, develop and advocate for them (Findings 4a and 4b) would enhance their retention. This

could improve actual or perceived pay and align with Baylor's mission of being good stewards of

people by paying them what they are worth (Finding 3b).

Evaluating advisor responsibilities can assist supervisors in identifying those who are

seeking advancement opportunities and those who are satisfied with their existing duties

(Finding 6a). Recognizing which staff are seeking growth opportunities also allows supervisors

to be empowered to make decisions about what is best for their team. With this responsibility,

supervisors can make decisions to ensure their advisors have their Basic Needs and Safety Needs

met. Advisors will also fulfill their Self-Esteem Needs as they will be seen for their individual

and unique strengths, which can further add to the retention of advisors at Baylor.

Limitations and Future Study

One of the limitations of this study was that we did not examine social identity factors

such as race, gender, and age. However, some of these factors emerged during our study. Gender

was referenced several times in connection with how advisors answered questions, underlining

the idea that this may have been an additional source of investigation that was left out of our

study. Our survey also asked about years of advising experience at Baylor but not age, which

came up several times throughout the focus groups. Future studies may include evaluating these social identity factors as a priority when examining retention.

Survey results and focus group data were analyzed without considering the advisor's unit. While our participation rate was high, there was not participation from all advising units. When there were inconsistencies in the feedback received, it was often due to the differences in each unit's way of operating. Future studies should disaggregate data and direct recommendations toward individual units, as not all recommendations will be relevant to all units, and some units may be limited by their capacity to make changes.

During the focus groups, we found that several advisors admitted to changing their initial answer(s) on the survey. Answering one way on the survey and then changing their answer in the focus groups may be attributed to the social influence fact or impacted by a group setting. While most advisors expressed gratitude for conducting this research, we recognized that by conducting a mixed methods study, challenges such as conflicting and sometimes contrasting results would emerge. Our focus remained in identifying feedback that combined our qualitative and quantitative results in order to give advisors a voice and to provide Baylor with valuable recommendations, despite these limitations. Future studies would include post surveys in order to compare responses and increase precision of advisor feedback.

Part VIII: Conclusion

This study explored the extent to which institutional factors impact the retention of academic advisors within Baylor University's undergraduate schools and colleges. After analyzing data collected from a survey and focus group interviews, there was not one factor that stood out as being solely responsible for influencing retention. Instead, the findings indicated

that all six institutional factors impacted advisor retention and were often intermingled within an advisor's decision to continue in their role.

Consistent with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, physiological and safety needs, such as benefits and pay, must be met to facilitate esteem and self-actualization. However, the visual of a hierarchy is inconsistent with our findings; instead, we found that institutional factors overlap and merge with one another. For example, Opportunities for Advancement, Commitment to Mission, and Salary were factors that merged together as advising directors emphasized their desire to retain staff through promotions and increased pay when they upheld Baylor's mission in service of students. It is through the Merging Needs Framework that we begin to understand the interconnected and overlapping nature of these institutional factors as impacting retention of advisors at Baylor.

Our three recommendations are based in relevant literature and seek to address the 12 total findings established through our data analysis process. With the support of university leadership, supervisors are uniquely positioned to facilitate the retention of advisors by enhancing communication and transparency (Panaccio et al, 2023), creating a positive and inclusive work environment (Galinsky et al., 1996; Yusliza et al., 2021; Naz et al., 2020), and advocating for advisors to receive professional advancements that align with their strengths and workloads (Croteau and Wolk, 2010).

These findings highlight the need for Baylor University to continue fostering a strong sense of mission and community while addressing practical concerns related to communication, inclusivity, and professional growth. By focusing on these areas, the university can improve advisor retention, ultimately contributing to the overall success and stability of academic advising units.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Advising Qualifications and Salary Guidelines

Current Advising Career Ladder
(2014)

Position	Minimum Qualifications	Preferred Qualifications
Academic Advisor	Bachelor's degree <1 year of experience	Master's degree 2 years of experience
Senior Academic Advisor	Bachelor's degree 2 years of experience	Master's degree 4 years of experience
Advising Coordinator	Master's degree 3 years of experience	Master's degree 6 years of experience
Manager, Academic Advising	Master's degree 6 years of experience	Master's degree 8 years of experience
Assistant Director, Academic Advising	Master's degree 6 years of experience	Master's degree 8 years of experience
Associate Director, Academic Advising	Master's degree 6 years of experience	Master's degree 8 years of experience

Advising Academic Qualifications
(2024)

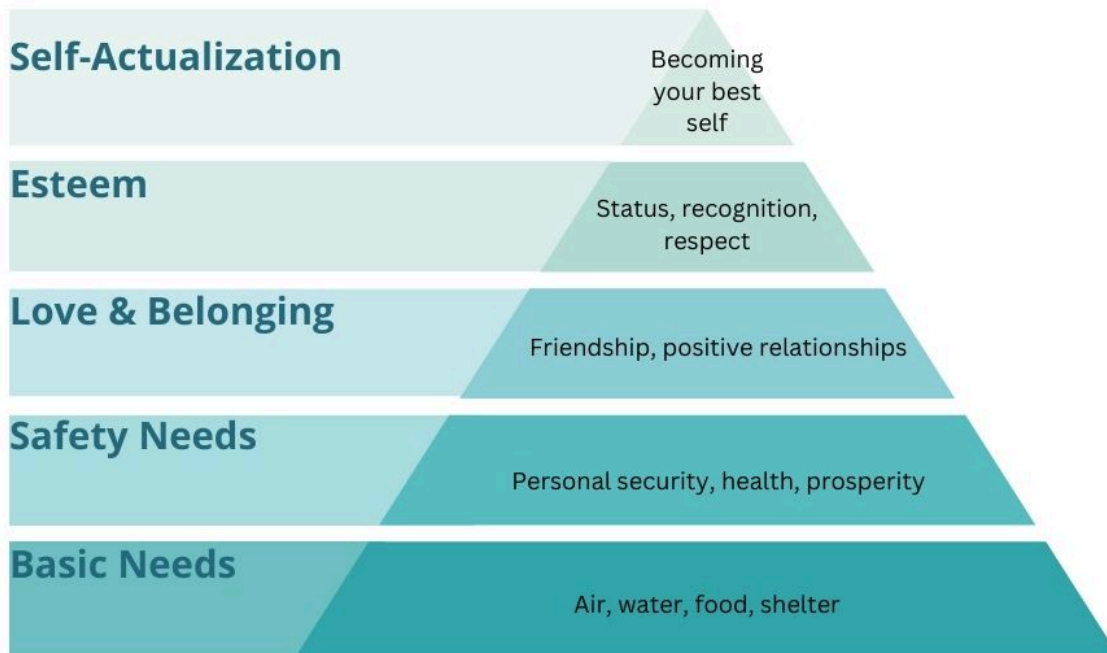| Position	Minimum Qualifications	Preferred Qualifications
Academic Advisor	Bachelor's degree <1 year of experience	Master's degree 2 years of experience
Senior Academic Advisor	Bachelor's degree 2 years of experience	Master's degree 4 years of experience
Program Manager, Academic Advising	Master's degree 3 years of experience	Master's degree 6 years of experience
Assistant Director, Academic Advising	Master's degree 6 years of experience	Master's degree 8 years of experience
Associate Director, Academic Advising	Master's degree 6 years of experience	Master's degree 8 years of experience
Director, Academic Advising	Master's degree 8+ years of experience	Master's degree 10+ years of experience

Advising Academic Qualifications and Compensation
(2024)

Position	Minimum Qualifications	Preferred Qualifications	Compensation
Academic Advisor	Bachelor's degree <1 year of experience	Master's degree 2 years of experience	$50,000-$55,000
Senior Academic Advisor	Bachelor's degree 2 years of experience	Master's degree 4 years of experience	$55,000-$60,000
Program Manager, Academic Advising	Master's degree 3 years of experience	Master's degree 6 years of experience	$60,000-$65,000
Assistant Director, Academic Advising	Master's degree 6 years of experience	Master's degree 8 years of experience	$65,000-$70,000
Associate Director, Academic Advising	Master's degree 6 years of experience	Master's degree 8 years of experience	$70,000-$75,000
Director, Academic Advising	Master's degree 8+ years of experience	Master's degree 10+ years of experience	$75,000-$80,000

Appendix B: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- **Self-Actualization** — Becoming your best self
- **Esteem** — Status, recognition, respect
- **Love & Belonging** — Friendship, positive relationships
- **Safety Needs** — Personal security, health, prosperity
- **Basic Needs** — Air, water, food, shelter

Appendix C: Merging Needs Framework

Merging Needs Framework

Self-Actualization:
Retention and engagement, commitment to mission

Basic Needs:
Pay/Perception of Pay, Benefits, Investment into staff

Safety Needs:
Benefits, Safe work environment, Faith liberty, Authentic self

Self Esteem:
Opportunities for advancement, Value of work contributions

Love and Belonging:
Positive work relationships and environment, Supervisor effectiveness, Mission to serve the greater good

Appendix D: Participant Contact List

Last Name	First Name	E-mail Address	HR Category	Academic Unit
Anzaldua	Savanah	Savanah_Anzaldua@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Major Exploration and Success Advising
Asher	Lisa	Lisa_Asher@baylor.edu	Assistant Director	College of Arts and Sciences
Bailey	Pam	Pam_Bailey@baylor.edu	Associate Director	Hankamer School of Business
Beck	Al	Albert_Beck@baylor.edu	Assistant Director	Honors College
Beck	Karen	Karen_Beck1@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Bentley	Dawn	Dawn_Bentley@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Louise Herrington School of Nursing
Binkley	Sam	Sam_Binkley@baylor.edu	Associate Director	Hankamer School of Business
Black	Kristen	Kristen_Black@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Hankamer School of Business
Bond	Ronda	Ronda_Bond@baylor.edu	Assistant Director	Honors College
Broaddus	Patrick	Patrick_Broaddus@baylor.edu	Assistant Director	College of Arts and Sciences
Bushnell	Jason	Jason_Bushnell@baylor.edu	Director	College of Arts and Sciences
Chudej	Shelly	Shelly_Chudej@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Hankamer School of Business
Clepper	Ricci	Ricci_Clepper@baylor.edu	Assistant Director	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Daugherty	Alec	Alec_Daugherty@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	Hankamer School of Business
DeYong	Grant	Grant_DeYong@baylor.edu	Director	Hankamer School of Business
DiMauro	Coco	Coco_DiMauro@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	Honors College
Dull	Charmaine	Charmaine_Dull@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Honors College
Durnell	Austin	Austin_Durnell@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Hankamer School of Business
Estepp	Deanna	Deanna_Estepp@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Major Exploration and Success Advising
Garcia	Catherine	Catherine_Garcia@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Garcia	Rachel	Rachel_Garcia@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Diana R. Garland School of Social Work
Gibson	Brett	Brett_Gibson@baylor.edu	Associate Director	College of Arts and Sciences
Griffin	Anna	Anna_Griffin@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Hammond	Kimberly	Kimberly_Hammond@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Hatfield	Kaitlyn	Kaitlyn_Hatfield@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Louise Herrington School of Nursing

Hejduk	Julia	Julia_Hejduk@baylor.edu	Assistant/Associate Dean	Honors College
Hitt	Jessi	Jessi_Hitt@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Holland	Amanda	Amanda_Holland@baylor.edu	Director	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Holloman	Becky	Becky_Holloman@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Howell	Krista	Krista_Howell@baylor.edu	Assistant/Associate Dean	Hankamer School of Business
Hughes	Cody	Cody_Hughes@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Jacobus	Erin	Erin_Jacobus@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Jahrmarkt	Holly	Holly_Jahrmarkt@baylor.edu	Assistant Director	Hankamer School of Business
Jaynes	Katelyn	Katelyn_Jaynes@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	Honors College
Kamperman	Carrolle	Carrolle_Kamperman@baylor.edu	Assistant/Associate Dean	College of Arts and Sciences
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Klotz	Lynley	Lynley_A_Klotz@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Hankamer School of Business
Kramer	Deanne	Deanne_Kramer@baylor.edu	Senior Director	College of Arts and Sciences
Lalani	Laura	Laura_Lalani@baylor.edu	Associate Director	Hankamer School of Business
Lindley	Marie	Marie_Lindley@baylor.edu	Assistant/Associate Dean	Louise Herrington School of Nursing
Lopez	Amy	Amy_Lopez1@baylor.edu	Assistant Director	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Lowe	Lance	Lance_Lowe@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Marcum	Sarah	Sarah_Marcum@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Honors College
Marley	Carrie	Carrie_Marley@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
McAninch	Nicole	Nicole_McAninch@baylor.edu	Assistant/Associate Dean	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
McGregor	Adair	Adair_McGregor@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
McNutt	Laura	Laura_McNutt@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Moore	Mary	Mary_Z_Moore@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	Honors College
Mosher	Emily	Emily_Mosher@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Nanez	Oscar	Oscar_Nanez@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Hankamer School of Business
Owen	Amy	Amy_Owen@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	School of Education

Pogue	Scharla	Scharla_Pogue@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Hankamer School of Business
Porter	Joel	Joel_Porter@baylor.edu	Assistant/Associate Dean	School of Education
Prothro	Ashleigh	Ashleigh_Prothro@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Pyron	Kyle	Kyle_Pyron@baylor.edu	Assistant Director	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Rhodes	Amy	Amy_Rhodes@baylor.edu	Associate Director	Hankamer School of Business
Rice	Mary	Mary_Rice2@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Major Exploration and Success Advising
Roberson	Emily	Emily_S_Roberson@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Scott	Michele	Michele_Scott@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Scott	Laura	Laura_Scott@baylor.edu	Manager	Major Exploration and Success Advising
Shearn	Chad	Chad_Shearn@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	Hankamer School of Business
Shipp	Bob	Robert_Shipp@baylor.edu	Director	Major Exploration and Success Advising
Smyers	Ronald	Ronald_Smyers@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Terry Fendt	Natalie	Natalie_Terry@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	Major Exploration and Success Advising
Venegas	Eddie	Eddie_Venegas@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Major Exploration and Success Advising
Weatherman	Pam	Pam_Weatherman@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	Hankamer School of Business
Whitney	Jolinda	Jolinda_Whitney@baylor.edu	Assistant Director	College of Arts and Sciences
Wickliffe	Keith	Keith_Wickliffe@baylor.edu	Director	Louise Herrington School of Nursing
Wilkes	Lara	Lara_Wilkes@baylor.edu	Academic Advisor	Robbins College of Health and Human Sciences
Woolverton	Candace	Candace_Woolverton@baylor.edu	Senior Academic Advisor	College of Arts and Sciences
Zuniga	Melody	Melody_Zuniga@baylor.edu	Assistant/Associate Dean	Diana R. Garland School of Social Work

- Individuals highlighted in blue include advising unit supervisors.

- Individuals highlighted in green include academic unit leaders who oversee advising unit supervisors.

Appendix E: Qualtrics Survey

Baylor Advisor Retention

Q6 This survey is intended to collect data for a quality improvement project to study retention of academic advisors at Baylor University. Based on responses we receive through this survey and upcoming focus groups and interviews, we hope to provide actionable recommendations for Human Resources and the Office of the Provost to enhance the work experience for academic advisors.

While participation is completely optional, we would greatly appreciate you taking the time to share your honest answers with us and to dedicate time toward a focus group and/or interview in April.

Questions or concerns can be directed to Ida Jamshidi (Ida.Jamshidi@vanderbilt.edu) and Sara Lozano (Sara.M.Lozano@vanderbilt.edu).

Q1 First Name

_____

Q2 Last Name

_____

Q7 Academic Unit/Advising Office
- ○ College of Arts & Sciences (1)
- ○ Diana R. Garland School of Social Work (2)
- ○ Hankamer School of Business (3)
- ○ Honors College (4)
- ○ Louise Herrington School of Nursing (5)
- ○ Major Exploration & Success Advising (6)
- ○ Robbins College of Health & Human Sciences (7)
- ○ School of Education (8)

Q4 Which race or ethnicity best describes you?
- ○ American Indian or Alaskan Native (1)
- ○ Asian/Pacific Islander (2)
- ○ Black or African American (3)
- ○ Hispanic (4)
- ○ White / Caucasian (5)
- ○ Multiracial (6)
- ○ I use another term: (7)

  _____
- ○ I prefer not to answer. (8)

Q12 Which gender best describes you?
- ○ Female (1)
- ○ Male (2)
- ○ I use another term: (3)

  _____
- ○ I prefer not to answer. (4)

Q3 How many years have you worked at Baylor University in an advising role?
- ○ Less than 1 year (1)
- ○ 1-3 years (2)
- ○ 3-5 years (3)
- ○ 5-10 years (4)
- ○ 10+ years (5)

Q13 Approximately how much is your annual salary?
- ○ Less than $40,000 (1)
- ○ $40,000 - $49,999 (2)
- ○ $50,000 - $59,999 (3)
- ○ $60,000 - $69,999 (4)
- ○ $70,000 - $79,999 (5)
- ○ $80,000 or more (6)

Q5 Approximately how many students are assigned to you for advising for the Spring 2024 semester?
- ○ I do not have any students assigned to me for Spring 2024. (1)

    ○ Less than 50 students (2)
    ○ 50-149 students (3)
    ○ 150-249 students (4)
    ○ 250-349 students (5)
    ○ 350+ students (6)

Q8 Do you have supervisory responsibilities?
    ○ No (1)
    ○ Yes (2)

Q9 Please indicate your willingness to participate in a focus group and/or private interview.
Note: Advisors will be grouped based on their position titles for focus groups, and no advisors will be placed in a group with their direct supervisor.
    ○ I am willing to participate in a focus group or private interview. (1)
    ○ I am ONLY willing to participate in a focus group. (2)
    ○ I am ONLY willing to participate in a private interview. (3)

Q10 In preparation for your focus group or interview, please take a moment to rank how the factors below impact your decision to continue serving as an advisor at Baylor. (1=most influential factor; 6=least influential factor)

_____ Benefits (tuition remission, time off/holiday schedule, retirement, health insurance, etc.) (1)

_____ Commitment to Baylor's mission (to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community) (2)

_____ Effectiveness of my supervisor (3)

_____ Opportunities for leadership and upward mobility (4)

_____ Salary (5)

_____ Work modality (flexibility for remote work) (6)

Display This Question:

    If Please indicate your willingness to participate in a focus group and/or private interview. Note:... != I am ONLY willing to participate in a private interview.

Q11 Focus group interviews will take place on April 15 and April 16 during business hours. Please indicate your availability to attend a one-hour focus group on either of these days. You will receive an Outlook meeting request by April 2 with the exact date

and time of your focus group.

	Focus Group Availability	
	Monday, April 15 (1)	Tuesday, April 16 (2)
8-9 AM (1)	☐	☐
9-10 AM (2)	☐	☐
10-11 AM (3)	☐	☐
11 AM - Noon (4)	☐	☐
Noon - 1 PM (5)	☐	☐
1-2 PM (6)	☐	☐
2-3 PM (7)	☐	☐
3-4 PM (8)	☐	☐
4-5 PM (9)	☐	☐

Display This Question:

If Please indicate your willingness to participate in a focus group and/or private interview. Note:... != I am ONLY willing to participate in a focus group.

Q14 If you are selected to participate in a private interview, you will be contacted after April 2 to discuss your availability.

Q15 Do you have any questions or comments regarding your participation in this study?

_____

Appendix F: Focus Group Protocol

<u>**Room Set-up**</u>
- Conference table seating: 10 chairs
    - 2 researchers + 5-7 participants
- Researchers will each sit at heads of table with participants on long ends of table facing each other.
- Water/coffee/lemonade and light snacks will be provided.
- Researchers will greet participants as they arrive.
- Roles of researchers during Focus Group:
    - Ida Jamshidi: moderator
    - Sara Lozano: notetaker and recorder

<u>**Welcome & Introductions**</u>
- Purpose of Focus Group:
    - *Thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group and discuss your experiences as an academic advisor at Baylor. As we shared via e-mail a few weeks ago, Sara and I are nearing the end of our doctoral program at Vanderbilt University studying Leadership and Learning in Organizations. For our final Capstone project, we are interested in learning about the extent to which institutional factors impact the retention of academic advisors at Baylor.*
    - *These factors include: benefits, commitment to mission, opportunities for advancement, salary, supervisor effectiveness, and work modality.*
    - *Today you will hear questions related to each factor, as well as some broader questions about your decision to continue in your advising role.*
- *Introductions:*
    - *Before we get started, we would love to go around the room and have each of you introduce yourselves. Please share your name, your advising unit, and how long you have served as an advisor at Baylor.*
- Data Sharing and Consent Process
    - *We plan to share our results and recommendations with Dr. Chad Eggleston, Asst. Vice Provost for Academic Operations and Advising, as well as the Office of Human Resources. Both the Provost's Office and HR have expressed an eagerness to learn from our study to better understand ways in which they can enhance the advisor experience and improve retention of this critical role at Baylor. When we share our results, we will not disclose identifiable information related to our participants or attribute any specific names to quotes.*
    - *We hope to create a space where you can speak openly and authentically about your experiences, but we do understand that there is a level of risk associated with a focus group because while Sara and I can keep your information private, we cannot prevent you all from repeating what you hear during our time together.*

- *Before we begin asking questions, I want to remind you that participating in this study is voluntary. You are each encouraged to address every question but also should not feel pressured to contribute if you'd prefer not. At any point during the focus group, if you wish to pause or take a short break, just let me know.*
- *Do you have any questions about the study before we begin? Or are there any objections to starting the recording at this time?*

SARA TURNS ON RECORDER

- *This focus group is composed of _____ (select one: Academic Advisors/Senior Advisors; mid-level advising professionals; advising leaders) at Baylor University. It is _____ (date: April 15/16) at _____ (time).*

Introductory Question
- *What initially attracted you to the academic advising role, and has that motivation evolved over time?*

Benefits
- *What is your perspective on the benefits Baylor offers for academic advisors and staff in general? For example, do benefits like retirement, health insurance, tuition remission, the time off and holiday schedule, or any others contribute to your decision to continue working at Baylor?*

Commitment to Mission
- *Baylor is a unique place that aspires to be a leading research university while also maintaining a mission to integrate academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community.*
- *Does Baylor's mission make the advising role more attractive? Or do you think you'd be just as likely to pursue an advising position at a public university?*

Opportunities for Advancement
- For Advisors/Senior Advisors
  - *Do any of you aspire to hold more responsibilities and transition into an advising leadership role one day? If so, do you feel there is a path for you to reach that goal at Baylor?*
- For mid-level advising professionals
  - *You all have some supervisory responsibilities, and your positions include more than strictly academic advising… Was that opportunity important to you, and has that impacted your decision to remain in an advising role at Baylor?*

- *Do any of you aspire to hold even more leadership responsibilities and do you feel there is a path for you to reach that goal at Baylor?*
- *For advising leadership*
  - *Tell me about your rise to leadership within the advising community. Did you step directly into your leadership role when you came to Baylor or did you work your way through advising roles at Baylor?*

Salary

- *We are all likely aware that, effective March 1st, salary adjustments were made across all advising positions, which resulted in a salary increase for most advisors. Thinking about the role salary plays in your decision to continue working as an advisor at Baylor, can you describe your perspective on compensation for advisors, both before and after the salary adjustments were made.*

Supervisor Effectiveness

- *Understanding that this question may be sensitive for some, we would like to learn more about your relationship with your supervisor and the impact that relationship has on your decision to continue working as an advisor at Baylor.*
- *Are there leadership characteristics that your supervisor displays that contribute toward that decision, either in a positive or negative way, or opportunities for your supervisor to increase their effectiveness?*

Work Modality

- *Understanding that the standard for most advising positions is to work on campus (not remotely), do you feel like you have the flexibility to work outside of the office as needed? And is that important to you as you think about your decision to continue working in an advising role?*

Final Questions

- *Have there been moments when you've considered leaving your role as an academic advisor? If so, what factors contributed to those feelings, and what ultimately kept you in your position?*
- *When you think about the six institutional factors that we've discussed specifically today (benefits, commitment to mission, opportunities for advancement, salary, supervisor effectiveness, and work modality), are there one or two factors that rise to the top in your consideration to continue in your role? Or are there other institutional factors not mentioned that are important to you?*
- *Can you describe any changes or improvements you would like to see in the academic advising system or your role within it that would contribute to your decision to remain in your advisor role?*

<u>Closing</u>

Those are all the questions we have for you. Thank you very much for participating in this focus group. We are hopeful that the information you have provided will help to improve the work experience of academic advisors at Baylor.

Are there any questions that I can answer before we end the session?

Thank you again for your time, and have a great rest of your day!

SARA TURNS OFF RECORDER

About the Authors

Ida Jamshidi | Assistant Dean of Student Success, Baylor University

Ida Jamshidi is originally from Corsicana, Texas and is a two-time graduate of Baylor University (B.A., Journalism, 2009 and M.S.Ed., Higher Education & Student Affairs, 2011). She began her career in 2011 as an Academic Advisor at Baylor in the School of Engineering & Computer Science (ECS), later rising to Director of Advising in 2015 and Senior Director of Advising in 2021. Ida was promoted to the Assistant Dean for Student Success in ECS in 2023 and oversees academic advising, recruiting, the ECS residential college, and other student success initiatives.

During her time at Baylor, Ida has served on several university committees, most recently on the Strategic Planning Group in 2023-2024, charged with creating the university's next strategic plan. She has also served as the Advisor for the Theta Iota chapter of Alpha Chi Omega since 2011. She is passionate about college student development, leadership, and organizational behavior and has taught courses related to these areas of study. Ida currently resides in Waco, Texas with her goldendoodle, Millie.

Sara Lozano | Dean of Business, Public Safety, & Technology, South Texas College

Sara Lozano graduated from Edcouch-Elsa High School in 2001, received a bachelor's degree in Architecture from Yale University in 2005 and a Master's degree in Higher Education Administration and Leadership from Adam's State University in 2012. In August 2021, she was selected into the doctoral program through Vanderbilt University-Peabody College's online Educational Doctoral Program in Leadership and Learning in Organizations and will graduate in August 2024. Sara's goals have always been to give back to her community, to provide educational opportunities, especially for underserved populations, and to be a mentor for aspiring leaders.

Sara serves as the Dean for Business, Public Safety and Technology at South Texas College. She has been in this role since January 2020. Previously, she served as the Department Chair for the Architectural and Engineering Design Technology Program at South Texas College, where she had been teaching since 2007. Over the years, Sara has been appointed to several advisory committees and boards, locally, state-wide, and nationally, including as a founding member of the Pharr Economic Development Council Foundation Board, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Workforce Education Course Manual Advisory Board, and NIMS (National Institute for Metalworking Skills) Board. Her expertise is around workforce education and work-based learning opportunities, and maintaining strong relationships with industry and educational organizations to build a better community.

Author Dedications

Ida Jamshidi

It has been a long, winding, and exceptionally fulfilling road, and I could not have reached the end without the support of so many people.

To my family… Mom, thank you for modeling the success that a strong, independent woman can achieve. You instilled in me the importance of education, perseverance, and a strong work ethic from a young age, and those values have carried me to this point. Ira, the sacrifices you have made for our family have not gone unnoticed, and you gave me the push I needed to pursue a doctorate when I lacked the confidence to even apply. Nima, thank you for the consistent encouragement and reminding me that becoming "Dr. Jamshidi" would be worth the effort.

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Sara Lozano

This project is dedicated to my family, friends, advisors, and colleagues who have guided me, encouraged me, and inspired me to be the best version of myself and reach this finish line.

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