Librarian Advisors for Undeclared Students: Understanding the Advisee Experience

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Presenters

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About Belmont

Private, Christian, 8,700 students, Nashville, liberal arts and professional programs, music!
Librarian as Advisor Model at Belmont

- Library faculty advise undeclared students, both first year and transfer students
- Have been advising for about 10 years
- Librarian skill set well suited for advising
Librarian as Advisor Model - In the Literature

- Librarians are neutral (Sisoian & Hall, 1990)
- Generally more informed and integrated into campus (Czerny & Pham, 2013)
- Advisees more comfortable asking for research help (Kelleher & Laidlow, 2009)
- Parallels between academic advising and academic librarianship (Young, 2008)
- Relevant skill set, similarities between reference interview and advising (Wiley & Williams, 2015)
## Information search process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>A lack of knowledge or understanding leads to feelings of uncertainty and apprehension.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>A general area, topic, or problem is identified and initial uncertainty gives way to optimism and readiness to begin the search.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Inconsistent, incompatible information is encountered, and uncertainty, confusion, and doubt frequently increase such that confidence wanes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formulation</td>
<td>As a focused perspective is formed, uncertainty diminishes and confidence increases.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td>Pertinent information is gathered and uncertainty subsides as interest and involvement deepen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>The process is completed and a new understanding can be demonstrated through explanations and applications of the knowledge acquired in the process.</td>
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Current Assessment

Exit survey

• Communication with advisor
• Knowledge of advisor
• Satisfaction with advisor
• What could be improved?
Research Questions

1. How do undeclared students with a librarian as advisor describe their experiences with and perceptions of library faculty as academic advisors?

2. How can library faculty advisors better serve undeclared students through the advising and discernment process?
Methodology

- Qualitative
- Semi-structured interviews
  - Conducted fall 2020 and early spring 2021
- 15 participants
- Saldana’s model for qualitative analysis - participant, structural, and descriptive codes applied to interview transcripts (2015)
- NVivo
Participant Coding

- Current year
- Time spent undecided
- Level of undecidedness
- Special category
Characteristics of Participants: Current Year

- Junior: 13.3%
- First Year: 6.7%
- Sophomore: 80.0%
Characteristics of Participants: Time Spent
Undecided

- > 12 months: 33.3%
- > 9 months - 12 months: 26.7%
- > 3 months - 6 months: 33.3%
- 0-3 months: 6.7%
Characteristics of Participants: Level of Undecidedness (Gordon, 1998)

- Seriously: 13.3%
- Tentatively: 40.0%
- Developmentally: 46.7%
Level of Undecidedness (Gordon, 1998)

**Tentatively** - comfortable being undecided, ready to decide, vocationally mature, high functioning

**Developmentally** - normal developmental tasks of discernment process; need broad exploration of self and occupations; multipotential; may respond well to career planning interventions

**Seriously** - excessive anxiety associated with decision process; may lead to indecision; difficulty making decisions in many aspects of their lives; low self-esteem and self-efficacy; looking for authority to tell them the “right choice”
Characteristics of Participants: Special Categories

- Bridge Scholar: 26.7%
- Transfer student: 6.7%
- n/a: 66.7%
Interview Questions

Grand-tour question:

Can you tell me about your advising experience, from the first time you were advised during summer orientation to when you finally declared a major?
Interview Questions

• How did you feel about having a library faculty member for an advisor?

• How did your advisor guide you through the discernment process?

• Do you feel that your advisor was prepared to help you select classes that helped you to make progress towards a degree and that helped you explore various majors?

• What would be your advice to other students entering as undeclared as it pertains to the advising and discernment process?
Descriptive Coding

- Perception of being undeclared
- Advising expectations
- Towering Traditions (orientation)
- High school advising experience
- Community
- Librarian Advisor
- Advisor preference
- Advise

- Discernment process
- Course selection process
- Course registration process
- Majors considered
- Program requirement barrier
- Satisfaction with current major
- Perception of librarian as advisor model
- Degree progression
- “I wish”
- Overall satisfaction
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Librarian Advisor

- Relationship and connection - 17
- Perceived effectiveness - 31
- Perceived deficiencies - 20
- Knowledge - 66
- Communication - 48
- Library skills and research support - 2
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Librarian Advisor - Knowledge

BELL Core (General Education)

• She was super great about [...] keeping me on track with [...] the BELL Core.

• I felt like she helped me decide what I wanted to a lot or she gave me even other options I didn’t even think about. I think she helped me explore a lot and do more than I thought I could.
Librarian Advisor - Knowledge

Specific majors or programs

- I thought she had enough knowledge of kind of the general aspects of each College and the majors they offered to help me get a strong footing and whatever direction, I wanted to go in.

- My advisor wouldn’t know things about the classes I was thinking about taking and that could be difficult [...] but they also tended to have a more general knowledge of every department.
Librarian Advisor - Communication

• I guess I wish there would have been like a little [...] some sort of checking in, in between [...] advising.

• Email was pretty good. Face to face was great. And then once COVID hit we had Zoom.

• I emailed her a good amount, but I went into her office a lot in the library, a couple times to figure things out, I feel like that was our biggest way of communicating.
Librarian Advisor - Perceived effectiveness

• Honestly my experience is great[...] my advisor was super on it, she really helped me figure out my schedule and everything.

• She was very hands on and helped guide me through everything which sort of exceeded my expectations.

• My advisor was also very helpful with when I did think that there was something I might want to major in, helping me find the right faculty in that department to talk to. It was a very open environment.
Perception of Librarian as Advisor Model

- Positive: 44.4%
- Neutral: 22.2%
- Mixed: 22.2%
- Negative: 11.1%
Perception of Librarian as Advisor Model

- I don’t think it really mattered to me as long as, [...] the quality of what she was doing and that’s she was great.

- I first heard about it like that first week or whatever, I was a little bit nervous, I was like ‘oh no are they going to know like about the school and the scheduling’ [...] but after I got to sit and talk with my advisor I was like ‘okay, this is fine, I think this is great’, my nervousness went away

- I was kind of like, ‘are they going to know what they’re talking about’ [...] but later I found out that people that work in a library [...] can be like your best friend for literally almost anything.
Perception of Librarian as Advisor Model

- I think there are a few things that could be fixed and tweaked.

- I guess it sort of contributes to feeling like you’re not particularly valued because, nothing against library advisors.

- I wasn’t sure if she would be able to help me in ways I needed her to, so that was how I felt about her as an advisor. She was nice and helpful in ways, but then, there were actually many times I didn’t feel like it was, you know, helpful toward what I needed.
Advisor Preference

- Library Faculty: 64.7%
- Regular Teaching: 23.5%
- Professional Advisory: 11.8%
Advisor Preference

- I think the librarians are my ideal because they're unbiased like they're just going to give me the information not trying to like lead me one way

- I would probably do the librarian all over again because it's it's more of a they understand a lot of different sides, whereas like as major specific one only understands that side.

- I would have loved to have multiple advisors, maybe one or 1-3 just because I have multiple interests, and I feel like undeclared students, especially that could be really helpful to not just have one, but maybe have a few in different areas.
Correlations - Participant and Descriptive Codes

Level of Undecidedness had an impact in the following areas:

- Librarian advisor - relationship/connection
- Lack of community
- Perceived effectiveness
- Perceived deficiencies
Overall Satisfaction
“I wish”

• “I think it would have been nice to have the option to meet with students who majored in different things as an undeclared to talk with them about it...”

• “I wish there would have been like a little more like I guess some sort of like checking in...”

• “I kind of wish that like the different majors were more open to you be able to take classes in them.”
Next Steps

- **Communication**
  - Create and implement a communication plan for Fall 2021 semester

- **Community**
  - Implement Undeclared Connect Groups in Fall 2021 for undeclared students to meet one another and walk through the discernment process together
Questions?

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