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A Focus Group Study of the Academic Success
and Satisfaction among Undergraduates with Undecided majors

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Abstract

This project interviewed 4 initially undecided major students who now have declared majors in a focus group setting to determine their feelings of satisfaction and success. The study has three major findings. First, students felt their initial undecided status allowed more flexible course selection and resulted in a more well-rounded education. Second, while students liked this greater flexibility, students felt after declaring a major, they constantly played “catch up” to graduate on time and to receive career internships. Lastly, students liked their pre-major advisors, but wanted advisors to give them more time, career direction and advice, and to have a better knowledge of their specific major interests. The largest implications administrators need to rethink how to better assist students in catching up after a student declares their major, and thinking about how to make advising more personable and specific to each student.

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An estimated 20 to 50% of students come into the university as undecided majors (Lewallen, 1995). Undecided students have been studied for decades and still more research is needed. Undecided students are often clumped into one large category, however current research is beginning to separate students into multiple “types.” (Gordon & Steele, 2003; Savicka and Jarjoura, 1993; Wanberg and Muchinsky, 1995). I am interested in how different types of students, as outlined by Gordon and Steel (2003) differ in feelings of their overall treatment, academic success, and academic satisfaction. This research is important and worthwhile because it expands on previous research (Baird, 1969; Lewallen, 1993; Leppel, 2002) by exploring whether different “types” of undecided majors have different experiences in terms of advising, progress towards graduation, and academic success and satisfaction. I will use a focus group setting to explore this topic. A focus group lends best to this research because participants can compare and contrast their experiences as undecided majors.

The focus group will look at previously undecided students and their feelings of academic success, satisfaction, and treatment. Academic success includes how, if at all, student’s initial undecided status affects their progress towards graduation and their feelings of success before and after declaring a major. Academic satisfaction comprises students’ satisfaction with BGSU’s services, their current major, and their initial undecided status. Treatment explores students overall satisfaction with advisors and career consultants at BGSU. This project allows for exploring different types of undecided students’ opinions and allows for both agreements and disagreements about the positives and negatives of their experiences. This research gives a clear picture of how a small group of undecided students’ feel about the implications of their undecided status. By hearing directly and elaborately from students about their feelings, advisors

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and career consultants in the future can better assist these students in achieving their academic and career goals.

Who is an undecided student?

Many researchers debate how to define an “undecided student.” Some have defined this status as a student who comes to the university exclusively as an undecided major, while others include those who have changed their majors multiple times. “Major changers” may conflict research on undecided students because at one point they were undecided about their chosen major. Thus, while not included in the undecided category, these students could be similar to undecided students. If these students are similar to undecided students, they should be included in research on undecided students.

Undecided students are often stereotyped as unfocused students, who are in college for partying and not focused on their academics. The stereotypical undecided student may come from early research stating that students without educational goals are less likely to graduate from college (Noel, Levitz, and Saluri, 1985). However, more current research finds that undecided and decided students are similar in achievement, honors participation, and academic involvement (Lewallen, 1995).

Types of Undecided Students

Current research focuses on different categories of undecided students. I will explore several different researchers and their breakdown of “types” of undecided students. A longitudinal study done at a large Midwestern University finds that over 25 years approximately 18% to 20% of new students came in as undecided majors, with approximately 90% of these students as freshmen and 10% as transfer students (Gordon & Steele, 2003). This study classified

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students into four different categories: students who were completely undecided or “open” about their major, students tentatively decided about one specific major, students who had different thoughts about majors, but were not ready to make a decision, and students who were completely decided about their major (Gordon & Steele, 2003). One implication is that a large amount of students come in as undecided, but not all undecided students’ are the same in regards to their career indecision. Another implication is “types” of undecided student may differ significantly on their feelings of success, satisfaction, and treatment since students have differing levels of career indecision.

Anderson divided his groups in a slightly different fashion; he compared undecided, decided, and “major changers” and found no difference between these three groups of students on their levels of major indecision (Anderson, 1989). In contrast, Orndorff and Herr (1996) find a significant difference between students with declared and undeclared majors. In their study, they look at a convenience sample of 189 students with approximately half decided and half undecided students (Orndorff and Herr, 1996). They first distributed the career decision scale and survey of career development to five classrooms in a Midwestern university; from this sample they selected participants interested in interviewing for an hour about their career development (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). They found that declared students report more career certainty and career planning than undecided students (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). Savikas and Jarjoura (1993) also used the career decision scale to examine 368 students using cluster analysis. This research also found students that initial decided students report higher more career and major certainty, and the reverse is true for students who report less career and major certainty. The implications are that most current research finds a difference between undecided and decided college students on career and major certainty.

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Wanberg and Muchinsky (1995) separate 390 college students into six different categories to explore undecided students' career decisiveness and anxiety associated with their undecided status. They use the following six categories: confident decided, concern decided, indifferent undecided, and anxious. Their main findings report that undecided students are less happy with their identity, more anxious, and less decisive compared decided students (Wanberg & Muchinsky, 1995). This demonstrates how undecided students may be less satisfied and more worried about their major. This finding is important because the research points out a key difference in how undecided and decided majors think and feel about their status.

Newman and Fuqua (1990) look at 249 decided and undecided students' career status. Career status consisted of whether students decided on a major and if not, how high their career indecision was on a seven point likert scale. The following subgroups were then made: seriously and not seriously undecided, uncomfortable, somewhat comfortable, moderately comfortable, and very comfortable. The analysis looked at two career anxiety scales: the career decision scale and the career maturity inventory-attitudes scale. Findings reveal significant differences on several of the career measures, most importantly undecided students were more anxious about deciding on a career path. This finding demonstrates another example of differences between undecided and decided students.

Treatment

Academic advisers are the core individuals students go to for questions about classes, scheduling conflicts, or other general major questions. In fact, advising was cited as the most important concern by over 800,000 students, at public four year universities, surveyed by the National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report (Noel-Levitz, 2012). This study finds a one

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point gap on a seven point scale between student's ranked importance of advising and students' advising satisfaction score (Noel-Levitz, 2012). Accordingly, nationwide students are satisfied, but feel room for improvement in advising is possible. In comparison with career advisors, pre-major advisors have a different and unique set of students. Nearly all universities recognize this need and created offices to deal exclusively with undecided students. In fact, Gordon's (2007) book *The Undecided College Student: An Academic and Career Advising Challenge* focuses on the many challenges of advising undecided students.

Carduner, Padak, and Reynolds (2011) use an exploratory qualitative study interviewing twelve exploratory honors students. They find many of these students were unhappy with the use of vocational tests in high school and college, feel they were uninformed about major options in high school, and could identify subjects that did and did not interest them, but simply could not choose a major (Carduner, 2011). This study is one of the first studies on undecided students to use qualitative interviews and has very rich and detailed findings about these twelve honors students and their satisfaction with advising received.

Further research explores how undecided and decided students have different needs in terms of advising. Goodson (1981) looks at 2,153 college freshmen and finds that both undecided and decided major students need help with career development, but in different ways. Undecided students need more assistance in looking at specific majors options. On the other hand, decided major students need more detailed information about post-graduation options within their major (Goodson, 1981). This research is important because it justifies why colleges have offices like the pre-major advising office to assist undecided students since their needs are different than decided students. Van Wie (2011) also recognizes the importance of career and

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academic counselors working together to help undecided students. These integrated services are found to be instrumental in helping undecided students to prosper and grow.

Success

One large area of foci relates to how “successful” undecided students feel in terms of academic success as compared to students with declared major students. Throughout this research, contradictory studies find differences between undecided students and superficially if undecided or decided majors are more or less likely to succeed in college. Leppel looks at 5,000 undergraduates starting with an undecided status that finished a bachelor’s degree. The study finds that undecided major students have lower academic performance and are more likely to drop out (Leppel, 2002). On the other hand, Lewallen looks at 18,000 undecided and declared majors. When controlling for external variables, he finds no evidence the two groups were different in terms of academic and social involvement, relationships with faculty, grades, and honors participation (Lewallen, 1993). Similarly, Baird (1969) sampled 12,000 undecided and declared major students and also finds no significant differences between the two groups on academic success. In fact, he finds that undecided major students have slightly higher grade point averages and ACT score going into college (Baird, 1969).

Satisfaction

What is your major? This question is asked to students frequently on questionnaires, by other students, and even during introductions upon starting a new class. For some students starting college, this question is daunting because they do not necessarily know where their interests lie. Many of these students may declare as an undecided major. In contrast, some of

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these students may declare a major and end up really liking their major, really not liking their major and still graduating with the degree, or may end up switching majors.

Lunnenborg (1975) compares 127 graduating students who started the university as undecided majors to graduating students who started with a declared status. He finds that undecided students are less satisfied with their overall experience at universities than declared students and undecided students are less likely to go to graduate school (Lunnenborg, 1975). Another study by Maier and Herman (1974) looks at 141 students' career decisiveness and satisfaction. The researchers find that the more career indecisive a student is, the lower their self-esteem and the higher their levels of dogmatism.

Purpose of research

Previous research focuses on whether undecided students graduate late, their academic success in terms of grades, and problems they have seeking academic advising. I explore how different types of undecided students feel in terms of their overall treatment, academic success, and academic satisfaction. In terms of overall treatment, I explore how students evaluate the quality of advising of their current career advisors and their past pre-major advisors. I explore student's overall feelings of academic success in terms of on trackness for graduation and their overall feelings of success as undecided majors and now as declared majors. Lastly, I explore how satisfied students are with their initial undecided status, the advantages and disadvantages of their undecided status, and if they would choose to be initially undecided again if they could go back to their first semester as an undecided major.

This topic is interesting because very little qualitative research about undecided students has been researched and in most previous research student have lumped together into one large

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category. Currently, more categorical research presents itself. Gordon and Steele demonstrate the different “types” of undecided major students in their research and clumping all of these students into one large category would not give justice to the different types of undecided students. The hole in previous qualitative and different types of undecided student, is the gap in research my study explores.

I explore this topic in a focus group setting. A focus group is best fitted because the research can look at different types of undecided major students without quantifying the data. Using a focus group allows for a better understanding of how students feel without inadvertently asking participants questions on surveys for example that may not be meaningful towards their experiences. Also, a focus group allows students to compare and contrast one another’s experiences, so it is possible to understand more about how a group of undecided students feel regarding treatment, academic success, and satisfaction as compared to an individual undecided student.

Method

Participants

The plan of the study was to recruit fifteen Bowling Green State University students to participate in a focus group conversation. These students consists of students previously undecided about their major, but currently have a declared a major. To find these students, I emailed students from the Office of Pre Major Advising’s previous contact list. This list has over 500 email addresses. I emailed these students three times within a two week period asking for their participation in a focus group setting. All participants received a five dollar Starbucks gift card for their time. All students on the list were current Bowling Green State University students that were in good standing with the university. I recruited 4 students to be in my focus group. In

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the group, three students were female. One student was a sophomore, two were juniors, and one was a senior. Two students were in the college of arts and sciences; both of these two students were philosophy majors. One student was in the business college with a general degree in business with a specialization in management and the other student was a Human Development and Family Studies major, a part of the college of education.

What is a focus group?

A broad definition of a focus group is a group of people brought together with a specific purpose, size, and composition (Krueger & Casey, 2000). This group of people comes together with a common, shared experience. In this case, that is entering Bowling Green State University as an undecided student. A focus group is useful because participants can hear one another's experiences and then decide if their experiences are similar or different from that and if so, how. Focus groups typically range in size from five to ten participants, but often range from as few as four to as many as twelve (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The focus group in this study was on the smaller side with having only 4 participants. The benefit of having fewer participants is a set of richer data. On the other hand, the disadvantage of a small group is experiences may not be as varied and thus are less representative. A focus group fits my research goals because I want to explore types of undecided students and did not want to be constricted to a survey or similar mechanisms, where I would not be able to have a richer, more detailed explanation of participant's lives as both undecided and declared majors. I also wanted participants to be able to interact with one another and share common and uncommon experiences. Without the ability of students to interact with one another it would have been harder to explore the differences and similarities across student's experiences.

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Measures

Type of undecided student

The independent variable of the study is the type of undecided major a student self-identifies as during their first semester as an undecided major. The types of undecided students are going to be derived partially from Gordon and Steele's study. My categories will include the following: students completely open about their choice of major, students tentatively decided about one major, students with several ideas of majors within the same general area of study (e.g. Psychology, Sociology, Social work), and students with several majors that are not in the same general area of study (e.g. Art and Exercise Science). In the focus group, three of the four participants were completely undecided about their major and the fourth was undecided about her major, but had a general idea of the area she wanted to study. Since a participant is not even a part of every category, the ability to make comparisons across groups is impossible. However, the research still has value in that this data will give a richer, fuller understanding of how a small sample of undecided students feel in regards to their academic success, satisfaction, and treatment at BGSU.

Treatment

Treatment explores the features undecided students like and dislike about advisors and career consultants including their overall satisfaction with advisors, what they would want to change about their advising appointments, and their overall satisfaction with their undecided status at BGSU.

Success

Success explores how successful and unsuccessful undecided students feel before and after declaring a major. Success also includes student's perception of progress towards graduation

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and their perception of whether their undecided status impacts how successful they feel overall.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction includes students' satisfaction with BGSU services, their satisfaction with their current major, and their satisfaction with their choice to start college as an undecided student.

Procedure

The procedure will consist of sending an invitation via email asking previous students of the office of pre major advising to consider being a part of a 2 hour focus group. Students participating in the study are first asked to read over and sign an informed consent document. Students participating in the focus group are then asked to describe their feelings of success, satisfaction, and treatment as an undecided major student. These attitudes are recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to explore how attitudes of different types of undecided students differ from one another. However, since the sample size is so small, I look exclusively at undecided students as a whole since comparing groups is not possible.

Results

In the focus group, perceived advantages and disadvantages of an undecided status are first explored. Next, the group focuses on their own positive and negative experiences as they seek and declared a major. Experiences are varied in all students; one student feels his experience was not any different after he declared his major: "I did not really notice a difference, I just declared the major and then I kept doing what I was doing." Several themes stood out among the undecided majors. The themes focused on the 1) flexibility to have new experiences and friendships 2) playing "catch up 3) student's advising experiences and 4) feelings of success and satisfaction.

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Flexibility to have new experiences and friendships

One benefit of an undecided status is that so many opportunities and routes are available for students to go down and explore. Students felt that their options are endless, and they had the ability to be flexible with course selections and to have different, unique experiences compared to students starting college with a declared major. On the other hand, some students felt this flexibility increased anxiety to declare a major.

All participants believed being undecided, they had more flexibility in their course selections. One student said, “As an undecided major I think people feel more flexible with like changing their major or instead of just taking the classes because you have like a certain um road map that you have to take. With undecided it’s like well if I do this or if I do this; you can kind of just make more decisions.” She felt that as an undecided student she had “more freedom to try different possibilities.... just the whole idea of being able to branch out, meet new people, try new things.”

Along with course flexibility, several students felt that they received a more well-rounded education because they took many different classes in different departments. One student elaborates saying, “I have more knowledge on random topics than I ever thought possible. If my friends taking a soc class I can help them with that, philosophy terms, mathematics.” Another student also felt having a wider variety of classes helped her to get to know more people on campus. She elaborated saying “some [declared majors] have the same friends they met like in the fraternity or in classes freshmen year and they just kind of stopped there; whereas now you know more people around campus.”

However, while some students may prosper with this flexibility, others were not so sure about this freedom. One student stated “I like structure and so like whenever I was undecided it

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was like I didn't have that road map." She seemed to feel a little lost because being undeclared meant not having certain courses to take and not having a road map for her to go off of.

However, the same student felt she had gained an extra experience as an undecided major. She went to Disney her second semester of her freshmen year partly because of her undecided status. She said "I feel like if I was decided my freshmen year...I did the Disney internship and I kind of did that because it was like kind of like taking a semester off, but still like being in school." Overall, she had both positive and negative experiences as an undecided major as did all of the other participants.

Several students think an advantage of declaring a major was that you have a lot of the same students in your classes. One student explains: "I think like having people in your classes is really nice like the same people and the same teachers that you can talk to. Um just kind of like reassuring I guess that yea I don't know the classes like work so-- you are you know with the same people so I don't know, it just feels more comfortable." While another student felt he could not compare his experiences to someone who declared a major and did not feel he could explain those differences.

"Catch up"

"Catch up" was a key problem elaborately spoken about by participants. Catch up was stated by participants as a feeling of being behind because of their undecided status. "Catch up" consisted of several different components: not joining academic groups as sooner, not having internships as soon as other students did, and taking lower level classes as upperclassmen. Most students felt somewhat behind. As one student explains "some of the classes that you have to take are like sophomores and then juniors and then I was in like the sophomore one as a junior and then I don't know it was just like kind of weird."

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Another student expands on catching up for classes stating:

I mean just because I kept switching majors and everyone is like oh this is what I want to do and I was still questioning. And you know freshmen level classes, when you are a junior and I'm taking one now as a senior and everyone looks at you like wow you started off late."

Interestingly, even though most students felt behind, they all perceive themselves to be on track to graduate in four years. Most were taking heavy course loads in order to do so as demonstrated by one student; "it would have nicer if I would have made my decision [to declare a major] sooner just so I wouldn't have to you know jump through hoops to graduate on time. Another student amazed stated "I am actually seemingly on par for graduation. I was supposed to graduate in 2014. Considering I took like an entire year off, two whole semesters, I think that is doing pretty good." Most feel the extra effort, however is worth it to graduate in a timely manner. However, one student did not seem to have this same mindset. He stated "I'm ok with going the extra semester or the extra year. I get more in terms of credit hours and just having two majors."

Another problem students' face in catching up was students felt they had missed opportunities by not declaring a major sooner. For example, one student wanted to join a business fraternity, but said "whenever I like started to become familiar with it was my junior year and by then I would have been joining this semester and I felt it was so late in the game." The same was true in having to catch up because of not receiving internships earlier. One student talks about her friend and how "because she knew what she wanted to do she got all of these internships during the summer." This student felt she could not catch up with her friends relevant experiences.

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Advising

Pre major advising

Pre major advising experiences of students varied significantly—some had wonderful experiences, while others downright awful ones. One student remembers his first advising experience clearly as “they brought a bunch of people into a big room and sat everyone down at a computer with probably just another student and told us to pick classes.” On the other hand, one student felt “I’ve always had really excellent experiences with my advisors.”

While students’ experiences differed greatly, one key overarching finding was students liked their advisors, but wished they could give them more direction about topics specific to their areas of interest. Most students felt pre-major advisors knew only general information about all the majors. Whereas most students wished their advisor was more knowledgeable about their specific interests. One student states it like this:

“And maybe if they could break it up in math and science advisors that are knowledgeable in that section of..or that major instead of knowing a little bit about everything, just kind of knowing more about something.”

Another student agreed stating:

“If they could focus more on some divisions of college like math or science or uh theatre or film so that would be a little easier so if they are leaning towards one more than the other they can go for that specific advisor.”

Students explore their experiences and offer several suggestions for how pre major advising could improve student’s experiences. One suggestion was having “a day or something like you know how they have campus fest or the different organizations, I wish they had something like that for majors.” The finding suggests this student felt she did not know all of the available major

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options, and would benefit from learning more about the different majors. Another suggestion is completing a form similar to one at the counseling center that “matched you up with someone [an advisor] who was more knowledgeable on the topics they like— I feel that would be very beneficial. Students’ wanting a more personal experience and relationship with their advisor was implied from this comment.

Career Advising

Advising was quite different for undecided students once they declared their major. Three of the four students did not have a career advisor once they declared and most go to whatever counselor is available, primarily when it is time to register for classes. One student’s main source of guidance is a faculty advisor, another’s is primarily a check sheet, and one student is relatively happy with her assigned advisor. The one student assigned to an advisor thinks he is “knowledgeable about the topic” and feels it is an added benefit that she has “him as a professor” as well. Overall, little discussion about career advisors was recorded, probably because most students did not have a primary career advisor.

Feelings of Success & Satisfaction

All students while agreeing that they would not change their undecided experience, feel more successful now as a declared major compared to their time as an undecided major. One student states:

I think I feel more reassured now like how I feel about my freshmen year, undecided, and then how I feel now. Like if I compare those 2 feelings, I feel like really good now....

Now it’s like I’m actually going somewhere with this; like I’m here for a purpose, not just to be here.

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Another student also feels more successful now that she finds she will be graduating on time. She says “I honestly didn’t feel too successful until like just this year, until I realized I’ll graduate on time.”

When asked if they, as undecided students feel they were disadvantaged for being undecided. Most answered that they did not feel disadvantaged and that everyone is different so it is hard to compare themselves to decided students. One student makes this point very nicely stating

I guess it depends on who you compare yourself too because there has got to be some students who graduate in 4 years and have internships every summer and do everything that they need to do. And then there are going to be students who declare their major and who declare their major 4 different times in the 1st year, so it really just depends.

All students are really satisfied with their current major. Although students define themselves as happier after declaring their major, they would still go back and be an undecided student again if they could do it over. As one student states, “I think it [being undecided] just allowed you to have different experiences your freshmen year and I liked those experiences so I wouldn’t want to change it..I wouldn’t change it”.

Discussion

While undecided student’s experiences are all slightly different, undecided student participants on the whole have many similar thoughts and opinions. Students overall liked the flexibility offered to them as an undecided student and felt they had the opportunity to try and explore different classes instead of feeling like they have to take only classes on their career track. However, with this flexibility, most students feel they had missed opportunities in their major like internships or major organizations they could not join sooner. Overall, most students

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were happy with advising, but wished advisors could have given them more direction and had more knowledge about areas of study they were interested in. Although students feel more successful now as a declared major, they would not change being undecided because it was a part of their college life and they have memories and experiences they treasure. Lastly, all students were happy with the major they currently are and are excited to graduate with this degree.

Limitations

Several limitations arise from this study. The main limitation was the small sample size. This small sample made comparing across types of undecided students impossible because there were not even one student in each category. Thus, I did not get to see the differences across groups, but I did get a general view about the attitudes of undecided major students. One limitation is a focus group setting is not generalizable to a population because it is such a small sample size. Thus, the findings will be more exploratory and can lead towards other research, but will not be able to give direct explanations.

Another limitation is that since no comparative group that started off with majors were interviewed. While this population does allow for a comparison before and after students declare their major, a difference between starting college as an undecided major or starting college as a declared major is possible. Another limitation is that certain participants are more inclined to speak in the focus group so others opinions may not be heard.

Conclusion

The research findings enrich current research because this focus group adds qualitative research to the undecided field. Previously the main qualitative study was on a small honors group and focused almost exclusively on the reasons for coming in as an undecided student and

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their experiences with assistance in deciding a major in high school (Carduner and Padak, 2011). The research findings expand and support Goodson's research on how undecided students advising needs differ from decided students. Research also enriches Baird (1969) and Lewallen (1993) findings on success by expanding differences in success to explore not just quantitative measures, but also qualitative ones. These findings also expand on Lunnenborg research (1975) on how satisfied students feel with their overall experience at the university. This research, once again gives rich and detailed qualitative research from undecided students on their experiences. The research also magnifies Maier and Herman's findings about undecided students having lower self-esteem and higher dogmatism (Maier and Herman, 1974). The current research finds that undecided students feel more successful and satisfied with their self-identity after declaring a major.

Many policy implications arise from this study. One implication is undecided students like getting the opportunity to explore different majors and classes, but when they do declare their major they want to be able to catch up on opportunities quickly. This leads to a future research study considering how pre major advisors can assist undecided students to receive major opportunities quickly after declaring.

Another implication is undecided students were unhappy with advisors not having extensive knowledge about areas of major interest that were important to them. In the future, researchers could explore other methods for helping to "match" undecided students with a qualified advisor that fits their personality, needs, and major interests. Lastly, future studies could compare and contrast undecided students experiences in career and pre-major advising.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Transcription

Moderator: Tiffany Alexander, Principle Investigator

Assistant Moderator: Sara Janos, Sociology Graduate Student

Note: Focus group was held on Wednesday March 27th from 7-8:30 pm in the Bowen Thompson Student Union room306

4 participants in attendance: AF1 (Female, Junior, Business Management major); BM1 (Male, Sophomore, Philosophy/Psychology major) CF2 (Female, Senior, Human Development and Family Studies); DF3 (Female, Junior, Philosophy major)

TA- Hello. My name is Tiffany Alexander and I am a student in the Honors Program at Bowling Green State University. I am interested in how students who arrive at BGSU as undeclared majors feel about their academic success and progress toward graduation, react to family and friends' views of their undeclared status, and their satisfaction with pre-major advising services. I'm especially interested in how your feelings differ from each other based on the different reason you were undeclared when you first arrived at BGSU. Each of you has an individual story. Also, I'll want you to consider what are the advantages and disadvantages of being undeclared early in your undergraduate career, as compared to students who arrive at BGSU and already feel ready to declare a major.

Because this is a group discussion, I cannot guarantee anonymity nor confidentiality for you. I know your identity and have your email addresses. I plan to destroy the list with your name and email, after this focus group. I ask that all participants do not disclose information from this focus group outside of this room. However, I can't guarantee that your right to confidentiality will be respected. During this discussion, an assistant moderator will take notes. And I will audiotape the discussion. A transcription will be made of the audiotape and this transcription will suppress all identifying information. Feel free to pass on any questions you do not wish to answer. You may leave our discussion at any time, if you feel uncomfortable. If you have any questions about this study, you can contact me or either of my advisors on the piece of paper I gave to you as you arrived. The email list and audiotape will be destroyed on or before April 29, 2013. Are there any questions? Okay let's begin.

Opening Question

1) What is your year at BGSU?

AF1- I'm a Junior, a Business management

BM1- I'm a Sophomore and a Philosophy/psychology major

CF2- I am a Senior and a HDFS major

2) What is your current major and when did you declare it?

AF1- I did the end of my sophomore year

BM1- Sometime last year, I don't know.. (freshmen year)

CF2- actually at the end of my freshmen year I made the decision to go into education, and they wouldn't transfer that into the fall so that is the fall of my sophomore year, and then I switched over to HDFS the end of the sophomore year because I couldn't handle kids.. so the past 2 years I was human development and family studies

Introductory Questions

3) Moderator Comment: Please imagine your first semester as an undecided major student at BGSU. From the list of the following four categories, which do you feel most closely describes your status at that time. [Moderator gives out a card to each and they circle

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their response with pen.]

- I was completely open about my major; I did not know what major I would choose.
- I was tentatively decided about one major.
- I had interest in more than a single major within the same general area of study (e.g. Psychology, Sociology, Social work),
- I had interest in more than a single major not in the same general area, division, or college (e.g. Art and Exercise Science)

4) Please explain to the group why this category fits you best.

AF1- Um Ok I'll start.. um I was kind of, I started out with like with sciences like biology, then like physical therapy and then I liked math and then I was in math science and then I transferred to business.. I was kind of like everywhere my freshmen year

BM1- Well... I didn't really know what I was going to pick when I started... I don't know what else to say

CF2- Um... well I always wanted to find a major that had me working with people one on one in an helpful manner.. um so I kind had a general area of study, but I did jump around. I took soc classes and education.. um few philosophy and then I stuck with my major's criteria for the last 2 years

5) Please describe your history as an undeclared major? That is, please share the story of how you went from being an undeclared student to a student with a major.

AF1- Uhh I guess where I started out was I just couldn't see myself in the workplace in the major that I was choosing, I just kind of went from there and then business just seemed so natural so that is just kind of where I geared and it just started clicking from there

CF2- Umm for me I took sociology classes and I liked the idea of studying people but, I didn't like the research aspect cuz sociology and anthropology were more.. you know observer instead of working with them.. so I thought oh little kids and oh I get to teach them because I like math and English. So that was education. And then I realized that little kids treat me like a little kid because I am short so I decided not to stick with that because it was a little hard for me to be strict in the classroom. And I took umm classes in HDFS and I fell in love with it. So, undecided to that.

TA- What was the question? Explained question.

BM1- Well I took a philosophy class my freshmen year and I really liked it so I figured uh I would just stick with it. And then as far as psychology goes, I just had done some reading online and some research and I saw what I could do with psychology major and so I started looking at grad school and I realized that I was going to need to have a psychology major if I wanted to do what I wanted to do.

6) Overall, what have been the positive experiences, as you moved from an undeclared to declared major?

AF1- Uh, I think like having people in your classes is really nice like the same people and same teachers that you can talk to. Um just kind of like reassuring I guess that ya I don't know the classes like work so-- you are you know with the same people so I don't know it just feels more comfortable

BM1- I didn't really notice a difference, I just declared the major and then I kept doing what I was doing

CF2- Umm for me, it actually would have to be the advisors just because um my 1st advisor wouldn't really do much, so I changed my major. Then the 2nd advisor kept telling me you should be an accountant or all these random things and I'm like I don't know where you're

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getting this from.. so umm when I finally entered my current major the advisor was actually helpful and they told me different things I could do with my major and I thought the people here are so friendly and they actually do what I want to do so they helped me stick to it

7) Overall, what have been the negative experiences, as you moved from an undeclared to declared major?

AF1- Uh I feel like I just started behind on things. Like whenever some of the classes that you have to take are like sophomores and then juniors and then I was in like the sophomore one as a junior and then I don't know it was just like kind of weird and then I just saw someone the other day and they were like oh you're a junior I was like ya.. I thought you were a sophomore and I was like no. I feel like I was just behind on my business classes so like the 1st year I feel like I just took like all the random gen eds, but it would have been nicer to have been taking the business ones

BM1- There weren't really any negative experiences. I took classes that I knew I needed to graduate with almost any degree so I didn't have any trouble with taking classes

CF2- Um I would have to say it was pretty much the same as hers where I felt behind.. I mean just because I kept switching majors and everyone is like oh this is what I want to do and I was still questioning. And you know Freshmen level classes when you are a junior and I'm taking one now as a senior and everyone looks at you like wow you started off late and its like thanks..

Transition Questions

8) Based on your experience, what do you see as advantages to being an undecided major when a student first enrolls at BGSU?

AF1- Uh I think people feel more flexible with like changing their major or instead of just taking the classes because you have like a certain um road map that you have to take. With undecided it's like well if I do this or if I do this you can kind of just make more decisions but if you know what you want to do then

CF2- Um I felt um any undecided major they get more well-rounded kind of education because their freshmen year they try different classes and different things and instead of joining one thing and then sticking with it all 4 years and then later finding out that they don't want it at all they can test different like course topics and different majors at first and then make a final decision and you get your gen eds out of the way

BM1- Ya, um I really don't know the advantages because like I started undeclared and didn't start as declared so I wouldn't be able to tell the difference between the two. I don't know what it's like to be a declared major coming into college so I don't know what the positives and negatives of that would be

9) Based on your experiences, what do you see as disadvantages to being an undecided major when a student first enrolls at BGSU?

AF1- Umm I felt one disadvantage I there was like a business fraternity and I just didn't join it because like whenever I like started to become familiar with it it was my junior year and I then I would have been joining this semester and I felt it was so late in the game. So that was I guess a

BM1- Yea I wouldn't be able to answer that one

CF2- Um I just felt really awkward just because I had friend and family members who they always knew what they wanted to do with their lives and so talking to them they were like oh you find something yet and it's like nope still looking so it was kind of awkward trying to relate to them and then some classmates I would take other science classes and they would have it for

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the major and I just didn't to fill a credit and it was hard making friends with them because they kept trying to pull me into their major and I didn't get it.

Moderator comment: Please, think back to the first time you told your family and friends that you were not declaring a particular major or were undecided about your options, as you got ready to begin your studies at BGSU.

10) What were their reaction(s)?

BM1- My parents didn't care.

AF1- Yea Mine were the same.. my parent's really didn't care

CF2- Um my dad saw it as an opportunity for me to go into engineering, "no" and my mom and my mom she kept pushing for education for me and she knew just to keep quiet about it and as soon as I did pick a major, their hopes kind of went down the drain

11) What advice did they give you?

AF1- Umm I feel like my parents are kind of behind. In like the like future aspects. So I feel like they were just like whatever you want to do. So it was kind of more like if I want to get myself together, I need to do my own stuff

BM1- Yea I didn't get any real advice

CF2- I was just told to pick a major fast so I don't have to spend more than 4 years

12) What did they think of your journey to your major?

AF1- Um I think like once I got/ was declared they were like, like once I was doing well in what I was doing and I felt comfortable then they were ok with what I was doing they were really supportive whenever I decided my major. They just agreed with it anyway so I should have just went with it my freshmen year

BM1- I am sure they had opinions, I just don't know them.

CF2- My dad even though I am graduating with this degree still disapproves and he wants me to go into the sciences, but that is a different story. Um my mother, she is very happy that I am graduating with the major that I have and that I am happy with it. She still wants me to go back and you know get a degree so I can teach. Mm that's not going to work out well. But mm their kind of supportive with it.

Key Questions

Moderator comment: I am going to be asking you a few questions about your academic and advising experiences, as you moved from being an undecided student to declaring a major, as well as your perceptions of your success as a student and especially your success as compared to students who know their choice of major very early in their undergraduate careers.

Moderator comment: The first questions ask you to evaluate your own strategies as you made your choice about your current major:

13) Based on your experiences, what do you think were some real advantages of entering the university as an undecided student?

AF1- Yea Um I would say more well-rounded than like the others that just went straight into the um. Um like what you said earlier. um I feel like a lot of those two have like the same of friends they met like in the fraternity or in classes in freshmen year and they just kind of stopped there where as now you know more people around campus

BM1- Can't answer! [can't hear completely]

CF2- Um apparently me and AF1 (name omitted) are on the same wave length. Um Just the whole idea of being able to branch out, meet new people, try new things and um I don't know for me it kind of turned into a lifestyle in a weird way because I switched majors multiple times so

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you know not starting with one thing and feeling like I have to stick to it. That gave me more freedom to try different possibilities

14) Based on your experiences, what do you think were some real disadvantages of entering the university as an undecided student?

AF1- Um I feel like I like structure and so like whenever I was undecided it was like I didn't have that road map. So, for a lot of people that is an advantage that they can go wherever but I feel like I was just like well tell me what to do and I'll do it

CF2- Um I felt like I missed out on a few things because the friends I made in the education department I don't see them as often so it's a little strange and then the friends I've made here have they've had different experiences with elective classes they could take. And since I'm only taking only my major classes so I can graduate on time I haven't been able to have the same experience as they have. So, I feel like I've missed out a little bit, but at the same time I have had different experience that I still treasure

15) What would you do the same?

CF2- Um well for me uhh When I was undeclared I was just all over the place, not really not knowing what to do. So, I would do it the same. If anything I would probably skip changing my majors twice and just change it once. But you know doing it twice helped me realize that this major is the one I really want to be in. So there are good and bad to all of it. So..

AF1- I feel like if I was decided my freshmen year I did the Disney internship and I kind of did that because it was like kind of like taking a semester off, but still like being in school. So I kind of did it because I have this 1st semester or 2nd semester where I cannot take classes and not get behind so I feel like if I was decided and I had that roadmap I would have no done that. So there is good and bad

BM1- Maybe, I don't know.

16) What would you do differently?

AF1- I would have joined that fraternity that I was talking about earlier

CF2- Um I still I don't regret being an undecided major, I just it would have nicer if I would made my decision sooner just so I wouldn't have to you know jump through hoops to graduate on time. Which I am very proud to say that I am.

Moderator comment: The next questions ask you to evaluate the quality of the advising you received from pre-major advising or the consultants who advised you about majors of interest, including the major you ultimately chose.

17) Based on your personal experience, how would you describe the quality of advising in the pre-major advising office?

AF1- I don't really remember. I was like trying to think about this. I don't really remember like scheduling classes with my advisor, I know I did. But the only thing I can remember is that whenever I decided my major she was like she was like really happy which made me like really happy because she was like I remember her saying that like oh I feel like you're a little bird spreading your wings and I was just like what and she was just like really happy so I was like really happy whenever I left the office. So I don't really remember anything before that, but that is all I remember after

CF2- Um for me in my experience, I wish I had that advisor. Mine, she would help me pick out classes and then whenever it came up to oh what do you want to do. She just kept asking that over and over again. She wouldn't help me like find a direction, and I was like oh maybe this maybe that, and she was like ok and it's like thanks for helping me out. But uh when I did find a

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major and leave her, she was very supportive and she helped me get into the college and she really pushed for me to get in there so that was nice.

BM1- I remember freshmen orientation when I first signed up for classes. They brought a bunch of people into a big room and sat everyone down at a computer with probably just another student and told us to pick classes and the students there weren't really knowledgeable about what you were picking and they just told us to pick freshmen classes. And I didn't want to take those because most of them were boring so I had a hard time just being able to pick classes for my freshmen semester. And then when I got to pre-major advising I didn't even get any sort of advice as to what to do or what to take. SO, I guess the overall experience was poor.

TA- Ok so you kind of had a rough time with pre-major advising. Did anyone else experience anything like that?

AF1- Uh just for me I wish they would have like been like a little more hands on helping us find a major, mine was just like here ok are your classes and then come back and tell me what you would like, it was like I like all of them and can't decide

18) What are the positive features of the pre-major advising office that you would not want changed?

BM1- Nothing positive about it.

TA- Ok, your experience was pretty negative so I could see that

AF1- I had a good experience with I don't know, I really wouldn't change too much with my particular advisor, she was really supportive and like whatever I would throw out to her she was just like, oh you could do this or you could do this. So, just different advisors for different people

CF2- Um, even though mine wouldn't give me direction. I mean that kind of helped me in an odd way by making me more decisive in myself. I mean it wasn't the best advising experience, but I learned from it.

Ok, so when you say it wasn't the best advising experience, can you can kind of elaborate kind of a little more

CF2- Well I feel like she wasn't exactly advising me as she was agreeing with whatever I said. So, it was hard getting a direction when she was trying to be supportive of everything.

AF1- Mhmm ok

BM1- Any of the information I ever got, I could have just looked up on the internet. Most of it I had already looked up so I didn't really receive anything beneficial from one of those meetings, So it seems like there wasn't very much direction..that you felt like. And the counselors.

Advisors weren't very helpful. I mean for, at least for you.. [shakes head]. Ya ok

CF2- I mean kind of understand it just because its pre-major advising. They have to have a basic knowledge of all the different majors so they can't be too knowledgeable on one in specific. So when you do find an advisor for your major it is a little easier for them to work with you than if its pre-major where they don't know what you want to do so they can't know everything.

TA- Ok, So Kind of reversely what are the negative features of the pre-major advising office that you would want changed and I know we have kind of spoke a little bit about it already.

So what you would change?

TA- Yea, so what you'd like to change in the office if you could tell them what to change. Tell like pre-major advising maybe the director. What would you change?

AF1- Maybe like how you were saying how they are knowledgeable in everything. And maybe if they could break it up in math and science advisors that are knowledgeable in that section of/or that major instead of knowing a little bit about everything, just kind of knowing more about something. Ok

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CF2- I would agree with that. Um I mean its nice for one who doesn't know anything like any idea whatsoever to go to a pre major advisor but if they could focus more on some divisions of college like math or science or uh theatre or film so that would be a little easier so if they are leaning towards one more than the other they can go for that specific advisor

BM1- I don't really know what they do, so I didn't really know what to change it so. So, I can't really be helpful there.

TA- Ok um if you could take back and based on your experience, describe the quality of advising with one or two words. How would you describe it?

CF2- For pre-major advising or for?

TA- Yes for pre-major advising

AF1- Supportive

BM1- A waste of time [laughing in background]

CF2- Umm enlightening and confusing

Ok. So now I'm going to ask you this is more focused on your career advisors so the advisors you have now. What were the positive features of advice that advisors gave you about your majors?

AF1- Um I actually don't really have like a specific advisor, I just have a faculty advisor that I kind of talk to in like one of my groups. So I like talk to her. Then when I like schedule classes, then I just talk to a general one. But like my faculty advisor that I just go to for advice, she is just like awesome. She just like helps me with like finding internships, jobs, anything like future related, she is definitely like really supportive about that and she is not even my advisor

CF2- Um for my current advisor, he is very knowledgeable on the topic and I have him as a professor so he will help me in the classroom and outside of the classroom for um graduation needs and for applying to graduate school and jobs, which it is very helpful. But when it does/ when it did come down to picking classes I decided to not go with him and I went with a general advisor in my college just because he's all over the place, he is very hard to follow and he'll start talking about one story and end up telling me about another one so He is very knowledgeable which is a benefit, but he is very unfocused. So yea

BM1- I haven't really gone to any of the advisors in my declared major. I went once; I got the check sheets that I needed to complete for graduation. And I can fill those out on my own, So, I don't really need to go to them to get advice as to what to do. And then sort of what to do after graduation, I don't have to really worry about that yet.

TA- Ok let's see what were the negative features of advice advisors were giving about your current major? Or just the negatives they've told you in general

AF1- I was just going to say catching up was kind of an issue. They were like well you need to take this and this and then with like some classes only offered in the fall and some are only offered in the spring which is nice because they know that and they are prepared to tell you that information. But I still feel like catching up is the biggest issue.

CF2- I agree with that. Um for my advisor right now, umm sorry I am having a brain fart right now can you re ask the question.

TA- Ya, ya, of course. So what are the negative features of advice, advisors are giving about your major. Err, not so much about the major as much about the negative experiences that you've had.

CF2- Ok, um where my advisor is really positive and helpful, he kind of pushes for graduate school and I feel he pushes really hard. So if I decide not to do it, it would be hard to explain that

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to him cause he keeps saying how you need it order to get a good job. Or otherwise you will just be working at a nonprofit. So ya.

BM1- So are you asking about the experiences or the negative experiences with advisors?

TA- Maybe more about the negative experiences with the advisors.

BM1- I don't really have any.

TA- Ok and that is understandable. So go ahead and introduce yourself and kind of you can tell us a little bit about yourself.

DF3- Alright well I'm _____, I actually know _____... philosophy club. A little bit about myself concerning the context of why we're here. Um I came in I came here here as an undecided student from my parents live in Cleveland. And I actually lived overseas previously so I came directly here overseas like 2 days before school started or something. Um I thought about doing music and that was what I was going to pursue and I did for a while.. I was a jazz studies major my 2nd semester out and I made it all the way up to junior status and then I just couldn't do it anymore. Umm so I took a year off from school and now i'm a philosophy major, I also switched to social work for a little bit right after the jazz degree. Before I quit, the 1st time

TA- Ok and if you guys all want to go around and at least say your name. I know there are name tags, but maybe your name, your year, and your major would be good.

CF2- I'm _____, I'm a senior and I'm a Human Development and Family Studies major

AF1- I'm _____. I'm a junior and I'm business management

BM1- I'm _____, psychology and philosophy

TA- And we will catch you up a little bit. Right now, we are kind of asking a little bit about your academic advisors for philosophy and what negative and positive experiences you've had with them.

DF3- Um for me, it's definitely.. I've always had really excellent experiences with my advisors. But it wasn't always like I don't know. I think I came looking for a little bit more direction than the advisors could actually give me. So, I feel like that is a little bit of disaffect between the advisors and myself. But I mean I, uh I don't know I have just always loved my advisors. Like Mary she was really nice and then the social work advisor was really great; and like very informative and like encouraging. You know all of those things.. But never really had a really terrible experience; just other than that story. Other thanI wish there was more information provided on some things here. I couldn't say what kind of information that would entail but there is a lot to learn in your 1st year away.

TA- Yea I agree. So now on the whole, please describe your level of satisfaction with the quality of advising at BGSU. So this can be pre-major as well as your advisor now or your advisors previously.

AF1- I agree, I had the same experience. It was just all good, everything. I can't complain one bit.

CF2- Um I've had good and bad so I'm kind of in the middle. Where I wish some of them were a little more informed or directional and others were just spot on.

BM1- It wasn't great. It was pretty bad with pre major and then I haven't really done much with the other advisors. Ok.

TA- Alright, so the last questions will ask you to evaluate your success as a student.

19) So, in what ways do you feel your academic career has been successful in terms of academic progress toward graduation? So do you feel like you're kind of on track for graduation. Your progress. What's your progress for graduation?

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AF1- Uh, I'm on track for graduation. I feel like uh my classes have just gone well. And then I've liked once I got in my major actually started clicking. And it just started working out for me and it just planned out for four years and I got lucky I guess.

CF2- Um for me I don't know. I had to play catch up for a long time cause with education its already 5 years. So starting as a sophomore, I was way behind. And then when I switched out of it I was extremely far behind for my current major. So um it was touching for a little bit there where I didn't know if I was going to graduate on time or if I could afford to stay for extra years but as it turns out I am graduating on time. I am waiting to hear back to see about grad school. And everything turned out alright, somehow.

DF3- I am actually on seemingly on par for graduation. I was supposed to graduate in 2014. Considering I took like an entire year off, two whole semesters, I think that is doing pretty good. Um and like thinking about the time that I, trying to go back to like the advising, you know I was thinking about there was never there was never any, just to exemplify like if you were a kid and you were go to church and then some ones mean to you and you don't want to go back to church anymore. And like it here it was always like I knew I could always come talk to the counseling staff, talk to the advising staff, I could get direction. Err even, not even direction because it was always like me asking the right questions, but it was like you know just like little nudges in the right direction. You know gathering information from all the different advisors that I've encountered. So, they have helped certainly. umm In bringing that about in that it was never discouraging, it was only encouraging. Like even saying not that it wasn't discouraging is really rude... It was always like really positive [inaudible].

BM1- Yea I may have to go an extra year or maybe just one semester.. It depends on when the classes are offered. But overall like as far as graduating, I'm fine.

20) Ok so, in what ways do you feel your academic career has been unsuccessful in terms of academic progress toward graduation? So, I know we kind of spoke a little bit about that already, but kind of giving your opinion again doesn't really hurt.

CF2- Um just like playing catch up; Even though I am graduating on time, I can tell you for a million dollars in the world last year I would have done anything to not have to do catch up. I kept thinking I was going to be here for an extra year or two or three and I was already debating taking years off to earn the money to stay. So, you know being undecided when I first started it was really hard for me to see myself as successful college student graduating in the 4 year period that they always expect you too. But it turned out for the best so can't complain.

AF1- I agree with um the issue of catching up. But with doing the internship my freshmen year that was like another reason I had to catch up. So I feel like Um like um 18 credit hours. It's kind of hard, it gets tiring, it gets old. But it's worth it in 4 years I feel like.

BM1- Yea I don't think there is anything negative. I'm ok with going the extra semester or the extra year. I get more in terms of credit hours and just having two majors. So, it's helpful.

TA- Huh.. I can repeat the question if you want. So um in what ways do you feel your academic career has been unsuccessful in terms of academic progress toward graduation?

DF3- Mine kind of starts in high school; when I don't know I always took like honors courses and AP courses. That when I came here I didn't have to take any GSW courses and I didn't have to take any math courses. And and now it's been 4 years since I've had a math course. And I'm in an astronomy class now and I'm really I don't know, this is more of like I've been really interested in being an astronomy major. But I realized like that math is isn't gone but it would take a lot to retrieve that from the far recesses of my brain. So, I don't know that's not necessarily I mean any one's fault but my own that's for sure. So not so much a failure, I guess

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it's driven me in other directions you know. Realized I have strengths in other places but um that's probably been my big stumbling block. Having interests in things but not actually having like some of the background knowledge required to pursue those things.

TA- Ok alright so we are going to kind of move on and talk a little bit about do you feel well we are going to ask about how you feel that your initial undecided status has impacted your success like overall as a student, if at all.. So

DF3- Just to get mine out of the way this time so I'm not last. Um I think coming in. My personal philosophy of life is that everyone goes at completely their own pace. You know I look back at what my college experience so far and it's probably not even half way over at all. But you know it's easy to say that since it's happened and you just can't change it. But I just don't.. it is the way its mm supposed to be. I'm happy with my direction now and so I feel like those struggles of being like really undecided like just your undecided it's like you have no idea, you've got the whole world in front of you. But it allowed me to focus err span out and then refocus in once I got a little more guidance.

AF1- I think I feel more reassured now like how I feel about my freshmen year, undecided, and then how I feel now. Like if I compare those 2 feelings, I feel like really good now. Like Freshmen year was like oh my gosh I don't know what I'm going to do and now I can like see myself like I see myself in the future, this is just realistic. Whereas freshmen year I was just like oh lets go to college and let's just learn all these new things. Now it's like I'm actually going somewhere with this; like I'm here for a purpose, not just to be here.

TA- Ok

BM1- I don't think declaring would have been any different, I still wouldn't have been able to answer if it had been beneficial or not.

TA- Ok.

CF2- I wouldn't trade it for the world just because I learned different things and I can help. I have more knowledge on random topics than I ever thought possible. If my friends taking a Soc class I can help them with that, philosophy terms, mathematics.. I've learned so many different random topics, that if anyone like especially those who are taking freshmen classes or entering a new major I feel like I could help them out and relate to them more easily. So I'm very glad I started off undecided.

TA- Ok umm.. Sorry one second here. In what ways could the university have helped you more to be successful? In going from the undecided to decided transition

CF2- It would have been nicer if they had I don't know like a day or something like you know how they have campus fest or the different organizations I wish they had something like that for majors. For freshmen just because you can like walk around and like learn about the different topics and see which ones you want to go to. Instead of just like take the classes and which your spending I don't know like a couple thousand to take them and if you realize you don't like them, then there it goes.

TA- Ok does anyone like agree that this would be kind of a good experience?

BM1- I think they had that at least in the arts and sciences. Even for pre-major advising they had that where they got faculty from each of the different majors and brought them into the dorms. And if you wanted to ask questions you could go down and meet them. But..

DF3- It's like ideal but I know it's pretty unfeasible to get representatives from all of the majors. You know considering the majority of the population of the student body has a major decided. There wouldn't be that many you know it would be a handful of people going to that event. You

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know and which I am not saying it wouldn't be beneficial still but uh its just things outweigh each other. But

AF1- And I think that if they would have that event, like you couldn't even have students do it, it would have to be faculty. Cuz I wouldn't like.

DF3- They've already cut their budgets so aren't going to pay them for overtime.

AF1- Yea I just feel the information that you would get from students versus faculty, it just might just be misleading and be completely wrong.

TA- Ok are there any other ways that you think the university could have helped you to be more successful?

CF2- They could have paid me to come here. [laughs]

AF1- More scholarship money; no I think they do a good job. They provide I mean it's a big school so they provide you with a whole bunch of different classes you can take freshmen year. And all of those classes were meaning to count for your gen eds based in the long run. So uh just a matter of you personally knowing um what the classes have benefitted you if that's what you want to go. You have to have your own vision of where you're going which it's hard to have.

BM1- I would say that taking courses like uh like psych the 1st psych course—intro to psychology where its in a giant lecture hall is a waste of time because most people they're not going to remember that information. They are just going to cram for the test and then they are just really wasting time. And you can't really learn much about psychology in those classes—you just kind of get basic information that you can look up on the internet and then I think more of a like a discussion class would like be more beneficial to students. That way they can understand more about the class. And if they're interested in psychology it would they would be able to find out if that is really what they want to do. And uh in a discussion oriented class instead of a giant lecture with 300 students.

DF3- I think class size is a definitely a difficult thing that is an issue. Like it is really like.. I for a person with ADD you know like I can't like there are people on Facebook over here and mean it's just uh chaotic and it's just like you can't maintain a standard of education in that kind of setting. Then some I love sociology and I am really fascinated with psychology. Retaining like this much information. Um well from the classes like yea the stuff you learn on your own. But yea class size is but I think you know the nice thing is that when you if you can get a major the class sizes do get smaller. But I think the university could afford to you know even if you had one lecture class and two recitation classes. You know like its always two lecture classes and one and like more of the lecture classes than the recitation class where it's like I don't know it's just lopsided, it doesn't really make a lot of sense. You know if you are really trying to educate students on the you know those general education things.

CF2- I can understand that but I can also see from the other side where if you have someone and you just have someone testing the waters, you have a lot of people going into a major and if they don't stick around I mean you spend all that time focusing on that student. I would rather have a larger classroom just teach as many as I can the basics. So they have an idea so if they want to stick around then we could go more in depth with group discussion classes, but just because so many people start off in a major and then so many drop out or switch out I can understand why they have large classroom lecture halls for freshmen. Though I don't know I feel like that should only be freshmen, maybe sophomore. Butt yea

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BM1- At that point they're just wasting time because even if they are interested there not getting the full experience and then those who aren't interested why are they bothering with the course if they're not going to remember it.

DF3. It's like a matter of like do the needs of the individual outweigh the needs of the many or do the needs of the few outweigh the needs of the many. Like do we you know.. enhance the educational structure or do we you know like with the

CF2. Make education more affordable by having large classrooms instead of buying or paying more teachers

DF3- Yea do we pay that much more money

AF1- I think with the large classroom settings I think it's more even up to the student like even if you are a freshmen to like take the initiative if this if this is something you are interested in. Like make sure you buy the book like make sure you read the book make sure you attend class and sit in the front row-- like there are so many students that will complain about those classes and then there the one up in the back row. There 50 percent of the time.

DF3- Like I think it's like survival of the fittest. You know a little bit of like weeding out the people. I had music theory, my music theory 1 teacher. First day of class, she says my job I'm here in music theory 1 and skill 1, to weed out those of you who don't belong in music school. And I was like ohhh, Oh h my goodness, I felt tension. It was tense, but you know I like I don't think a professor should say that to her students. But I can understand the concept. I mean that's just life. I mean people who want are going to go and grab it. If they are truly interested in they will go get it. And that's the nice thing, I think that's the cool thing about BG, it is it is a fairly accessible school and you can really do well with it if you really have the ambition. You know and then you know the people who don't, always there. I mean generally speaking, I mean I have seen a lot of friends not get jobs after college, but it's not that they don't have drive, but that's that is irrelevant. They still graduate college. You know. But

AF1- And to go off of being BG good I feel like a lot of our majors and like divisions are like top—like education amazing, [philosophy] business is amazing, music we just have a relay good program. So I think it's really uh easy for students to find what they are doing and to have a good environment to pursue.

DF3- Definitely

BM1- I don't think the programs here are like that special. There not

DF3- I don't know

BM1- I mean I feel like we have a few good programs, but they're not fantastic

DF3- I think I think if you look at it on a purely popularis scale. Yes the classical music department isn't going to be as popular as the pop culture department but like I mean I having been in music schools. There are tons of competition, we would have people place in these competitions, like state side competitions, people would go to New York for competitions. As it's like you know we are actually producing musicians who are competing with people from conservatories. You know and like granted I have also seen so musicians at BG that I was like if you graduate I will be amazed. You know but that environment, you know that accepting environment you know breeds ambition in people and it provides above and beyond. You know the saxophone program at BG it's like 5th in the nation, it might be 5th in the world, I can't remember which 5th it is, but I know it's one of the best. And like Dr. Stampin, oh my heavens, he's awesome, a phenomenal player. But that's just that's just like one example. I don't want to beat that of course. But..

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TA- Ok it sounds kind of like that you guys, some of you think that BG has such a diverse atmosphere and many different programs are good that it was helpful to be an undecided student here. Is that kind of what you're thinking? Not helpful as much as being undecided was a good option here because you had so many programs to choose?

CF2- I would agree with that.. yea umm just when I was undecided I got to look at the different majors. Education I heard was top notch and it is top notch for those who have a drive for it-- same with the sociology's, psychology and the ones that I looked into. And even those that I met in the basic bio class, they, the teachers were phenomenal. Some of them were—some were a little hard to listen to. But um just being undecided it was good having uh so many uh fantastic teachers and having so many wonderful uh career or different programs to choose from and knowing that each of them are just as good as the others. Instead of coming to a college where there only good with one specific major. Where if I didn't want to do it I would have had to go to a different college.

TA- Ok. Does anyone have any last thoughts for this one?

BM1- Yea, I wouldn't really be able to say the disadvantages or advantages of being undecided because I don't know what it is like to be undecided so I can't tell the difference.

TA- Ok. So now I'm going to ask you to *think back to when you were an undecided major student.*

21) How academically successful did you feel then? This isn't just about progress toward graduation. This kind of includes your entire academic career as an undecided student.

AF1- Well I think most of our undecided classes were like freshmen, sophomore level classes. So they were easier so I feel like academics were fine. But they weren't like leading somewhere. It was more like uh take a little test of this, take a little test of that. And it was up to you to put things together to what you excel in and what you enjoy and what you could say yourself doing.

CF2- I feel the same way about it—yea

TA- Ok does anyone have anything else? err No

CF2- No she said it all.

22) Ok Do you feel more or less successful now? Why or why not?

DF3- Definitely more successful, just you know college is pretty empowering. Um, you know like just like thinking about all there is to know in the world and its pretty much at your fingertips if your wallet is big enough. [laugh] But that aside, but you know it's like you know it's like coming back to school for me was a really big decision and I, I don't want to say I felt grown up. But I did feel like it was another tier, in yes I'm taking charge of something. You know, yea I definitely feel more successful.

AF1- I agree, I think every year I become more involved with things, get a job, and then just keep moving up whereas you can still handle the school stuff like times 10 from your freshmen year with other things, curricular activities on top of that. So I think not even just your grades, but just being involved on campus and just really immersing in the whole college atmosphere is what I felt successful about.

CF2- Umm I honestly didn't feel too successful until like just this year, until I realized I'll graduate on time, um applying to grad school, and I'm in a freshmen level class and they have a big 4 page paper and I got it done in 2 hours and everyone else is like scrambling. And I'm like oh jeez. I don't know it just makes me feel old. I have just been doing so many papers it just doesn't faze me as much. I just feel a little pride in that.

TA- Do you have anything to add? No, ok

23) In what ways, if any, has your initial status as an undecided student affected your

likelihood of graduating either at all or on time? And then I know we have touched this multiple times, but

AF1- Uh to go back on my experience it's more of the internship plus being undecided. The both of them together makes it hard to graduate on time, but it's doable. If you want to do it you'll do it

DF3- Summer courses—God's gift to the college student. So much fun..

CF2- Mine was just scrambling—scrambling to catch up with the other people in my grade level and just trying to graduate on time. It is chaotic when you change majors especially when you change more than once. Cause I honestly I was ready to take summer courses and do like 18 credit hours just to graduate in the 4 years. And now looking back, there is no way I would have survived so

DF3- That's actually why I quit school I did a bunch of stuff____. Fall Spring Summer Fall Spring Summer Fall. And it's like I'm done, no more so

BM1- Yea I'm fine with graduation again. I'll be close to on time, but I am getting two majors so one more semester is worth it.

24) Alright As you compare your experiences to students who declared their majors very early in their undergrad career, do you think you had more or less academic success than them because of your initial undecided status? Why or why not?

AF1- Oh no different. I think it just depends on what student you're comparing yourself to. If you are comparing yourself who took it upon themselves their freshmen year to get involved and to start excelling right away then you might feel less successful. I feel like coming in later you can still do the same thing that I did

DF3- I think I'm going to say what I said before, like it has to do with like your own pace. You know just you got to do it in your own way. You can't do it in a way that in a way that everyone else is doing it. So to like to compare yourself to people who are doing it differently than you is like counterintuitive. I mean you're only going to hold yourself back. You now for me, with graduation I used to it were like the reason I started off so head strong when I did declare my major. I was determined to catch up with my class because I wanted to graduate early. And that was part of anxiety to move on, get on with my life. You know and then when I burnt out, I was like something needs to be refocused here and then from there I took a year off and worked at McDonalds, you know the most craziest stressed out place ever. Umm not really, but umm just like releasing that anxiety and taking that.. I had anxiety over graduating on time and now it like really doesn't matter. I don't really care if I am 22 or 25 when I graduate just as long as I eventually get.. Well I would like to not be 25 but you know. It's the deed not the time.

CF2- Umm with my experience I honestly have mixed reviews for I have a friend, you know even out of high school she knew what she wanted to do and she is graduating on time. Because she knew what she wanted to do she got all of these internships during the summer. And she is way ahead of me in terms of like uh career goals and having things set up for after graduation. At the same time, I've had those that enter college with a specific major and then after 2 years they decided to change. Or one of them that is graduating with the major but he decided he didn't like it half way through so he is having it as back-up plan which I would probably have gone with something else. So, I've seen the good and the bad of starting off for those that stick to it- good head start. And from those that change, take a lesson from me and undecided first off before you jump in.

TA- Ok so I know you mentioned something kind of about feeling like you were behind with internships and that kind of thing. Did anyone else have that same feeling?

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AF1- Yea, I really wished I had an internship now looking back last summer cause that would have helped with getting a better internship this summer. But I mean, whatcha going to do. You just go with what you have and roll with the punches.

TA- Ok so does anyone have any last thoughts about kind of, I'll say the question one more time Does anyone have any thoughts before we move on/

BM1- I guess it depends on who you compare yourself too because there has got to be some students who graduate in 4 years and have internships every summer and do everything that they need to do. And then there are going to be students who declare their major and who declare their major 4 different times in the 1st year, so it really just depends.

25) In sum, how satisfied are you with your current major?

DF3- I would like to make a note she made the a okay sign and I would say a thumbs up.

TA- So very happy you think?

DF3- I love my major. Am I aware there may not be a job market for after I graduate, yes. You know college has just become a place where you can go to just go to learn about the world. You know that is why we do gen eds for goodness sake. You know, that's cool and so I feel like I love everything I'm taking in. IT is pretty glorious. I am thinking mostly of my astronomy classes. [laugh] But you know, I just. Just food for thought, I don't want to say this but I don't compare myself directly, but I think about how I would have been in their circumstances--my personality, my experiences. If I had come in and ended up you know choosing an education major. I don't know. I just choose a major, got a job afterwards, I would have had a midlife crisis. I would have like been like oh what else could I have done with my youth. You know and I am totally experiencing my youth now to the fullest extent that I possibly can. I know I'm going to be more grateful for that in the future than you know I know I would've gotten to a point and been like I'm completely you know I even though I could probably have a great life, but I would somehow be completely dissatisfied with it. And like probably feel crazy. So, but that works for some people. Like my brother is doing that he was he's been hell bent on journalism since he was a freshmen in high school and now like he's serving a mission for his church, but you know he has put in 2 years in that degree. And like he's still like keeping up on his studies while he is over there. So you know I see him and for him that is what he needed. He needed something he could just attach to and pour his life into. It's really a person by person experience.

TA- Ok Jason what about you? Do you feel like you're satisfied with your choice?

BM1- Yea

TA- Yea, ok do you want to elaborate at all? No, ok so we are getting close we are getting close to the ending questions, just to let you know.

Ending Questions

26) What was the greatest challenge of being an undecided major student during your time at BGSU?

CF2- For me it was catching up and then making friendships last when I did change majors. So, it's like oh I took this intro class with this person and then I decided to have a major in something else and keeping in touch with them err or talking about similar topics when we have completely different classes and schedules. It got a little hectic.

DF3- For me, my biggest struggle was grappling with inadequacy. Not from advisors, not from fellow students, but from the stigma on college. Getting good grades or being the best or something like that. My dad was kind of raised and he said one day you are going to be a CEO of

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some company. And I was like well maybe I don't want to do that. And you know the biggest/ the hardest thing was like coming to terms with my indecisiveness you know and realizing that. I had to learn that

AF1- Declaring and feeling competent and knowing that that's what you want to do was pretty tough. Being that you're going in there and you're kind of just like well I can do this or this and then when it comes down to crunch time you're just like oh gosh.

DF3- Putting your name on that paper was like ohh

AF1- I don't think I want to sign it right now.

DF3- [inaudible talking]

AF1- Take a bathroom break

TA Ok anyone have anything to add. No, okay.

27) So, if you could use a time machine to go back to when you were an undecided major student, would you make the same choices again? Why or why not?

CF2- I'd stay undecided either for an extra year just to try random classes cause I mean I'm not going to use anything from my education classes and they were just way too stressful/. And I would have just had more fun with it, but I wouldn't change the fact that I was undecided my 1st year.

AF1- I agree, I think it just allowed you to different experiences your freshmen year and I liked those experiences so I wouldn't want to change it, I wouldn't change it.

BM1- If I had a time machine, I wouldn't be going back to that time. [inaudible]

CF2- Right— I think I would just leave my past self alone, you know I would have never found that time machine.

TA- I don't actually have a time machine just letting you all know.

All things considered question:

28) Suppose you had a minute to talk with President Mazey about the needs of undecided major students. What would you tell her?

CF2- Well for me, it is very beneficial to be undecided at least at some part in your academic career just so you can try different things instead of you know jumping on one major staying with it not liking it and then jumping directly into another major, instead of having a transition period of trying new things. Because I feel like having an undecided major for at least a semester or so, it opens you up to all of these different possible possibilities instead of focus on one not like it and then focus on another; instead focusing on a broader spectrum. That wasn't a full minute, but..

AF1- I was going to say that they can like focus or umm encourage students to come in as undecided-- if they do focus more on those undecided students instead of just your in pre-major advising. But I feel like that was the only difference.

CF2- Are there schools that do that? You come in you come in like you know you come in as like a freshmen and then you don't declare your major until. I feel like Reckers might.. I don't know. Specifically music programs do that a lot though. Um like I was looking at a place in temple because I have some family in Pennsylvania too, but like they were like you can't declare being in a Jazz major until your junior year. And I was like pssh I'll probably be over it by then. Umm but I think yea I think yea just like how everyone would come, wet everyone's pallets.

AF1- I think that is what the gen eds are for, [mhhm] but you can like still come in with a basic idea of like you know you want to do medical. You can still take classes around medical. But just like providing those classes to get interested in a little bit of everything instead of just like. I feel

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like they focus on the colleges, which is really good but they have to remember those freshmen that they need to support and I mean that makes up the big majority of undecided students are students in their major, but they're not decided on that.

CF2- I actually have a funny story to go along with umm undecided majors. My one friend.. He goes to a different college. But he was an undecided major and they kept pushing saying you know you should pick something, you should pick something. So, they gave him a piece of paper and he said ok I'll write down the major I am going into. And he wrote down knowledge and it went on for at least another year and half before they realized that isn't an actual major and they told him that hey you could pay a couple thousand extra and turn it into another major and we will just comp your for what you've been doing OR you could pick an actual major. So they didn't like force him out of undecided, but they kept you know saying it would be wise to get a major and they kept doing that to the point where he just wrote down anything.

TA- Going off of that does anyone feel like they were forced to declare a major or there was pressure to declare a major.

DF3- I feel like there was pressure. In a group where everyone else—it not everyone, but a lot of people already have a major and it's just like maybe I should. It's more of a psychological thing [inaudible talking]

AF!- Uh once I was in the business field you like pick your specialization, and so I was talking to that faculty advisor and I was like you you know I'm kind of thinking about management and marketing. And she's like uh in the management department. And she said...this is how our conversation ended. She was like ok I'll sign you up for management and starting walking away. Then I was like oh that's cool, I guess I'm in management. But it turned out well, because it worked out and I guess she knew, she knew, I knew talking to you, it was just how it was going to be. I was just like well I'm glad you knew.

TA- Alright so now I'm going to turn it over to Sara and she's going to kind of give the key points of the discussion for the focus group so.

Summary question:

SARA- So some of the key points that we came up with. That being an undeclared major has both its advantages and disadvantages, but overall everyone wouldn't train those because you did learn so much from being undecided that you were able to experience different classes, to meet new people, to work with other faculty members those were all advantages, but then some of the disadvantages were the inconsistencies with classes, with friends, with not being able to do things like internships, and then issues with scheduling and timing even though everyone has proved that you are able to schedule correctly if you want to graduate on time or if you want to add another major. And then with the advising experience, it was overall kind of mixed depending on the person, depending on the setting, some people had extremely helpful people, some did not. But then also too this goes also with also with what you commented on and said it's what you make of your own experiences. If you can take advantage of what is offered or what's here, then you will usually do better—but then again that is also why you.. then also that people experience pressure and they experience stress of being an undecided major and their results was a sense of finality once you do decide and it's almost a scary feeling of having to commit to something after being undecided. And also when it comes to advising people generally got some sort of direction, but they almost would have liked more direction in saying this would be beneficial or helpful or helping you have more of a path to the problem. So, in that respect advising was usually positive but not necessarily as beneficial as it could have been

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within the university setting. Once again, you wouldn't trade any of your experiences as an undecided major or as other majors experiencing the university. Is there anything else you left off?

29) Is this an adequate summary?

TA- Yes? Ok. [agreement of yes]

Final Question:

30) Have I missed anything?

BM1- I would just that I feel like they spend more time with the students than the regular advisors. They tend to know a little more. Which I would think all the advisors should be able to spend as much time with their advisors as they do.

TA- Do you feel your academic advisors didn't give you enough time compared to what other advisors may have?

CF2- I actually have a funny story with that. But first I want to say I'm very jealous you have 2 to choose from. My first advisor I only saw when I had schedule classes. Even then, it was like I have these times open, pick from them. And I'm like oh okay I'll pick this one. Because it was a pre major so she dealt a lot of other undergrads so she was all over the place. Um and then I had an advisor last year and I kept trying to get in touch with them because they signed up and they wouldn't tell me anything as to why I couldn't reach her on her phone or email or anything like that. And they kept saying she was the best, she's the best. She went out and she was on a sabbatical. And it's..I thought it was very unprofessional just for. Yea they didn't tell me until afterwards because they thought that she could still keep in touch with me and she wasn't even on campus. So that was one of the problems with advising and then after that they got a little more organized and things worked out.

[inaudible talking]

DF3- Oh yea she's not here for a while. Oh thanks. I'd like to switch please.

In my experiences it is really hard to answer the question. Sometimes the right questions weren't being asked. Because it felt like it was a long time ago. It was like what are your interests. Oh I like music. Not really specific enough I don't know how to make that more specific. But like that's just like you're like what are my interests. You know that's so. I feel like personality tests are god are applicable you know to help because advising, advisors do not get that much time especially pre major advisors don't get that much time with their students. I mean it has always been really rushed. And I like really liked her and the things that she could answer for me were good where I had good enough questions for her. And like when I had answer. She was good because there was a distance because time was like so crunched and so like you know a questionnaire beforehand you know something that they can look over really quickly like in a doctor's office. They can look over and have some like quick biographical err or I think that's the word I want to use. Sorry I'm really tired. You know information just to kind of you know gage and they have and they have in depth you know intimate knowledge of the university and the classes and the majors and what kind of people are attracted to those majors and they should be you know a qualification for that kind of job. You know you're helping students with what they are going to do for the rest of their lives. So you know that should be known. They shouldn't hinder themselves by trying to cram in tell me a little about yourself in 5 minutes.

TA- Did you guys have that experience?

AF1- Uh yea I was going to add on top of that that I think it's really important for them to be personable I feel like every time I went to the advisor like she had her paper and she looked over it before I got in there. And so whenever I got in there she would be like I remember you did this

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and I remember we talked about this last time. I was like oh that's awesome that was 4 months ago so that's great that she knows that and not only that I would go in with a paper, I have this question... then all those could be answered and that would ramble on to more topics we need to discuss and so at the end of the 30 minutes. I was like oh 30 minutes already, kk I got to go.

DF3- Preparation on both sides.

AF1- So make the 30 minutes like a good 30 min instead of the 1st 10 minutes trying to get it together

BM1- Tell me what I'm supposed to do. Sometimes that is how I felt, but I think it would be helpful if the pre major advisors could tell students more about what it takes to get to get where they want to go. Yea, like grad school what it takes to get in not just saying grad school, better grad schools in the area. Whereas, they aren't; not in my experience. And I told my advisor like I planned on going to grad school and she was like oh.. Didn't give me any sort of advice as to what to do. I think that if they were more stressing more about what they wanted you to do and getting more of where you want to go. It would be helpful with students. If they want to

DF3- Like the what it takes thing. Like you know maybe not have a list, or maybe have a list of things that you that you know you know you enter this world of college, there are ins and things you don't expect. Like how can you expect.. when I came to college I didn't even understand how the credit hours system worked. Like 3 hours, like now I know and I can't imagine not knowing, but it's like. What it takes, like this is how many you need now or pretty much just

AF1- Kind of reflecting on an earlier topic and how it relates to this. Having more differentiated advisors especially for pre major where you can have one that talks about grad school and some more a have an idea about these types of classes versus those types of classes that would be fantastic and just I promise this relates but it sounds weird. But if you go to the counseling center they have a questionnaire and you just talk about yourself and then it matches you up with someone and if they had something like that for incoming freshmen who are undecided so they could find an advisor who was more knowledgeable on the topics they like I feel that would be very beneficial. Just an idea; they would have to be really top notch.

[Long pause]

TA- Does anyone have anything else to add? No, ok great. This is the conclusion of the focus group.