Reimagining Academic Advising: Proactive Interventions for Retaining At-Risk Students

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References

Introduction

Traditional Academic Advising:

- Prescriptive advising – passive, transactional information exchange
- Advisors act primarily as a course planner and rely on students to independently seek help

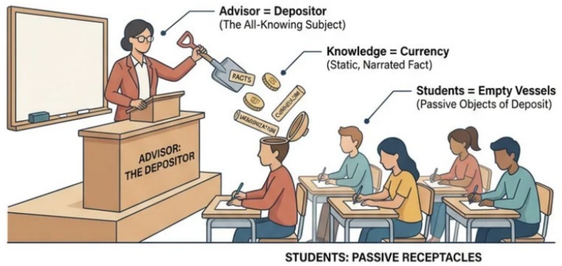
The Guiding Research Question:

How does academic advising influence retention rates among at-risk undergraduate students?

Theoretical Framework:

Paulo Freire's (2000) critical pedagogy

- critics the banking model of education where students are treated as passive receivers, mirroring the traditional prescriptive advising model
- meaningful education must operate as a transformative practice, rooted in problem-posing dialogue and the development of critical consciousness



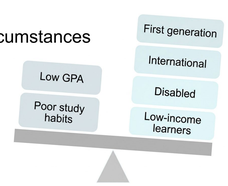
(Google, 2026)

Proactive & Holistic Advising:

- Advisors actively initiate contact with goal of forming on going partnership
- Creating a collaborative partnership where student's aspirations and advisor's mission converge

At-Risk Student Demographics:

- Often intersect with historically marginalized groups: first generation, international, disabled, or low-income leaners.
- Compounding systemic challenges due to personal circumstances



Significance of Research

- Social, economic and cultural responsibility of higher education

Thesis Statement:

Retaining at-risk students demands a systemic shift from prescriptive to proactive advising models capable of holistically addressing external challenges, cultivating self-efficacy, and guiding students through institutional barriers.

Literture Review

Characteristics and Experiences of At-Risk Students

- Quantitatively measured by low GPA resulting in academic probation
- Historically marginalized groups
- Ineffective study habits and time management struggles
- Disconnect of perceived and actual abilities

(Arena et al., 2024; Bledsoe, 2025; Magd et al., 2022; Milcu, 2026; Nordstokke et al., 2026; Waddington, 2019)

Proactive vs. Reactive Advising

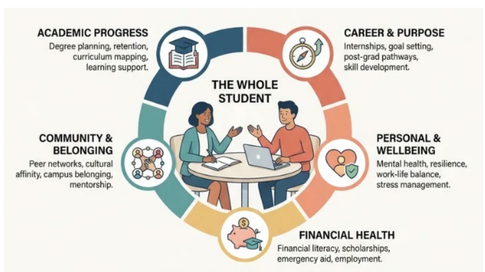
- Reactive Advising waits for students to seek help
  - Often too late and no student accountability
- Proactive advising, institution takes the first step
  - Form active partnership and rebuilding student motivation and accountability

(Earl, 1988; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Zhang et al., 2014)

Holistic Advising and Institutional Barriers

- Validating each student's unique experience
- Integration of academic support, mental health services and extracurricular engagement

(Arena et al., 2024; Bledsoe, 2025; Bowering et al., 2017; Ford, 2024; Liu et al., 2022)



(Google, 2026)

Student Self-Efficacy and Motivation

- Highly motivated students are more likely to achieve their academic goals
- Setting clear, actionable goals enhancing commitment and creating a positive feedback loop strengthens their self-efficacy

(Bowering et al., 2017; Bowman et al., 2020; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Robinson & Shi, 2022)

Efficacy of Proactive Advising

- Early intervention enhances learning outcome and institutional retention
- Implementing mandatory, appreciative advising meetings has been shown to reduce academic dismissals by 50%

(Bowering et al., 2017; Butler et al., 2016; Dao et al., 2026; Drake, 2011; Lin, 2023; Liu et al., 2022)

Recommendation

Caseload-Based Advising

- Assigning specific cohort of students to dedicated, department-embedded advisors
- Fosters long-term, collaborative partnerships

Peer Mentorship Programs

- Relatable support



(Google, 2026)

Early Alert Systems

- Initiates advisor reach out before academic failure

Barriers and Feasibility

- Financial constrains
- Emotional labour felt by advisors
- Faculty buy-in

Gaps & Future Research

Generalizability of Research

- Inherent complexity and variation of individual institution design
- Inconsistencies in advising models
- Demographic and regional homogeneity
- Small sample size

(Finnie et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2022; Robinson & Shi, 2022; Sneyers & De Witte, 2018; Zhang et al., 2014)

Advising Modalities

- Shift of advising models into virtual environment

(Miller et al., 2019; Peters et al., 2023)



Future Research

- Emotional labour experienced by advisors
- Long-term impact of peer mentorship programs
- Increasing digital landscape