

2005

## An exploration of academic advising care groups at an Iowa private college

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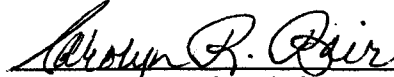
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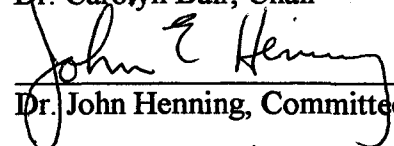
AN EXPLORATION OF ACADEMIC ADVISING CARE GROUPS  
AT AN IOWA PRIVATE COLLEGE

A Dissertation  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

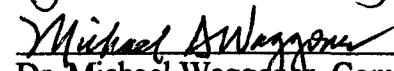
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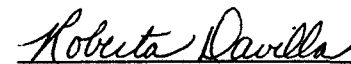
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AT AN IOWA PRIVATE COLLEGE

An Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted  
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Approved:

  
Dr. Carolyn Bair, Chair

  
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## ABSTRACT

Care Group advising, as it was institutionally developed, is an academic advising method intended to improve the first year experience of undergraduate college students. The purpose of this study was to explore student perceptions of their participation in Care Group advising, as well as faculty and administrative perceptions. The overarching research question was: “How are academic advising Care Groups perceived by students, faculty, and administrators?” From the perspectives of students, faculty, and administrators, the following sub-questions served to guide this study:

1. Are academic advising Care Groups serving their intended purpose?
2. What are the perceived benefits of academic advising Care Groups, as identified by the participants?
3. Are academic advising Care Groups contributing to student persistence and retention?

This qualitative study utilized focus group interviews with existing academic advising Care Groups, and individual interviews with Care Group advisors and select college administrators. Seven groups of students, six Care Group advisors, and two college administrators were interviewed. Data analysis, with use of the constant comparative method, was ongoing throughout the data collection process.

Data analysis revealed several themes relevant to academic advising. Although the implementation of academic advising Care Groups does carry some added responsibility and obligation to the institution and faculty, the benefits may outweigh the identified concerns. Implications for practice related to Care Group advising were also

identified. While numerous benefits were recognized by participants, perhaps the most important finding of Care Group advising is that students come to understand that they matter to the College community.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late husband, Hector Perez. Without his support and encouragement this journey would never have begun. And although, his physical presence was missing during the process of completing this dissertation, his spiritual presence was never-ending.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members in the development of this dissertation. Dr. Carolyn Bair, committee chair, was influential in providing direction and encouragement throughout this study. Dr. John Henning was invaluable in his assistance with the documentation of the methodology employed. Dr. Geraldine Perreault, Dr. Roberta Davilla, and Dr. Michael Waggoner provided support and guidance throughout the process. I am privileged to have worked with you all.

I must also acknowledge the unconditional support and encouragement from my family during the writing of this dissertation. My mother, Shirley Williams, provided numerous hours of support for my family while the writing continued. My daughters, Sophia and Alexandra, were always ready to sacrifice, and never doubted that a successful outcome would one day be realized. Without the support of my family, the completion of this dissertation would never have been possible.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Retaining first-year students is one of the most crucial issues colleges and universities face; and accomplishing it depends on the collaborative, collegial, and creative efforts of administration, faculty, and staff. Because attrition often occurs during the first six weeks of the academic term, early support for academic achievement is essential (Jeffreys, 1998). Woosley (2003) “linked initial social adjustment to higher probabilities of degree completion, even when pre-entry characteristics and educational commitment were included in the study” (p. 201). These findings support the need to focus attention on social adjustment as soon as students begin their academic careers. To address this need, many campuses are making it a priority to establish meaningful advising relationships early in a student’s career (Wilbur, 2003). More specifically, many campuses are attempting to integrate academic advising into a variety of first-year programs or experiences. Delivery of high-quality, innovative academic advising on college campuses, with a focus of enhancing faculty-student relationships, is one way to promote students’ persistence to graduation, motivation to succeed in college, satisfaction with the college, and personal and academic success (Kramer, 2003).

Retention of students in all postsecondary institutions is a necessity. Retention of Bachelor of Science in nursing (BSN) students is critical to the profession. According to Staiger, Auerbach, and Buerhaus (2000), only half as many women are selecting nursing as a career today as compared to twenty-five years ago. They have also projected that by the year 2020, the total supply of registered nurses (RNs) will fall to 20% below the

needed requirements projected by the federal government (p. 231). Clearly, the implications of the rapidly aging and declining RN workforce present serious concerns to the nursing profession, nursing education, and the healthcare needs for an aging society in general. Taking action to increase enrollments in nursing education has been identified as necessary to increase the supply of RNs (Buerhaus, Staiger, & Auerbach, 2000).

While intentionally increasing enrollments certainly deserves attention, the retention of those students will be just as important in the attempt to increase numbers of working RNs. In fact, Cuseo (2003) argues that investing in retention efforts is more cost-effective for institutions than vigorous recruitment initiatives.

According to Tinto (1999) four institutional conditions distinctly support retention: “information/advice, support, involvement, and learning” (p. 5). Institutions that choose to focus on these activities may be able to influence student retention. One such measure that has the potential to affect all of these activities is Care Group advising. This advising strategy was developed in an effort to improve the first year experience of students. Care Group advising is a unique method of providing and promoting student-faculty interactions and connections with first year students through academic advising in a group setting.

A model identified as useful in addressing academic advising Care Groups is the Care Group Model (Pullen, Murray, & Mcgee, 2001). The Care Group Model “describes a process for skills acquisition for novice nursing students within a caring environment” (p. 287). The model is based on the development of interrelationships between faculty mentors and students in a protective, helping, and nurturing environment. This nurturing

environment allows students and faculty to spend quality time together in small groups. These groups promote learning through the establishment of collaborative and caring relationships. This model is consistent with Tinto's (1999) assertion that active involvement is a key to retention. Tinto maintains that students who are actively involved in classrooms are more likely to learn and thus more likely to stay.

Principles of adult learning and a caring community are the foundations of the Care Group Model. Adult learning principles encourage students to be involved in planning activities for the Care Group, as well as foster problem-solving, critical thinking, and self-direction (Knowles, 1984). The faculty mentor serves as a guide and role model in the development of these skills. The model defines a caring community as "one in which faculty members nurture students' development through compassion, empathy, patience, and spending time with them" (Pullen, Murray, McGee, 2001, p. 287). Although the model was developed to reduce novice students' anxiety and promote successful acquisition of basic nursing psychomotor skills, the model has potential to be adapted to other novice student settings. In a broader context, the model may be useful in decreasing new college students' anxieties related to the transition to college and promotion of successful adaptation to college student life, leading to improved retention.

#### Description of the Problem

Retention of first year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students to the second year at a small, private, Midwestern non-residential college, hereafter referred to as the "College," remained somewhat consistent from 1995 to 2000, ranging from 75% to 83%. A significant decline was noted with the fall 2001 incoming class of BSN students



who demonstrated a 69% first year retention rate (J. Ramsden-Meier, Registrar, Allen College, personal communication, October, 2003).

Upon identification of this decreased BSN retention rate an ad hoc group of faculty and staff began to review processes related to admission and the first year of enrollment, including academic advising. Historically, the organizational model for delivery of BSN academic advising at the College was a faculty-only decentralized model, in which all faculty served as academic advisors. The design of the prescribed curriculum led to infrequent contact between faculty advisors and first-year students. First-year students rarely met their advisors prior to mid-term of the first semester when it was time to schedule courses for the second semester. This lack of contact and lack of opportunity to form connections with the College was identified by faculty and staff as a potential problem with student satisfaction, and quite possibly with retention.

In an effort to boost retention rates in the BSN program at this College, an intervention referred to as "Care Group advising" was developed, based on the Care Group Model developed by Pullen, Murray, and McGee, (2001). The advising Care Groups were implemented with first semester students, with the first meeting occurring during orientation and five to six subsequent meetings scheduled across the first semester of enrollment. Advising Care Groups serve to acquaint incoming students with a small group of peers, as well as with a faculty advisor. Care Group sessions initially include some ice-breaker activities. Subsequent meetings involve registered nurse guest speakers, various course-related activities (such as clarifying and reviewing assignments

or small group discussions related to course topics), and time for informal group discussions.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore student perceptions of their participation in Care Group advising, as well as faculty and administrative perceptions. Particular attention was addressed toward determination of benefits related to student involvement in Care Groups. In order to gain a broad understanding of the phenomena under investigation, faculty and administrative perceptions were also explored.

### Research Questions

The specific retention effort, Care Group advising, was explored. In order to delineate and synthesize the essence of this intervention, the overarching research question was: “How are academic advising Care Groups perceived by students, faculty, and administrators?” From the perspectives of students, faculty, and administrators, the following sub-questions served to guide this study:

1. Are academic advising Care Groups serving their intended purpose?
2. What are the perceived benefits of academic advising Care Groups, as identified by participants?
3. Are academic advising Care Groups contributing to student persistence and retention?

### Conceptual Framework

Several theories (Bean, 1980; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1987, 1993) have been developed to explain college student persistence and/or departure. Two

of these theories have received considerable attention in the literature: Tinto's Student Integration Model and Bean's Model of Student Departure. Both of these theories were used to explore and examine the issues related to student retention and an intervention designed to improve first year student retention at a small, private, non-residential college.

The Student Integration Model, developed by Tinto (1993) is a longitudinal model that focuses on the background traits students bring to a particular college or university. Tinto theorized that students enter college with intentions and commitments related to varying patterns of personal, family, and academic characteristics and skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Tinto (1993) argued that student departure from institutions of higher education is a result of "a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of the academic and social systems of the institution" (Tinto, 1993, p. 113). Tinto further explains that a student's intentions and commitments are continually modified as a result of "intellectual (academic) and social (personal) integration" (p. 115). Students may have positive experiences that are referred to as "integrative" (p. 115), which tend to reinforce persistence through enhanced intentions and commitments to the individual's goals and to college. Negative experiences, or "malintegrative" (p. 115) occurrences, tend to diminish intentions or commitments, and lead to an increased likelihood of leaving the institution.

Tinto (1993) asserts that even upon consideration of the attributes and dispositions an individual possesses upon entry, subsequent experiences within the college, particularly interactions with other individuals (students, faculty, staff), are pivotal to further continuance in that college. Positive integrative interactions are believed to promote the student's goals and commitments. Interactions that enhance social and intellectual integration will lead to increased persistence within the institution. Conversely, Tinto concludes, when the student's social and intellectual integration are less positive, departure from the institution is more likely.

Tinto's theoretical structure offers significant opportunities to researchers who intend to study the college student change process related to persistence and departure, as well as to educators and administrators who wish to develop academic and social programs and experiences intended to enhance student educational growth (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Tinto's model was selected for the exploration and evaluation of an intervention designed to improve first year student retention at a small, private, non-residential college.

While most research related to college student retention, including Tinto's, has focused on traditional students (under age 25, enrolled full time, and residing at the institution), Bean's Model of Student Departure has centered on nontraditional undergraduate student's attrition. According to Terenzini and Pascarella (1978), "the academic and social correlates of attrition may be different for different kinds of students" (p. 364). Bean's model indicates that decisions to drop out for nontraditional students are based on four sets of variables (Metzner & Bean, 1987). First, academic

variables represent the student's interactions with the academic processes of the college. Students who perform well academically are predicted to persist at higher rates than students with poor academic performance. The second variable is intent to leave, which is influenced by both psychological outcomes and academic variables. The third group of variables posited to affect attrition is the background and defining variables, including age, number of hours enrolled, ethnicity, gender, high school performance, and educational goals. High school performance and educational goals (commitment) are expected to be the most influential (Jeffreys, 2001). Finally, environmental variables, such as finances, hours of employment, family responsibilities, etc., are predicted to have significant effects on decisions to dropout of college. Bean and Metzner (1985) predicted that environmental variables have a direct effect on the decision to leave the educational institution. This prediction was based on two assumptions. First, nontraditional student interaction with the college mainly involves academic programs, due to few opportunities for social integration and extracurricular activities. Second, nontraditional students interact more frequently with the external environment.

According to Bean and Metzner (1985) these variable sets interact and result in a range of academic and psychological outcomes. The academic outcome is represented by the student's grade-point average. Psychological outcomes include the student's attitudes about college, utility of the program in meeting career goals, and student satisfaction with their role as a student. Bean and Metzner concluded that academic outcomes and psychological outcomes influence persistence in college and retention.

Bean's Model of Student Departure (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metzner & Bean, 1987) was appropriate for examining issues of student retention and departure at a non-residential college, in that commuter institutions often provide fewer opportunities for social involvement and integration than residential institutions, and commuter students may be less integrated, both socially and academically, than their residential peers (Tinto, 1987).

Tinto's Student Integration Model (Tinto, 1987, 1993) and Bean's Model of Student Departure (Bean, 1980; Bean & Metzner, 1985) were essential in framing the focus group interview questions used to elicit beliefs and perceptions from the perspectives of the participants. Bean's Model was also used to determine the student characteristics that were collected. Tinto's Model was especially useful during the analysis phase of this research study. The four institutional conditions (information/advice, support, involvement, and learning) were used to guide the discussion of findings from the interview data.

#### Significance of the Study

An increased understanding of interventions designed to promote college student retention is particularly important at a time of decreasing financial support for higher education and escalating tuition costs. In addition, accreditation guidelines for the evaluation of student achievement emphasize retention rates (National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission, 1996). Student persistence and graduation rates are being used as performance indicators for both accountability and budgeting (Stauss & Volkwein, 2004). The cost of attrition is detrimental to students, colleges and

universities, and society, while the adverse psychological cost to students may have the greatest impact (Jeffreys, 2004).

Although there have been numerous studies investigating retention of special populations (e.g. minority students, at-risk students) and undergraduate students in general, exploration of interventions designed to promote or improve retention of first year nursing students are limited (Jeffreys, 2001). According to Jeffreys (2004) nurse educators are in an ideal position to develop theoretically supported retention strategies targeting specific student populations, more specifically nursing students.

Focusing on the first year of college for undergraduate nursing students was significant because the student's experiences during that first year shape the subsequent persistence (Tinto, 1993). In addition, attrition is greatest during the first year, prior to students beginning the second year of college (Cuseo, 2003; Tinto, 1993). For this reason, the first year has become the focus of numerous institutional endeavors to improve retention. Tinto identifies the potential isolation and lack of contact during the first year as instrumental in student decisions to leave college. It is during this transition phase that students are least integrated into the college, and thus most susceptible to withdrawal. Research focusing on monitoring whether an institution's intervention plan is having an effect on the persistence of first year students is also highly recommended (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993).

During the spring semester of 2003 a pilot study was conducted to determine whether or not the introduction of academic advising Care Groups was a successful intervention for improving student satisfaction with the first year of enrollment at the

College. The preliminary findings indicated that Care Groups may have benefits for some students and that faculty have mixed perceptions. These findings suggested the need for further study regarding the intervention of academic advising Care Groups.

#### Parameters

Clearly the small purposeful sample (“sample selected for study participation based on their knowledge of the phenomena being studied”) (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2003, p. 67) and the fact that this study was conducted at a single private independent, non-residential college limited this study. The generalizability of findings to nursing student populations at four-year colleges, as well as to general undergraduate student populations, is limited. Participants were volunteers from assigned Care Groups at the College, as well as involved faculty and administrators. This purposeful sampling was necessary in order to select individuals based on their particular knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the researcher’s role as a nurse educator at the institution under investigation may have been a limitation. Although all student participants would at some point be students in one of the researcher’s courses, none were enrolled in courses taught by the researcher at the time of the interviews. It was impossible to provide anonymity during the focus group interview process. It was however, possible to provide privacy through not revealing the participants’ identities in any research notes, transcripts, or write-ups.



### Definition of Terms

Numerous terms are used when referring to issues surrounding college student retention and success. For consistency of interpretation and to avoid discrepancies, the following terms important to this qualitative research study are defined:

Attrition – “refers to students dropping out of the nursing program. Voluntary attrition occurs when a student drops out due to personal (nonacademic) reasons, compared to involuntary attrition for academic reasons (failure or dismissal)” (Jeffreys, 2004, p. 8).

Care Group – 12 to 15 novice nursing students enrolled in Introduction to Professional Nursing, a first semester nursing class, with one faculty member serving as Care Group mentor/advisor/group leader.

Completion – refers to a student successfully completing the program’s requirements for graduation. Ideally, the student successfully completes the program’s requirements for graduation within the specified time period (most typically six years for a BSN/four year degree), without withdrawing or failing (Jeffreys, 2004).

Conceptual framework – a set of related abstractions and/or constructs that broadly explain or are relevant to the phenomena of interest, express assumptions, or reflect a philosophical position (Burns & Grove, 2003; Polit & Beck, 2004).

Focus group – a semi-structured group session, moderated by a group leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of collecting information on a designated topic (Carey, 1994, p. 226).

Nontraditional students – students who are older than 24 years, commute to campus, or are enrolled part-time (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metzner & Bean, 1987).

Persistence – a student's continued enrollment, regardless of where they are enrolled, as in persisting to the goal of college completion (V. Tinto, personal communication, March 4, 2004).

Purposeful sample – a sample selected for study participation based on their knowledge of the phenomena being studied (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2003, p. 67).

Retention – the continuous enrollment in the nursing program at a specific institution (part- or full-time) by completing the required courses until all program graduation requirements have been met (Jeffreys, 2004; V. Tinto, personal communication, March 4, 2004).

Retention rate – a measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational programs at educational institutions, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelor's (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall (National Center for Education Statistics – Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, n.d.).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study was informed by relevant literature related to the conceptual frameworks that informed the research, academic advising, and retention in higher education. There is considerable overlap among these cognate areas, and the most salient aspects of each were selected for this review of the literature.

#### Conceptual Frameworks

Although numerous theories have been used to explain the college persistence process, the two theories that offer the most comprehensive framework for investigating retention in postsecondary education are Tinto's Student Integration Model (Tinto, 1987, 1993) and Bean's Model of Student Departure (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metzner & Bean, 1987). The primary model for studying student retention is grounded in the work of academic and social integration presented by Tinto (1987, 1993). While most of this research is based on traditional-age students on residential campuses, it is also necessary to investigate undergraduate student attrition from the non-traditional student's perspective. The work of Bean and Metzner (1985) focused on the attrition process of non-traditional students, defined as older, part-time, and/or commuter. Both of these models served as lenses through which the identified problem was viewed.

#### Tinto's Student Integration Model

Many factors may contribute to a student's decision to persist or withdraw from college. These factors are well documented in the literature, and although individual student attributes may affect students' decisions, these attributes are largely beyond the

control of the institution. As identified by Tinto (1999), four institutional conditions can be controlled by institutions and have been highlighted as foundations of retention: (a) information/advice, (b) support, (c) involvement, and (d) learning.

Tinto (1993) contended that individual departure from college is the result of a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given characteristics, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of the academic and social systems of the college (p. 113). The individual's experiences in college continually shape his or her intentions and commitments. Experiences interpreted as positive, or integrative, reinforce persistence of the student. Experiences viewed as negative, or malintegrative, weaken intentions and commitments to the institution, and increase the chance of leaving the college. In general, the greater the student's level of social and academic integration, the greater his or her subsequent commitment to the college and commitment to the goal of college graduation (Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1983).

Although Tinto (1999) emphasized that student characteristics are beyond the control of the institution, he identified four institutional conditions that are supportive of retention: information/advice, support, involvement, and learning. Information and advice were significant because students are more likely to persist and graduate in environments that provide adequate information regarding institutional requirements. Students need to be well-informed to make successful decisions and achieve personal goals. Support was identified as essential when it is readily available in the form of academic, social, and personal assistance. Tinto also maintained that students were more

likely to persist when colleges involved them as valued members of the institution. In addition, the frequency and quality of interactions with faculty, staff, and peers predicts retention. Furthermore, Tinto asserted that involvement was especially important during the “first year of college, when student attachments are tenuous and the pull of the institution is still so weak” (p. 6). Finally, Tinto posited learning as the most important factor in fostering retention.

Active involvement is identified as the key to retention. When students are actively involved in learning activities, especially with other students and faculty, learning is enhanced, and they are more likely to persist. Tinto (1999) identified this as a potential challenge though, as most first-year students experience education as isolated learners. This isolation exists both in classrooms where faculty tend to dominate, with little active participation, and in the program of study, where courses are separated by content. Tinto strongly believed that in order to promote retention, strategies must begin in the classroom.

Although much of the research on college impact and student persistence has demonstrated the importance of early involvement, Milem and Berger (1997) contended that many educators have underestimated the role that very early involvement plays in retention in higher education. These researchers sought to further define the process of transition and incorporation described by Tinto. Milem and Berger’s findings suggest that “the extent to which students become involved during their first 6 to 7 weeks of a semester are significantly related to whether they are likely to persist at the institution” (p. 398). Milem and Berger also highlighted the significant role that early involvement

with faculty appears to have in the retention process. Faculty in higher education may tend to believe that involvement with faculty will evolve as students progress through their college careers. The results of this research support the need for early faculty involvement in and out of the classroom.

Although Tinto's model was originally developed based on traditional, residential college students, Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983) attempted to determine the explanatory power of the model in an urban, nonresidential setting. More specifically, they sought to determine the generalizability of the model to a commuter institution. Although their study was limited by a single institution and a single year sample, it was determined that certain components of the model function effectively in a commuter college. For instance, academic integration was determined to be predictive of student persistence, just as in residential campuses. However, a significant difference was also identified. Pascarella et al. (1983) suggested that characteristics that students bring to college (e.g. academic aptitude, affiliation needs, etc.) have a direct effect on student persistence. This suggestion was supported by the fact that commuter students spend substantially less time on campus and the commuter campus environment provides significantly fewer opportunities for interaction. Thus, the characteristics students bring to college will have a greater impact on persistence/withdrawal decisions because the experience of college is not strong enough to influence the individual background characteristics. Tinto's original work did not emphasize the effect of student characteristics on persistence/withdrawal decisions.

### Bean's Model of Student Departure

Bean and Metzner (1985) began their research on attrition because they found that a theoretical model related to attrition in nontraditional students was lacking at a time of increased enrollments of nontraditional students. They described the rise in nontraditional undergraduate enrollments, defined the nontraditional undergraduate student, and developed a conceptual model of the attrition process for these students. They found that the primary difference in the attrition process is that “nontraditional students are more affected by the external environment than by the social integration variables affecting traditional students” (p. 485).

Bean and Metzner (1985) identified the one defining characteristic of nontraditional students, the lack of social integration into the institution, as the difference necessitating theory development. Nontraditional students have less interaction in the college environment with peers or faculty, less interaction through extracurricular activities, and much greater interaction with the noncollege, external environment than traditional students. Bean and Metzner did recognize elements other than socialization, such as background variables and academic variables, common in theories of traditional student attrition, and maintained these variables. Briefly, their model indicates that decisions to leave college are based on four sets of variables. First, students with poor academic performance are expected to drop out at rates higher than students who perform well, and GPA is expected to be based primarily on past (high school) academic performance. The second major factor is intent to leave, which is expected to be influenced by the psychological variables and by the academic outcomes. The third set

of variables expected to affect attrition is the background and defining variables, essentially high school performance and educational goals. Finally, the environmental variables are expected to have substantial direct effects on dropout decisions (p. 490).

McDaniel and Graham (2001) attempted to predict retention status based on pre- and early-matriculation variables. These variables included demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, state and county of residency, and whether or not the student was a first-time entering student. Information on prior academic performance, such as high school rank, high school GPA, and composite and sub-scores on the American Testing Service (ACT) examination, was also collected. The sample for this study came from an historically black and open admissions university, and consisted of 1,949 black residential and white commuter first-time entering, degree-seeking freshmen. Pre- and early matriculation variables used in this study consistently underestimated the probability of students withdrawing. The authors concluded that other factors of the students' personal and college lives were evidently involved in the decision to withdraw. While there could be a variety of factors, those most frequently cited in the literature relate to social and academic integration. McDaniel and Graham further concluded that their findings support the models of Bean (1985) and Tinto (1987, 1993).

Salinas and Llanes (2003) used Bean's Model of Student Departure in a causal-comparative study of 1,425 entering freshmen at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA). The student characteristics of this sample were much different than participants in Tinto's research. The majority of these participants were Hispanic (91.5%), commuted



to campus every day (99%), were low income (72%), and were first-generation college students (85%). Several significant findings were identified by these researchers. During the semester before nonpersisters opted out, they greatly reduced their academic loads, sometimes taking only one course per semester. Interestingly, “regardless of how they were doing academically, this reduction was a precursor for dropping out and thus a signal to administrators that an intervention was necessary” (Salinas & Llanes, 2003, p. 94). This sample also demonstrated that about half of the students who were placed on probation or suspension in one semester did not return the following semester.

Salinas and Llanes (2003) were unable to distinguish academic indicators that would distinguish between the two groups of students, persisters and nonpersisters. The researchers concluded that the lack of integration into college student life may have stemmed from students’ commuter status, lack of intention to persist, and financial situations that required students to remain employed while attending school, which limited their ability to participate in extracurricular activities. These researchers acknowledged the need to continue with a qualitative focus to attempt to answer some questions raised by their research.

While the issue of college student retention is highly relevant to all colleges and universities, it is an especially significant concern to institutions with high percentages of non-traditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; McDaniel & Graham, 2001). Nontraditional and minority students tend to have higher attrition rates than do traditional students (Astin, 1975). Retention efforts should not be reactive, only being seen as necessary when students fail to meet expectations or demonstrate deficiencies in the

academic setting (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001). Rather, retention efforts must focus on preventive measures in order to avoid attrition.

#### Comparison of the Tinto and Bean Models

Clearly, the work of Tinto and Bean provided direction and support for qualitative study in the area of retention and academic advising. Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) provided a comparison of the two models. Several similarities exist. Both models perceive persistence to be the result of a complex set of interactions over time. The two models also propose that precollege attributes affect the success with which students adjust to their college. In addition, the two models argue that persistence is affected by the successful match between the student and the college. This is evidenced by the common reference to institutional commitment.

The comparison continued with identification of major differences (Cabrera et al. 1992). Tinto's model appears to suggest that academic integration, social integration, institutional commitment, and goal commitment exert the greatest effect on retention, whereas Bean promotes the role of intent to persist, attitudes, institutional fit, and external factors. Another significant difference between Tinto and Bean is the issue of finances. Whereas Tinto (1987) concluded that financial concerns were not primary, Bean clearly identified that students who perceive financial difficulties are less likely to persist in college.

Both models lend support and provide direction for the study of academic advising and retention. These models were useful in the analysis and discussion of data collected. In addition, a more comprehensive understanding of the retention process may

be achieved when combining these two major theories of college retention (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992).

### Academic Advising

Academic advising has been identified as the most significant institutional mechanism available to affect students' academic success, satisfaction, and persistence (Habley & Morales, 1998). Substantial advising is imperative for the successful transition of students into postsecondary education, as well as for their persistence to completion. In addition, academic advising should be a prime component of the first-year experience, not an add-on to it (Tinto, 1999).

### Benefits of Academic Advising for Student Satisfaction and Persistence

Academic advising is frequently cited as one of the most consequential components of undergraduate education. According to Light (2001), "good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience" (p. 81). Based on ten years of student interviews, Light offered numerous suggestions for academic advising. A remarkable college education relies heavily on interpersonal relationships. One of these relationships should develop between each student and at least one faculty member. While this may seem obvious, Light recommended that it is worth mentioning when advising new students, and even challenges "new advisees to get to know one faculty member reasonably well" (p. 86) during the first semester. Many of the student participants in Light's study reported this as being the most significant advice they received during their freshman year.

Light (2001) also noted the importance of getting involved in group activities. This non-academic finding was identified by students who had academic difficulty. Some students arriving on college campuses may not integrate as quickly as others may. Light suggested that a policy implication related to this finding is that advisors should encourage advisees to find groups to join as soon as they arrive to the new environment.

In order to comprehend the process of academic advising, an understanding of the concept of academic advising is necessary. The term “developmental academic advising” pervades the literature. Developmental academic advising is defined by a dynamic relationship between the student and the advisor (Frost, 1995). Developmental academic advising was promoted in the early 1970s by Crookston (1972) and O’Banion (1972). These researchers linked academic advising to student development theories and used the link to define advising as a form of teaching.

Developmental advising is intended to replace the more traditional, prescriptive, academic advising. Prescriptive advising is based on an authoritarian relationship and relies on the authority of the advisor. Prescriptive advising is identified as a mechanism to determine course selection, scheduling, and registration (Frost, 1995). This style of advising involves very little, if any, interpersonal contact between student and advisor.

In contrast, developmental advising is defined by two general beliefs: (a) postsecondary education provides opportunities for students to plan for self-fulfilling lives, and (b) teaching includes any experience that contributes to personal development (Crookston, 1972). Collaborative problem solving and decision making are examples of activities inherent in developmental advising. Frost (1993) delineated specific advising

practices to include: (a) involve students in their college experiences, (b) explore with students the factors that lead to success, and (c) demonstrate interest in students' academic progress and extracurricular achievements. In addition, developmental academic advising focuses on the whole student (Grites & Gordon, 2000). For example while students enrolled in one academic discipline, such as nursing, have the curriculum in common, they come to the educational setting with many individual differences. Advisors using developmental advising will be open to considering these individual characteristics when assisting students with academic and personal goals. Clearly, these concepts are ideal for advisors of first-year students to consider. Advisors offer opportunities for first-year students to connect with their new environments. Developmental advising has the potential to enhance the transition process encountered by first year students.

There is evidence that increasing attention to academic advising during the freshman year promotes student satisfaction and student success. McBeth, Richardson, Cregler, and Meyer (2000) evaluated the effectiveness of an advising system combined with a freshman seminar course taught by advisors. This advising system involved advisors teaching the required freshman orientation course to their own advisees for the first semester of enrollment. Implementation of this advising system was intended to address an identified problem of lack of ongoing contact between students and academic advisors. Results of the study indicated that the advising system was successful in improving both student satisfaction and student success. While the total number of meetings with advisors increased following implementation of the advising system, the

reasons for meetings also expanded. Student reports indicated that they were seeking assistance related to poor grades, personal issues, and reviewing records, where in the past the majority of visits had been categorized as introductory in nature (p. 17).

Academic performance was evaluated by comparing biology grades and first year GPA before and after implementation of the advising system. The percentage of A and B grades in freshman biology was significantly higher after introduction of the new system. Average GPA also increased from before to after the introduction of the new system. Providing links between advising and student performance is difficult, but this correlation between the new advising system and performance did indicate an apparent relationship.

Student satisfaction and its relationship to academic advising were examined by Corts, Lounsbury, Saudargas, and Tatum (2000) in a study that explored overall student satisfaction and its relationship to academic advising with psychology majors. Corts et al. developed an assessment survey based on topic domains identified by previous assessment. The seven-point Likert scale survey was administered to 293 undergraduate psychology majors. The most significant issues regarding advising “were difficulty in arranging meetings with advisors and advisors’ lack of preparation and failure to fully understand graduation requirements” (p. 403). While academic advising was not identified as one of the major factors affecting student satisfaction, career preparation was a significant factor. The relationship between career and advising factors was noted, and improvements in advising may support students’ satisfaction with career development. Based on their findings, Corts et al. recommended improving the preparation for faculty advisors and reemphasizing the role of academic advisor.

Kramer (2000) made the case for advising students at different levels, or advising by academic class. This approach has the distinct advantage of focusing on the unique needs of each level (e.g. freshman). Each academic class faces distinctive challenges in the educational environment. Kramer categorized the freshman year as one of vulnerability. Freshmen students are vulnerable in regards to academic planning, they have limited knowledge of resources, and they are clearly in a period of adjustment. Changing of majors and dropping out are very common in the first year of college. With this in mind, Kramer suggested that a half-year orientation course or seminar be implemented to focus on freshman issues and expectations. The course should include facilitation of career development and the utilization of available campus resources.

#### Academic Advising From the Perspective of Academic Advisors

Faculty advising continues to be the prevalent advising delivery model at all types of colleges and universities (Kramer, 2003). Regardless of the institutional mission or size, faculty are an integral component of the advising process.

Examination of academic advising from the perspective of faculty advisors is an important aspect of improving academic advising. According to ACT's Fifth National Survey of Academic Advising (Habley & Morales, 1998), a trend in faculty advising was that nearly all faculty are expected to advise as a component of their workloads. The Survey found that typical faculty advisors have four advising contacts per term, have a typical load of twenty-six advisees, and spend approximately 11 percent of their time advising students. Although accessibility and availability were identified as potential

concerns with faculty serving as academic advisors, their knowledge of their major field of study was a valuable asset in the advising process (King & Kerr, 1995).

The “faculty-only model” (King & Kerr, 1995, p. 37) is the predominant model in both two- and four-year private institutions. This model offers several strengths. Faculty advisors are most knowledgeable regarding discipline-specific questions, are excellent resources for students considering graduate education in the particular field of study, and may develop rapport with students both inside and outside the classroom (Reinarz, 2000). Faculty advising also involves low direct costs (King & Kerr, 1995; Pardee, 2000; Reinarz, 2000) and proximity of advising services to classes students take within their major field of study (Pardee, 2000). A drawback is that, “when all faculty members are required to advise, there may be varying levels of commitment, resulting in an inconsistent quality of advising” (King & Kerr, 1995, p. 37). In addition, some faculty may not have the necessary skills or interest in the process of advising. Reinarz (2000) recommended involving only faculty who choose to be advisors, which is generally preferable to requiring all faculty members to advise. In addition, a comprehensive, ongoing advisor training program is fundamental (M. C. King, 2000; King & Kerr, 1995).

#### The Importance of Student-Faculty Relationships

Dillon and Fisher (2000) examined the perceptions of faculty regarding the role of faculty advisor and faculty-student advising interactions. These authors suggested that frequent, quality interactions between students and advisors do promote academic performance and student retention. The question they were concerned with was: “How does advising affect or benefit faculty members?” (p. 16). Dillon and Fisher utilized a



survey and focus groups to gather information from 50 advisors. These researchers identified advisor knowledge as the essential factor that contributes to successful advising. Knowledge was more important in establishing student-advisor relationships than interpersonal attributes. Faculty respondents identified assigning advising responsibilities to faculty who want to perform the role, as well as to those who are good at it, as suggestions for improvement of advising. Additional suggestions were providing more education for faculty advisors and implementing the use of professional academic advisors.

#### Timing of Academic Advising

The need for initiating the provision of academic advising early in students' academic programs was highlighted by Alexitch (2002). This study included 361 first-year undergraduate students who completed the Learning Orientation-Grade Orientation Scale and two help-seeking scales to determine whether educational orientation, gender, academic performance, and help-seeking attitudes and tendencies directly or indirectly predicted preferences for advising received from advisors. Two groups of students were identified in this study. One group valued learning and readily engaged in help-seeking behaviors that maximized their educational experiences (learning-oriented students). The other group valued a more outcome-oriented approach to education and tended to feel threatened by seeking help (grade-oriented students). This evidence supports the notion that educators and administrators must implement initiatives to provide advising to students who may not seek assistance on their own. Effective advising should be provided for students who are in the initial years of their academic studies, who may be

experiencing academic difficulties, or who may have a more outcome-oriented approach to their postsecondary education.

### Group Advising

Although individual advising is often acknowledged as the ideal method for the delivery of advising, group advising has been identified as effective in enhancing and broadening advising services (N. S. King, 2000). King further indicated that “innovative group advising methods may offer retention value by connecting students with both their peers and an advisor” (p. 228). Group advising offers several definite advantages. This method can be valuable in meeting challenges of numbers and time, and can also be efficient and effective in sharing important information to many students at the same time. King identified the establishment of peer groups as a powerful reason for advising in groups. Peers have the potential to play a significant role in student success, especially in the critical first year. King also stated that “peers influence students’ attitudes toward academic goals and values” (p. 230). Commuter students, who typically find it more difficult to establish peer group connections, may particularly benefit from group advising.

### Freshmen Seminars as a Method of Group Advising

Freshman seminars are another method of providing successful transition through academic advising in a group type of format (N. S. King, 2000; White, Goetz, Hunter, & Barefoot, 1995). The use of freshman seminar courses became prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994). “Freshman seminar” is the most typical name for a course that is offered for first-year students at approximately two-thirds of

American colleges and universities (White et al., 1995). Although the structure and content varies considerably in freshman seminars, the sense of group identity that develops is an important aspect of the class. In addition, the supportive atmosphere is an ideal setting for academic advising. According to White et al. (1995), the combination of academic advising and a freshman seminar course is most common in four-year institutions with enrollments less than 5,000. Ideally, a freshman seminar should be taught in small sections, be highly interactive, and be linked to academic advising.

Boudreau and Kromrey (1994) provided evidence for maintaining and expanding freshman seminars to reach all first-year undergraduate students. Their longitudinal study “examined completion of a freshman orientation course and retention (defined as enrollment during a subsequent semester following completion of the course), academic performance, and graduation” (p. 444). Results of this study indicated that participation in a freshman seminar did improve retention and academic performance. No significant difference in graduation rates of participants vs. nonparticipants was identified. Although this study did not attempt to assess how participation in the freshman seminar may contribute to improved student retention and performance, Boudreau and Kromrey suggested several relevant factors. These included: increased interaction with peers and faculty, provision of opportunities for discussion of personal and academic concerns, presentation of information regarding the campus and available student support services, and demonstration that the college is committed to student success. All of these factors may influence the level of student satisfaction, with the potential outcome of promoting retention.

Freshman seminars were also identified by Schwitzer, McGovern, and Robbins (1991) as an effective strategy for promoting early academic and social adjustment to college life. Schwitzer et al. identified and evaluated outcomes of a freshman seminar on early adjustment to college life. Participants included 113 entering freshman volunteers. The participants enrolled in a one-credit seminar and received a regular academic letter grade upon completion. This format was intended to promote commitment, by both faculty and students. The goal of the seminar was to provide relevant information, as well as a social support and satisfying initial experience at the college. Schwitzer et al. were able to demonstrate that participant's knowledge of the college increased, adjustment to the campus social environment was promoted, and all participants remained enrolled for the following semester.

Academic advising has been noted as one of the most significant factors in the retention of undergraduate students (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Academic advising can provide benefits that lead to improved student satisfaction and persistence. This is especially true when the timing of academic advising is respected, the importance of student-faculty relationships is considered, and the perspective of faculty academic advisors is valued. Furthermore, innovations for improvements in academic advising have been identified as the most frequently recommended and implemented interventions for increasing retention (Metzner, 1989).

### Retention

Student retention is also an essential consideration for every college and university. Student retention is one of the most significant factors "for measuring

institutional effectiveness in the prevailing environment of accountability and budgetary constraints” (Wild & Ebbers, 2002, p. 503). Colleges cannot disregard the potential revenue to be obtained by retaining students from the first to second year of their postsecondary education. The cost-effectiveness of focusing on student retention is estimated to be greater than increasing attention to recruitment strategies (Cuseo, 2003). Research abounds related to retention in higher education.

#### Linking College Students’ Initial Experiences to Retention

Woosley (2003) examined whether college students’ initial experiences could be linked to retention. Woosley’s sample consisted of first time freshman at a residential public university. Three types of initial experiences were included in the study: employment, initial social adjustment, and initial academic adjustment. Results of this longitudinal study indicated that neither employment nor initial academic adjustment significantly predict degree completion. Being employed upon enrollment in college did not affect whether or not a student completed a Bachelor’s degree. Similarly, being satisfied with courses in the initial weeks of school was not a factor in predicting degree completion. The factor that was linked to degree completion was initial social adjustment. More specifically, “students who believed they had made friends, were adjusting well, and were satisfied with their social life during the first weeks of the semester were also more likely to complete a degree within five years” (Woosley, 2003, p. 203). Woosley concluded that colleges should continue to emphasize social activities and social adjustment, with further research necessary regarding other student

populations, as well as investigation of what aspects of social experiences are important to adjustment.

#### Retention As It Relates to Academic Advising

Retention has been studied as it relates to academic advising. Metzner (1989) examined the perceived quality of academic advising on student attrition. Metzner's sample consisted of 1,033 first-time freshmen students. Students who had received academic advising rated their advisement on a 5-point Likert scale. Findings supported relevant academic advising literature in that high quality advising can promote student retention. Good advising, as reported by the students, was negatively associated with attrition, and no advising was positively related. Metzner concluded that the best single strategy for improving retention was to offer good advising. Metzner also noted:

With respect to freshman attrition, effects of an intervention such as advising may seem small when the total group of students serves as the basis for evaluation, but a sizable proportion of freshmen are committed to remaining in school regardless of their advising experiences. If only the attrition-prone students are considered, whose behavior might be influenced by advising, the effects are more dramatic. (p. 435)

For most colleges, even moderate improvements in retention will be interpreted as positive in terms of the benefits to students, as well as the financial advantages to the institution.

#### Retention As It Relates to Nursing Students

Retention of nursing students is a crucial issue facing higher education. It has been projected that by the year 2010, 40% of working registered nurses (RNs) will be older than age 50 (Buerhaus, Staiger, & Auerbach, 2000). In addition, by the year 2020, it is estimated that there will be 20% fewer nurses than are required to care for the aging

population (Staiger, Auerbach, & Buerhaus, 2000). Nursing programs have a responsibility to address this concern. One way is to provide strategies and resources to facilitate success so that enrolled students will persist, graduate, and become competent members of the nursing profession (Shelton, 2003).

Retention has been investigated as it relates to nursing students' perceived faculty support (Shelton, 2003). Shelton attempted to answer the question, "Is there a relationship between perceived faculty support and student retention in ADN (Associate Degree in Nursing) students?" (p. 71). The sample consisted of 458 students from nine accredited ADN programs in Pennsylvania and New York. Participants completed the Perceived Faculty Support Scale, developed by the investigator. Results of the study indicated that students who persist from their first clinical nursing course to the final semester had significantly greater perceived faculty support than students who withdrew voluntarily or because of academic failure. Shelton concluded that faculty should provide both functional support that provides direct help in achieving goals and facilitates learning, and psychological support that will provide the caring environment necessary for a mentoring relationship. These findings are supported by Tinto's (1993) assertions that faculty support promotes academic integration and that students who are integrated into the academic environment of the college are more likely to persist. Shelton recommended further studies that include BSN students, as well as studies that compare student and faculty perceptions of the support provided to determine if there are differences. Collection of qualitative data regarding identification of faculty behaviors students found to be supportive and unsupportive would also be of benefit.

Changes in the registered nurse (RN) workforce are additional important factors to be considered when addressing retention of BSN students. Staiger, Auerbach, and Buerhaus (2000) conducted an analysis of data that examined the declining propensity of recent cohorts of women to become RNs. Data for their analysis came from two sources. The first was the U.S. Bureau of the Census Current Population Surveys (CPS), which provide data on employment of RNs and all other occupations in the U.S. workforce. Data from the CPS are widely used by researchers, as well as the Department of Labor to predict current trends in unemployment, employment, and earnings, including the nursing profession (Buerhaus & Staiger, 1996, 1999; Buerhaus & Auerbach, 1999). The second source of data for the analysis was collected from the information on career plans of college freshmen reported in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) freshman surveys. The Higher Education Research Institute has conducted these surveys each fall since 1966 at the University of California, Los Angeles. Data collected from these surveys included annual data on background characteristics, attitudes, education, and future goals of new students entering college in the United States (Astin, Parrott, Korn, & Sax, 1997). Analysis of data from these sources indicated that the peak interest in nursing occurred among cohorts graduating from high school in the 1970s. Since then, interest has consistently declined and there has been no evidence of renewed interest in the past several years (Staiger, Auerbach, & Buerhaus, 2000). The most likely cause for this decreased interest, according to the researchers, was the expansion of career opportunities in traditionally male-dominated careers over the last 30 years. Data from the freshman survey supported this explanation. When this declining interest in nursing



is combined with the rapidly aging RN workforce the challenges facing the profession are substantial. It is crucial to develop strategies to strengthen the current and future professional nursing workforce.

Based on substantial data collection and analysis, Buerhaus, Staiger, and Auerbach (2000) outlined potential policy responses aimed at strengthening the current and future professional nursing workforce. Actions to strengthen the professional nursing workforce were categorized into three groups: “(a) actions that accept the declining supply of RNs as inevitable, (b) actions that attempt to increase the supply of registered nurses, and (c) actions intended to increase the visibility of and policy interest in the RN workforce” (p. 280). The authors suggested that it will require assistance from hospitals, physicians, policymakers, the public, and the media, in addition to educators to address the challenges facing the nursing profession and the broader health care industry. Nursing educators may be able to address actions that attempt to increase the supply of registered nurses. Buerhaus, Staiger, and Auerbach (2000) identified increasing enrollment in nursing education as a potential action intended to increase the supply of registered nurses. Several strategies for increasing enrollments were discussed, including new approaches to education, as well as communicating the perceived benefits of nursing as a career and lowering the costs of nursing education.

Jeffreys (2001) conducted an exploratory study investigating select aspects of an enrichment program designed to increase academic success, promote psychological outcomes, and decrease attrition of nursing students. The enrichment program consisted of orientation, mentoring, tutoring, study groups, career advisement, networking,

newsletters, and transitional support. The study utilized a convenience sample drawn from a population of ADN students enrolled in an urban commuter public university. Data were collected over four semesters. The results supported the anticipated outcome that students who consistently participated in the enrichment program study groups would demonstrate better academic outcomes than students who did not participate. Overall, the intervention group achieved higher pass rates and lower failure rates in nursing courses, and lower withdrawal rates than the control group. Students participating in the enrichment program also reported high levels of satisfaction with the enrichment program. Jeffreys concluded that the high student satisfaction with the enrichment program and the perception that the enrichment program would positively affect retention supports the continued need for development and implementation of strategies that enrich the academic experience. Jeffreys advocated for continued creation of innovations to enhance student success, as well as systematic evaluation of interventions to maximize their strengths.

Retention efforts should not be reactive, only being seen as necessary when students fail to meet expectations or demonstrate deficiencies in the academic setting (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001). Rather, retention efforts must focus on preventative measures in order to avoid attrition.

#### Summary of Literature Review

In order to explore student perceptions of their participation in Care Group advising, as well as faculty and administrative perceptions, the review of literature related to academic advising and retention in higher education was essential. In addition, review

of Tinto's Student Integration Model (Tinto, 1987, 1993) and Bean's Model of Student Departure (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metzner & Bean, 1987) was necessary for framing the research. Review of the existing literature provided focus for the study, and although review of literature prior to implementing a qualitative study is sometimes controversial this review provided the necessary direction for this qualitative study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study focused on a common experience of first semester Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students and faculty. The common experience involved the process of Care Group advising. The goal of this study was to explore how the involved students and faculty interpreted the experience (Care Group advising) and transformed the experience into consciousness (Patton, 2002). Investigating the perceptions and meanings of the involved individuals was the subject matter for the study. The primary methodological approach used was interviewing, both focus group and individual. Focus group interviews were used with student Care Group participants and individual interviews were used with faculty and administrator participants. Focus groups worked well due to the nature of the student participants' participation in Care Group advising. Student participants had the common experience of Care Group advising and this data collection technique allowed for the collection of high-quality data in a setting where the participants could consider their own views in comparison to the views of other participants (Patton, 2002). Data analysis relied on the use of the constant comparative method. Through the use of the constant comparative method, data was categorized throughout the research process and continuously compared to new data identified throughout the process.

#### Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of the methodology utilized in the study. This chapter contains a description of the participants,

a pilot study conducted as a precursor to this study, an overview of the role of the researcher, data collection procedures (including an in-depth discussion of focus group interview techniques and individual interviews), data analysis procedures (including the constant comparative data analysis method utilized), and protection of human rights.

### Participants

Participants in this study included all first semester (fall 2003) BSN students enrolled in the common course, Introduction to Professional Nursing. This purposeful sample was used because of the first-hand experience these students had with the phenomenon under investigation, Care Group advising. In addition to the student participants, the sample included faculty who served as group advisors and college administrators who had responsibility for the care group intervention. The goal of purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is to develop a rich or dense description of the phenomenon (Streubert- Speziale & Carpenter, 2003), and all of these participants were selected for the purpose of describing the experiences of which they were a part.

### Pilot Study

During the spring semester of 2003 a pilot study was conducted in order to explore the initial response to the implementation of Care Group advising. Approval for the pilot was granted through the University of Northern Iowa Human Participants Review Committee, as well as the College Human Subjects Review Committee. Participants included students assigned to Care Groups during the fall 2002 semester and faculty Care Group advisors. These participants were the first student Care Group participants and their advisors. Five groups of students (N=27) were interviewed, as well

as three faculty Care Group advisors. Interviews with student groups were scheduled prior to or immediately following a common class, and individual interviews were scheduled at the convenience of each faculty member.

Implementation of the pilot study allowed for revision and refinement of the open-ended interview questions, for both the student groups and the individual faculty advisors. The pilot study also offered the opportunity to utilize the focus group interview methodology for the first time. Being a novice researcher, conducting five separate focus group interviews led to an increased comfort level with some of the techniques and strategies employed in this methodology. For instance, the use of probing, prompting, and allowing the participants to provide their subjective responses were experienced and honed.

Although analysis of the interviews was not the focus of the pilot study, some preliminary interpretations indicated the need for further investigation. For instance, the students responded favorably to the concept and process of Care Groups. Some shared examples of specific positive experiences that were identified as a result of Care Group involvement. Some students also offered suggestions for changes in the structure of Care Groups. Faculty response was mixed. Two of the three faculty interviewed were positive regarding the experience. For instance, the advisors believed they got to know their advisees (Care Group members) better than they had prior to the implementation of Care Group advising. They also thought that connections were made between advisors and students, as well as among student Care Group members. The third faculty member was not as comfortable with the process and did not perceive it as a worthwhile experience.

Her interpretation was that students did not value the Care Group meetings and that use of meetings to complete and/or clarify class assignments was not conducive to the intended purpose of Care Groups.

The pilot study clearly indicated the need for further study regarding the effects and benefits of Care Group advising as implemented at the College. Although students responded favorably to the initiation of Care Group advising, they also provided several suggestions for improving the Care Group process. The mixed response from the three faculty advisors also indicated a need for further investigation.

#### Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research requires a unique blend of characteristics. When the “lived experience becomes the description of a particular phenomenon, the investigator takes on specific responsibilities in transforming the information” (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2003, p. 66). Transformation of information follows several phases (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2003, p. 66-67): first, the people’s experiences are transformed into language; second, the researcher transforms what is seen and heard into an understanding of the original experience; third, the researcher transforms the understandings regarding the phenomenon under study into conceptual categories that represent the original experience; and fourth, the researcher transforms those essences into a written document that depicts what the researcher has captured regarding the experiences and reflects the participant’s descriptions. This written document serves to clarify the series of transformations.

The researcher must also possess certain characteristics that will allow for data collection to occur. Essential qualities of a qualitative researcher include the ability to communicate clearly and help the participants feel comfortable in discussing their experiences. The researcher is the instrument for data collection and must function effectively to facilitate data collection. Personal characteristics may interfere with data collection. Some characteristics that may affect the data collection process include manner of speaking, gender, age, and class or status differences. A characteristic that required sensitivity was the status difference. Efforts were made to minimize the researcher's employment status as a faculty member within the institution. Rather, the status and role as a "researcher" was highlighted.

In this study, being an insider had the distinct advantage of providing considerable breadth and depth of understanding regarding the phenomena under investigation and the College in general. Understanding the institution, processes, and terminology is identified by Edmunds, (1999) as a distinct advantage to personally conducting focus group interviews. As an employee of the institution, gaining access to participants was uncomplicated. The Director of Admissions provided lists of students in Care Groups. Arrangements were then made with course faculty to speak with the class to schedule interview times based on convenience for the participants. Individual interview times were scheduled with Care Group advisors and administrators based on their availability.

Being an insider also carried some potential risk during the interview process. As a faculty member within the institution there was a distinct potential to have the student



participants in class at some point during their education. Efforts to emphasize the processes taken to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were necessary. An effort to avoid introducing any potential bias was also necessary. An attempt was made to avoid wording questions in a manner that may have led participants to support the views of the researcher. In addition, being a colleague/peer had the potential to lead to hesitation or tentativeness on the part of the faculty Care Group advisors. Confidentiality was also emphasized with faculty Care Group advisors.

#### Data Collection

Two primary types of data collection were used: focus group interviews with advising Care Groups and individual interviews with Care Group advisors and select college administrators. An interview guide was utilized with each group (Appendix A), as well as with each individual interview (Appendix B and Appendix C).

#### Focus Group Interviews With Students

The primary method of data collection employed in this constant comparative qualitative study regarding the impact of Care Group advising on first semester BSN students enrolled at the College was focus group interview techniques. This method has been shown to provide researchers and social scientists with an efficient tool by which to conduct qualitative investigations (Carey, 1994; Carey & Smith, 1994; Kidd & Parshall, 2000). The focus group strategy was appropriate for the collection of qualitative data because it offered the advantages of being flexible, stimulating, cumulative, elaborative, assistive in information recall, and capable of producing rich data (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). According to Morgan (1997), “the hallmark of focus groups is their

explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction of the group” (p. 2). Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996) assert that the central assumption of focus groups is that the permissive atmosphere allows for a range of opinions, providing a more complete and revealing understanding of the issues. The goal of focus interviews was to create a candid conversation, focusing on the subjective experiences of the people exposed to the event. Thus, it was essential that all focus group participants experienced a similar, specific situation (Vaughn et al., 1996). In this study the common experience of the focus group members was participation in Care Group advising.

This qualitative approach offered several advantages for studying the identified intervention of academic advising Care Groups. The constant comparative method is a research design for multi-data sources (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The multiple data sources included eight student focus groups, individual interviews with six Care Group advisors, and three administrators, as well as review of select College retention data. In addition, the use of qualitative methodology is supported and identified as valuable for investigating programs, services, problems, and products in higher education, including the exploration of the first-year experience of students (Morris, 2001; Patton 2002). This approach allowed for an examination of how first-year students and faculty advisors experienced the established intervention of academic advising Care Groups. In addition, the focus group interview process allowed for collection of comprehensive qualitative data in order to discover characteristics of the experience from the perspectives of students, faculty, and administration. The focus group interview technique allowed for

investigation of significant data to explain not just the “what,” but also the “why” and “how” of academic advising Care Groups (Vaughn et al., 1996).

Vaughn et al. (1996) identified five core elements of focus groups (p. 5). These elements, as they relate to the investigation of academic advising Care Groups, include the following:

1. *A focus group is comprised of individuals who have experienced a phenomena under investigation.* The focus groups included students who had participated in academic advising Care Groups for at least one semester.

2. *The group is generally small, fewer than 12 participants, and somewhat homogenous.*

Composition of the focus groups was dictated by previously assigned Care Group membership. All incoming, first semester students were randomly assigned to an advising Care Group by the College’s Director of Admissions. Maintaining these already existing groups provided for homogeneity in the composition of the focus groups. This homogeneity “allows for more free-flowing conversations among participants within groups and also facilitates analyses that examine differences in perspective between groups” (Morgan, 1997, p. 35). Although it is often suggested that focus group composition should include strangers rather than acquaintances, use of acquaintances is often unavoidable (Morgan, 1997). Use of naturally occurring groups was necessary because use of this organizational setting made it nearly impossible to avoid acquaintances. Use of pre-existing groups necessitated researcher sensitivity to any established relationships among the group members (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). In addition, the focus group methodology was effective

because all group members were on an equal basis. According to Morris (2001), “commonality” is the vital determinant for participation. Thus, faculty Care Group advisors and administrators were asked to participate in separate individual interviews.

3. *Participant responses are obtained through use of a moderator who prompts discussion with prepared questions and appropriate probes.* In order to facilitate participation in the interviews, students were given a brief overview of the purpose of the study just prior to the interview. This may have stimulated their thinking regarding the Care Group advising process and led to more detailed and rich discussion. Open-ended questions were utilized that were informed by the relevant conceptual frames. A review of appropriate literature guided development of pertinent research questions.
4. *The goal of the focus group is to elicit perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and ideas from the participants regarding advising Care Groups.* The interview questions were semi-structured for the focus group interviews and investigated participant’s perceptions and beliefs related to their involvement in academic advising Care Groups (see Appendix A). The “semistructured interview” (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 310) involved asking a series of structured questions and then used probes to obtain more detailed responses. According to Morgan (1997), it is useful to organize the discussion questions into a guide that is followed from group to group. This structure was valuable in leading the group interaction, as well as in making comparisons between groups in the analysis phase of the research. Utilization of an interview

guide for the focus group (including potential target questions and follow-up probes) was necessary for the successful implementation of the focus groups (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996, p. 148). Although specific questions were prepared in advance, the guide was viewed as tentative, allowing for emergent and unexpected responses during the interviews.

5. *Focus groups do not generate quantitative data that can be generalized to larger groups.* Data gathered through focus groups was unique to the identified phenomenon. Generalizations are typically not appropriate, nor the goal of this technique. Focus groups in this study elicited beliefs and perceptions from the perspectives of the participants, based on their participation in Care Group advising.

Focus group interviews were conducted during the students' second semester of enrollment. This allowed for a complete semester of participation in academic advising Care Groups. Focus group interview questions were informed by the relevant literature, specifically the conceptual frameworks of Tinto (1993) and Bean (Bean & Metzner, 1995; Metzner & Bean, 1987). Semi-structured, open-ended questions were used. This approach allowed for latitude in the answers provided. Open-ended questions allowed participants to identify their own priorities using their own vocabulary (Craig & Smyth, 2002). The respondents were free to move about in their description of Care Group advising (Streubert-Speziale, 2003; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996).

Student participants were also asked to complete a "Care Group Student Demographic Data" form (Appendix D). This provided some very basic demographic data regarding the participants. Student participants were also given the opportunity to

be interviewed individually. Students who wished to be interviewed individually were asked to indicate this on the “Student Demographic Data” form that was completed at the time of the group interview. No students chose to participate in an individual interview. Individual interviews may have provided for a more in-depth interview with participants who may have been more reserved or reticent.

Additional data were gathered through the summative “Care Group Evaluation” form (Appendix E) that is completed by students at the end of the first semester of participation in Care Group advising. This was an institutionally designed and implemented evaluation intended to monitor student perception of and satisfaction with Care Groups. Students rated various aspects of the Care Group experience using a 5 point Likert-type scale. These summative evaluations were distributed and collected by Care Group advisors. Responses were averaged and summarized by College support staff.

#### Individual Interviews With Faculty Advisors and Administrators

Individual interviews were utilized with faculty Care Group advisors and select college administrators. Semi-structured interview guides were also developed for the individual interviews (Appendices B and C). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) semi-structured interview guides are appropriate for multi-participant studies. They allowed for comparable data to be gathered from the multiple participants. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to fully explain their perceptions of their involvement in Care Group advising. Although specific questions were prepared in advance, this guide was viewed as tentative, allowing for emergent and unexpected responses during

the interviews. Individual interviews were scheduled for convenience of the participants to facilitate thorough and efficient data collection.

Care Group advisors were also asked to complete an Academic Advisor Demographic Data form (Appendix F). This provided some basic information that was useful when analyzing data. For instance, the number of years teaching and the number of years advising were examined in relationship to the Care Group advisor's perceptions and attitudes concerning group advising.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim in order to review the information collected. The tape recording of interviews offered the distinct advantage of reducing the tendency to make unconscious selections of data favoring the researcher's biases (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The tape recording of interviews also offered a high level of fidelity. Fidelity refers to the researcher's ability to reproduce data as actually evidenced (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Other advantages of tape recording the interviews included a complete verbal record which could be analyzed more thoroughly than data from interview notes, and a quicker interview process because extensive note taking was not necessary (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

Gaining access to interview participants is often cited as an important data collection consideration. Access to interview participants in this study was facilitated by the researcher's status as a faculty member of the College. Establishing rapport with the interview participants was also facilitated by the researcher's current interaction and knowledge of students within the institution.

## Data Analysis

### The Constant Comparative Data Analysis

Data collection is often referred to as emergent in qualitative research (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). In qualitative methods, data collected at one point in time are used to determine the direction and focus of subsequent data collection. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the data collection. The constant comparative method was used as an ongoing data analysis approach for data collected throughout the focus groups and individual interviews. This method involved posing initial questions to the participants, analyzing the data, revising questions as guided by the analysis, conducting subsequent interviews, and analyzing additional data in an ongoing way until such time as data collection was complete. Thus, emerging themes guided data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) and the data suggested emerging themes. Analysis began early and continued on an ongoing basis throughout the study.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) offer a series of steps in the constant comparative method. These steps were utilized for ongoing data collection and analysis in this qualitative study:

1. *Begin data collection.* Data collection began during the second semester of enrollment for first year BSN students. After a brief description of the study and completion of informed consent, initial questions were posed to volunteer participants. Sample interview questions are contained in Appendix A. All interviews were audiotaped. Data from the audiotapes were transcribed verbatim by the researcher within twenty-four hours of the interview. This allowed for



clear and accurate transcriptions. Anecdotal notes taken during the focus group and individual interviews were also compiled with each transcription. These notes included minor wording changes for questions posed to participants. An example of such a change was rather than asking participants to “describe some interactions that occurred with your peers during the Care Group meetings,” the participants were asked to provide examples of discussions or conversations that took place during the Care Group meetings. This particular change seemed to make more sense to the student participants. Changes such as this led to more detailed responses from participants, in much the same manner as probing.

2. *Identify key issues, recurring events, or activities that may become categories of focus for the group.* Every participant response was analyzed for key words and phrases. Relevant excerpts from responses were categorized according to the identified key words and phrases. Initial categories were created based on the broad topical areas of interview questions asked. Initial categories included (a) what students like about the College, (b) identified supports related to Care Groups, (c) purpose of Care Groups, (d) achievement of purpose, (e) connections, (f) frustrations with Care Groups, (g) satisfaction, (h) benefits, and (i) retention. These categories allowed for data to be sorted and organized early in the data analysis process, although there were clearly instances when data overlapped between categories. For instance, students may have been satisfied with the process of meeting their peers which could be categorized under connections and satisfaction. At this point in the data analysis, if a response fit in more than one

category it was included in each. As data collection and analysis continued, it became evident that although these categories worked well as a method for sorting initial data, the existing overlap did not lend to the development of distinct categories of data. At this point an attempt was made to integrate Tinto's Student Integration Model (Tinto, 1987, 1993) into the process of categorizing data. Tinto's four institutional conditions, information/advice, support, involvement, and learning, were used to refine the categorization of data. This allowed for greater distinction among categories as all responses were categorized according to this framework.

3. *Collect data that support the categories of focus, allowing for diversity of dimensions under the categories.* Focus group participants were allowed and encouraged to engage in discourse related to the questions posed. Group consensus was not a factor for the focus group interviews, as supported in literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Any similarities or differences of opinions and perceptions (Morris, 2001) were noted. For example, every focus group spoke about getting to know peers and faculty advisors through the process of Care Group advising. However, students did occasionally contradict each other as well. For instance, while most student groups talked about communication in a positive perspective, one group discussed some issues with communication within their group. These identified differences were noted throughout the data analysis process.

4. *Document and describe the categories being explored, attempt to include all incidents identified, and continue to search for new data.* Ongoing documentation and description of identified categories of data took place throughout the interviewing process. All participant responses continued to be analyzed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) caution the researcher to stop coding periodically and write memos on ideas. Frequency, intensity, and saliency of responses were considered during analysis of categories. For instance, it was noted when several students within one group made similar comments. In addition, an attempt was made to make note of repetitive comments among groups, as well as occasional difference of opinion. As the data analysis process continued, discussions with a qualitative researcher led to the development of further refinement of the categories into the identified themes. Through the ongoing data collection and analysis, these themes developed and were theoretically supported by the literature. Early themes included first-year transition to the College, student-student and student-faculty relationships, and communication. Throughout the process the additional categories of retention of first year students and socialization to nursing education and to the profession of nursing were identified. Definitions of the categories evolved throughout the process. Table 1 summarizes the definitions of the themes. In addition, certain key words were used when assigning participant responses to categories/themes. These key words are included in Table 1, as well as sample participant responses.

Table 1

*Definitions of Themes*

Theme	Definition	Key Words	Sample Participant Response
First-year transition to the College	Included any comments related to the process of change that students underwent during their first year at the College. This also included discussion related to changes in the phase of life, from pre- or non-college student to college student.	comfort, adjustment, transition, familiarity, belonging, support, orientation, facilitation of first year	"Care Groups helped us adjust to college."
Student-student and student-faculty relationships	Data related to relationships included comments regarding connections between students and connections between students and faculty. Any discussion related to cooperation and collaboration that took place was considered within this category.	meeting peers, meeting faculty, establishing friendships, connections, getting to know others, trust in Care Group advisors, seek assistance from advisor, relationship, advisor as resource	"I really trust my advisor." "The Care Group was good for me. It made me branch out and meet new people."
Communication in downward, upward, and lateral modes	Any reference to the exchange of information, whether it was between individuals or within groups, was considered for inclusion in this category. Written and verbal communication were both included.	hearing, explaining, communication, ask questions, talked, discussion, sharing, e-mail, dissemination of information	"Communication was easier when we met with our group." "We talked about what stressed us."

(table continues)

Theme	Definition	Key Words	Sample Participant Response
Socialization to nursing education and the nursing profession	Discussion related to familiarization with the College and the nursing curriculum, the profession of nursing (e.g. opportunities in nursing), or exposure to nurses and nursing were considered for inclusion in this category.	familiarization with College policies and curriculum, development of plans of study, opportunities in nursing, nurses' professional experiences, values	"Learning about all of the opportunities in nursing was helpful."
Retention of first-year students	Any discussion that included elements of remaining active students (maintaining student status at the College) or leaving the College was included in this category. Comments regarding satisfaction with the College were also considered within this category.	drop, leave transfer, stay, retention, attrition	"I decided to stay." "No one has decided to leave in my Care Group."

5. *Continually revise interview questions, reflecting the constant comparative analysis of data.* Unitizing and categorizing continued throughout the completion of the focus group interviews. Data collection and analysis continued until saturation was achieved. Saturation refers to the repetition and confirmation of previously collected data (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). Although each Care Group was interviewed once during the data collection, no new categories of data emerged during the final focus group interview.

As the categories evolved to the identified themes, each piece of data was considered individually in an attempt to categorize it within one of the five distinct themes. There were occasions when a piece of data may have contained elements that were characteristic of more than one theme. Decisions were made based on certain key words. For instance, while one student talked about meeting her peers at the College she commented, "I was so glad to see a familiar face, being able to sit next to someone I had met in Care Group really helped. If I hadn't seen her sitting there, I'm not sure I would have gone into class." Thus, although this discussion did involve meeting a peer and may have potentially been categorized with the "student-student relationships" theme, the key words of familiarity and comfort were considered priority for placing this data in the "first year transition to college" theme.

Another example of the decision making process for categorizing data involved the following quote: "Having Care Groups meet during orientation helped. The structure of having the group to eat lunch with and having the advisor start the conversation, helped gets things going. This helped my comfort level." While this data included the word "conversation," the comment was interpreted as it related to the student's reference to "comfort level." "Comfort" was a key word for the "first-year transition to the College" theme, and this data was categorized accordingly.

While each piece of data was considered for inclusion in the five identified themes, there were infrequent pieces of data that were excluded. The student focus groups occasionally got off track during the interviews. For instance, one group started discussing the campus e-mail system while discussing communication. The comments

about the e-mail system were not relevant to any of the identified themes. Another group started talking about a particular class that they believed was worthwhile and allowed them to meet several peers. While this was somewhat related to establishing student relationships, the nursing course they were referring to did not correspond with this qualitative study. Although these irrelevant discussions were infrequent, the students were re-directed as necessary to the focus group discussion.

Although the identified themes evolved beyond the four institutional conditions set forth by Tinto (Tinto, 1987, 1993), there remained a certain connection. For instance, the identified theme of “communication in downward, upward, and lateral modes” was connected to Tinto’s institutional condition of information/advice. Another example of a connection existed between the identified themes of “student-student and student-faculty relationships” and “first-year transition to the College” and Tinto’s institutional condition of support. In this case, Tinto’s institutional condition branched out into two distinct directions. While the identified themes are supported by Tinto’s framework, they developed into the two identified themes based on the analysis and interpretation of the data. Two themes that evolved through the data analysis process, socialization to nursing education and the nursing profession and retention of first-year students, were not as easily connected to Tinto’s institutional conditions.

The constant comparative method allowed for continuous and simultaneous data collection and analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as a “continuously developing process” (p. 340). The evolution of themes was indicative of this continual and on-going process. While each step provided direction for the next, the steps were

often times overlapping or occurring all at once. Data analysis led back to more data collection. The ultimate goal of data analysis and interpretation in this constant comparative study was the generation of a rich description that led to deep understanding of the essential elements underlying the human experiences related to Care Group advising. While this generation of descriptions was occurring, there was also an attempt to demonstrate trustworthiness, “by being balanced, fair, and conscientious” (Patton, 2002, p. 575) in the data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

### Trustworthiness

While it is generally recognized that decisions regarding the rigor in a research study ultimately amount to judgement, the rigor in qualitative research is demonstrated through the researchers’ attention to and confirmation of information discovery (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2003, p. 38). Guba and Lincoln (1994) have identified the following terms that describe the categories involved in establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative work: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement and multiple focus groups. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “prolonged engagement is the investment of sufficient time” (p. 301). This includes becoming oriented to the situation in which the phenomenon takes place and building trust. As an insider, existing in the culture in which the study took place, this researcher was accepted by the participants. Prolonged engagement was sufficiently met through continued data collection and analysis over a two-year period, including the pilot study.



Credibility can also be satisfied through triangulation of data. Several different modes of triangulation existed in this study. Use of data triangulation was implemented to provide credible findings. More specifically, use of person triangulation, collecting data from more than one level of person (Streubert- Speziale & Carpenter, 2003) enhanced the credibility of findings. Several groups of students were interviewed, as well as faculty Care Group advisors and administrators.

Dependability. Dependability is a criterion met once the researcher has demonstrated the credibility of the findings. Generally, if credibility is established, dependability follows. There can be no dependability without credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study the dependability was established through the aforementioned credibility.

Confirmability. Confirmability is a process criterion. The technique used to establish confirmability in this study was an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail consists of “a recording of activities over time that another individual can follow” (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2003, p. 38). The goal of the audit trail is to document as clearly as possible the evidence and thought processes that led to the conclusions. The audit trail consisted of interview transcriptions, written field notes, synthesis products (including identified themes and relationships), process notes (including notes related to procedures, strategies, and rationale), and the final report, with connections to the existing literature and an integration of concepts and relationships (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability. Transferability refers to the likelihood that the findings of this study will have meaning to others in similar situations. Transferability has also been labeled “fittingness” (Streubert-Speziale & Carpenter, 2003, p. 38). The expectation for determining this criterion rests with potential users of the findings, not with the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) have stated, “It is *not* ...the naturalist’s task to provide an *index* of transferability; it *is* his or her responsibility to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of the potential appliers” (p. 316). That said, there are certain general categories of individuals who may find meaning from this study, most notably nursing faculty concerned about first year student retention.

#### Protection of Human Rights

The Human Participants Review Application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Northern Iowa (Appendix G) and the College (Appendix H). Some of the key features of the IRB proposal were: (a) participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any time during the study; (b) participants were provided with a written informed consent (Appendix I) that included an explanation of the purpose and duration of the study; (c) potential risks related to involvement in this study were no more than minimal; (d) the only identifiable risk was the inconvenience related to time required to participate in focus group or individual interviews; (e) there were no direct identifiable benefits to the participants in this study. However, participants had the opportunity to reflect on their experience and perhaps even gain some personal insights; (f) anonymity and confidentiality were

ensured; (g) all data are to be destroyed at the conclusion of the study; and (h) the results of the research are being published in such a manner that no participant can be recognized on an individual basis.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative study of student and faculty perceptions of a specialized type of first-year academic advising, Care Groups, was conducted at a private, independent, accredited, co-educational, non-residential college. Students are dually enrolled at the College and a local regional university, where the majority of their general education requirements are completed. During the first semester of their first year students take one three-hour course at the College and are on campus one time per week. This limited contact during the first year had been identified by students, faculty, and staff as an obstacle to student satisfaction, as well as a potential issue for first-year retention. In an effort to increase contact with first-year students, academic advising Care Groups were initiated. Academic advising Care Groups served to acquaint incoming students with a small group of peers and a faculty advisor. The academic advising Care Groups were intended to improve first year student satisfaction and improve first year student retention.

This study investigated student perceptions of their participation in Care Group advising, as well as faculty and administrative perceptions. Data were collected through focus group interviews with eight student groups, and individual interviews with six Care Group faculty advisors and three administrators. The interviews were conducted over a period of three months. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher within 24 hours. This process allowed for identification of key issues and categorization

of data. The constant comparative method of continuous and simultaneous categorizing of data provided a rich description of the Care Group phenomena.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze data collected during the focus group interviews with Care Group student participants and individual interviews with Care Group advisors and select college administrators. An overview of the basic demographics of the participants, both students and faculty advisors, and a description of a typical Care Group meeting, from both the student and faculty perspective, are provided. This chapter contains the results of the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. Themes that emerged from the interviews are presented.

#### Participant Demographics

Student participants (32 students in eight focus groups) were a somewhat homogenous group. The mean age was 21.4 years. The range of ages was 18 to 48, although this included two outliers of 35 years and 48 years. If the outliers were excluded the range would be 18 to 25 years. The gender of the student participants was predominantly female, 87.5% (28 of 32 student participants). Self-identified race was overwhelmingly Caucasian, 96.9% (31 of 32 participants).

Faculty advisor participants (6 advisors) were also distinctly homogenous in terms of gender and race. The gender of the faculty advisors was 100% female and the self-identified race was 100% Caucasian. There was, however, some variance in regard to teaching and advising experience. The mean total years in teaching was 8 years, with a range of 2 to 28 years. The mean number of years in the current position was 4.3 years, with a range of 2 to 7 years. The mean number of years in academic advising was 5.7

years, with a range of 2 to 15 years. There was some additional variance in regard to the number of advisees these faculty advisors were assigned. The mean number of students in each faculty advisor's Care Group was 10, with a range of 5 to 15 students. The mean number of additional advisees (non-first year and non-Care Group) assigned to these faculty advisors was 5.7, with a range of 0 to 11.

#### Typical Care Group Meeting

Students described the typical Care Group meeting to be very informal. Students also described most meetings as casual and informative. At times there were some planned activities that related to the common course in which Care Groups members were enrolled. Students typically would have preferred Care Group meetings be more social, and less academic. For example, discussing criteria and formatting for assignments was not received as well as discussing issues related to nursing and/or the College curriculum. A few students did, however, comment on using the time for Care Group meetings wisely. They would not want to come to meetings if there was not a plan or focus for the group. Nearly all students reported attending when meetings were scheduled before or after the common class.

Faculty Care Group advisors concurred with students regarding the typical group meeting. Faculty reported a casual, yet attentive atmosphere for group meetings. Attendance was high (nearly all students) when meetings preceded or followed the common class. Faculty also preferred a less academic focus for the meetings. Discussion related to specific course content and requirements was often difficult, as these Care Group advisors were not involved in teaching the common course. Faculty also preferred

the more general nursing topics for discussion, as well as responding to spontaneous questions raised by student Care Group members. Meetings typically lasted about one hour. There were only some exceptions when Care Groups were working on registration materials for the upcoming semester, these meetings took somewhat longer, but students left as they finished updating their plans of study.

### Emergent Themes

Care Group student participants, Care Group faculty advisors, and select administrators were interviewed regarding their understanding of the purpose of Care Group advising and their interpretation of achievement of purpose. The interviews were conducted in focus groups (students) and in individual, in-depth interviews (faculty and administrators). Several major themes emerged from the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. These themes included: (a) Care Groups and the transition of first-year college students; (b) student-advisor and student-student relationships related to Care Groups; (c) Care Groups and the influence on communication in downward, upward, and lateral modes; (d) socialization to nursing education and nursing as a professional field of study related to Care Groups; and (e) satisfaction and retention of first-year students associated with Care Group advising.

### Care Groups and the Transition of First Year College Students

Easing the transition from high school to college for nursing students who were new to the College emerged as a theme in the focus groups. This was particularly important for first-time students, but was also mentioned by transfer students and second year students. Students indicated that they were well aware that one of the underlying

purposes of Care Groups was to assist them in making the transition to the College. For example, two students revealed that they understood that to be one of the purposes of Care Groups, indicating that, "Care Groups were supposed to help us transition from high school" and "Care Groups were intended to help us adjust to college." Beyond understanding this as an intended purpose, students also indicated that Care Groups met this purpose. Students described Care Groups as providing support during orientation and the first few weeks of classes. One commented, "It helped get past that first step," meaning that it helped her get through the first day when she did not know anyone and had just arrived on campus. Meeting as early as possible, ideally during orientation, was identified as a significant benefit to Care Groups: "Starting Care Groups at orientation was definitely a benefit, it was nice to have the advisor there to start the conversation, and to have people to sit with." The value of Care Groups in easing the transition to college for new students was underscored by one student, who suggested that more might be better, "I just think we should meet more often, I think that if we met more it would help even more with the transition."

Another student discussed the personal benefit of getting to know another student immediately upon arriving at college, and at the same time she stressed the sense of urgency and importance that she felt as a new traditional-aged student in a new environment. When she arrived at her anatomy and physiology class in a large lecture hall she recognized a Care Group member and proceeded to sit next to her. This student commented, "I was so glad to see a familiar face, just being able to sit next to someone I had met in Care Group really helped. If I hadn't seen her sitting there, I'm not sure I



would have gone into class.” Knowing just one other person certainly increased the comfort level of this student and in all likelihood assisted with the transition of attending classes the first semester. It may also have been a key factor that contributed to the student’s comfort with her new surroundings and her persistence as a new student.

Easing the transition to college also emerged as a theme evident in data collected during in-depth interviews with faculty advisors and administrators. Faculty advisors described the importance of providing support during the first semester of enrollment. One Care Group advisor described Care Groups as providing a “warm environment” to help with the initial transition. Another Care Group advisor discussed the importance of “increasing the students’ feelings of belongingness, and the sense of the College being ‘home’ for the students.” Administrators also identified with the easing the transition theme, with comments such as “Care Groups are a means to facilitate the first year for our students,” and “Care Groups provide an added support for first-year students.”

Although faculty and administrators believed that Care Groups made a difference regarding the student transition to college, they clearly believed that not all student needs are the same. One administrator commented,

I am sure Care Groups serve their intended purpose for some students, probably the younger students. Maybe there needs to be a different format for the other ones. I am not sure it all needs to be face-to-face. I also think we have to be constantly asking ourselves what the needs of our students are. For instance, for their social development are there other things that our students would need.

Faculty tended to question the process as it is designed for all first-semester students. Typical comments included statements such as, “Care Groups serve their purpose for some, but not for all. My students were at different points and some just

didn't need that level of interaction with peers. They maybe already had a supportive peer group. But others did benefit from the group."

Faculty advisors and administrators indicated that the structure of Care Groups might need to be altered or revised in order to meet the differing needs of students. For instance, some participants discussed the possibility of deliberately grouping students into Care Groups based on student status; first year college students grouped together, transfer students grouped together, and second-degree students grouped together.

The differentiation of student needs also came through in some of the discussions with students. Some students who identified themselves as transfer students found the experience of Care Groups frustrating at times. For instance:

I felt that I had gone to college for two years already when I came to the Care Group, it was sort of like I was back in high school. I don't know, I guess I thought of college as going to the classroom, take notes, leave, and do my own thing. I don't need someone to hold my hand, I mean it was sort of nice, but not needed.

Another transfer student commented, "I liked Care Groups but I wish that we hadn't been grouped with freshmen. I felt like being a transfer student I had already gone through that so it would have been more helpful to be with transfer students at my level."

Another student identified a specific reason to group transfer students together,

No one from my Care Group is in any of my classes now. We were together for that first class and I met them, but because of the credits I transferred in, I am now ahead of them. It would have been better for me to have been grouped with other transfer students.

This certainly corresponds with the faculty advisor's and administrator's discussions regarding differing needs of different student groups.

Student summative evaluations of Care Groups. The “transition of the first year students” theme was also supported by the summative evaluation students completed following their first semester at the College. Following completion of the first semester of participation in Care Groups, students were asked to complete the summative “Care Group Evaluation” form (Appendix E). In general, student responses to this evaluation indicated general agreement, where a “4” signifies “agreement,” with the evaluation statements. The evaluation referred to transition to college and students rated the following statement: “The Care Group experience has aided my transition to the College.” The group average was 3.9. Table 2 summarizes the “Care Group Evaluation” data.

Another item on the summative “Care Group Evaluation” form that related to facilitation of the first year was, “The Care Group experience helped decrease my anxiety level.” This item received a group average of 3.7. Starting college is nearly always equated to increased levels of anxiety, and although participants did not verbalize anxiety specifically, the summative Evaluation supports the notion that Care Groups did help decrease anxiety for some students.

All participants valued the connection between academic advising Care Groups and facilitation of the first year of college. Students appreciated being part of the group especially during orientation and their early days on campus. Care Groups were seen as a means to quickly meet others, both peers and faculty, which led to increased feelings of belongingness. Faculty and administrators also supported Care Group advising in relation to first-year transition to the College. All participants, did however, question the

Table 2

*Care Group Evaluation*

Evaluation Criteria	Group Average
My care group advisor has been available for consultation.	4.5
My care group advisor has served as a resource for me.	4.3
The care group experience has aided my transition to the College.	3.9
The care group experience has facilitated my personal and professional growth.	3.7
The care group helped me form supportive relationships.	3.9
My care group leader modeled caring behaviors.	4.6
The care group experience helped decrease my anxiety level.	3.7
The care group encouraged me to be an active learner.	3.8
The care group facilitated development of professional values.	3.9
The care group was an effective advising method.	4.1

existing organization of the process for all entering students.

Student-Advisor and Student-Student Relationships Related to Care Groups

The development of relationships was identified as a theme throughout the data collection. Student focus group participants and faculty advisors discussed relationships between students and faculty. Students also spoke freely about the development of peer relationships.

Student-advisor relationships. All eight student focus groups discussed the development of relationships with faculty advisors throughout their first year of enrollment at the College. Many students talked about how they believed they really got to know their advisors and that their advisors got to know them. Common comments included, “The teachers really seem to know you, I like that they know who I am;” “At the College you know everybody, that’s really nice;” and “Care Groups helped us get to know our advisor, she is supposed to be a resource for us and getting to know her has helped us be comfortable with her.” Another student described the relationships that formed in terms of helpfulness of faculty: “I went to another small school before I came here and the teachers were personable, but not like here, here they almost go the extra mile to help.” Students clearly believed that their advisors and faculty made connections with them during the first year of enrollment, and that these connections were important to them.

Faculty-student relationships were apparent through many of the examples students discussed about support they received during their first year at the College. Students discussed advisors keeping in contact with them, either via the scheduled meetings or via phone and e-mail contacts. Students perceived faculty advisors as being very caring and professional. One student commented, “Our advisor really cares about our success.” Students identified various other supportive activities that occurred through the relationships that were developed with faculty advisors. For instance, advisors arranged for tutors, provided direct help with note-taking, and served as a resource for academic concerns.

Students overwhelmingly agreed that their faculty advisors were individuals they would seek for assistance with academic and/or personal concerns. The Care Group experience obviously led to development of adequate comfort levels between students and advisors. Students believed they knew their advisors well and had developed a level of trust that would allow for personal contacts if necessary. Although students did comment that they would be comfortable discussing personal concerns with their advisors, only academic concerns were discussed during the focus group interviews. One student commented, "I haven't had any problems, but if I did I could go to my advisor. I feel really comfortable with her."

Meeting course expectations was a common academic concern for which students sought help from advisors. For instance, "My advisor was able to help me through a problem I was having in a class and I was able to make it through. She helped me get a tutor and she frequently checked in with me to make sure everything was going ok." Another student discussed an instance where she sought assistance from her advisor,

There was this time when I got a letter from the College that I was on academic probation and I went to my advisor and was like, "what did I do?" She was able to find out it was just a mistake and she helped me find out about it and take care of the problem.

The development of relationships was also identified through discussions of trust regarding advisors. One student vigorously stated, "I really trust my advisor. She told me not to take any more hours than I am this semester, and now that I am in it I am glad I took her advice." When others were asked about trusting their advisor there was general agreement. Care Groups offered the opportunity for students and faculty advisors to develop trusting relationships early in the student's academic careers.

Some faculty advisors also discussed the value of relationships developed through the Care Group process. Some faculty were able to identify specific examples of personal interactions that occurred with Care Group participants that they believed were a result of the relationships they developed. One advisor described a personal interaction with a student. This student

was wondering about whether she should live at home in the fall semester or in an apartment. She stopped by to ask me what my feeling was about that decision she was making. She also had questions about working and money, along with adequate time for classes.

The advisor went on to say, "I think that we had developed enough of a relationship that she was comfortable approaching me for some guidance in her decision making process."

Another example of an interaction that most likely occurred because of the faculty-student relationship was of an even more personal nature. A faculty advisor shared that one of her Care Group members came to her for support during the serious illness of a close friend. This student was able to confide in her advisor concerning emotions and feelings regarding her fear of the approaching death of her friend. They not only talked about the process of death but the related sentiments associated with the impending loss. The advisor believed that the relationship developed through the Care Group was directly responsible for this student being able to entrust her with this personal situation.

Advisors generally believed that relationship development with advisees was enhanced through the Care Group interactions, as compared to the previous individual advising method. One advisor described advising her Care Group as helping her advise

better. She commented, “As their advisor I followed them more closely than I usually do, which I think came from the Care Group setting or structure.”

However, some Care Group advisors also tended to believe that it was still not ideal. Although some relationships were developed many advisors believed that they didn’t connect with all Care Group members. Common concerns were related to time constraints and diversity within the groups. When attempting to meet at times other than during class it was often difficult to determine times for meetings that were convenient for everyone. This became especially difficult when Care Group members were not enrolled in common classes. Many advisors scheduled meetings based on the majority of students’ availability, and then made themselves available for individuals who were not able to attend the groups.

Diversity related to relationship development was also discussed as a potential barrier. One advisor commented:

My group was very diverse. One student is a licensed practical nurse (LPN), several were non-traditionals, a couple were very traditional, and then one student had several learning disability type issues. I think this made it more difficult for the group to form relationships, there were so many differences.

This not only affected scheduling of meetings, but also affected the potential connections among students in the group. She really believed that the group would have benefited from greater similarities among members.

Student summative evaluations of Care Groups. The value of relationships was also evident in the summative Care Group Evaluation data. One item on the evaluation form asked the students to respond to the following, “The Care Group helped me form supportive relationships.” This item received a group average of 3.9. Another item on



the evaluation asked students to respond to, “My Care Group advisor has served as a resource for me.” This item received a group average of 4.5. These items reflect the students’ self-identified beliefs that faculty advisors were individuals they would seek for assistance or as a resource.

Student-student relationships. Students spoke candidly about peer relationships during the focus group interviews and indicated that Care Groups were important in building peer relationships. For instance: “It is important to have Care Groups, people need that. It is a small school and you should know lots of people.” Students in every group spoke about relationships that were developed with Care Group members. Most students did not know any other students when Care Groups originated. A typical comment was, “We didn’t know each other before the Care Group. Now we hang out. Today we went to her parents’ home.” Several focus groups discussed friendships and study groups that developed based on Care Group membership. Many students believed this was a significant benefit of Care Groups. For instance, one student commented, “The Care Group was good for me. It is hard for me to branch out and meet new people. This forced me to meet the people in my group, and some of us are still friends.” Interestingly, one student spoke of the potential for these foundational relationships to be even more significant in subsequent semesters, stating, “Right now we have very little contact with the College. I think the connections I have made will be even more beneficial later in the program when we are on campus even more.” This particular student was able to identify a very complex way that the Care Group could be of benefit, beyond its formal duration.

Other students identified with the value of meeting peers through the Care Group, although they did not believe they were to the point of forming lasting relationships with fellow Care Group members. Although they may have felt comfortable with their groups, they were not interacting, socially or academically, with the Care Group members outside of group meetings. This was particularly true for transfer students and non-traditional students who had not connected with other non-traditional students.

#### Care Groups and the Influence on Communication in Downward, Upward, and Lateral Modes

Although communication is a basic foundational component of relationship development, certain elements of communication were identified as a separate theme through the focus group interviews, as well as the in-depth faculty and administrator interviews. Elements of communication were manifested in the data collected with all participants. Student focus group participants, faculty Care Group advisor participants, and administrator participants all described various elements of communication. Aspects of communication included several communication networks (downward, upward, and lateral; Grohar-Murray & DiCroce, 2003).

Downward communication. Downward communication occurred through dissemination of information from the Care Group advisors to the Care Group student members. Examples of downward communication included instructions related to course assignments, registration information, results of standardized assessments, and College-wide memos/announcements. In general, downward communication is most effective if the person delivering the message is well prepared and clearly understands the

information being delivered (Lancaster, 1999). When communication from faculty advisors was related to course content students indicated that it was not always effective. Many students stated that course faculty would have more effectively delivered course content information. Students described their frustration with a perceived lack of communication between course instructors and Care Group advisors. For instance, “relating course content to the Care Group was difficult, our Care Group advisor didn’t always appear to have the complete picture of what was going on in class.” Another student echoed those thoughts, “Explaining requirements for a paper should have been the instructor’s responsibility, instead of giving it to the Care Group leader. She (Care Group leader) was like an interpreter and things got lost in translation.” As such, students were providing feedback suggesting that Care Groups would have been more effective if they had more time for spontaneous interaction and less time spent on class related activities.

Downward communication related to registration processes and procedures was received in a more positive way by students. Students identified the process of developing plans of study in the group format to be beneficial. One commented: “I liked it when we scheduled together last semester, because if some of us had already taken a class we could tell other students in our group. It was just real helpful.” Another student described the group format as helpful. “We were able to help each other; like if a class could substitute for another class, and we didn’t realize it.” Faculty concurred, believing that dissemination of registration related information in the group setting saved time and

was an efficient method of communication. In addition, communicating in the group format facilitated delivery of college wide memos and announcements.

One less obvious aspect of downward communication occurred when advisors shared personal background and experiences with their groups. Students appreciated the personal reflection that was shared by advisors. This was evidenced in the comment, “One benefit of Care Groups was hearing about all of the opportunities in nursing, especially from our advisor’s perspective, she shared her professional background and experiences with us.”

Some faculty did not share this observation. For instance, one advisor was frustrated with her workload and the addition of a new Care Group added to her stress level. She really did not believe she got to know her students. “There were two or three students I could pick out when the next semester rolled around. I know I have a bad time with names, but it was very frustrating.” However, another advisor thought she got to know her students better than she had in past semesters of individual advising,

“I did get to know them more quickly. I took their pictures and put them on cards. This helped me get their names down quickly. Sometimes it is difficult for me to put names with faces and this really helped. I thought I would really make an effort because this was supposed to be more warm and fuzzy.”

Some students also identified individual downward communication as “excellent” with their assigned faculty advisors. A characteristic comment praised the communication process: “Our advisor went above and beyond. Communication was excellent in our group. She e-mailed us a lot.” Students who had transferred to the College from other institutions overwhelming indicated that communication was exceptional when they compared it to experiences with advisors at previous institutions.

Upward communication. Care Group advising also provided numerous opportunities for upward communication. Group meetings tend to encourage upward communication and upward communication promotes feelings of belonging and being part of the organization (Lancaster, 1999). Students stated that “communication was easier when we met with our group.” One student identified herself as shy and frequently intimidated by faculty. This student indicated that communication was improved for her because she

felt less intimidated in the group. It just seemed easier for me to talk and ask questions, it may have been because I didn't have to seek out my advisor, the opportunity was given to me by way of the group meeting. Whatever it was, it worked for me.

Another student indicated, “I felt comfortable asking questions in the Care Group. It would have been more difficult in the classroom. I probably asked more questions than I would have in the large group.” In general, the students indicated that the group format allowed for adequate contact with the advisors, as well as opportunities for communication. Upward communication seemed to be motivating and satisfying to the Care Group student members and faculty advisors.

Lateral communication. Lateral, or horizontal, communication was another aspect of communication apparent in the Care Group meetings. Students had opportunities to share information with peers in the group setting. Many first-year college students appreciated the contact with transfer students regarding course sequencing and scheduling. For instance, “I liked having transfer students in my group to get their perspective on courses to take, and which courses should be taken together.”

Benefits of lateral communication, such as peer support and a team spirit atmosphere (Lancaster, 1999) were evident from students and faculty advisors. Students were able to identify that they were not alone, especially with academic concerns or issues. Students commented that they were able to “talk about what stressed us.” Fellow students agreed and one indicated that “talking about difficult classes, like A&P [Anatomy and Physiology], helped us realize that others were having similar experiences.” Another student described her experience within the group, “From the freshman point of view it helped to know that everyone else was going through the same thing, it was not just me going through a lot of stress.”

One administrator commented that she had “observed increased confidence and comfort between students.” She stated that:

a Care Group is really a community of students together, it provides them the opportunity to share positive kinds of things that are working for them, in their environment, whether it be the academic piece or just adjusting to changes in their new environment.

Faculty advisers agreed that Care Groups provided the opportunity for heightened communication between students. One advisor noted,

A benefit for my group was the discussion between students. They talked about time management and different things going on in their lives. We had a single mom in our group and she had a lot going on, sometimes it was just encouragement that we offered each other. They helped each other out with scheduling too. They talked about different courses and when to take electives.

Having groups form when students first arrived to campus allowed for lateral communication to be enhanced as students were making initial adjustments to their new environment. Students identified the importance of initiating Care Groups early in their academic career, “Starting Care Groups at orientation was definitely a benefit. The

structure of having a group to eat lunch with and having the advisor start the conversation helped get things going.” Open and active communication, necessary for effective lateral communication, was enhanced in the group-advising format.

Communication barriers. Barriers to communication were another aspect of communication that became apparent throughout data collection, interpretation, and analysis. One example shared by a student group was that their advisor was not present at the first meeting. This group of students demonstrated frustration because, “we didn’t even know we had attended our first meeting until we got to class and they told us we had already had our first Care Group meeting.” Another group shared that “communication was a problem in our group, once a meeting was cancelled and we weren’t notified.” Whenever the number of individuals involved in the communication process increases, effectiveness may be decreased. These are certainly instances that can be used as examples for improving communication with Care Groups in the future.

Faculty advisors also identified a potential barriers or frustration with communication. Some advisors believed that communication in the form of feedback related to Care Group advising could be improved. One advisor commented, “I think this method of advising is effective, but sometimes I wonder if it is working for my group.” While the summative evaluations provide some feedback, faculty advisors were not always aware of the positive perceptions students identified.

In most instances, participants described communication as an essential element of the Care Group process. Upward and lateral communication probably provided the

most satisfaction for students, although the downward network also provided some necessary communication of specific information.

#### Socialization to Nursing Education and Nursing As a Professional Field of Study

Socialization to the College was identified by the original ad hoc committee as a necessary component of the Care Group process. Although socialization had been an initial goal of the College when implementing Care Group advising, this goal did not receive the same amount of consideration as some of the other goals. Even though faculty Care Group advisors were not as intentional with this goal, socialization to nursing education and nursing as a professional field of study was identified as a theme in the findings.

Faculty Care Group advisors described the significance of familiarizing students with general College policies, as well as the nursing curriculum. Many discussions revolved around sequencing of courses and developing plans of study. Quite often questions regarding plans of study and/or progression raised by individual students were likely to impact other students in the group. One faculty advisor commented that “Care Groups helped students become more familiar with the curriculum earlier in their program,” and that this may lead to fewer problems with progression through the program. Faculty and administrators viewed Care Groups as providing an ideal avenue for promoting discussions regarding the rigorous academic program and reinforcing the program requirements.

The group setting had the provided added benefit of receiving input and suggestions from other students. Student participants indicated that recommendations



from fellow Care Group members were helpful in determining course section selection, as well as sequencing when there were identified options.

Another aspect of promotion of socialization was evidenced by the comments related to exploration of opportunities in nursing. Several Care Group advisors shared personal professional experiences with their groups. Students stated that this was particularly beneficial. For instance, "Hearing about all of the opportunities from our advisor was helpful. She discussed all of the different areas we can work in nursing. It helped open our eyes to the variety in nursing." Being exposed to the potential diversity in nursing early in the educational endeavor was satisfying to students and may even provide an incentive to continue in nursing education.

Care Groups also provided the opportunity for group members to interact with practicing nurses. Practicing acute care registered nurses from a variety of specialties (emergency room, infusion therapy, critical care, oncology, orthopedics, and float pool) met with Care Groups during the semester. One student commented: "I really appreciated meeting the people who are in the work force who provided us with different types of options, and listening to nurses who are actually working." Another student commented: "The day the nurse from the ER [emergency room] came to talk with us was the most beneficial group meeting all year." She indicated that the guest speaker offered encouragement for continued study and "that in a year or so everything would start coming together, when we get more clinical experience."

Finally, the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with faculty Care Group advisors may have contributed to socialization to the College and the nursing

profession. Quite often the most important experiences to students are the informal faculty-student interactions that occur outside of the classroom or scheduled office hours (Jeffreys, 2004). These informal interactions provide opportunities for open sharing of nursing values, beliefs, and practices. Although students did not readily identify the connection between Care Group advisors and their developing socialization to nursing, Care Group advisors recognized their role as advocates for nursing, as well as role models for nursing students. These relationships could provide the foundation for development of positive socialization to the College and to nursing in general.

Student summative evaluations of Care Groups. Once again, the Student Summative Evaluation of Care Groups (Table 2) provided some data to support a theme identified in the findings. Two specific evaluation criteria: “The care group experience has facilitated my personal and professional growth;” and “The care group facilitated development of professional values” were both items that provided some relevant data. Although student’s ratings indicated general agreement with these items (3.7 and 3.9 respectively), there is room for improvement in this area.

#### Satisfaction and Retention of First Year Students Associated With Care Group Advising

Institutionally, improving the retention of first year students had been identified as a goal prior to the implementation of Care Group advising. Upon completing one academic year of Care Group advising, faculty advisors were somewhat hesitant to make a connection between academic advising Care Groups and retention. Only one faculty advisor came close to drawing a conclusion, with the statement, “I am surprised that no one has decided to leave in my group, especially when you consider our attrition rates.”

Other faculty advisors believed they could not draw any conclusions regarding Care Group advising and its effect on first year retention. This hesitancy was due to their lack of knowledge regarding retention/attrition statistics.

Several advisors did, however, speak about students who left the College. All of these were due to changes in the major or academic standing. For instance, one advisor commented, "One of my students realized nursing was not for her. She said she was switching to something else service-oriented, like social work. She had her mind made up and I did not try to talk her out of it." Another advisor noted,

One student was having academic trouble and was afraid she may have to leave. She was worried that she would not be able to 'do' nursing. We talked all about it and actually about how college can be very tough the first year, and it doesn't have to be an indication of the future necessarily. We talked about how much she has learned during the first year and to take some of that knowledge to make it, but she was still scared.

Although administrators believed they were somewhat removed from the actual process of Care Group advising, they shared a common belief that Care Groups were having a positive effect on retention. They were also more willing to make connections between Care Group advising and first year retention. One administrator provided substantive data, "We have an increase in retention. I believe that before we started Care Groups we were below the benchmark. Ever since, we have been above." When probed further this administrator commented, "You can't say that Care Groups are the reason for improved retention, but you also can't say that Care Groups had no effect. I am sure that they did." While the hesitancy of administrators to directly link Care Groups to first year retention is technically correct, they nonetheless recognized the importance of Care Groups and made connections between pre- and post-Care Group statistics.

Although very few students identified having contemplated a decision to leave the College, one student did drop and subsequently returned. This student stated, "I was lost as a freshman." When specifically asked if Care Groups had any affect on her decision to return she stated, "Maybe not directly, but I suppose I was comfortable coming back because I knew other students and my advisor."

In general, students were also able to identify connections with peers as a significant reason for staying at the College. Care Groups offered first semester students an opportunity to meet peers early in the academic year. One group member offered that he had thought about transferring to another institution. When questioned further, he stated, "I had made a lot of friends here, so I decided to stay." Established friendships were most influential in his decision to stay at the College. Another student stated that she had thought about leaving earlier in the semester in order to be closer to home. When she made her decision to stay, it was based on the connections she had made with peers, "I really know I want to stay here now. I really like my classmates and the program, and I have made some great friends.

Basic first-year retention data also may support the identified relationship between Care Group advising and first-year retention. Retention of first year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students to the second year at the College remained somewhat consistent from 1995 to 2000, ranging from 75% to 83%. Table 3 summarizes the retention rates at the College. A significant decline was noted with the fall 2001 incoming class of BSN students who demonstrated a 69% first year retention rate (J. Ramsden-Meier, Enrollment Management Director, personal communication, October,

2003). After implementation of Care Group advising in Fall 2002, first year retention for the Fall 2002 incoming BSN class rose to 78% (J. Ramsden-Meier, Enrollment Management Director, personal communication, March, 2004). First year BSN student retention rose again with the fall 2003 incoming class, with a reported retention of 84% (J. Ramsden-Meier, personal communication, October, 2004). While these rates for

Table 3

*Retention Rates*

Academic Year	Retention Rate
1995	81%
1996	79%
1997	82%
1998	77%
1999	83%
2000	75%
2001	69%
2002	78%
2003	84%

the Care Group years of 2002 and 2003 are not marked increases above the range of 69% to 83%, they both represent substantial positive trends over the prior year.

Student focus group participants, faculty advisors, and administrators were all able to identify potential retention benefits of academic advising Care Groups, as well as significant characteristics present within Care Groups that retention literature values. For instance, initial academic and social adjustment (Woosley, 2003) were identified by students and faculty advisors as necessary elements of Care Group advising. Advising in

groups must also be considered. As N. S. King (2000) indicated, a persuasive reason for advising in groups is the establishment of peer groups. Student and faculty participants were able to recognize the value of Care Group advising in the establishment of peer groups at the College.

Although student focus group participants did not share information directly related to retention until prompted with questions regarding their thoughts about leaving the College, their comments can be interpreted as significant in relation to retention. They were, however, able to discuss some positive aspects of Care Groups in relation to staying at the College. Student thoughts and descriptions support Tinto's (1987, 1993) assertion that academic advising is one of the most important factors in the retention of undergraduate students. Faculty advisors readily recognized the value of Care Group advising in relation to first year retention; however they believed they had a limited knowledge of actual retention data to support their beliefs. Administrators were more firm in their affirmations regarding retention. Their access to specific first-year retention data most likely contributed to their ability to form interpretations regarding Care Group advising and first-year retention.

#### Summary of Findings

The constant comparative methodology was effective for analyzing and interpreting the data collected through the focus group and individual interviews. Five emergent themes were identified through the collection and analysis of interview data. Themes included: (a) Care Groups and the transition of first-year college students; (b) student-advisor and student-student relationships related to Care Groups; (c) Care Groups

and the influence on communication in downward, upward, and lateral modes; (d) socialization to nursing education and nursing as a professional field of study related to Care Group advising; and (e) satisfaction and retention of first-year students associated with Care Group advising. Identification and development of these themes led to the subsequent development of an in-depth discussion of the findings, implications related to the findings, and recommendations for future research related to the findings.

CHAPTER 5  
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to explore student perceptions of their participation in Care Group advising at a small, private, non-residential college. Benefits of student involvement in Care Group advising were a specific focus of the study. In order to gain a broad understanding of the phenomena under investigation, faculty and administrative perceptions, as well as select departmental data, were also explored.

In order to investigate Care Group advising the following overarching research question was developed: “How are academic advising Care Groups perceived by students, faculty, and administrators?” From the perspectives of students, faculty, and administrators, the following sub-questions guided the study:

1. Are academic advising Care Groups serving their intended purpose?
2. What are the perceived benefits of academic advising Care Groups, as identified by participants?
3. Are academic advising Care Groups contributing to student persistence and retention?

Discussion

Overview of Findings

Academic advising Care Groups, as implemented at the College, provided students with several benefits. Student participants in each of the seven focus groups identified benefits related to transitioning to the College, development of relationships



with peers and faculty, communication with faculty advisors and other students, and socialization to nursing education and the field of nursing.

In relation to transition, students' most frequent comments supported Care Groups in the transitioning to college process. Students believed that their participation in Care Groups provided opportunities to meet peers early in the semester. The small group setting of Care Groups provided occasions for students to interact quite readily. These early peer connections were very important for some students, and may have provided sufficient support to ease the transition to the College, as well as provide the foundation for continued enrollment. A concerted effort should be made to schedule Care Group meetings early in the semester to allow for these connections to be made as soon as possible.

Many students also identified the importance of advisor-student relationships that developed from the assigned Care Groups. Students believed that Care Group advisors were genuinely concerned about them. Students also believed that they could consult their Care Group advisor for both academic and personal concerns. Although only a few students identified specific personal interactions taking place with advisors, all agreed that their advisor was someone they would reach out to if necessary. Having this identified support system in place could quite possibly lead to improved student satisfaction.

Although communication was identified as being effective in most Care Groups, there is some room for improvement. Communication regarding meeting times, cancellation of meetings, or general announcement type information must be

communicated consistently and frequently. Timeliness of communication is also important, especially on a non-residential campus. Everyone views time as an important resource and considerations regarding time will only improve student satisfaction.

The benefits of lateral communication within the Care Group setting were realized by many students. Students appreciated hearing about the similarities occurring among group members. Examples of some of these similarities included struggles with various courses, time management concerns, opportunities for part-time work, and other student related issues. Even though most Care Group sessions included a structured format or agenda for the meeting, allowing time for non-structured discussions among students is a simple way to promote collegiality and relationship building in student groups.

In regards to socialization to nursing, the opportunity to meet with practicing registered nurses was one of the most beneficial Care Group activities. All eight focus groups discussed the significance of hearing about nursing from the registered nurses' perspectives. These students had not yet had the opportunity to be on clinical units, and some may not be in the hospital setting for two more semesters. Meeting with practicing registered nurses helped the students connect with the education and profession they chose to pursue. This very positive activity might also lead to improved student satisfaction.

While students quite readily identified benefits to Care Group advising, and most faculty also believed Care Group advising was advantageous for incoming students, there were some faculty concerns with the process. Although students who attended Care

Group meetings were identified as active participants, faculty acknowledged attendance as a concern with Care Group meetings. Attendance was impressive when meetings were scheduled in conjunction with a class. However, when meetings were scheduled outside of class time faculty were frustrated when attendance was low. Some faculty advisors attempted to remedy low attendance by providing food for students, scheduling meeting times around student class schedules, and two faculty advisors combined their groups for a couple of meetings. Again, the non-residential setting of the campus affected this identified issue, as well as student diversity within the Care Groups. Faculty advisors will need to continue to be creative in their attempts to improve and increase attendance. In addition, it may not be necessary for all students to attend Care Group meetings. Students who identify with the benefits that come from Care Groups will make the effort to attend and the needs of those attending will be met.

Another faculty identified concern was the amount of time required to successfully manage Care Group advising. Faculty advisors were concerned with the time involved with group advising. Initially, some may have thought that less time would be required due to advising in groups, rather than individually. However, the time involved in planning and organizing meetings may have been more than anticipated. Faculty were, again, particularly frustrated when attempts to plan and organize group meetings were met with low attendance.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Care Group advising is that students come to understand that they matter. Concern and interest are communicated to students through the process of Care Group advising, and although not all students will need this

level of interaction, it may be the link that provides some students with the support necessary for success at the College.

#### Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework

Academic advising Care Groups, as they were implemented at the College, were an effective means of meeting the institutional conditions identified by Tinto (1999) as supportive of retention. It is generally agreed that college attrition is greatest during the first year of enrollment. Tinto (1993) asserts that it is also during this first year that institutional actions can be most effective in promoting retention. Academic advising Care Groups were especially effective in providing support to first year students in regard to the conditions of information/advice, support, and involvement.

Information and advice were identified by Tinto (1999) as significant because students are more likely to persist and graduate in environments that provide adequate information regarding institutional requirements. Students need to be well-informed to make successful decisions and achieve personal goals. Student members of academic advising Care Groups identified their advisors as primary resources for information. The utilization of downward communication to provide information regarding curriculum, plans of study, registration, and general announcements demonstrated the effectiveness of Care Group advising in providing information to students. There was general agreement among students that advisors were individuals they would seek for assistance with academic or personal issues or concerns.

Support was identified as essential when it is readily available in the form of academic, social, and personal assistance (Tinto, 1999). Academic advising Care Groups

clearly provided support to first year students. Care Group advising led to increased interactions between students and faculty advisors. Faculty advisors believed that the early and more frequent contact with students improved the level of interactions they had with students. Students perceived faculty advisors as being caring and interested. This distinctly supports the notion of developmental advising and its focus on the development of student-faculty relationships which promote open communication, caring, and mentoring (Alexitch, 2002). Student perceptions of the help and support received from advisors have been identified as significant in relation to retention (Jeffreys, 1998, 2001). Students participating in academic advising Care Groups did perceive the process as supportive and believed that advisors care about their learning and success.

Involvement was another institutional condition identified by Tinto (1999) as supportive of retention. Involvement during the first year is significant as student attachments are negligible. Involvement during the first six to seven weeks has also been identified as crucial in promoting persistence at an institution (Milem and Berger, 1997). Academic advising Care Groups were perceived as beneficial in providing opportunities for first year students to become involved. Students and faculty believed that initiating Care Groups during orientation was important. Students who came to the college knowing no other students appreciated the structured format for meeting peers early. Although this may be considered forced involvement, many students were able to form connections that continued outside of the structured Care Group setting. According to Tinto (1999), the frequency and quality of interactions are important in relation to improving retention. This is especially vital during the first year of college. Academic

advising Care Groups provided significant opportunities for more frequent and higher quality interactions between advisors and Care Group student members.

The implementation of academic advising Care Groups was also an effective method of addressing Bean and Metzner's (1985) one defining characteristic of nontraditional students – the lack of social integration into the institution. Academic advising Care Groups offered opportunities for increased interaction in the College environment. Because the College is a non-residential campus, all students meet the criteria of “nontraditional” (students who are older than 24 years, commute to campus, or are enrolled part-time) (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metzner & Bean, 1987). Academic advising Care Groups offered students the chance to become more integrated with the college, both socially and academically.

In addition to institutional involvement, N. S. King (2000) noted that peer interactions play a significant role in student success, especially during the first year. Care Groups did lead to the development of many peer relationships. These relationships have the potential to improve student retention and success at the college. Increased interactions with peers and faculty were also identified by Boudreau and Kromrey (1994) as important in increasing student retention. Academic advising Care Groups have the potential to demonstrate to students that the college is committed to student success, which again may positively influence the level of student satisfaction and the associated outcome of improved retention.

Interestingly, student and faculty perceptions were not always congruent. Faculty advisors were more modest in their views of the value and benefits of Care Group

advising. For instance, one faculty advisor in particular was even quite negative regarding the process and believed her students did not value the experience. She expressed dissatisfaction with being a Care Group advisor and felt burdened by the commitment. Yet, her group of students perceived Care Groups to be of benefit. They believed that their advisor had time for them, was reassuring when necessary, provided necessary information, and supported them during their first semester.

While other faculty advisors were not especially negative in their discussions of Care Group advising, they were also not overly enthusiastic about the experience. Although benefits could be readily identified, most faculty were not willing to commit to the value of Care Group advising, especially in terms of retention.

Even though faculty were hesitant to connect academic advising Care Groups with improved retention, there is evidence that students were satisfied with Care Groups and numerous benefits were identified. This coincides with Metzner's (1989) assertion that the best single strategy for improving retention is to offer good advising. Care Group advising may be a strategy to provide "good" advising. This "good" advising was clearly evident through the improved focus on developmental advising, including increased time and contacts between advisors and students. This increased level of interaction between advisors and students allowed for a greater focus on individual differences which may lead to smoother transitions during the first year of college, as well as improved retention.

### Implications

The importance of social integration in promoting student adjustment, persistence, and success is widely accepted (Jeffreys, 2004). Academic advising Care Groups are a specialized form of advising that provide formal faculty interactions and peer interactions. Although the implementation of academic advising Care Groups does carry some added responsibility and obligation to the institution and faculty, the benefits may outweigh the identified difficulties.

According to Jeffreys (2004), out-of-classroom activities have a powerful influence on retention. Although the majority of Care Group advising took place during structured classroom time, the process led to continued interactions beyond the walls of the classroom. Academic advising in Care Groups is an innovative strategy offering opportunities for connections between students and faculty, as well as peers, to occur. Students identified the formation of personal friendships and acquaintances within Care Groups, as well as the establishment of study groups with Care Group members.

Specific implications for practice related to Care Group advising include (a) inclusion of a distinct explanation of the purpose of Care Groups to all participants, (b) provision of feedback to advisors, (c) faculty recognition for the work involved in academic advising, (d) improved preparation for Care Group advisors, (e) consideration of student status/level when forming Care Groups, and (f) consideration of faculty desire to advise when selecting Care Group advisors. Each of these might improve the potential benefits related to Care Group advising.



### Explanation of Purpose to All Participants

An enhanced or more detailed explanation of the purpose of Care Group advising may benefit some student Care Group members. When meeting with groups for the first time, Care Group advisors could take some time to expound on the potential benefits for students. This should include a discussion of the conceivable relationships that may be formed with other students, as well as with the Care Group advisor. Students identified the need to know up-front why they were being asked to meet in groups. Communication of the institutional objectives related to Care Group advising would certainly promote greater understanding, and may even improve the experience for participants. In addition, as emphasized by Light (2001) an explicit discussion with students regarding the significance of the development of at least one relationship with a faculty member could be included in this overview of Care Groups. Highlighting the importance of this relationship must be explicitly discussed. Although the potential relationship need not be developed with the advisor, the students will be provided with the opportunity to develop such a relationship through the Care Group process.

### Provision of Feedback to Advisors

Provision of feedback to faculty Care Group advisors is imperative. Faculty advisors were not always aware of the positive perceptions students identified regarding Care Groups. The summative evaluations do provide some feedback for faculty, but the information is limited. In addition, very few narrative comments came through on the summative evaluations. This implication regarding feedback certainly corresponds with the faculty advisor who believed Care Group meetings were not valued by her students,

when in fact those students readily identified with benefits of Care Group advising. Feedback from students, whether positive or negative, is necessary for maintaining or modifying the advisor's approach to advising. In the case of the advisor who mistakenly believed Care Groups were not valued by her students, maintaining an effective process would be difficult, if not impossible.

#### Faculty Recognition for Involvement in Care Groups

In addition to feedback, faculty advisors must also receive recognition for the work involved in academic advising. It is recognized that "academic advising is the single most important relationship offered to students by an institution of higher education" (McGillin, 2003, p. 88). Faculty advisors described frustration with the workload issues related to advising Care Groups. There was a general perception that being a Care Group advisor added to the responsibilities of the faculty position. Although there is general agreement that advisors should be recognized or rewarded for their involvement in advising students, there is controversy regarding the level of recognition or appropriate reward (Kerr, 2000). The issue of recognition and reward can become quite complicated. One suggestion involves defining good academic advising on your campus and integrating academic advising into the faculty evaluation system (McGillin, 2003). McGillin suggests the use of a faculty advising portfolio to demonstrate achievements in advising. Implementation of a system for recognizing or rewarding faculty for academic advising may address some of the frustrations with workload.

### Improved Preparation for Care Group Advisors

Adequate preparation to fulfill the Care Group advisor role is another implication for practice. Corts et al. (2000) supports the need for improved preparation for academic advising. Lack of preparation quite often leads to feelings of frustration for both advisors and advisees. Even though Care Group advisors had been advising for an average of six years, a more thorough preparation may have been beneficial regarding this new method of advising. While some advisors quite readily stepped into the group advisor role, others were more reluctant to embrace the change. Although reluctance and resistance are common with any change, an improved preparation may lead to more satisfied group advisors. According to Yoder-Wise (2003), communication and education are necessary for integrating the elements of the change.

Faculty members who served as Care Group advisors during the first year of implementation had been involved in the task force that recommended the change in advising practices. They not only read the supporting literature and participated in extensive discussions, but also developed the policy and procedure related to Care Group advising. The faculty assigned to Care Group advising during the second year of implementation had very little, if any preparation related to the new methodology. Although there were some informal discussions regarding the process of Care Group advising, the advisors who were not involved in the initial planning had the distinct disadvantage of not being prepared for the expected role.

Some of the advisor identified frustrations related to Care Group advising may have been alleviated if more rigorous preparation had been provided for the Care Group

advisors. For instance, some Care Group advisors identified difficulty in making advising a priority. This coincided with the frustrations related to lack of time and difficulty scheduling group meetings. If advisors had been provided with an overview of the reasons Care Group advising was implemented, as well as the related benefits, there may have been greater efforts made on the part of some advisors. Education related to the substance of change is believed to stimulate formation of new values and attitudes (Grohar-Murray & DiCroce, 2003). Although the faculty involved in Care Group advising were aware of the basic change in practice, a more in-depth, detailed preparation for the group advising role may have led to improved outcomes related to the change in practice.

#### Consideration of Student Status/Level in Formation of Care Groups

In order to meet the specific and individual needs of students, deliberate efforts should be made to place students in Care Groups. Rather than randomly assigning students to groups, students should be grouped according to similarities. For instance, groups could be formed according to academic class, level in the program, transfer status, second degree status, etc. This clearly coincides with Kramer's (2000) contention that advising students at different levels offers the advantage of focusing on the unique needs of each level. Student members of Care Groups supported this implication. Students believed that the Care Groups would have been more beneficial if they had been grouped with students at the same level. This suggestion was particularly evident from transfer students who were not true first year college students.

### Consideration of Faculty Desire to Advise

One final implication regarding implementation of Care Group advising relates to the consideration of individual faculty member's desire to advise. Requiring all faculty to advise leads to varying levels of commitment. These varying levels of commitment may lead to inconsistencies among the faculty advisors (King & Kerr, 1995). Other factors that are closely linked to desire are skills and interests of faculty.

Recommendations regarding assignment of faculty to advising generally suggest involving only faculty who choose to advise (Glennen, 2003; King & Kerr, 1995; Reinartz, 2000). According to Glennen (2003), it is essential to select faculty advisors who are interested in advising students, who demonstrate a commitment to advising, and who demonstrate exceptional written and verbal communication skills. In addition, providing more thorough preparation for Care Group advisors may improve consistency among Care Group advisors.

Clearly, the implementation of academic advising Care Groups has the potential to link early social adjustment to degree completion. Woosley (2003) highlights the importance of colleges emphasizing social adjustment. The increased and improved interactions between faculty and students, as well as between peers, were perceived as benefits by participants and contributed to improved student satisfaction with the first year. The Care Group advisor has the potential to help students acclimate to the nursing program and feel integrated within the nursing profession. Positive first impressions with Care Group advisors also have the potential to promote the necessary socialization to the College and the nursing profession.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Certainly, as new advising practices aimed at improving advising are implemented, research is necessary to identify the issues that are important to students and faculty alike. Although this exploration of perceptions related to academic advising Care Groups provided some compelling information from the perspectives of students, faculty, and staff, it was conducted at points in time in the first year of college. A longitudinal approach following students through their entire college careers might provide more powerful insights into the nuances of Care Group advising. A longitudinal study, following Care Group participants through three or four years of involvement, would have the potential to identify additional benefits of this potential retention strategy. As identified during this study, the foundational connections that were formed during the first semester of enrollment might prove to be even more beneficial in subsequent semesters.

Exploring the process of Care Group advising longitudinally with Care Group advisors might also be worthwhile in establishing the value of Care Group advising. Although the Care Group advisor participants in this study all had at least minimal experience with academic advising, all were novice with academic advising in groups. A lengthened experience with the process of advising in groups may yield additional and/or different results.

Investigation of the interaction between first-year students and practicing nurses is another avenue of promising exploration. Although the contact between first-year

students and practicing professionals was limited, the potential connections are certainly worthy of further consideration.

Another recommendation for future research is in relation to a more quantitative aspect of the examination of Care Group advising. Measuring the actual number of contacts advisees have with their advisors might add to the evidence that Care Group advising is promoting student-faculty connections and relationships. In addition, a simple log of the types of contacts/encounters might also provide some useful data.

Future research regarding Care Group advising might also focus on the specific faculty behaviors that students find to be beneficial or supportive. Identification of factors that detract or enhance the advising process from the perspectives of students and faculty might be valuable. Although this qualitative study identified some behaviors found to be worthwhile by students, it was not the goal of the study. Knowing more about what behaviors are valued and respected by students could promote the process of developmental advising through the Care Group model.

An investigation focusing on the experience of advisors might also provide useful data. More specifically, comparisons between new advisors and those who have advised for longer periods of time might provide insight into advising practices. This might also include an investigation of the education faculty receive regarding advising.

While this study was conducted at the College, the findings do have important implications for the use of care groups in other types of institutions or professional programs. Implementation of Care Group advising with BSN students at other types of institutions (i.e. residential public and private campuses) could be examined. Potential

studies could also be conducted with other types of student groups participating in Care Group advising.

### Summary

Academic advising Care Groups, as they were implemented at the College in an effort to improve the first year experience of BSN students, were an effective means of meeting the institutional conditions identified by Tinto (1999) as supportive of retention. Academic advising Care Groups provided support to first year BSN students in regard to the conditions of information/advice, support, and involvement. Emergent themes included: (a) first-year transition to the College; (b) student-student and student-advisor relationships; (c) communication in downward, upward, and lateral modes; (d) socialization to nursing education and the nursing profession; and (e) retention of first-year students.

While numerous benefits related to Care Group advising were identified throughout the investigation, perhaps the most important finding related to Care Groups is that students come to understand that they matter. Concern and interest are communicated to students through the process of Care Group advising. In addition, while there is general agreement that advising is instrumental in student success, Care Group advising may provide the necessary and significant interactions to improve student satisfaction.

Although several positive themes emerged related to the implementation of Care Group advising, several suggestions for change or revision were also identified by study participants. The structure of Care Groups could potentially be altered or revised to meet



the differing needs of students. More specifically, assigning students to Care Groups based on common characteristics (first semester, first time college students, transfer students, and/or second-degree students) may prove to be valuable. Another common concern was related to time constraints and attempting to schedule meeting times that were conducive to the majority of the Care Group. Exploration of altered meeting times was supported by students and faculty.

Numerous benefits of Care Group advising were identified through the exploration of student, faculty, and administrator perceptions. This qualitative study provided for the development of several themes related to Care Group advising. Through these themes it became evident that Care Group advising may provide some of the conditions necessary for college student success.

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## APPENDIX A

## POTENTIAL FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Opening Questions

1. What do you like most about the BSN program at Allen and UNI so far?
  - What is it about [experience, event, person, etc.] that you enjoy?
  - Can you tell me more about [experience, event, person, etc.]?
2. Describe your satisfaction with your first year at Allen College.
  - Can you tell me more about that ...?
  - Can you give me some examples of ...?
3. When you think about being a student at Allen College, what are the two or three most important supports to you during your studies?
  - How does that help you?

Overview of Care Groups

1. Tell me about your experiences with Care Groups.
2. What do you think Care Groups were designed to accomplish?
  - How do you think they “stack up” in terms of those goals?
3. Can you identify any benefits from your experiences with Care Groups?
  - One thing I’ve heard several mention is \_\_\_\_\_. I wonder what the rest of you have to say about that?
  - One thing that I’m surprised no one has mentioned is \_\_\_\_\_? Does it matter or not?
4. What were the things talked about most in the Care Group sessions?
  - Can you give me some examples of ...?

Process of Care Groups

1. Were any individuals especially influential in your Care Group?
  - Can you describe some interactions with this individual?
2. Describe some interactions that occurred with your peers during the Care Group meetings.
  - Can you give me some examples of ...?
3. What significant interactions took place with faculty advisors?
  - Can you tell me more about that ....?
4. Did you work things / issues / problems out in Care Groups?
  - Any examples?
  - How did the group respond to ...?

### Outcomes

1. Have any lasting connections been formed with your peer Care Group members?
  - What sort of connections?
2. Can you identify any connection between your Care Group experience and your academic performance?
  - If so, what do you believe was beneficial, made a difference, etc.
3. Can you identify any examples of how your involvement in the Care Group facilitated your personal and/or professional growth?
4. Have you ever thought about leaving Allen College?
  - Why did you decide to stick it out?
  - Were any individuals or events involved in your decision-making process?

### Concluding the Discussion

1. What, if anything, was frustrating about your experience with Care Groups?
  - What about that was particularly frustrating, difficult, annoying, etc.?
  - I have heard several people mention \_\_\_\_\_. What do the rest of think about that?
2. Describe your satisfaction with the Care Group experience.
3. Do you feel supported by Allen College?
  - What are we doing that helps to support you here?
  - Are there other things we could be doing?
  - What suggestions do you have for us to improve your experience here?

## APPENDIX B

## FACULTY PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS

1. What is your understanding of the purpose behind the Care Groups?
2. Describe your experiences with academic advising in Care Groups.
3. How long were your meetings each time?
4. What percent of students attended?
5. Describe some interactions that occurred between students during the Care Group meetings. What kinds of things are most frequently talked about? Are they structured?
6. What did students get excited about? What topics did they tend to “go with”? Did the group ever lead itself?
7. What significant interactions took place between you, as the advisor, and Care Group members?
8. Have students felt free to share “griefs and joys”?
9. Have students shared “epiphanies” with you? Describe in detail.
10. Did any encounters with students take place outside of the established Care Group meeting times? If so, what was the nature of these encounters?
11. Can you identify any student benefits related to the Care Group experience?
12. What would you say are the two or three most important things that have occurred within your group?
13. Have your students discussed staying vs. leaving? Describe the nature of those conversations.
14. What kinds of feedback have you received from students about your group?
15. What, if anything, did you find frustrating with the Care Group experience?
16. Describe your satisfaction with the Care Group experience.
17. Do you think Care Groups are serving their intended purpose?

## APPENDIX C

## ADMINISTRATOR PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS

1. What is your understanding of the purpose behind the Care Groups?
2. What kinds of feedback have you received from students about Care Group advising?
3. What kinds of feedback have you received from faculty about Care Group advising?
4. Can you identify any student benefits related to the Care Group experience?
5. Can you identify any institutional effects of Care Group advising?
6. Have any administrative concerns related to Care Groups been identified? If so, describe.
7. Has the implementation of Care Group advising affected your role as an administrator in any way?
8. Do you think Care Groups are serving their intended purpose?

## APPENDIX D

## CARE GROUP STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Care Group Advisor \_\_\_\_\_
2. age \_\_\_\_\_
3. gender \_\_\_\_\_
4. race \_\_\_\_\_
5. academic performance in college  
 \_\_\_\_\_ A    \_\_\_\_\_ A-B    \_\_\_\_\_ B    \_\_\_\_\_ B-C    \_\_\_\_\_ C    \_\_\_\_\_ <C
6. year in college \_\_\_\_\_
7. high school GPA \_\_\_\_\_
8. ACT score \_\_\_\_\_
9. highest level education of mother  
 \_\_\_\_\_ high school    \_\_\_\_\_ some college    \_\_\_\_\_ associate degree  
 \_\_\_\_\_ bachelor's degree    \_\_\_\_\_ master's degree    \_\_\_\_\_ doctoral degree
10. highest level of education of father  
 \_\_\_\_\_ high school    \_\_\_\_\_ some college    \_\_\_\_\_ associate degree  
 \_\_\_\_\_ bachelor's degree    \_\_\_\_\_ master's degree    \_\_\_\_\_ doctoral degree
11. current living arrangements  
 \_\_\_\_\_ UNI dormitories  
 \_\_\_\_\_ live with parents  
 \_\_\_\_\_ apartment in Cedar Falls/Waterloo area  
 \_\_\_\_\_ own/rent own home  
 \_\_\_\_\_ other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

\* If you would prefer to be interviewed one-on-one and would be willing to meet with me individually, please provide your name and contact information.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ Phone and/or Email \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

## CARE GROUP EVALUATION

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please evaluate your care group experience using the following scale: 5 = strongly agree, 4= agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, and 1= strongly disagree.

Currently Enrolled in NU \_\_\_\_\_, Semester \_\_\_\_\_.

Did you attend care groups this semester? If so, how many? \_\_\_\_\_.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My care group advisor has been available for consultation.	5	4	3	2	1
2. My care group advisor has served as a resource for me.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The care group experience has aided my transition to Allen College.	5	4	3	2	1
4. The care group experience has facilitated my personal and professional growth.	5	4	3	2	1
5. The care group helped me form supportive relationships.	5	4	3	2	1
5. My care group leader modeled caring behaviors.	5	4	3	2	1
7. The care group experience helped decrease my anxiety level.	5	4	3	2	1
8. The care group encouraged me to be an active learner.	5	4	3	2	1
9. The care group facilitated of development of professional values.	5	4	3	2	1
10. The care group was an effective advising method.	5	4	3	2	1

**COMMENTS:**

## APPENDIX F

## ACADEMIC ADVISOR DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. gender \_\_\_\_\_
2. race \_\_\_\_\_
3. total years  
teaching \_\_\_\_\_
4. years in current  
position \_\_\_\_\_
5. years in  
academic advising \_\_\_\_\_
6. number of students  
in Care Group \_\_\_\_\_
7. number of additional  
advisees \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G

University of Northern Iowa  
Human Participants Review Committee Application

All items must be completed and the form must be typed or printed electronically.  
Submit 3 copies to Human Participants Review Committee, Graduate College, 122 Lang  
Hall, 0135

Title of proposal: An Exploration of Academic Advising Care Groups at an Iowa Private College

Project Type(s):  Faculty/Staff Research  Class Project  Thesis/Dissertation  Indep Study  
 Grant/Contract  Other, Specify \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Principal Investigator (PI): Kendra Williams-Perez

Status:  Faculty  Undergraduate Student  Graduate Student  Staff

Department: Education Leadership – Postsecondary Education

PI Phone: 266-1021 PI Email: kbwperez@cfu.net

PI Campus/Mailing Address: 523 Alvarado Ave., Cedar Falls, IA 50613

Source of Funding: N/A

Agency's Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

Data collection dates: Beginning April 2004 Through December 2004

Project Status:  New  Renewal  Modification  Grant-Compet. Renewal  Grant-Non-compet.

Has the PI and faculty sponsor (if applicable) completed IRB training/certification in Human Participants Issues?  NO  YES

DATE OCTOBER 9, 2003  NO  YES

FACULTY SPONSOR  YES DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
 NO - PLANNED

SIGNATURES: The undersigned acknowledge that: 1. this application represents an accurate and complete description of the proposed research; 2. the research will be conducted in compliance with the recommendations of and only after approval has been received from the UNI IRB. The PI is responsible for reporting any serious adverse events or problems to the IRB, for requesting prior IRB approval for modifications, and for requesting continuing review and approval.

Principal Investigator: Kendra Williams-Perez

TYPED NAME PLUS SIGNATURE

DATE

Faculty sponsor (required for all student projects):

Carolyn Bair

TYPED NAME PLUS SIGNATURE

DATE



<b>Committee Use Only</b>	
APPROVE <input type="checkbox"/> DISAPPROVE <input type="checkbox"/> APPROVAL CONTINGENT <input type="checkbox"/>	
Subject to the following conditions:	
_____	
_____	
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW COMMITTEE SIGNATURE	DATE
_____	
Period of approval is one year, from _____ through _____	
_____	

**SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY.** In lay language, answer in spaces provided (add numbered and referenced sheets when necessary). Do not refer to an accompanying grant or contract proposal.

**A. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH.** Explain 1) why this research is important and what the primary purposes are, and 2) what question(s) or hypotheses this activity is designed to answer.

1) The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to explore student and faculty perceptions of their participation in Care Group advising. In addition, identification of benefits related to student involvement in Care Groups is anticipated. This research is important in order to determine whether or not the introduction of academic advising Care Groups at Allen College was a successful intervention designed to correct the problem of student attrition.

2) This study has been designed to answer the questions:

- How are academic advising Care Groups perceived by students, faculty, and administrators?
  - Are academic advising Care Groups serving their intended purpose?
  - What are the perceived benefits of academic advising Care Groups, as identified by participants?
  - Are academic advising Care Groups contributing to student persistence?

**B. RESEARCH PROCEDURES INVOLVED.** 1. Provide a complete description of: a. the study design, and b. all study procedures that will be performed (e.g., presentation of stimuli, description of activity required, topic of questionnaire or interview, name of psychological test). Provide this information for each phase of the study (pilot, screening, intervention and follow-up). Attach study flow sheet, if desired.

Attach questionnaires, interview questions/topic areas, scales, and/or examples of stimuli to be presented to participants.

- a. Study design: A qualitative research design is being proposed. This approach will allow for examination of how first year students experience the established intervention of academic advising Care Groups. This will also allow for an exploration of the advisor's perspectives and perceptions, as they have experienced the phenomenon of Care Groups.
  - b. Focus group interview sessions will be utilized to interview students currently assigned to an academic advising Care Group at Allen College. These interviews will serve as the dominant strategy for data collection. Individual interviews will also be conducted with faculty advisors and select college administrators. An attempt will be made to capture each participant's own words. Open-ended questions will be utilized to garner responses, yet allow for flexibility to note and collect unexpected responses to the topic. Potential questions are attached.
- C. DECEPTION: If any deception or withholding of complete information is required for this activity, explain why this is necessary and attach a protocol explaining if, how, when, and by whom participants will be debriefed.

N/A

#### D. PARTICIPANTS

1. Approximately how many participants will you need to complete this study?

Number 40      Age Range(s) 18-60

2. What characteristics (inclusion criteria) must participants have to be in this study?

(Answer for each participant group, if different.)

- The student group will consist of 2<sup>nd</sup> semester 1<sup>st</sup> year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) students enrolled at Allen College, Waterloo, Iowa.
  - The academic advisor group will include Allen College academic advisors who have served as Care Group Advisors.
  - Allen College administrators serving the BSN program.
3. Describe how you will recruit your participants and who will be directly involved in the recruitment. (Attach advertisements, flyers, contact letters, telephone contact protocols, web site template, etc.)
    - All second semester first-year students are currently assigned to an existing Care Group. Each of the seven Care Groups will serve as a focus group for interviewing. In order to enhance convenience for the students, groups will be asked to either meet prior to or after a common class.
    - Individual faculty advisors and administrators will be asked to participate in an interview at their convenience.

4. How will you protect participants' privacy during recruitment? (Attach letters of cooperation & agreement from agencies, institutions or others involved in participant recruitment.)

An open invitation to participate will be given to the students during a common class. Interested individuals will be asked to identify potential times for interviews based on their availability. A suggestion will be made to schedule the interviews prior to or immediately following the common class.

5. Explain what steps you will take during the recruitment process to minimize potential coercion or the appearance of coercion.

Students will be informed that participation in the focus group is voluntary and will not affect their academic endeavors at Allen College.

Faculty advisors and administrators will be informed that participation in the interview is voluntary and will not affect their employment status at Allen College.

6. Will you give participants gifts, payments, services without charge, or course credit?

No  Yes If yes, explain:

7. Where will the study procedures be carried out? If any procedures occur off-campus, who is involved in conducting that research? (Attach copies of IRB approvals or letters of cooperation from non-UNI research sites if procedures will be carried out elsewhere.)

On campus  Off campus  Both on- and off-campus

Do offsite research collaborators have human participants protection training?

No  Yes  Don't know  Not applicable – no offsite collaborators

#### E. RISKS AND BENEFITS

1. All research carries some social, economic, psychological, or physical risk. Describe the nature and degree of risk of possible injury, stress, discomfort, invasion of privacy, and other side effects from all study procedures, activities, and devices (standard and experimental), interviews and questionnaires. Include psychosocial risks as well as physical risks.

Risks related to participant involvement in this study are no more than minimal. The only identifiable risk is the inconvenience and/or burden of time related to

participating in the focus group discussions and/or individual faculty and administrator interviews.

2. Explain what steps you will take to minimize risks of harm and to protect participants' rights and welfare. (If you will include protected groups of participants which include minors, fetuses in utero, prisoners, pregnant women, or cognitively impaired or economically or educationally disadvantaged participants, please identify the group(s) and answer this question for each group.)

Focus group discussions will be scheduled either prior to or immediately following a common class. This will eliminate any added burden related to additional travel to campus.

Faculty and administrator interviews will be scheduled at a time identified as convenient for the individual.

3. Study procedures often have the potential to lead to the unintended discovery of a participant's personal medical, psychological, and/or psycho-social conditions that could be considered to be a risk for that participant. Examples might include disease, genetic predispositions, suicidal behavior, substance use difficulties, interpersonal problems, legal problems or other private information. How will you handle such discoveries in a sensitive way if they occur?

Although it is unlikely that any unintended discovery of participant's personal conditions will occur, if any such discoveries occur the participant will be asked to refrain from continued discussion of the condition/problem in the group setting. Upon completion of the focus group discussion, the participant will be counseled regarding the availability of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at Allen Memorial Hospital. This service is offered to all Allen College students, and information exchanged during counseling is kept strictly confidential.

4. Describe the anticipated benefits of this research for individual participants in each participant group. If none, state "None."

An anticipated indirect benefit to individual participants is that the discussion which will take place through the focus groups may demonstrate an interest in their well-being and a concern for their viewpoints. Investigation of student attitudes regarding the program may provide a sense of caring on the part of the academic institution. Participants may also come to realize positive effects of their involvement in the academic advising Care Groups.

Faculty may also come to realize the positive effects of their involvement with students via the academic advising Care Groups.

5. Describe the anticipated benefits of this research for society, and explain how the benefits outweigh the risks.

The anticipated benefit of this study includes discovery of potential positive aspects of "Care Group" advising at Allen College. A determination regarding the efficacy of the intervention of academic advising Care Groups to target the identified problem of retention is an intended benefit.

#### F. CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH DATA

1. Will you record any direct participant identifiers (names, Social Security numbers, addresses, telephone numbers, locator information, etc.)
- No  Yes If yes, explain why recording identifiers is necessary and describe the coding system(s) you will use to protect against disclosure.

Lists of participants in the focus groups will be kept separate from the transcripts of the interviews.

2. Will you retain a link between study code numbers and direct identifiers after the data collection is complete?
- No  Yes If yes, explain why this is necessary and for how long you will keep this link.

Lists of participants in each group will be maintained for a maximum of four years. When student participants graduate from Allen College the lists will be destroyed. Lists of participants will be maintained only for subsequent data gathering. The lists of participants will be held only by the PI.

3. Describe how you will protect data against disclosure to the public or to other researchers or non-researchers. Other than members of the research team, explain who will have access to data (e.g., sponsors, advisers, government agencies) and how long you intend to keep the data.

Data obtained during the focus group interviews will be kept at my personal residence. There will be no other individuals involved in the data gathering process. Dr. Carolyn Bair, dissertation chair, will also have potential access to the data, as deemed necessary by the research process. The data will be kept until all related research has been completed. Data will be kept for a maximum of four years.

4. Do you anticipate using any data (information, interview data, etc.) from this study for other studies in the future?

No  Yes If "Yes," explain and include this information in the consent form.

**G. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

1. Will you need access to participants' medical, academic, or other personal records for screening purposes or during this study?

No  Yes. If yes, specify types of records, what information you will take from the records and how you will use them.

2. Will you make sound or video recordings or photographs of study participants?

No  Yes. If yes, explain what type of recordings you will make, how long you will keep them, and if anyone other than the members of the research team will be able to see them.

Audio recordings of the focus group interviews will be made. I am the only researcher involved. Dr. Carolyn Bair, dissertation advisor, will also have potential access to the data, as deemed necessary by the research process. The audio recordings will be kept until interview data has been transcribed and the final report has been written.

**H. CONSENT FORMS** Check all that apply.

**Written** (Attach a copy of all consent and assent forms for each participant group.)

**Oral** (Attach a written script of oral consent and assent for each participant group.)

**Waiver** (Attach written justification of waiver of consent)

## APPENDIX H

XXXXX COLLEGE  
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW REQUEST/APPROVAL FORM

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

Investigator/Clinical Project Director: \_\_\_\_\_ Co-investigator or Research Assistant: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name: Kendra Williams-Perez / \_\_\_\_\_  
 Position/Program: Associate Professor / BSN & MSN programs / \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: Allen College / \_\_\_\_\_  
 Telephone: 319-226-2044 / \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: williakb@ihs.org / \_\_\_\_\_  
 PROJECT TITLE: An Exploration of Academic Advising Care Groups at an Iowa Private College  
 Project Advisor: Dr. Carolyn Bair, UNI

SUBJECT INFORMATION:

Number of subjects to be enrolled: approximately 40

Special subjects/Procedures (if indicated): N/A

- \_\_\_\_\_ Minors  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Pregnant Women  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Prisoners  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Invasive procedures/medications/new devices/tissue samples  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Existing Data  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Mentally Impaired  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Physically Impaired  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Cognitively Impaired  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

FUNDING INFORMATION:

Is external funding provided? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_X\_ no Pending? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_X\_ no

If yes to either of above:

Funding Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of funding/pending funding: \_\_\_\_\_

ASSURANCE:

The undersigned assure that the protocols involving human subjects described in the application are complete and accurate and are consistent with applicable protocols submitted to external funding agencies. All protocol activities will be performed in accordance with Allen College, State, and Federal regulations. No activities involving the use of human subjects will be initiated without prior review and approval by the XXXX College Human Subjects Review Committee.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Project Advisor      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Approved by Human Subjects Committee Chair      Date

(Date Received by Human Subjects Committee: \_\_\_\_\_)



APPENDIX I  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA  
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW  
INFORMED CONSENT

**Project Title: An Exploration of Academic Advising Care Groups at an Iowa Private College**

**Name of Investigator: Kendra Williams-Perez**

**Invitation to Participate:** You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate.

**Nature and Purpose:** The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to determine potential benefits of academic advising Care Groups at Allen College, Waterloo, Iowa. Care Groups were instituted with first semester first-year bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) students in the fall of 2002.

**Explanation of Procedures:** The data collection will take place through the use of focus group discussions with students and individual interviews with faculty and administrators. Open-ended questions will be utilized to garner responses. As a student participant, you will remain in your identified Allen College Care Group. Focus group discussions will take place on the Allen College campus, either prior to or just following a scheduled class. Depending on the nature of the discussion, focus group interviews should last no longer than two hours. In the unlikely event that additional data is necessary, you may be contacted for a brief follow-up interview, again prior to or following an Allen College class. Audio recordings of the focus group interviews will be made. I am the only researcher involved. Dr. Carolyn Bair, faculty advisor, will also have potential access to the data, as deemed necessary by the research process. The audio recordings will be kept until interview data has been transcribed and the final report has been written.

**Discomfort and Risks:** Potential risks related to involvement in this research study are no more than minimal. The only identifiable risk is the inconvenience and/or burden of time related to participating in the focus group discussions. Agreement to participate will not affect academic endeavors at Allen College.

**Benefits:** There are no benefits to you as a participant in this research. An anticipated benefit of this study is the discovery of potential positive aspects of "Care Group" advising at Allen College.

**Confidentiality:** Information obtained during this study which could potentially identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The information will be published in a dissertation, and may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw:** I have been told that my participation is completely voluntary. I have been advised that I am free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and that by doing so I will not be penalized or lose benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

**Questions:** I have been told that the investigator will answer any questions I have about my participation. I have also been advised that if I desire information in the future regarding my participation or the study generally, I can contact Kendra Williams-Perez at 319-226-2044 or the project investigator's faculty advisor, Dr. Carolyn Bair, at the department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-2636. I can also contact the office of the Human Participants Coordinator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-2748, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

**Agreement:** I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

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(Signature of Participant)

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(Date)

---

(Printed name of Participant)

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(Date)

---

(Signature of Investigator)

---

(Date)

---

(Signature of Advisor)

---

(Date)