From Policy to Practice: Academic Advisors' Interpretations of Academic Notice and Student-Facing Support

by

Jennifer Maitland

B.A., California State University, Long Beach, 2008
M.S., California State University, Long Beach, 2020

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs
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Abstract

Academic notice is a consequential institutional policy intended to identify academic difficulty and support students' return to good academic standing. Although research has examined students' experiences of academic probation and the outcomes of academic recovery interventions, less has been known about how academic advisors interpret and enact academic notice policies in everyday practice. In this basic qualitative study, I examined how academic advisors made sense of the purpose and function of academic notice policies within their institutional context, how they interpreted and enacted those policies in day-to-day advising practice, and how they drew on asset-based, validating, and equity-minded approaches and navigated tensions between institutional expectations and relational care.

The study was grounded in a social constructionist perspective and informed by validation theory and critical theory. Thirteen academic advising professionals from multiple advising units at a large public research university with a decentralized advising structure participated in semi-structured interviews. I analyzed data through first-cycle in vivo coding, second-cycle focused coding, analytic and reflexive memoing, and cross-case comparison and synthesis.

I organized eight cross-case findings into three analytic domains: (a) policy meaning, enactment, and professional judgment; (b) decentralization, consistency, and organizational context; and (c) relational meaning, accountability, and recovery. The findings showed academic notice became practice through local interpretation and operationalization; professional discretion was distributed, stage-dependent, and bounded; policy agency varied by organizational position and responsibility; participants valued consistency in institutional guardrails over uniform procedures; and organizational capacity shaped the forms of support advising units

could provide. Participants also described communication and relationships as shaping the meaning of academic notice; relational care and accountability as complementary practices; and academic recovery as developmental and nonlinear while remaining bounded by formal institutional measures of good standing. The findings position academic notice as a policy-shaped, organizationally situated, professionally enacted, and relationally mediated institutional practice. The findings suggest that improving academic notice requires attention not only to formal policy but also to organizational capacity, professional judgment, decision authority, communication practices, relational support, and the conditions under which advisors enact policy with students.

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To everyone who has been part of this journey, whether mentioned here by name or not, thank you. This accomplishment may bear my name, but I did not reach it alone.

Dedication

To the little girl who was endlessly curious: continue asking questions and exploring your world. It will always serve you well.

Chapter 1 - Introduction to the Study

Despite the central role academic advisors play in promoting student success, persistence, and belonging in higher education, little has been known about how advisors make meaning of and enact institutional policies that shape students' academic trajectories. Academic advisors are key institutional agents who translate policy into practice. Nevertheless, research has largely overlooked how they make sense of high-stakes policies and how their interpretations shape advising practice. Because academic notice is not self-executing, its practical meaning is shaped through the interpretive work involved in implementation. This gap is particularly consequential in the context of academic notice, a policy that signals academic difficulty and structures the institution's response to a student's underperformance.

Academic notice is a term used to refer to a formal academic standing status assigned to students whose academic performance falls below institutional standards, typically a cumulative and/or term grade point average (GPA) below 2.0 on a 4.0 scale (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015, 2022). Although academic notice is commonly intended to alert students to academic difficulty and allow them to return to good standing, students may experience academic probation and its associated labeling as stigmatizing and emotionally difficult, contributing to feelings of failure, embarrassment, fear, and uncertainty about their academic futures (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015). Students may also view probation as punitive rather than supportive (Varney, 2013). In response, many institutions have adopted the term academic notice in place of academic probation to reduce stigma and signal a more supportive, developmental philosophy (Boretz et al., 2021; Brady, 2017). This linguistic shift reflects a broader movement toward equity-minded, student-centered practice. Although changing terminology may signal a different institutional

philosophy, a social constructionist perspective suggests that advisors' interpretations, communication, and enactment also shape policy meaning.

Historically, academic probation policies have functioned as regulatory mechanisms that set standards for academic performance and classify students based on whether they meet those standards. Policy discourse has also incorporated monitoring, regulation, and sanctioning practices intended to shape students' academic behavior and promote a return to good standing (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022). Over time, academic advising has evolved from a predominantly prescriptive practice toward approaches that emphasize student learning and development, while the field has simultaneously undergone an ongoing process of professionalization (Lowenstein, 2005; McGill, 2019). More recent advising scholarship has further emphasized strengths-based, relational, and equity-oriented approaches to supporting students (Museus, 2021). This evolution creates potential tension between regulatory policy logics and contemporary advising values, positioning academic notice as an important site where institutional expectations and relational care intersect. Therefore, advisors' interpretations matter for understanding how academic notice may reproduce regulatory or deficit-oriented practices and also create conditions for relational support, accountability, validation, and equity.

In this basic qualitative study, I examined how academic advisors interpreted and enacted academic notice policies within their institutional contexts and how these interpretations informed advising practice. The study was grounded in a social constructionist ontology and epistemology, which positions academic notice as a socially constructed policy whose meaning is produced through interpretation, interaction, and institutional context. Critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011) and validation theory (Rendón, 1994) informed the study's analytical lenses. Critical theory focuses on power, language, and inequity embedded in

institutional policies and organizational practices (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011). Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) highlights the relational and affirming dimensions of advising interactions, including how advisors communicate belief in students' capacity to succeed and foster belonging during periods of academic difficulty. Together, these frameworks support an equity-minded analysis of how advisors interpret and enact academic notice policies. By examining how advisors navigated institutional expectations, relational care, and equity considerations, this study deepens understanding of the intersections among institutional policy, advising practice, and equity in higher education.

Background of the Problem

Institutions of higher education have traditionally used academic standing policies to monitor student progress and encourage academic recovery (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Morris & Harris, 2022). One component of these policies is academic notice, formerly called academic probation. Academic notice signals a student is experiencing academic difficulty, sets conditions for continued enrollment, and structures the institution's response to underperformance. Students who do not meet institutional requirements for returning to good academic standing may face more serious consequences, including academic dismissal or required withdrawal (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015, 2022).

Although academic notice is intended to identify academic difficulty and provide students an opportunity for academic recovery, it can have unintended academic, emotional, and motivational consequences. Research has shown that placement on academic probation can reduce students' likelihood of degree completion. Bowman and Jang (2022) identified substantial negative effects of academic probation placement on 4-year graduation, and Bowman and Fenton-Miller (2025) found that negative effects on 6-year graduation varied by the

circumstances and timing of probation placement. Students may experience academic probation and its associated labeling as stigmatizing and emotionally difficult, contributing to feelings of failure, embarrassment, fear, and uncertainty about their academic futures (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015). Academic probation may also be perceived as punitive rather than supportive, potentially complicating its intended role as an intervention designed to promote academic recovery (Varney, 2013). These findings underscore that academic notice is not simply an administrative classification but a consequential institutional intervention that can shape students' academic trajectories.

Academic notice can be understood as a historically and institutionally constructed regulatory policy that sets standards for academic performance and consequences for failing to meet them (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022). The terminology associated with academic probation may carry punitive meanings, including associations with criminal justice (Rodriguez, 2019), and the labels attached to academic probation can contribute to students' experiences of failure, embarrassment, stigma, and uncertainty (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015). The language surrounding academic standing can consequently frame academic difficulty through regulatory and deficit-oriented terms that emphasize individual student failure. Such framing may obscure structural and institutional conditions that shape student success, a concern that is particularly consequential for first-generation, low-income, and racially minoritized students who encounter systemic barriers within higher education (Kitchen et al., 2021; Museus, 2021). In this regulatory context, academic notice becomes a site where institutional accountability and equity considerations intersect, raising the stakes of how the policy is interpreted and enacted.

Despite a growing body of research documenting the consequences of academic notice and the effectiveness of structured recovery programs, existing literature has focused primarily

on student experiences, institutional interventions, and retention outcomes (e.g., Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Frink, 2021; Hanger et al., 2011; Rodriguez, 2019). This scholarship provides important insight into academic recovery and student support. However, it offers limited examination of how the institutional agents responsible for implementing academic notice interpret and enact these policies. Academic advisors may serve as important institutional contacts for students on academic notice and occupy an underexamined role in translating academic standing policy into practice. Consistent with scholarship on street-level bureaucracy, frontline practitioners exercise discretion when interpreting and implementing institutional policy, thereby shaping how policy operates in practice (Lipsky, 2010). In academic advising, such discretion may influence how advisors explain policy requirements, frame academic difficulty, apply institutional expectations, and guide students through recovery processes. However, little has been known about how advisors make sense of academic notice, how they draw on professional and equity-oriented frameworks when enacting it, or how institutional context shapes their practice.

Research on academic advising has advanced frameworks for supporting student learning and development, including advising as teaching, strengths-based advising, and equity-minded practice (Crowe, 2020; Lowenstein, 2005; Museus, 2021). However, less attention has focused on how these frameworks operate within high-stakes institutional policy contexts (e.g., academic notice). This gap leaves unanswered questions about how advisors integrate student-centered approaches with regulatory expectations and organizational constraints. Limited empirical attention to advisors' policy sensemaking also obscures how professional interpretation and enactment may create conditions that advance or constrain equity. Therefore, examining these

processes is important for understanding how equity-oriented advising principles are translated into practice within academic standing systems.

This literature reveals a critical problem: how institutions enact academic notice matters. Although academic notice can influence students' academic trajectories, the interpretive work of academic advisors who implement the policy remains underexamined. Addressing this gap is essential to understanding how institutions translate policy into student-facing practice and to informing advising practices and policy structures that promote belonging, validation, accountability, and academic recovery. To address this need, I centered academic advisors' interpretations of academic notice and examined how they enacted the policy within their institutional contexts.

Statement of the Problem

Academic notice is a high-stakes institutional policy that can shape students' continued enrollment, academic recovery, and degree completion. Although intended to signal academic difficulty and promote recovery, research has indicated placement on academic probation may itself have substantial negative consequences for students' likelihood of graduating (Bowman & Fenton-Miller, 2025; Bowman & Jang, 2022). Despite growing evidence on the consequences of academic probation and the outcomes of structured recovery interventions, comparatively little is known about how academic advisors interpret and enact these policies in everyday practice. Advisors communicate institutional expectations, explain academic standing requirements, exercise professional judgment within organizational constraints, and guide students through recovery processes. However, empirical attention has been limited in examining how advisors make sense of the purpose and function of academic notice, how institutional context shapes policy enactment, or how equity-oriented advising frameworks inform this work.

This gap matters because academic notice policies are neither self-executing nor value-neutral; implementing them requires interpretation, judgment, communication, and relational enactment. These processes occur within institutional contexts that can reproduce or challenge deficit-oriented assumptions about students and academic difficulty. Such concerns are particularly consequential for first-generation, low-income, racially minoritized students, and other historically underserved students who may encounter systemic barriers within higher education (Kitchen et al., 2021; Museus, 2021). Therefore, advisor interpretation represents an important site for examining how institutional expectations, student agency, validation, accountability, and equity are negotiated in practice.

Existing scholarship has focused primarily on student perspectives, program outcomes, and institutional interventions (e.g., Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Hanger et al., 2011; Rodriguez, 2019), leaving unanswered questions about the advisors who translate academic notice policies into student-facing practice. From a social constructionist perspective, advisors' understandings of academic notice influence how policy is interpreted, communicated, and enacted within advising interactions. Greater empirical attention to these sensemaking processes is, therefore, needed to understand how formal academic standing policies acquire practical meaning within institutional contexts and how advisors navigate tensions among policy requirements, relational care, and equity-minded practice. To address that gap, I examined academic advisors' interpretations and enactment of academic notice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine how academic advisors made sense of the purpose and function of academic notice policies within their institutional context, and how those interpretations shaped advising practice and student support. Grounded in a social

constructionist perspective and informed by critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011) and validation theory (Rendón, 1994), I centered advisors' sensemaking processes as a mechanism through which academic notice is translated from institutional policy into student-facing practice. This framing positions academic notice not as a neutral or self-executing designation but as a socially constructed policy whose practical meaning emerges through interpretation, communication, organizational context, and relational engagement.

The study was conducted at a public 4-year research university characterized by a decentralized academic advising structure. Although the institution set academic-standing expectations, it distributed advising responsibilities across academic schools and programs. This organizational structure provided a context for examining how academic advisors working within different academic units interpreted and enacted a common institutional academic notice policy. By examining advisors across multiple advising units within the same institutional setting, I explored how advisors understood and operationalized the policy across varied organizational contexts. I also examined advisors' professional judgment, relational practices, and use of asset-based, validating, and equity-minded approaches when supporting students on academic notice.

Research Questions

Research Question (RQ) 1: How do academic advisors make sense of the purpose and function of academic notice policies within their institutional context?

RQ2: How do academic advisors interpret and enact academic notice policies in their day-to-day advising practice?

RQ3: How do academic advisors draw on asset-based, validating, and equity-minded frameworks to navigate tensions between institutional expectations and relational care when supporting students on academic notice?

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in a social constructionist ontology and epistemology and informed by two complementary theoretical frameworks: (a) critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011) and (b) validation theory (Rendón, 1994). Social constructionism provided the study's overarching epistemological foundation, positioning academic notice as a socially constructed policy whose meaning emerges through interpretation, interaction, and institutional context. Critical theory and validation theory served as analytical lenses for examining how advising practices understood and enacted academic notice policies.

Critical theory highlights power, language, and inequity embedded in institutional policies and organizational practices, supporting an examination of how academic notice may reproduce or challenge structural inequities (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011). Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) highlights the relational and affirming dimensions of advising interactions, particularly how advisors communicate belief in students' capacity to succeed and foster belonging, self-efficacy, and persistence among students from historically marginalized backgrounds. Together, these frameworks provided an integrated analytical perspective for examining the relationship among institutional policy, professional interpretation, relational practice, and equity in academic notice advising.

Social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Crotty, 1998) served as the study's foundational paradigm. It positions academic notice not as a fixed or neutral policy reality but as a phenomenon whose practical meaning emerges through interactions among advisors, students,

colleagues, and institutional structures. From this perspective, advisors interpret the purpose and function of academic notice as they translate institutional policy into advising practice. Therefore, social constructionism aligns directly with RQs 1 and 2, which examine how advisors make sense of and enact academic notice within their institutional contexts and place advisor sensemaking at the center of the inquiry.

Building on this interpretive foundation, critical theory offers a complementary lens for examining how power, language, and institutional norms shape how academic notice policies are interpreted and enacted. Critical theorists argue policies and organizational practices are not neutral; they are embedded in broader systems of power that can reproduce inequities, particularly for historically marginalized populations (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011). From this perspective, academic notice can be understood not only as an administrative mechanism but also as a regulatory practice shaped by institutional assumptions about academic performance, merit, and responsibility. Therefore, critical theory supports examining how advisors navigated institutional accountability, equity considerations, and student-centered practice, and how their interpretations could reinforce or challenge deficit-oriented understandings of academic difficulty.

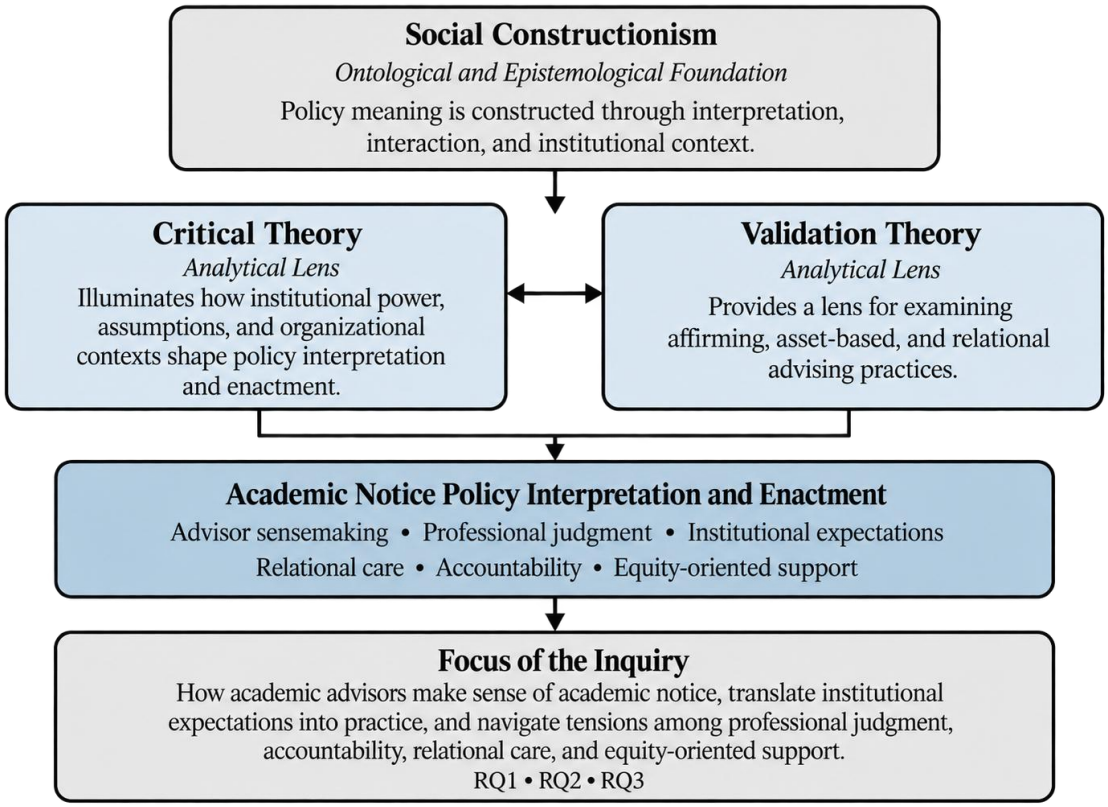
Complementing this structural and institutional lens, validation theory (Rendón, 1994) centers the relational and affirming dimensions of advising. Validation emphasizes intentional practices through which institutional agents communicate belief in students' capacity to succeed and foster belonging, self-efficacy, and persistence. In the context of academic notice, validation theory supports examining how advisors draw on asset-based and equity-minded practices to affirm students' strengths, counter deficit narratives, maintain relational care, and communicate institutional expectations. The framework directly informed RQ 3, which examined how advisors

drew on asset-based, validating, and equity-minded approaches when supporting students on academic notice.

Scholarship on institutional agents further contextualized advisors' roles in mediating students' access to institutional resources and opportunities. Although this study did not use institutional agent scholarship as a primary theoretical framework, it provided additional context for understanding advisors' roles in enacting academic notice policy. Institutional agents possess knowledge, authority, and relational access that can facilitate students' connections to resources and opportunities (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Applied to academic notice, this perspective highlights how advisors' policy interpretations and practices may influence not only adherence to institutional requirements but also students' access to support, validation, and institutional resources.

These perspectives conceptualize academic advising as an interpretive practice shaped by social meaning-making, institutional power, and relational interaction. Social constructionism explains how policy meaning is constructed; critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011) illuminates how institutional power, assumptions, and organizational contexts shape that meaning; and validation theory (Rendón, 1994) provides a lens for understanding how advisors enact affirming and asset-based relational practices. Together, these perspectives supported an examination of how academic notice could simultaneously involve institutional expectations, professional judgment, accountability, relational care, and equity-oriented support.

Figure 1.1 ***Conceptual Model of Academic Notice Policy Interpretation and Enactment***



Note. Social constructionism provides the ontological and epistemological foundation, while critical theory and validation theory serve as complementary analytical lenses. The model illustrates the conceptual perspectives guiding the inquiry rather than causal relationships or empirical findings.

Research Design Overview

I employed a basic qualitative research design to examine academic advisors' interpretations, experiences, and perspectives related to academic notice policy. Basic qualitative inquiry was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth examination of the meaning-making processes and contextual influences that shaped advisors' interpretation and enactment of institutional policy (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative approach was particularly well suited to examining a socially constructed phenomenon like academic

notice, for which participants' interpretations and contextualized experiences were central to addressing the research questions (Crotty, 1998).

I selected participants through purposive sampling to capture perspectives across advising units within the same institutional context (Patton, 2015). I conducted semi-structured interviews with professional academic advisors from multiple advising units at a public research university in the western United States. Semi-structured interviewing allowed participants to describe their experiences in their own words and provided opportunities to explore how they interpreted policy, navigated institutional expectations, exercised professional judgment, and approached student support (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2015). This design aligned with a social constructionist ontology and epistemology that prioritizes participants' meaning-making and contextualized experience. The basic qualitative approach, therefore, supported examining advisors' sensemaking processes and the organizational and relational contexts that shaped how academic notice was enacted in practice.

Definitions of Key Terms

Academic advising: Academic advising is a field of study and profession that focuses on the intellectual, personal, and educational development of advisees as they engage with higher education. The research-informed practice of academic advising is grounded in interpersonal relationships that support, understand, and empower individual advisees to navigate their academic journeys and make personally, socially, and culturally relevant meaning of their learning experiences. Academic advising creates unique expertise in how curricula, policies, and institutional cultures shape and are shaped by learner goals and experiences (NACADA, 2026).

Academic disqualification: An institutional determination that a student is no longer eligible to continue enrollment because of insufficient academic performance or progress toward

degree completion. Academic standing policies may establish consequences, including academic suspension or dismissal, when students fail to meet institutional academic standards (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022). Students may become subject to disqualification when they do not meet established academic standing or progress requirements; however, becoming subject to disqualification does not necessarily result in a final decision to discontinue enrollment. Depending on institutional policy, additional academic review and procedures to contest disqualification decisions may apply. In this study, academic disqualification represented a potential consequence of continued academic difficulty and an institutional boundary within which advisors supported students' academic recovery.

Academic notice (formerly academic probation): An institutional academic standing status assigned to students whose cumulative and/or term grade point average (GPA) falls below the minimum standard required for good academic standing, typically a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. Academic notice signals academic difficulty and structures institutional responses through advising, interventions, and expectations for academic recovery (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Morris & Harris, 2022).

Academic standing policies: Institutional policies that define academic performance thresholds, structure probation and notice processes, and establish conditions for continued enrollment, academic recovery, and dismissal, shaping how institutions identify and address academic difficulty (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Morris & Harris, 2022).

Critical theory: A theoretical framework that examines how power, ideology, and institutional structures shape social practices, policies, and outcomes. Critical theory assumes policies and organizational practices are not neutral but are embedded in broader systems of power that may reproduce inequities, particularly for historically marginalized populations. In

this study, critical theory provided a lens for examining how academic notice policies, institutional expectations, and advising practices may reflect or challenge structural inequities in higher education (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011).

Equity/equity-minded advising: A commitment to identifying and addressing structural and systemic barriers that produce differential outcomes for historically marginalized students and to designing advising practices and policies that intentionally redistribute opportunity, validation, and support (Bensimon, 2005; Museus, 2021).

Policy sensemaking: The process through which practitioners interpret, construct meaning around, and enact institutional policy based on professional knowledge, beliefs, and organizational context (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995).

Social constructionism: An interpretive paradigm that conceptualizes meaning and reality as socially produced through interaction rather than as fixed or objective truths (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Crotty, 1998).

Street-level bureaucracy: Frontline public service work in which individuals with direct client interaction exercise discretion in interpreting and implementing policy, thereby shaping how policy is enacted in practice (Lipsky, 2010).

Validation theory: A theoretical framework that emphasizes the role of institutional agents in affirming students' capacity to learn, belong, and succeed through intentional, asset-based interactions. Validation counters deficit narratives and fosters self-efficacy, academic identity, and persistence, particularly for students from historically marginalized backgrounds (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to academic advising and higher education scholarship by centering academic advisors as interpreters and enactors of academic notice policy. Although prior research has documented student experiences of academic difficulty and examined structured recovery interventions, less empirical attention has focused on how advisors interpret and enact institutional academic standing policies in everyday practice. By examining advisors' sensemaking processes, this study addresses a gap in understanding how academic notice is translated from formal policy into advising practice and how organizational context, professional judgment, and relational enactment shape that process.

Conceptually, this study contributes to scholarship by bringing social constructionism, critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011), and validation theory (Rendón, 1994) into conversation to examine academic notice as a socially constructed policy process with important equity implications. This integrated perspective highlights how meaning, power, institutional context, and validation intersect in how advisors interpret and enact policy, and it draws attention to advisor interpretation as a key mechanism through which formal policy acquires practical meaning.

The findings offer insight into how advisors navigate institutional expectations, relational care, professional judgment, and equity considerations when supporting students on academic notice. These findings may inform the development of academic standing policies, professional development, communication practices, and advising structures that promote validation, belonging, accountability, and academic recovery. Centering advisors' perspectives may also help institutions identify organizational conditions that support or constrain more inclusive, student-centered, and equity-minded approaches to academic notice.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, including the problem, purpose, research questions, and the social constructionist ontology and epistemology, critical theory, and validation theory frameworks that inform the inquiry. Chapter 2 synthesizes scholarship on academic advising, academic standing policies, policy enactment, student support, and equity, positioning academic notice as a socially constructed policy process enacted through professional interpretation and organizational context. Drawing on scholarship related to policy sensemaking, street-level bureaucracy, validation, and equity-minded advising, the chapter establishes the literature base for understanding advisors as institutional actors whose professional judgment, communication, and relational practices shape academic notice implementation. Chapter 3 details the basic qualitative methodology, including the research design, study setting, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and strategies used to support trustworthiness. Chapter 4 presents the findings from advisor interviews, highlighting how participants made sense of academic notice and enacted policy within varied organizational and relational contexts. Chapter 5 interprets the findings in relation to existing scholarship and the study's conceptual frameworks, discusses implications for advising practice and institutional policy, and offers recommendations for future research.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the purpose, context, and conceptual grounding for this study of academic advisors' interpretation and enactment of academic notice policies. Academic notice was presented as a high-stakes institutional policy whose terminology and associated labeling can carry punitive and stigmatizing meanings for students and whose implementation occurs within broader organizational and equity contexts. Drawing on social constructionism (Berger &

Luckmann, 1966; Crotty, 1998), critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011), and validation theory (Rendón, 1994), the chapter positioned academic notice as a socially constructed policy process whose practical meaning is shaped through advisors' sensemaking, professional judgment, communication, and relational practice.

The chapter also established the study's purpose and research questions, emphasizing advisor interpretation as an important mechanism through which formal academic standing policy is translated into practice. By framing academic advising as a site of policy enactment, Chapter 1 established the need for qualitative inquiry centered on advisors' perspectives and experiences. Chapter 2 builds on this foundation by reviewing scholarship on academic advising, academic notice and academic standing policies, policy implementation, student development, and equity-oriented frameworks to situate the study within existing literature and further establish the gap addressed by the research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Academic notice policies occupy a critical yet understudied position in higher education, functioning at the intersection of institutional accountability, academic standards, and student support. These policies are designed to identify students experiencing academic difficulty and to promote improvement through defined academic thresholds, timelines, and required interventions (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Gordon et al., 2011). Although academic notice establishes formal expectations for academic performance and recovery, understanding how those expectations operate in practice requires attention to the institutional actors responsible for implementing them. Higher education policy scholarship has emphasized that formal policies gain practical meaning through interpretation and enactment, and institutional actors' experiences, professional understandings, organizational contexts, and power dynamics embedded in institutional structures shape implementation (Felix & Nienhusser, 2023; Spillane et al., 2002). Research on academic probation has further illustrated how policy discourse and communication shape students' experiences of academic standing (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015, 2022).

Academic advisors represent one group of institutional actors positioned within this implementation process. Grounded in a social constructionist perspective, this study approaches academic notice not solely as a formal policy designation but as a policy whose practical meaning is shaped through advisors' interpretation, communication, and relational engagement with students. Accordingly, this literature review examines how academic advisors' interpretive work, situated within professional philosophies, institutional contexts, and equity-oriented commitments, may shape how academic notice is communicated and enacted, including the

relative emphasis placed on compliance, accountability, development, and relational support (Lowenstein, 2005; McGill, 2019).

This review synthesizes scholarship from academic advising, student development, higher education policy, and equity-focused research to establish a conceptual foundation for examining advisors' interpretations of academic notice. First, the review traces the historical evolution of academic advising and examines its relationship to student success. Second, it reviews prescriptive, developmental, proactive, integrative, strengths-based, and equity-minded approaches to advising, with particular attention to their relevance during periods of academic difficulty. Third, the review examines the structure, purpose, and evolution of academic notice policies, including their regulatory, developmental, socially constructed, and equity-related dimensions. Finally, drawing on theories of policy enactment and organizational sensemaking, the review conceptualizes academic advisors as policy-implementing agents whose discretion, judgment, and meaning-making mediate how academic notice policies are interpreted and enacted within institutional contexts.

Across these areas of scholarship, equity represents an important consideration in understanding academic notice and advising practice. Academic notice policies can classify students through institutional standards and deficit-oriented discourse, and research on first-generation, low-income, racially minoritized, and other at-promise students highlights the importance of asset-based, validating, and institutionally responsive approaches to student support (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Kitchen et al., 2021). Together, these perspectives position advisor interpretation as an important site for examining how equity may be enacted within academic notice processes. Drawing on validation theory (Rendón, 1994) and equity-minded advising scholarship, this review considers how advisors' relational practices, language, and

framing may reproduce deficit-oriented understandings of academic difficulty or create conditions that affirm students' belonging, agency, and capacity for academic success (DeRosa, 2023; Museus, 2021; Rendón et al., 2000).

This literature review positions academic notice as a policy domain in which advisor interpretation may shape students' experiences of academic difficulty, institutional support, and academic recovery. By synthesizing these bodies of scholarship, the review identifies critical gaps in the literature, most notably the limited empirical attention to advisors' meaning-making processes and equity-oriented enactment of academic notice policies. These gaps provide the rationale for the present qualitative study, which centers academic advisors' voices to examine how they construct meaning around academic notice and how those interpretations inform advising practice within institutional contexts (Lowenstein, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). Although this review draws on multiple conceptual perspectives to situate academic notice and advising practice, critical theory and validation theory served as the primary theoretical frameworks guiding the present study. Policy enactment, sensemaking, and various approaches to academic advising provide complementary conceptual lenses for understanding the institutional and professional contexts in which academic notice is interpreted and enacted.

Historical Foundations of Academic Advising

Academic advising in the United States has evolved alongside changes in higher education, institutional missions, and theories of student learning and development. Throughout this history, advising has served as a mechanism for maintaining institutional standards and as a practice that supports student growth, autonomy, and meaning-making (Crookston, 1972; Grites, 2013). This enduring tension between institutional accountability and developmental support

provides important context for understanding contemporary advising practice, particularly how advisors interpret and enact academic standing policies.

Rather than reflecting a linear progression from administrative control to developmental support, contemporary advising incorporates overlapping traditions shaped by institutional priorities, student development theory, professionalization, and equity-oriented approaches (Crookston, 1972; Grites, 2013; Lowenstein, 2014; Museus, 2021). These traditions continue to influence how advisors understand their professional roles and responsibilities within contemporary higher education. This section traces that evolution to situate the professional and interpretive role academic advisors occupy in contemporary academic notice processes.

Early Foundations of Advising

In its earliest form, academic advising functioned primarily as an extension of faculty authority and institutional control. Emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, advising focused largely on course selection, degree requirements, and compliance with prescribed curricula rather than intentional educational or developmental work (Cook, 2009). Advising lacked distinct training, theory, or professional identity, and advisor–student relationships generally reflected hierarchical institutional structures centered on regulation and academic order (Geiger, 2014; Kuhn, 2008).

Within these structures, advising emphasized students' adherence to institutional expectations rather than the developmental and collaborative dimensions later emphasized by developmental advising scholars (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972). This orientation centered advising on institutional requirements and students' responsibility for meeting them. The emphasis on standards, eligibility, and consequences provides important historical context for

contemporary academic standing policies, which continue to establish institutional expectations for satisfactory academic progress.

The Student Personnel Movement

The student personnel movement introduced a broader developmental orientation to higher education. The student personnel point of view (American Council on Education [ACE], 1949) articulated an institutional responsibility to educate the whole student, including students' intellectual, emotional, and social development (Himes & Schulenberg, 2016). This perspective challenged purely administrative approaches to student support and helped frame advising as a developmental function.

As higher education expanded after World War II, growing enrollments and increasingly complex student needs contributed to more formalized advising and student-support structures (Geiger, 2014; Gordon, 2004). Advising included helping students navigate academic transitions, setbacks, and decision-making, and remained embedded within systems responsible for maintaining academic standards (Frost, 2000). Therefore, advisors occupied a dual role involving student development and institutional expectations, a tension that remained relevant as academic advising became professionalized.

Emergence and Professionalization of Academic Advising

By the mid-20th century, expanded access to higher education, driven by the GI Bill, the growth of community colleges, and increasing student diversity, prompted institutions to formalize advising roles and organizational structures (Geiger, 2014; Gordon et al., 2011). During this period, advising evolved into a more clearly defined occupational role, supported by emerging scholarship, theoretical models, and professional norms (Frost, 2000). Advisors guided

students through complex curricula and institutional policies and contributed to retention and academic success initiatives.

The field's continued professionalization was reflected in the development of professional organizations, ethical commitments, and standards of practice. A critical milestone in the professionalization of academic advising was the establishment of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) in 1979, which provided a professional home for advising scholarship and practice. The association subsequently adopted the name NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, reflecting its expanding international reach. NACADA's (2023a, 2023b) core values and core competencies articulate expectations related to relational engagement, inclusive practice, knowledge of institutional policy, and ethical decision-making.

Professionalization also helped conceptualize advising as an educational and interpretive practice rather than solely information delivery (Grites, 2013; Lowenstein, 2005; Troxel, 2018). Advisors came to be understood as educators who help students interpret their academic experiences and navigate institutional expectations. Hagen (2018) further conceptualized advising as a narrative and interpretive practice through which advisors help students construct meaning from and develop authorship of their educational experiences. This interpretive dimension is particularly relevant to academic notice, where advisors' professional knowledge, philosophies, and judgment may shape how institutional policies are communicated and enacted. These developments established a foundation for theoretical approaches that emphasize student learning, development, and participation in the advising relationship. One of the most influential was developmental advising.

The Emergence of Developmental Advising

The emergence of developmental advising in the 1970s marked a pivotal shift in advising philosophy and practice. Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) reconceptualized advising as a teaching and learning process that supports students' academic, personal, and career development. Rather than positioning advisors as directors of student behavior through compliance-focused interactions, developmental advising emphasized engaging students as active partners in decision-making, goal setting, and reflection.

This shift reframed advisor authority from enforcement toward facilitation, emphasizing collaboration, student autonomy, and co-constructing meaning within advising relationships (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972). Grounded in student development theory and humanistic educational principles, developmental advising focuses on holistic student growth, relational support, and students' capacity for development (Frost, 2000). Within this framework, advisors are positioned as educators who help students interpret their academic experiences, including periods of academic difficulty, as opportunities for learning and growth. Therefore, developmental advising provided an important foundation for contemporary approaches that emphasize student agency, relational engagement, and holistic development.

Contemporary Advising and the Expansion of Theoretical Perspectives

Contemporary academic advising draws from multiple theoretical and disciplinary perspectives, including student development and equity-oriented scholarship. Building on foundational developmental, strengths-based, and validating approaches, contemporary scholarship emphasizes holistic, culturally responsive, relational, and equity-oriented ways to support students (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2021; DeRosa, 2023; Museus, 2021; Troxel et al., 2021). These perspectives position academic advising as more than delivering academic

information, emphasizing student development, meaningful relationships, and the institution's responsibility to support student success. At the same time, advisors work within organizational structures and policies that regulate academic progress and establish institutional expectations (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; McGill, 2019).

Academic notice illustrates this intersection. Advisors must interpret institutional policy within specific organizational contexts (Spillane et al., 2002) and draw on professional knowledge, advising philosophy, and judgment in their interactions with students (McGill, 2019). Collectively, this history shows contemporary advising incorporates institutional, developmental, professional, and equity-oriented traditions rather than reflecting a simple progression from one model to another. This foundation helps situate the advising approaches and student-support outcomes reviewed in the next section.

Academic Advising and Student Success Outcomes

Academic advising plays an important role in student success, persistence, and engagement in higher education. Foundational scholarship on student persistence emphasizes students' academic and social integration within the institution (Tinto, 1993), and later work highlights motivation, sense of belonging, and beliefs about one's capacity to succeed as conditions that are shaped partly through institutional experiences (Tinto, 2017). Research on academic advising similarly links high-quality advising to student outcomes, including academic performance, self-efficacy, perceived support, and persistence (Young-Jones et al., 2013). These findings suggest advising contributes to student success not only by providing information but also through the relational and interpretive dimensions of advisor–student interactions.

Advisor–student interactions may be especially consequential during periods of academic difficulty, when students make sense of setbacks, institutional expectations, and their capacity to

recover. Academic self-efficacy, the belief that one can successfully perform academic tasks, is linked to persistence and performance and is shaped by how students interpret feedback, support, and prior experiences (Bandura, 1997). Sense of belonging and institutional connection are similarly important to continued engagement, particularly when students encounter experiences that cause them to question their place within the institution (Strayhorn, 2012; Tinto, 2017). Therefore, advising can provide an institutional context in which students interpret academic challenges, clarify expectations, and identify possible pathways forward.

Relational interactions with institutional agents may also shape how students interpret challenging academic experiences. Validation scholarship emphasizes the importance of institutional agents actively affirming students' capacities and communicating that they are valued members of the academic community (Rendón et al., 2000). Research on holistic student success similarly highlights relationships, social connectedness, and belonging as important dimensions of students' college experiences (Schreiner, 2013b). In academic advising, supportive interactions may help students contextualize setbacks, maintain connections to institutional resources, and navigate academic difficulty. Rather than functioning solely as an information-delivery process, advising can, therefore, serve as a space where students interpret and incorporate academic experiences into their developing educational narratives (Hagen, 2018; Lowenstein, 2015).

Relational support, validation, and students' meaning-making matter especially in academic notice, where students must navigate setbacks alongside institutional expectations and potential consequences for continued enrollment. Recent research has shown probationary status can be associated with increased attrition, with effects varying by how and when students enter academic probation (Bowman & Fenton-Miller, 2025). Advising interactions may influence how

students understand their academic standing, interpret institutional expectations, and perceive the accessibility of institutional support and pathways toward recovery.

Therefore, academic advisors hold an important institutional position during academic difficulty, helping students understand expectations for academic standing and navigate available options and resources. Policy sensemaking and implementation scholarship offers a lens for examining this work, emphasizing that institutional actors interpret and enact formal policy requirements through professional knowledge, prior experience, and organizational context (Century & Cassata, 2016; Felix & Nienhusser, 2023; Spillane et al., 2002). Collectively, the literature suggests advising during academic difficulty may support conditions associated with continued engagement, including self-efficacy, belonging, institutional connection, and a clearer understanding of academic setbacks. These relationships between advising and student experience provide a foundation for considering the specific advising approaches reviewed in the following section.

Advising Approaches

The preceding discussion demonstrated that advising philosophies shape how advisors engage students and understand their professional roles. Advising approaches bridge these philosophies and everyday practice, influencing how advisors build relationships, communicate institutional expectations, and support student learning and development (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972; Varney, 2013). The following section reviews prescriptive, developmental, proactive, and integrative (i.e., holistic) approaches particularly relevant to supporting students experiencing academic difficulty.

Prescriptive Advising

Prescriptive advising is among the earliest formal advising models and reflects a hierarchical, expert-driven approach in which advisors guide students' academic decisions according to institutional rules and requirements (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972). Advising interactions center on information delivery, course selection, and procedural compliance, with advisors positioned as authorities and students expected to follow guidance, with limited opportunities for dialogue or shared decision-making. Within this model, responsibility for determining appropriate academic actions rests primarily with the advisor rather than being negotiated collaboratively with the student.

Although prescriptive advising can efficiently communicate technical information, such as degree requirements or academic-standing thresholds, its hierarchical structure can create an imbalance of authority between advisor and student. It may provide limited opportunities for meaning-making (Frost, 2000). In the context of academic notice, a primarily prescriptive approach may emphasize rules, requirements, and consequences more than student meaning-making or contextual factors. When academic difficulty is communicated primarily through regulatory or deficit-oriented language, such framing may position students primarily in terms of risk or deficiency rather than capacity and potential (Bettencourt et al., 2023). These limitations helped spur more relational, student-centered approaches to advising, most notably developmental advising.

Developmental Advising

Developmental advising is a student-centered approach that emphasizes students' academic, personal, and career development through collaborative advisor–student relationships (Crookston, 1972; Grites, 2013). It reframed advising as a teaching and learning process rather

than a primarily administrative function. Crookston (1972) and O'Banion (1972) described this relationship as an educational partnership emphasizing reflection, problem solving, goal clarification, and shared responsibility. These principles later informed advising approaches that emphasize student agency, assets, and holistic development. Applied to academic notice, developmental advising provides a framework for considering academic difficulty as part of an ongoing learning process rather than solely as a compliance problem (Grites & Gordon, 2000).

Proactive (Intrusive) Advising

Proactive (intrusive) advising emphasizes advisor-initiated outreach and structured engagement, intentionally anticipating academic challenges rather than waiting for students to self-identify or seek help (Earl, 1988; Varney, 2013). This approach challenges the assumption that students will seek help independently, and it affirms the institution's responsibility to reach out to students facing academic or personal challenges. Proactive advising includes early alerts, required check-ins, and sustained follow-up designed to prevent academic difficulties from escalating.

Proactive advising is a common approach that can initiate support for students on academic notice. Many students placed on academic notice may feel fear, shame, or uncertainty that discourages them from seeking help (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015; Rodriguez, 2019). Research has suggested proactive advising can support students less likely to seek help on their own, including those experiencing academic difficulty or facing structural barriers to engagement (Schwebel et al., 2008). When advisors proactively engage students on academic notice, they not only increase access to resources but also shape how students interpret the policy. Proactive outreach may communicate institutional care and investment, consistent with Rendón's (1994) emphasis on institutionally initiated validation.

Integrative and Holistic Advising

Integrative advising emphasizes academic advisors' educational role in helping students connect their coursework, learning experiences, and educational goals (Lowenstein, 2014). Rather than focusing exclusively on course selection or degree requirements, this approach encourages students to reflect on how their academic experiences contribute to their broader learning and development. This educational orientation matters during periods of academic difficulty because it gives students opportunities to consider how academic setbacks relate to their goals, experiences, and circumstances. For students on academic notice, integrative advising, complemented by holistic approaches, may help students connect their academic experiences and goals while considering the personal and contextual factors affecting their progress (Lowenstein, 2015; Yosso, 2005). The following section examines strengths-based and equity-minded approaches more directly, focusing on their relevance to student agency, belonging, and academic recovery.

Strengths-Based and Equity-Minded Advising Approaches

Though integrative and holistic advising emphasize the scope and developmental purpose of advising as an educational practice, strengths-based and equity-minded perspectives focus more explicitly on how advisors understand students' experiences, identities, capacities, and institutional contexts. These perspectives are particularly relevant to academic notice because they provide conceptual lenses for examining how advisors frame academic difficulty, communicate institutional expectations, and recognize students' existing assets.

Appreciative advising exemplifies a strengths-based, student-centered approach grounded in appreciative inquiry that emphasizes identifying students' assets, co-constructing goals, and fostering academic success through affirming, relational practices (Bloom et al., 2008). Together

with validation and culturally responsive perspectives, strengths-based approaches provide a foundation for examining how advisors may communicate academic notice in ways that affirm students' capacities and attend to institutional expectations and structural context.

Strengths-Based and Appreciative Advising

Strengths-based advising is rooted in positive psychology and strengths-based education and views students as capable individuals who possess knowledge, experiences, and skills that contribute to their academic journeys. Strengths-based approaches emphasize identifying and developing students' existing assets in teaching, advising, and other educational contexts to support engagement, achievement, well-being, persistence, and post-graduation readiness (Lopez & Louis, 2009). This orientation shifts attention from what students lack to capacities they can develop and apply to academic challenges.

Empirical research supports the relevance of strengths-based approaches in higher education. Anderson et al. (2024) identified statistically significant, moderate positive relationships between strengths-based educational practices and students' general and academic self-efficacy. Although this research was conducted in classroom contexts, it suggested asset-focused approaches may strengthen students' perceptions of their capacity to manage academic demands. Similarly, Soria et al. (2017) found students who participated in strengths-focused advising reported greater engagement, stronger academic self-efficacy, and deeper connection to their educational experiences, along with stronger persistence-related outcomes. For first-generation, low-income, racially minoritized, and other at-promise students, ecological validation scholarship likewise emphasizes affirming students' capacities and embedding support within responsive institutional environments (Kitchen et al., 2021).

Strengths-based advising also provides an interpretive lens for understanding how advisors engage students during periods of academic difficulty. Rather than focusing primarily on remediation or perceived deficits, strengths-based advising encourages reflective conversations that identify students' talents, previous successes, values, and motivations (Bloom et al., 2008; Schreiner, 2013a). Applied to academic notice, this lens may influence how advisors frame policy requirements and academic difficulty by emphasizing students' capacities for learning, adaptation, and recovery rather than treating academic challenges as indicators of personal failure. This perspective matters because academic notice can feel stigmatizing or punitive when institutional communication emphasizes deficiency, failure, or sanction (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015; Brady, 2017).

In practice, advisors may use strengths-based questioning and language to help students identify assets they can draw on as they navigate academic challenges. These conversations can help students connect prior successes, personal strengths, and existing resources to academic strategies and institutional expectations, supporting agency and ownership in the recovery process (Bloom et al., 2008; Lopez & Louis, 2009; Schreiner, 2013a). In this sense, strengths-based advising functions not only as a set of techniques but also as a framework for how advisors may interpret and communicate academic difficulty.

Strengths-based advising also aligns with validation theory and equity-minded advising perspectives. Validation theory emphasizes institutional agents' responsibility to affirm students' capacity to learn and their sense of belonging, particularly for students from historically marginalized backgrounds (Rendón, 1994). Strengths-based advising complements this orientation by positioning students' knowledge, experiences, and identities as assets rather than deficits. Similarly, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) framework emphasizes the

forms of capital students bring to higher education and provides an additional asset-based lens for understanding students' experiences. Applied to academic notice, these perspectives encourage advisors to consider how students' existing strengths and forms of cultural wealth can inform academic recovery strategies.

Asset-based terminology, including at-promise as an alternative to at-risk, further reflects this orientation. The term challenges deficit-based labeling by emphasizing students' capacities, resilience, and potential rather than positioning them primarily through risk or deficiency (Bettencourt et al., 2023; Kitchen et al., 2021). Within academic notice contexts, asset-based language may help advisors communicate academic difficulty in ways that acknowledge institutional expectations and avoid unnecessarily stigmatizing students or using deficit-oriented framing. Strengths-based advising offers practical strategies and an asset-oriented lens for examining academic difficulty. Its relevance to this study lies in how advisors' philosophies and training may inform support for students during academic recovery.

Validation, Cultural Wealth, and Culturally Responsive Advising

Validation, cultural wealth, and culturally responsive advising extend this discussion by foregrounding belonging, sociocultural context, and the assets students bring to higher education. Applied to academic notice, these perspectives offer lenses for examining whether and how advisors recognize those dimensions and communicate institutional expectations. Together, they extend strengths-based advising by drawing greater attention to how students' assets and experiences are situated within broader cultural and institutional environments.

Rendón's (1994) validation theory emphasizes that student success grows when institutional agents take proactive responsibility for affirming students' ability to learn and validate their rightful place within the academic community. Rodriguez's (2019) findings

underscored the relevance of validation during academic notice. Students described probation as an emotionally consequential experience that undermined confidence, belonging, and academic identity, particularly when institutional communication reinforced deficit narratives. Their call to decrease deficit-based language and increase institutional awareness aligns with validation theory by illustrating the potential importance of affirming, relational practices in countering stigmatizing interpretations of academic standing. In advising contexts, validation can, therefore, be understood as more than an interpersonal gesture; it provides a framework for examining how advisors communicate policy and affirm students' capacities and possibilities for continued learning.

For students placed on academic notice, validating practices may include normalizing academic difficulty, affirming students' capacity for improvement, and clearly articulating pathways to recovery. These practices may help students understand academic notice as a temporary status rather than a fixed judgment of ability. Validation scholarship suggests affirming interactions can strengthen students' confidence, motivation, sense of belonging, and engagement in college (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Validation also emphasizes institutional initiative rather than requiring students to seek support independently (Rendón et al., 2000), making it especially relevant to advising contexts where students may be reluctant to seek help.

Yosso's (2005) CCW framework provides an additional asset-based perspective by challenging deficit understandings of students from historically marginalized communities and identifying six forms of capital: (a) aspirational, (b) navigational, (c) social, (d) linguistic, (e) familial, and (f) resistant. Applied to academic advising, CCW provides a lens for recognizing the knowledge, relationships, resilience, and navigational resources students bring to institutional

encounters. Within academic notice contexts, advisors might, therefore, consider students' existing forms of cultural wealth alongside institutional requirements and academic recovery strategies rather than interpreting academic difficulty primarily through perceived deficiencies.

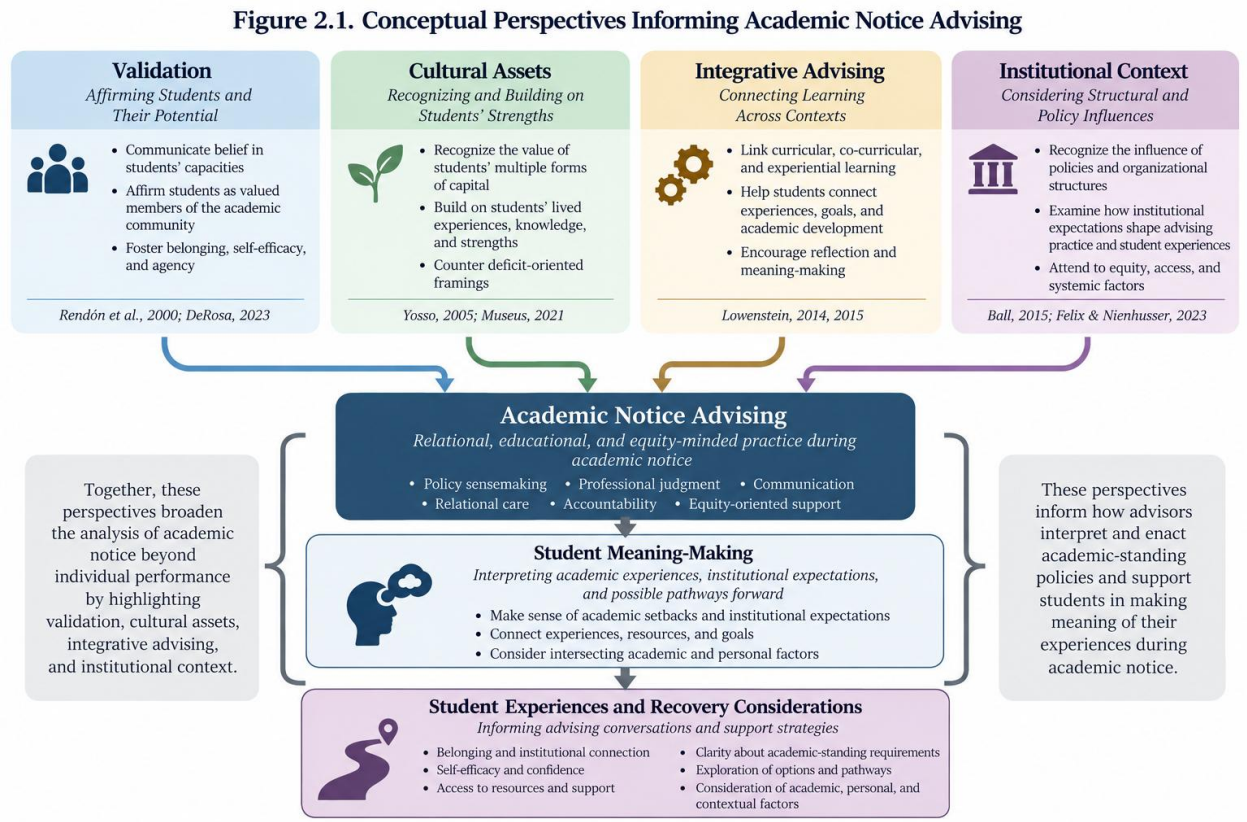
Culturally responsive and culturally engaging approaches to advising emphasize attending to students' sociocultural contexts, identities, and experiences (Museus, 2014; Museus & Ravello, 2010). Applied to academic notice, this perspective cautions against assuming all students encounter institutional policies under equivalent circumstances (Museus, 2014; Museus & Ravello, 2010). This perspective highlights students' identities, values, lived experiences, and structural conditions when considering academic challenges. Applied to academic notice, culturally responsive advising provides a lens for examining whether and how advisors contextualize policy requirements, acknowledge barriers, and engage students in developing pathways forward that account for institutional expectations and students' circumstances.

Kitchen et al.'s (2021) ecological validation model extends validation beyond individual interactions by emphasizing the person, process, context, and timing of validation. The model highlights that student support is shaped not only by interpersonal relationships but also by organizational practices and institutional environments. Applied to academic notice, ecological validation provides a useful lens for examining how advising interactions operate within broader systems of communication, resource referral, policy, and student support.

Together, these perspectives broaden the analysis of academic notice beyond individual academic performance by emphasizing the importance of validation, students' cultural assets, integrative advising, and institutional context. Figure 2.1 presents a conceptual synthesis of these perspectives, illustrating how they may inform relational, educational, and equity-minded advising practices during academic notice. Although these perspectives offer complementary

ways of understanding advising practice, limited research has examined how advisors draw on them while interpreting and enacting academic-standing policies. The following section turns more directly to the structure and purposes of academic notice.

Figure 2.1 ***Conceptual Perspectives Informing Academic Notice Advising***



Academic Notice Policies in Higher Education

Academic notice policies establish academic standards and conditions for continued enrollment and recovery, typically through grade point average (GPA) thresholds, progress benchmarks, timelines, and required or recommended interventions (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Gordon et al., 2011). As a result, they serve regulatory and student-support purposes, creating a recurring tension between institutional accountability and developmental aims. Although codified in catalogs, handbooks, and policy statements, academic-standing requirements are

implemented within organizational systems and student-facing practices. Policy and sensemaking scholarship provide a framework for examining this implementation process (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). Student-focused research has further shown why implementation matters: unclear or delayed communication about academic standing can contribute to confusion, embarrassment, and perceptions of failure (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015). Therefore, this section reviews the origins and purposes of academic notice, its regulatory and developmental dimensions, its social construction and equity implications, and institutional variability.

Origins and Purposes of Academic Notice Policies

In this study, academic notice refers to institutional policies on academic standing that signal academic difficulty and outline the conditions necessary for continued enrollment and academic recovery. These policies typically establish formal thresholds, timelines, and required actions intended to prompt students' engagement with advising and academic support resources. Though academic notice policies are generally framed as mechanisms to promote academic improvement and student persistence, their enacted goals often reflect a complex interplay among regulatory oversight, institutional accountability, and developmental support.

Foundational advising scholarship situates academic notice within broader institutional systems for academic standing and student support. This includes standardized thresholds, progress monitoring, and advising-based interventions (Gordon et al., 2011). Historical analyses of advising's evolution further show how institutions have relied on structured advising and intervention models as student populations expanded (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Gordon, 2004).

Based on historical analyses of institutional standardization and academic regulation in U.S. higher education, these policies underscore institutions' responsibility to monitor academic

progress and uphold degree-completion standards (Geiger, 2014; Gordon et al., 2011). Historically, higher education operated within institutional structures characterized by prescribed curricula, faculty authority, and systems of rules and discipline. Early colleges served relatively narrow student populations, and institutional leaders and faculty exercised substantial authority over students' academic, moral, and social lives (Cook, 2009; Kuhn, 2008). As higher education expanded and student populations became more diverse, advising and student-support structures developed to address students' academic, personal, and developmental needs (Cook, 2009; Kuhn, 2008). Academic dismissal nevertheless remained one mechanism through which institutions enforced academic standards and determined students' continued enrollment (Gordon et al., 2011).

Contemporary academic notice policies often articulate goals related to student improvement and persistence, yet analysis of policy discourse shows that regulatory, classification, and punitive language may complicate these intentions (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022). Although academic probation policies are often intended as motivational wake-up calls, emerging evidence suggests placement on academic probation can produce unintended negative consequences, including immediate attrition before students enroll in the probationary term or can engage with institutional support services (Bowman & Fenton-Miller, 2025). Despite these intentions, policy and institutional communications often retain elements of earlier, compliance-oriented models, emphasizing punitive language, eligibility criteria, and consequences (Brady, 2017). This historical layering contributes to ambiguity and negative connotations in how students and advisors understand academic notice.

Academic Notice as a Regulatory and Developmental Tool

Academic notice sits between regulation and development (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022). It establishes consequences for continued academic difficulty and is framed as an opportunity for reflection, support, and improvement (Grites, 2013). Therefore, students may receive mixed messages when a process described as supportive also carries the possibility of dismissal (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015). For advisors, this dual purpose creates interpretive complexity because professional knowledge, beliefs, and institutional context may influence how academic-standing policies are interpreted and how accountability and support are communicated to students (McGill, 2019; Morris & Harris, 2022; Spillane et al., 2002).

Academic Notice as a Socially Constructed Policy Process

From a social constructionist perspective, academic notice acquires meaning through institutional discourse and interaction rather than through policy text alone (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). Student accounts illustrate this process: Rodriguez (2019) found some students associated academic probation with stigma, punishment, and diminished belonging, demonstrating how institutional terminology can become part of students' understandings of themselves and their academic standing. Advising conversations are one setting in which these meanings may be negotiated. Advisors explain requirements and next steps, and local sensemaking can vary how policy messages are conveyed across contexts (Grites, 2013; Lowenstein, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002).

Policy-Level Equity Implications of Academic Notice

The preceding discussion establishes academic notice as a regulatory and socially constructed policy process. A related body of scholarship critiques academic standing policies that rely on deficit-oriented frameworks, attributing students' academic difficulties primarily to

perceived shortcomings rather than considering institutional and structural factors that may contribute to these challenges (Harper, 2010; Valencia, 2010). Such framings shape how academic notice is designed, communicated, and implemented, influencing whether institutional responses affirm students' strengths or reinforce stigmatizing narratives. When grounded in deficit-oriented assumptions, academic notice policies may reproduce inequitable or stigmatizing understandings of academic difficulty (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Valencia, 2010). From this perspective, equity in academic notice depends not only on formal policy provisions but also on the meanings attached to academic difficulty and how those meanings are communicated in practice.

Qualitative research has shown that students on academic probation may interpret institutional classifications as reflections of personal failure, which can contribute to shame, embarrassment, and reluctance to seek support. Barouch-Gilbert (2015) found that students labeled academically deficient described feelings of failure and embarrassment, along with limited understanding of academic expectations and institutional processes. Similarly, McPherson and Arbelo Marrero (2021) found Latinx community college students on academic probation experienced emotional distress and challenges navigating institutional expectations while balancing academic, employment, and family responsibilities. Rodriguez (2019) found students on academic probation reported diminished perceptions of their academic abilities and uncertainty about their place within the campus community. These experiences illustrated how academic-standing classifications may shape students' academic identities, perceptions of belonging, and engagement with institutional support. Beyond students' experiences, Barouch-Gilbert (2022) showed how academic probation policies can reflect institutional priorities around classification, regulation, and retention, while Dix et al. (2020) highlighted how higher education

professionals negotiate the potentially stigmatizing implications of deficit-oriented student labels. Taken together, this scholarship positions academic notice as a policy domain in which institutional regulation, developmental considerations, policy discourse, and student experiences intersect (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015, 2022; Dix et al., 2020; McPherson & Arbelo Marrero, 2021; Rodriguez, 2019). Less understood, however, is how academic advisors interpret and navigate these intersecting dynamics within their institutional contexts.

Institutional Variability of Academic Notice Policy

Academic notice policies vary across institutions and sometimes across units within the same institution, including differences in GPA thresholds, duration, required interventions, financial aid implications, and conditions for return to good academic standing (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Gordon et al., 2011). Such differences occur within broader institutional contexts shaped by mission, governance, student populations, and resources (Geiger, 2014; Kuhn, 2008). These contexts can also affect advisors' discretion and the options available to students. Rigid enforcement structures may narrow opportunities for individualized responses, whereas more flexible advising environments may provide greater room for professional judgment (Drake et al., 2013; Grites, 2013; Morris & Harris, 2022). Therefore, institutional variability provides important context for the following examination of academic advisors as interpreters and enactors of policy.

Academic Advisors as Interpreters and Enactors of Policy

The preceding literature positioned academic notice as a historically layered, institutionally variable policy with regulatory, developmental, and equity implications. This section narrows the focus to academic advisors and examines how they enact policy. The aim is

to provide a foundation for how advisors' sensemaking and street-level bureaucracy help conceptualize their professional judgment within academic-standing processes.

Policy as Practice: Advisor Sensemaking and Interpretation

Formal academic-standing policies establish rules and procedures, but implementation still requires professional judgment. Therefore, policy implementation scholarship focuses on the everyday decisions through which written requirements become practice. Lipsky's (2010) theory of street-level bureaucracy further illuminates this process by conceptualizing frontline professionals as de facto policymakers whose discretionary decisions and routine practices effectively constitute policy as clients experience it. Lipsky argued that because street-level actors operate under constraints, ambiguity, and competing demands, they inevitably rely on professional judgment and interpretive routines to translate formal policy into action (Lipsky, 2010). Applied to academic advising, this framework positions advisors as street-level bureaucrats whose discretionary choices (e.g., how academic notice is framed, the degree of flexibility emphasized, the extent to which student context is acknowledged) shape the enacted form of academic notice policy. Honig (2006) extended this view by describing educational policy implementation as an interactive process shaped by actors, organizational routines, and institutional contexts. Together, Lipsky and Honig provided a basis for examining advisor judgment without treating policy enactment as either mechanical application or unconstrained individual choice.

Advisor Sensemaking and the Social Construction of Academic Notice

From a social constructionist perspective, academic notice does not carry a fixed meaning independent of interaction; students encounter it through institutional language, messages, and advising practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Educational implementation scholarship

similarly emphasizes that practitioners, organizational conditions, and local contexts shape implementation. Century and Cassata (2016) synthesized implementation research and highlighted the importance of examining what is implemented, how implementation unfolds, and the individuals and contexts involved. Scholarship on policy sensemaking further suggested implementing agents interpret policy through existing knowledge and local contexts (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995), while Honig (2006) highlighted the influence of organizational norms, professional roles, and institutional histories. Advising scholarship offers a parallel account of professional meaning-making. Crowe (2020) found advisors and advising administrators framed advising-as-teaching through professional philosophies, theoretical commitments, and institutional contexts. Applied to academic notice, this literature suggested students' understandings may be influenced by how institutional expectations are explained and contextualized, making variation in enactment a relevant empirical question rather than an assumption of uniform practice (Honig, 2006; Troxel, 2018).

Policy as Nonneutral: Power, Values, and Institutional Assumptions

Academic notice policies reflect institutional values and assumptions about responsibility, merit, and academic success. Scholars have argued that policies governing academic standing often embed deficit-oriented narratives in policy discourse, classifying and regulating students as individually responsible for academic failure while obscuring structural and contextual factors such as inequitable preparation, financial stress, caregiving responsibilities, or campus climate (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022). Brady (2017) demonstrated that students' responses to academic probation were shaped not only by the status itself but also by how it was communicated. Impersonal or compliance-oriented notification practices could contribute to stigma, shame, or fear. Student accounts of academic probation highlight that these

policy messages are often perceived as punitive and confusing. Many students first discover their probation status through impersonal institutional emails or registration holds. This experience can lead to embarrassment and confusion, causing some students to delay seeking help because communication about academic standing requirements is unclear (McPherson & Arbelo Marrero, 2021). Qualitative research examining higher education professionals' use of the at-risk label showed that practitioners interpret the term inconsistently and often resist it, recognizing its stigmatizing and deficit-oriented implications for students (Dix et al., 2020).

Institutional policies are produced within power structures and reflect values, priorities, and assumptions rather than functioning as purely neutral instruments (Ball, 2015). Extending this understanding to higher education policy implementation, Felix and Nienhusser (2023) explained that critical approaches examine how institutional power, underlying values, and organizational structures shape policy enactment and may reproduce inequities. According to Ball's (2015) distinction between policy as text and policy as discourse, academic notice policies operate not only through written requirements but also through the discursive conditions that shape advisors' and students' understandings of academic success, failure, and responsibility. Advisors mediate these institutional expectations through interpretive practice. Consistent with Rendón et al.'s (2000) critique of assimilationist retention models, an equity-oriented perspective asks whether institutional practices affirm students or require them to adapt to dominant institutional norms. Applied to academic notice, advisor communication may reproduce deficit-oriented framings or help counter them by emphasizing growth, capacity, and institutional responsibility (Rendón et al., 2000; Spillane et al., 2002). Using a relational, asset-based approach is especially consequential for students placed on academic notice, who may already be questioning their sense of belonging or academic identity.

Advisor Discretion and Interpretive Agency

Academic advisors exercise professional judgment within the formal boundaries of academic-standing policy. Their work may involve adapting advising approaches to students' individual circumstances while navigating institutional expectations and requirements (McGill, 2019; Morris & Harris, 2022). Honig (2006) emphasized that discretion is embedded in organizational systems rather than exercised independently of local structures, resources, and norms.

Advising philosophy, professional preparation, workload, institutional culture, and distributing authority can, therefore, influence the scope and character of advisor discretion (Crowe, 2020; Gordon et al., 2011; Honig, 2006; Museus, 2021). These factors may help explain why advisors working under the same broad policy framework approach student support differently. Despite recognition of professional judgment in advising and implementation scholarship, limited empirical attention has focused on how advisors exercise that judgment specifically within academic notice. This gap makes advisor discretion and its organizational boundaries an important focus of the present study.

Communication, Framing, and Messaging

Communication is one way students encounter academic notice. Research suggests that academic-standing labels and messages can influence students' interpretations, emotional responses, motivation, and willingness to seek support (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015; Brady, 2017). Accordingly, language used to explain academic standing matters. Advisors may contextualize institutional terminology and clarify pathways forward, and communication centered on risk or failure may intensify anxiety or disengagement. This communicative role is consistent with understanding advising as a meaning-making practice (Lowenstein, 2005).

Variability in Policy Interpretation and Contextual Constraints

Academic notice policies vary across and within institutions in criteria, duration, required interventions, consequences, and related practices (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Gordon et al., 2011). Spillane et al.'s (2002) sensemaking framework helps explain why local norms, professional cultures, organizational routines, and prior knowledge can vary in enactment. Honig (2006) similarly argued that such variation can be an inherent feature of implementation in complex educational systems rather than simply evidence of failure.

Institutional context also shapes advisors' latitude. Caseloads, enforcement structures, professional roles, resources, and institutional priorities can enable or constrain discretionary and relational work (Honig, 2006; Kezar, 2014). These conditions help explain why students may encounter different academic-notice practices even within the same institution.

Equity Implications of Advisor Interpretation

Academic notice carries equity implications because students encounter academic difficulty within unequal educational and institutional contexts. Research on deficit thinking, culturally responsive advising, and ecological validation highlights uneven access to resources, validation, and culturally responsive support among first-generation, low-income, racially minoritized, and other at-promise students (Kitchen et al., 2021; Museus, 2021; Patton Davis & Museus, 2019). Academic-standing discourse may also foreground individual performance and give less attention to structural and contextual conditions (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022).

Lipsky's (2010) theory of street-level bureaucracy provides a structural lens for considering these concerns. Frontline professionals exercise discretion amid ambiguity, constraints, and workload pressure, and routine practices may produce different experiences

when applied in unequal institutional contexts. Therefore, equity questions involve not only policy design but also the conditions under which professionals exercise discretion.

Research on higher education professionals' engagement with deficit labels has suggested practitioners may also recognize and resist stigmatizing framings through relational and asset-based practices (Dix et al., 2020). Such efforts require intentionality because efficiency-driven routines can otherwise reproduce existing patterns of treatment (Lipsky, 2010). Frink's (2021) qualitative study of African American and Latinx students on academic probation illustrated these stakes. Participants' experiences of academic difficulty and recovery were intertwined with race, politics, microaggressions, belonging, and institutional interactions, with some students describing experiences of fear and silence. Frink also found students often did not seek help, leaving available academic support resources underused. These accounts showed how academic-standing processes can feel exclusionary even when support resources exist.

Daily advising practice is one site through which equity may be advanced or constrained (Museus, 2021; Rendón, 1994). Because advisors often communicate academic-standing expectations directly to students, their use of contextual, validating, or strengths-based approaches warrants attention when examining academic recovery and equity. Policy implementation and advising scholarship provide a conceptual basis for examining academic notice through institutional context, professional judgment, communication, and relational practice. Crowe's (2020) study showed how advisors construct meaning around advising-as-teaching through professional philosophy and sensemaking, and student-centered studies documented the emotional and identity-related dimensions of academic probation (Rodriguez, 2019). Less understood is how advisors themselves make sense of academic notice policy. The

following section considers how this interpretive work becomes visible through specific advising interventions.

Advising Interventions During Academic Notice

Interventions for students on academic probation may include structured academic advising, probation contracts, special courses, skills workshops, and other support services intended to facilitate academic recovery (Bowman & Fenton-Miller, 2025). Although institutions may standardize or require specific interventions, advisors implement them within advising relationships in which they communicate expectations, respond to student context, and connect students with institutional resources. From a policy sensemaking perspective, these interventions can, therefore, be examined not only as programmatic structures but also as sites where formal academic-standing expectations are translated into student-facing practice (Spillane et al., 2002). Academic notice policies often mandate or recommend interventions like required advising meetings, academic contracts, success plans, or workshops (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022). However, advisors implement them within relational and organizational contexts by explaining their purpose, assessing student needs, and connecting requirements with academic goals and available resources.

Advisor Framing and Student Meaning-Making

Broader advising research has linked supportive advising with students' self-efficacy and perceived support (Young-Jones et al., 2013), and research on academic probation has suggested unclear or punitive communication can contribute to shame, confusion, and disengagement (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015). Together, these findings suggested how interventions are communicated may be an important component of students' academic notice experiences.

Therefore, communication is part of the intervention itself, not merely a mechanism for informing students that an intervention is required.

Proactive Advising as Interpretive Engagement

Among commonly used interventions, proactive outreach illustrates how institutional support can be initiated rather than left solely to student self-referral. Building on earlier models of intrusive advising, Varney (2013) conceptualized proactive advising as advisor-initiated engagement intended to connect students with guidance and support before academic challenges intensify. This orientation is also consistent with validation theory (Rendón, 1994), which emphasizes the importance of institutional agents initiating validating interactions rather than requiring students to seek validation independently. Applied to academic notice, proactive advising, therefore, provides a useful framework for examining how advisor-initiated communication may shape students' access to support and understanding of institutional expectations.

Common Interventions, Advisor Discretion, and Institutional Constraints

Institutions use interventions like mandated advising appointments, academic success plans or contracts, early alert systems, success coaching, peer mentoring, and skill-building workshops (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022). Advisors may retain varying degrees of discretion in implementing these interventions, with autonomy shaped by institutional and departmental contexts (McGill, 2019). Required appointments, academic plans, and early alerts can, therefore, carry different meanings depending on how institutions contextualize and communicate their purposes. Following Tinto's (2017) conceptualization of persistence as influenced by self-efficacy, belonging, and perceived value, these interactions may represent important institutional touchpoints through which students encounter support and assess their capacity to continue.

Accordingly, evaluating academic notice interventions requires attention to formal program design and the professional judgment exercised within institutional constraints.

Advisors' capacity to implement academic notice interventions is shaped by advising models, caseload size, policy rigidity, available resources, and professional autonomy (Gordon et al., 2011). Standardized or highly centralized environments may limit individualized support, whereas developmental advising and cross-campus collaboration may create more room for relational work (Drake et al., 2013; Lowenstein, 2015). These conditions help explain variation in how similar interventions are implemented across settings.

Implications for Academic Notice and Equity

Review of intervention design alone is insufficient for understanding academic notice. Students may experience academic-standing processes as stigmatizing when communication is unclear or relational support is limited (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; McPherson & Arbelo Marrero, 2021; Patton Davis & Museus, 2019), and institutional conditions also shape implementation. However, limited empirical research has examined these processes from advisors' perspectives, which helps explain the gaps addressed in the following section.

Synthesis of the Literature and Identified Gaps

Although the literature on academic advising, student development, and equity in higher education is extensive, several gaps remain in understanding how academic advisors construct meaning around the purpose and function of academic notice policies and how they interpret and enact those policies in practice. Existing research provides valuable insight into student outcomes, advising models, and equity frameworks; however, it rarely centers the interpretive work advisors perform when supporting students placed on academic notice. These gaps underscore the need for qualitative inquiry that highlights advisors' perspectives, sensemaking

processes, and equity-oriented practices within institutional contexts, building on conceptualizations of advising as an interpretive practice (Lowenstein, 2005) and of policy enactment as a sensemaking process (Spillane et al., 2002). Drawing on Spillane et al.'s (2002) policy sensemaking framework, which conceptualizes frontline practitioners as active interpreters of policy, this study examines how advisors' interpretations, shaped by professional knowledge and institutional context, intersect with equity-oriented advising frameworks.

Limited Attention to Advisors' Meaning-Making and Policy Interpretation

Most research on academic notice focuses on policy structure, students' experiences of academic-deficiency labeling, or intervention outcomes (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015, 2022). Comparatively little scholarship has examined how academic advisors themselves understand the purpose and function of academic notice within their institutional contexts. This omission leaves important questions unanswered about how advisors understand policy intent, navigate tensions between institutional control and student development, and connect those interpretations to advising practice.

Underexamined Role of Advisor Discretion and Policy Enactment

Advising scholarship and professional standards recognize that academic advisors draw on theoretical and conceptual knowledge, professional competencies, institutional knowledge, and professional judgment as central components of their practice (Menke et al., 2018; NACADA, 2023a; Shaffer et al., 2010). The updated *Definition of and Scope of Practice for Academic Advising* (NACADA, 2026) further recognizes academic advising as a research-informed profession grounded in interpersonal relationships and specialized expertise concerning how institutional curricula, policies, and cultures intersect with students' educational goals and experiences. The document explicitly identifies interpreting institutional policies and procedures

in ways responsive to individual students, contributing professional expertise to institutional policies and organizational structures, and representing the institution while prioritizing students' individual circumstances as academic advisors' responsibilities (NACADA, 2026). Together, these professional frameworks position advisors as skilled practitioners who integrate relational expertise, contextual understanding, and institutional expectations to support student success. Despite this recognition, empirical research remains limited on how advisors explicitly leverage these professional strengths in policy-laden advising contexts, including academic notice (McGill, 2019).

This gap in the literature leaves advisors' interpretive agency within academic-standing processes insufficiently understood. Advisors make consequential decisions about how they communicate policy language, which interventions they emphasize, and how they balance institutional expectations with students' academic, personal, and contextual needs. When researchers leave these interpretive choices underexamined, the literature offers an incomplete account of how academic notice policies function in practice and how advisors' professional judgments shape students' experiences of academic difficulty.

Insufficient Focus on Equity in Policy Interpretation and Implementation

Though research on equity-minded advising, deficit thinking, validation, and culturally responsive practice has expanded, few studies have examined how these perspectives inform advisors' interpretation and enactment of academic notice policies. Academic-standing policies can classify and regulate students through deficit-oriented language and institutional standards that shape how academic difficulty is understood and experienced (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022), and scholarship on first-generation, low-income, racially minoritized, and other at-promise students emphasizes asset-based, validating, and institutionally responsive approaches to student support

(Kitchen et al., 2021; Museus, 2021). However, limited empirical attention has examined how advisors draw on these perspectives when communicating academic notice, framing academic difficulty, or navigating tensions between institutional expectations and relational care. This gap under examines how equity-oriented commitments enter the everyday interpretation and enactment of academic-standing policy.

Lack of Qualitative Research Centering Advisors' Voices

Existing research on academic notice focuses heavily on measurable student outcomes, including academic performance, retention, and persistence (Brady, 2017; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Though this research provides valuable evidence about relationships between advising, academic standing, and student outcomes, it provides less insight into the relational, contextual, and meaning-making dimensions of advisors' practice. As a result, qualitative research that centers advisors' voices, explores their lived experiences, and examines how advising work is shaped through everyday interactions with students experiencing academic difficulty has remained limited. Qualitative inquiry is particularly useful for illuminating the professional judgment, meaning-making, and contextual reasoning involved in advising practice (Lowenstein, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). Centering advisors' perspectives can, therefore, extend existing research by showing how academic notice work is understood and carried out within everyday institutional settings.

Advising Approaches, Equity Frameworks, and Policy Interpretation

Although advising approaches like developmental, proactive, and strengths-based advising are well established in the literature (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972), and student development theories emphasizing validation, cultural assets, and ecological context are similarly well developed (Kitchen et al., 2021; Rendón et al., 2000; Yosso, 2005), these

frameworks are often examined separately from institutional policy contexts. As a result, advising scholarship tends to focus on how advisors support students or why equity-minded practices matter, without thoroughly examining how these approaches shape advisors' interpretations and enactments of institutional policies. The literature reviewed for this study revealed limited integration of these bodies of scholarship in examining how advisors draw on professional strengths, cultural responsiveness, and equity-minded practices when interpreting academic notice policies within institutional constraints (Museus, 2021; Spillane et al., 2002).

This lack of integration limits understanding of advising as an interpretive practice situated at the intersection of policy, equity, and student development. When advising approaches and equity frameworks are disconnected from policy enactment, institutional policies (e.g., academic notice) may be treated as neutral or technical mechanisms rather than as sites where meaning, power, and equity are actively constructed through advising practice. Research that bridges these domains is, therefore, needed to examine how advisors translate institutional policy into affirming, developmental, and equity-oriented support for students experiencing academic difficulty, particularly in moments of academic vulnerability.

Gaps and Rationale for the Present Study

The literature revealed a persistent gap in understanding academic notice from advisors' perspectives. Although existing research documents policy structures, advising models, student experiences, and outcomes, it has paid comparatively less attention to advisors' sensemaking, discretion, and equity-oriented practice during policy enactment (Lowenstein, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). This gap matters because academic notice is experienced within unequal institutional and educational contexts, and professional interactions are one site through which equity may be advanced or constrained (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022; Museus, 2021).

Addressing these gaps, the present study centered academic advisors' voices to examine how they understand the purpose and function of academic notice, interpret and enact policy in practice, and draw on asset-based, validating, and equity-minded perspectives while navigating institutional expectations. In doing so, the study connected scholarship on academic advising, policy implementation, and equity in higher education. The following chapter outlines the qualitative methodology and research design used to examine these questions.

Summary

Chapter 2 reviewed literature on academic advising, student development, academic notice policies, and equity in higher education to situate this study within the existing scholarship. The chapter traced the historical foundations and evolving professionalization of academic advising, examined advising approaches and student success outcomes, and reviewed academic notice as a high-stakes institutional policy shaped by regulatory, developmental, and equity-oriented frameworks. Across these bodies of literature, advising emerged as a relational, interpretive practice through which institutional policies are translated into lived student experience.

Literature also highlighted academic advisors as professionals whose judgment, sensemaking, and relational engagement shape how they communicate academic notice in student-facing practice. Strengths-based, equity-minded, and validating perspectives provide additional lenses for examining how advising may challenge deficit-oriented narratives and support students' agency, belonging, and academic recovery. However, existing research has paid limited attention to advisors' perspectives on these processes. Together, this review established the need for qualitative inquiry that centers academic advisors' voices and examines policy sensemaking, professional judgment, institutional context, and equity-oriented practice.

Chapter 3 builds on this foundation by outlining the qualitative research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, and analytic approach used in the present study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

In this basic qualitative study, I examined how academic advisors interpreted and enacted academic notice policies within a public research university. I explored how advisors balanced institutional expectations with their commitment to supporting students experiencing academic difficulty. Grounded in a social constructionist ontology and epistemology and a social constructionist understanding of meaning-making, and informed by critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011) and validation theory (Rendón, 1994), the inquiry examined advisors' sensemaking processes and how these processes shaped the implementation of academic notice policy in practice.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were:

Research Question (RQ) 1: How do academic advisors make sense of the purpose and function of academic notice policies within their institutional context?

RQ2: How do academic advisors interpret and enact academic notice policies in their day-to-day advising practice?

RQ3: How do academic advisors draw on asset-based, validating, and equity-minded frameworks to navigate tensions between institutional expectations and relational care when supporting students on academic notice?

In this study, I examined how academic advisors interpreted and enacted academic notice policy within a single public research university. The institution provided an information-rich setting for examining policy interpretation and enactment because academic notice expectations were established at the institutional level, while academic advising responsibilities were distributed across academic schools and programs. This decentralized advising structure was an

important characteristic of the institutional context, not a defining feature of public universities generally. Higher education institutions operate within distinctive governance systems, cultural norms, and organizational arrangements that influence how policies are understood and enacted in practice (Kezar, 2014; Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1976). Within this environment, academic advisors engage in sensemaking as they interpret formal policy language, reconcile institutional expectations with professional values, and translate academic notice into advising interactions. This chapter describes the study's methodological framework, including the research paradigm and design, institutional context, participant selection, data collection procedures, analytic strategies, and approaches to trustworthiness and ethical rigor. Given the interpretive nature of the research questions and the focus on participants' meaning-making processes, a qualitative approach was appropriate.

Research Paradigm

I situated this study within a social constructionist ontology and epistemology. This paradigm recognizes that reality is socially constructed through interaction, language, and context rather than existing as a singular objective truth (Crotty, 1998). From this perspective, academic notice policies are neither neutral nor self-executing; their meaning emerges through interpretation and enactment as individuals make sense of policy within professional practice (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Epistemologically, knowledge was understood as co-constructed by participants and the researcher through interpretation and meaning-making. This constructionist orientation aligns with interpretive qualitative approaches, particularly those advanced by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). A basic qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand how participants interpreted their experiences and constructed meaning around a phenomenon.

In addition to a social constructionist ontology and epistemology, critical theory and validation theory served as interpretive lenses for the analysis. Critical theory supported examining power, language, institutional expectations, and structural inequities embedded in policy and practice (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011), and validation theory (Rendón, 1994) foregrounded relational and affirming dimensions of advising practice. Together, these lenses supported interpretation of how academic notice was constructed, communicated, and enacted.

Research Design

I used a basic qualitative research design to explore how academic advisors interpreted and enacted academic notice policy within their advising practice. Basic qualitative research is well suited to examining how individuals make meaning of their experiences within socially and contextually situated environments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus was on advisors' perspectives and meaning-making processes rather than on the institution as a bounded case. The primary aim was to understand how advisors interpreted, communicated, and enacted academic notice policy. Guided by a constructionist orientation, I conceptualized academic notice as a policy whose practical meaning emerged through professional judgment, institutional expectations, organizational context, and advising interactions.

Institutional Context

The study took place at a large public research university with more than 29,000 undergraduate students. The institution maintained formal academic standing policies governing student progress, academic notice, and academic recovery. The university served a diverse undergraduate population across a broad range of academic disciplines and programs. Its size, student diversity, and organizational complexity made it a relevant setting for examining how a common institutional policy was interpreted and enacted across different advising contexts.

I selected the institution as the research site for both practical and methodological reasons. As an academic advisor employed at the institution, I was familiar with its academic advising structure, academic standing policies, and organizational context. This familiarity gave me a practical advantage in identifying and recruiting academic advising professionals with experience supporting students on academic notice. Beyond accessibility, the institution's decentralized advising structure offered an opportunity to examine how a shared institutional policy was interpreted and enacted across different organizational settings. Although academic notice requirements were established at the institutional level, I was aware through my professional experience that advising units differed in their approaches to academic notice, including the interventions, procedures, and forms of student support they provided. This variation made the institution a particularly relevant setting for examining how advisors made sense of academic notice and translated institutional expectations into advising practice. Selecting a single institution also allowed me to explore differences in policy enactment across advising units while maintaining a common institutional policy context. Thus, my research site selection reflected both the accessibility afforded by my professional role and the methodological value of examining academic notice within a decentralized advising environment.

The institution has approximately 14 undergraduate advising units across academic schools and programs. Academic advising is organized within a decentralized structure, with approximately 87 professional academic advisors and advising administrators working across these units. Advisors were embedded primarily within academic schools and programs rather than within a single centralized advising office. Advising contexts included STEM, health sciences, social and behavioral sciences, arts and humanities, professional programs, and university-wide or exploratory advising. Although academic notice policies were centrally

defined, advisors interpreted, communicated, and operationalized those policies within their respective organizational contexts.

Advising units vary in disciplinary context, the size and characteristics of the undergraduate populations they serve, curricular structures and degree requirements, staffing structures, available student-support resources, and local advising procedures. These differences created distinct organizational conditions within which advisors supported students experiencing academic difficulty. For example, advisors in units with highly structured or sequential curricula may face different academic constraints than advisors in programs that offered students greater curricular flexibility. Advising units also differed in the professional roles and levels of responsibility held by academic advisors, assistant directors, directors, and other institutional actors involved in academic-standing processes. Although advisors operated within a shared institutional policy framework, the organizational contexts in which they enact academic notice were not uniform.

The institution's decentralized advising structure provided an information-rich setting for examining how academic advisors interpreted and enacted a common institutional academic notice policy across varied organizational contexts. Although the institution set academic-standing expectations, advising responsibilities were distributed across academic units that differed in disciplinary focus, organizational arrangements, and student-support practices. This variation provided opportunities to explore how advisors understood and operationalized institutional policy within their respective advising environments. I recruited participants from multiple advising units and professional roles with direct experience supporting students on academic notice, enabling me to collect information-rich accounts of how they interpreted and enacted policy in everyday advising practice. Although organizational context mattered, the

study focused on advisors' interpretations, professional judgments, and enactment practices rather than systematic comparisons across advising units. The following section describes the participant selection and sampling strategy used to obtain these perspectives.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

I selected participants using purposive, criterion-based sampling to include individuals with direct experience interpreting and enacting academic notice policy (Patton, 2015). Eligible participants were advising professionals who worked with undergraduate students and had experience supporting students on academic notice. The final sample included 13 participants representing multiple advising contexts and organizational roles, including academic advisors, assistant directors, and directors.

Participants were recruited across multiple advising units to capture variation in advising contexts while maintaining a shared institutional policy environment. Variation in role, years of advising experience, and unit context provided access to perspectives associated with different forms of responsibility, decision authority, and professional discretion. To address my insider positionality and reduce potential role-related influence, I intentionally excluded my own academic advising unit from participant recruitment. Because I managed aspects of the academic notice process within that unit, I recognized that interviewing colleagues who worked directly with me could influence their willingness to discuss disagreements, challenges, or alternative approaches to academic notice. Excluding my unit was intended to reduce this potential influence while recognizing the decision also limited the perspectives represented in the sample.

I recruited participants through institution-wide communication (see Appendix A for the recruitment email). A Qualtrics screening survey confirmed eligibility and collected limited demographic and professional background information, including advising unit, years of

experience, and professional role (see Appendix B for the screening survey). This information supported purposive selection and was used descriptively to contextualize participants rather than as a primary source of analytic data.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source for examining how academic advisors interpreted and enacted academic notice as institutional policy and advising practice. I used publicly available institutional documents or materials participants voluntarily provided as contextual materials to support the interview process and interpretation. These materials included formal academic standing policies, student communications, advising guidelines, and other materials related to academic notice. I did not analyze institutional materials as a separate data source. Instead, I used them as references and, when relevant, prompts during interviews and analysis. This approach kept the study centered on participants' interpretations and experiences and grounded the formal and local policy environments they described. I analyzed interview data to examine how advisors interpreted, communicated, and enacted academic notice within their advising practice. I used demographic and professional background information collected through the screening survey descriptively to contextualize the sample; I did not analyze it as a primary data source.

Recruitment

I recruited participants through an institution-wide email invitation distributed to academic advising professionals across undergraduate advising units at the study site. The invitation included a brief overview of the study's purpose, eligibility criteria, voluntary nature of participation, and a link to a Qualtrics screening survey. I then emailed eligible individuals who indicated interest in participating to schedule an interview.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source for exploring how academic advisors interpreted and enacted academic notice policies through their experiences, perspectives, and meaning-making processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). This method allowed participants to describe their interpretations of policy, communication with students, professional judgment, and how they navigated institutional expectations and relational care, while also providing flexibility to explore individual experiences in depth.

I conducted five in-person interviews and eight remote interviews via Zoom using a consistent semi-structured protocol. The protocol included open-ended questions and follow-up probes designed to elicit detailed accounts of advisors' interpretations, experiences, and professional judgment, and to allow emergent topics to be explored. Please see Appendix C for a copy of the interview questions and probes. The interview questions were aligned with the research questions and were informed by the study's constructionist orientation and theoretical lenses, without requiring participants to use the language of those frameworks.

With participant consent, I audio-recorded and transcribed interviews. I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy before coding. I wrote analytic and reflexive memos throughout data collection and analysis to document contextual details, emerging questions, initial interpretations, and reflections relevant to the developing analysis (Saldaña, 2016). As a credibility strategy, participants reviewed their transcripts and confirmed that the interview captured what they communicated.

Institutional Documents

In this study, I used institutional documents as contextual materials to support and inform the interview process. Materials included academic standing policies, student communications,

advising resources, and other documents related to academic notice. Participants submitted materials voluntarily, and they were instructed not to provide documents containing student-identifying or protected information.

I also consulted publicly available institutional materials, including academic standing policies in the university catalog, advising websites, and other student-facing resources. I documented the source and context of relevant materials when they informed interview probes or analytic interpretation. These materials supported interview probes and clarified policy language or unit practices participants described. I did not code or analyze documents as standalone data. Their primary function was to provide contextual reference points for understanding how participants described interpreting and enacting academic notice policy.

Data Collection Procedures

This subsection outlines the procedures for obtaining informed consent, conducting interviews, and securely managing data. Data collection followed procedures designed to support systematic, ethical, and transparent qualitative inquiry. These procedures included informed consent, semi-structured interviewing, researcher review of transcripts for accuracy, analytic and reflexive memoing, and secure data management.

Informed Consent

I provided participants with a consent form before data collection; see Appendix D for a copy of the informed consent form sent to participants. The consent materials described the study purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality protections, the voluntary nature of participation, and participants' right to discontinue participation. I obtained consent to participate and to audio-record interviews before each interview.

Timeline

Following institutional review approval, I conducted 13 semi-structured interviews between May 8, 2026, and May 22, 2026, over 15 days. I scheduled interviews individually based on participants' availability and engaged in analytic and reflexive memoing during data collection to document initial observations and emerging interpretations. After completing the interviews, I reviewed the interview transcripts and continued data analysis through July 2026. This process aligned with qualitative research methodology that treats data collection and analysis as interconnected and iterative rather than strictly separate phases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Analytic memoing supported documenting emerging insights, researcher reflections, and developing interpretations throughout the analytic process (Saldaña, 2021).

The 15-day interview period was sufficient to complete the planned interviews with all 13 participants, while the subsequent analytic period provided additional time for systematic transcript review, coding, memoing, and cross-case analysis. Although interviews were conducted within a relatively concentrated timeframe, the continued engagement with data through July 2026 supported a more sustained examination of participants' perspectives and experiences. This combination of focused data collection and extended analysis fit the study's basic qualitative design and its emphasis on understanding how academic advisors interpreted and enacted academic notice policy.

Data Storage and Security

In this study, I managed data in accordance with Institutional Review Board requirements. I assigned participants pseudonyms and removed identifying information from transcripts and analytic materials. Audio files, transcripts, screening information, analytic memos, and related study materials were stored in secure, access-controlled locations. Data

retention and destruction followed the timeline and procedures approved through the institutional review board.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was iterative and interpretive, involving multiple stages of engagement with the interview data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Analysis focused on how participants constructed meaning around academic notice, how they described policy enactment in day-to-day practice, and how organizational, professional, and relational conditions shaped their work.

Interview transcripts constituted the principal analytic dataset. Analytic memos and contextual materials supported interpretation but did not replace participants' accounts as the primary basis for the findings. I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software to organize, code, retrieve, compare, and manage interview data. I remained responsible for interpretive decisions, category development, cross-case analysis, and developing findings.

Analysis progressed through several stages. After interviews, I reviewed transcripts for accuracy and read them closely to become familiar with participants' accounts. In the first coding cycle, I used in vivo coding to foreground participants' language and identify concepts grounded in their descriptions of academic notice. In the second cycle, I used focused coding to identify analytically significant codes, consolidate related concepts into broader categories, and examine relationships among those categories (Saldaña, 2016). The analysis then moved to cross-case comparison and synthesis, examining patterns, variation, tensions, and boundary conditions across participants. Analytic memos and cross-case matrices supported development and refinement of the eight findings presented in Chapter 4.

Interview Analysis

Analysis began with close engagement with each participant's interview. Following each interview, I documented initial impressions, emerging questions, and contextual observations through analytic memoing. I reviewed interview transcripts for accuracy and read them closely to become familiar with each participant's account before and during coding.

In the first cycle of analysis, I used in vivo coding to foreground participants' language and preserve the terms and phrases they used to describe their experiences (Saldaña, 2016). This approach aligned with the study's constructionist orientation by closely attending to how participants constructed meaning around academic notice. In vivo coding captured language related to participants' understandings of academic notice, institutional expectations, advising practices, professional judgment, organizational context, student support, accountability, and academic recovery.

Coding remained inductively oriented rather than being organized around predetermined theoretical categories. Codes emerged through close engagement with participants' accounts, allowing patterns and concepts to arise from data rather than imposing categories derived from the study's theoretical frameworks. Analytic memoing accompanied first-cycle coding to document emerging patterns, questions, connections across interviews, and developing interpretations.

Focused and Cross-Case Analysis

After completing first-cycle in vivo coding, a second cycle of focused coding identified and developed the most analytically significant patterns across the dataset (Saldaña, 2016). Focused coding involved reviewing initial codes, comparing their meanings and relationships, and organizing conceptually related codes into broader categories. This process moved the

analysis beyond participants' individual language toward higher-level interpretations of how academic notice was understood and enacted across advising contexts.

As focused coding progressed, the analysis compared categories across participants to identify convergence, variation, tensions, and relationships among participants' accounts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During analysis, I considered not only whether an idea appeared across interviews but also the conditions under which it appeared and whether other participants' accounts extended, complicated, or established boundaries around an emerging interpretation. This comparative process was particularly important within the decentralized institutional context because differences among participants could reflect organizational position, advising context, decision authority, professional discretion, available resources, or local implementation practices rather than individual preference alone.

I subsequently moved into cross-case synthesis, comparing focused categories and supporting coded excerpts across participants to develop broader analytic claims addressing the research questions. Through iterative comparison, the analysis examined related focused categories across cases and refined them into higher-order analytic claims that became the eight cross-case findings presented in Chapter 4. Analytic matrices compared evidence across participants and organized evidence as exemplar, supporting, variation, and boundary evidence for emerging findings. This process refined the scope and meaning of each finding, ensured the findings reflected patterns across the dataset, and preserved meaningful differences among participants. Cross-case analysis ultimately resulted in eight findings, which were organized for presentation in Chapter 4 within three broader analytic domains. The domains served as an organizational structure for presenting related findings rather than replacing the eight findings as the study's primary analytic claim.

Role of Theory in Analysis

In this study, I used an inductively oriented analytic process in which theory informed interpretation rather than establishing a priori coding structure. Social constructionism sensitized the analysis to how academic notice acquired meaning through language, interaction, interpretation, and organizational context. Critical theory informed the examination of authority, institutional expectations, organizational structures, resource distribution, policy assumptions, and how organizational conditions enabled or constrained professional practice (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011). Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) informed later interpretation of relational practices, including affirmation, communication, student agency, belonging, and the conditions through which participants described supportive advising.

Using theory as a sensitizing and interpretive lens helped preserve the distinction between what participants said and how those accounts were interpreted theoretically. This was particularly important for RQ3. Participants were not required to identify their work explicitly as validation, asset-based practice, or equity-minded advising for their accounts to contribute to analysis. Instead, I used the theoretical frameworks during interpretation to examine the relational and structural significance of participants' descriptions.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the extent to which a study's findings and interpretations are credible, well-grounded in the data, and supported by a transparent and systematic research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) conceptualized trustworthiness through four interconnected criteria: (a) credibility, (b) dependability, (c) confirmability, and (d) transferability. In this study, I addressed these criteria through strategies appropriate to the research design and interpretive orientation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Consistent with the

study's social constructionist orientation, I understood rigor as transparency, coherence, contextual grounding, and a demonstrable relationship between participants' accounts and the interpretations developed from them, rather than as researcher neutrality or statistical replicability. Several features of the research and analytic process contributed to trustworthiness, including in-depth, semi-structured interviews; repeated engagement with transcripts; iterative analytic and reflexive memoing; systematic first- and second-cycle coding; cross-case comparison; attention to variation and boundary evidence; contextual materials; and documentation of analytic decisions.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the extent to which findings offer a trustworthy, well-supported representation of participants' experiences, perspectives, and the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I supported credibility through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that gave participants opportunities to describe their understandings and practices in detail. During the interviews, I used follow-up probes to clarify participants' meanings and prompt specific examples rather than relying solely on generalized descriptions. Contextual institutional materials also supported interpretation by clarifying the formal terminology, local procedures, and policy environments participants described. These materials did not function as independent triangulating evidence of participants' practices because they were not formally analyzed as a separate dataset. Instead, they provided contextual grounding that supported interpreting participants' accounts.

Credibility was further supported through repeated engagement with interview transcripts, participant transcript review, analytic memoing, and comparative analysis across 13

participants representing multiple advising contexts and organizational positions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study examined emerging interpretations against supporting, varying, and boundary accounts rather than relying solely on the most illustrative participant examples. I used direct participant quotations in the findings presentation to show the relationship between participants' accounts and the analytic claims developed through the study.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research concerns the consistency and transparency of the research process, including the extent to which methodological decisions and procedures are documented and can be examined (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I supported dependability through systematically documenting research and analytic procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I maintained records of interview materials, coding development, analytic memos, category refinement, cross-participant comparisons, and findings development. The analytic process moved through identifiable stages, from first-cycle in vivo coding to second-cycle focused coding, category development, cross-case comparison, and refining findings. Documenting these stages created an audit trail showing how interpretations developed over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which qualitative findings can be traced to the data and analytic processes rather than being determined primarily by the researcher's assumptions or preferences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I addressed confirmability through reflexive memoing and continued attention to the relationship between evidence and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because I occupied an insider position at the study institution and had prior professional experience with academic notice, reflexivity was particularly

important for examining how my assumptions and professional experiences could have shaped my interpretations. Following each interview, I documented reflexive memos in NVivo to record my initial reactions, assumptions, and emerging interpretations. These memos gave me opportunities to critically examine my expectations, especially when participants described perspectives or practices that differed from my professional experience. Throughout the analysis, I examined whether emerging interpretations were supported by participants' accounts, considered contradictory or complicating evidence, and questioned whether I privileged familiar or preferred narratives. Direct participant quotations and explicit cross-case synthesis in Chapter 4 further demonstrate the connections between the data and findings.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research concerns the extent to which findings may be applicable or meaningful in other contexts, with researchers providing sufficient contextual detail for readers to assess their relevance to different settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I did not seek statistical generalizability. Instead, it sought contextual and analytic transferability by describing the study setting, decentralized advising structure, participant roles, and organizational conditions in sufficient detail for readers to consider similarities and differences between this setting and other institutional environments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The single-institution design provides depth on one decentralized advising context. It allows readers to assess whether the concepts developed through the study may offer useful interpretive insight in other advising and academic-standing environments.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in qualitative research extend beyond formal institutional review requirements to include ongoing attention to informed consent, confidentiality, researcher–

participant relationships, and potential power dynamics throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I addressed these responsibilities through informed consent procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality protections, and attention to potential conflicts associated with my professional role at the study site. These considerations were particularly important because I conducted the research at the institution where I worked as an academic advisor at the time of the study.

To address potential power dynamics and ethical concerns associated with my professional role at the study institution, I implemented several safeguards. I did not hold supervisory, evaluative, or administrative authority over participants, and I did not recruit or interview advisors from my home advising unit. Participants were informed that their decision to participate, or decline, would not affect their professional roles or standing within the institution. Recruitment materials emphasized confidentiality and the study's independence from institutional evaluation or performance assessment processes.

Informed consent procedures emphasized participant autonomy and the right to withdraw without penalty, consistent with the approved consent procedures. I protected participants' identities by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifying information from transcripts and analytic materials. I managed research data in accordance with institutional review board requirements.

Because students were not participants in the study, I treated participants' descriptions of student responses and experiences as advisors' accounts rather than direct evidence of students' perspectives. These practices supported ethical responsibility throughout the research process while maintaining appropriate boundaries between my professional role and my responsibilities as a researcher.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

I conducted this study from a social constructionist perspective, recognizing my role as an active participant in the research process rather than a neutral observer. Knowledge is understood as socially constructed through interaction, interpretation, and reflexive engagement with participants and data (Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Accordingly, my positionality, professional background, and interpretive perspectives shaped how I approached the inquiry and interpreted participants' accounts.

As an academic advisor at the institution under investigation, I occupied an insider position shaped by sustained professional engagement with academic advising practices, institutional academic standing policies, and the everyday experiences of supporting students on academic notice. This professional knowledge informed my research questions and familiarized me with the institutional language, organizational structures, and advising practices participants described. It also sensitized me to the ways academic notice policies could be interpreted and enacted differently across advising contexts. At the same time, I recognized my professional experiences, assumptions about academic notice, and commitments to student-centered and equity-minded advising could influence the questions I asked, the aspects of participants' accounts I emphasized, and the interpretations I developed during analysis.

To examine these influences critically, I engaged in ongoing reflexivity through analytic memoing after each participant interview. I documented these memos in NVivo, recording my initial reactions, assumptions, emerging interpretations, and questions raised by participants' descriptions of their experiences. This process was especially important when participants described approaches to academic notice that differed from my professional perspectives or the practices in my advising unit. Rather than assuming my experiences represented the appropriate

or expected approach, I used these differences as opportunities to question my assumptions and consider alternative interpretations of how academic notice policies could be understood and enacted. These reflections helped me remain attentive to participants' perspectives while recognizing how my professional experiences informed my engagement with the data.

Reflexivity remained an important component of the research and analytic process. Consistent with interpretive qualitative inquiry, I understood reflexivity as an ongoing examination of how my experiences, assumptions, and theoretical commitments shaped knowledge development throughout the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rather than seeking to eliminate my subjectivity or establish objectivity through researcher distance, I made my assumptions visible and critically examined how they shaped my interpretations. This approach supported transparency and trustworthiness by encouraging me to consider alternative explanations and perspectives that complicated my initial understanding. By acknowledging my position within the institutional and professional context under investigation and engaging critically with its influence on interpretation, I sought to develop a credible, contextually grounded understanding of how academic advisors interpreted and enacted academic notice policies in practice.

Subjectivity Statement

Fifteen years ago, I began my career in higher education as an administrative assistant in student housing, where I worked for 8 years. Although I had already earned my bachelor's degree, I did not know how student affairs professionals supported students outside the classroom. As a nontraditional student who commuted, worked, and balanced parenting, my only engagement with the university was attending classes. When I began working in student affairs, I realized how much support and resources were available. Through my role in student housing, I

first explored student affairs as a career, which sparked my passion for helping students achieve their goals and enhance their campus experience.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my role as an administrative assistant was supervising 30 student staff members. This was many students' first job, and I took pride in providing a supportive environment where they could develop professional skills. I regularly met with them to discuss their career aspirations and academic progress. During these meetings, especially at quarterly grade checks, I noticed some students consistently had grade point averages (GPAs) below 2.0. In conversations with them, I discovered certain departments, particularly the more competitive ones, placed students on academic probation without offering much support. Through these discussions, I heard my students' stories of shame, fear, and uncertainty. These experiences opened my eyes to the lack of support for students facing academic difficulties.

These insights motivated me to return to school and pursue a master's in counseling in higher education. During my program, I explored various career paths. Still, I was drawn to academic advising because it let me build relationships with students and support them through their academic journeys and personal challenges. Through internships in disability services and research, I gained experience across departments and institution types.

In 2020, amid the uncertainty of the early COVID-19 global pandemic, I returned to the university where I had worked previously, this time as an academic advisor. Initially, I was hesitant because of my experience with students' negative experiences in more competitive departments. However, I believed I could help change their narrative. Once hired, I was eager to make a difference.

In my 1st year, I quickly became immersed in the processes related to academic probation, dismissal, and reinstatement. The sheer number of students placed on academic probation each quarter stood out to me. Although we notified students of their academic status, we provided little follow-up support to help them recover. The emails sent to students were negatively worded, contributing to a sense of failure and inadequacy. Many students were dismissed or forced to change their major without meaningful intervention or guidance.

I questioned my colleagues about the lack of programming or support for students on academic probation. They explained that past efforts (e.g., workshops) had seen poor attendance. However, these students, who were already vulnerable, deserved more than passive emails. They needed proactive, compassionate support. This conviction led me to research how to better serve students with academic difficulties. I attended workshops on writing psychologically attuned messages and learned about the importance of language, particularly the negative connotations surrounding terms like academic probation.

Through professional development, I advocated for changes within our department. I rewrote our academic notice emails to be more supportive and proposed reframing our language around academic status. I also developed and led workshops to help students understand their academic standing, dispel myths about academic probation, and develop strategies for success. The response was positive, and many students attended. I tracked their progress over time, saw improvements in their academic performance, and documented data. I shared this data with my colleagues and advocated for continued support and refinement of these programs.

My advocacy extended beyond my department. Recognizing the damaging effects of the academic probation label, I co-presented a workshop at a systemwide advising conference. I called for a change in how we talk about academic status. The workshop resonated with

attendees, and with my director's support, she raised the issue with the advising directors group. Together, the directors group wrote a proposal to the university regents, advocating replacing the term academic probation with academic notice. The proposal was approved, and the entire system transitioned to using the more neutral and supportive term academic notice. This achievement was a proud moment, born from a desire to close the gap in support for students facing academic challenges.

My journey from administrative assistant to academic advisor and advocate has shaped my understanding of the complexities of supporting students, especially those on academic notice. My work challenging institutional norms and creating more supportive environments has reinforced my commitment to making higher education more equitable. This commitment informed my dissertation research on the experiences of academic advisors who support students on academic notice. However, I recognized my professional experiences and commitment to student-centered, equity-minded advising could have influenced how I interpreted participants' perspectives, particularly when their approaches to academic notice differed from my own. To address potential researcher bias, I engaged in ongoing reflexive and analytic memoing to document my assumptions, initial reactions, and emerging interpretations throughout data collection and analysis. I also critically examined participants' accounts that challenged my professional perspectives and considered alternative explanations rather than privileging approaches that aligned with my own advising philosophy. These practices helped me remain attentive to participants' meanings while acknowledging my professional experiences and values were part of the interpretive process. Rather than attempting to eliminate subjectivity, I sought to make my assumptions visible and critically examine their influence on the interpretations developed throughout the study.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

All research is shaped by underlying assumptions, methodological constraints, and intentional boundaries that define the scope of the inquiry. In qualitative research, making these elements explicit enhances transparency and helps readers interpret findings within the context in which they were produced (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This section outlines the assumptions guiding the study, limitations affecting interpretation and transferability, and delimitations that intentionally defined the scope of the inquiry.

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed participants would respond to interview questions honestly and reflectively, and that their accounts reflected their experiences as they understood and interpreted them within their institutional contexts. I also assumed participants could recall and articulate their advising practices, interpretations, and experiences with academic notice in sufficient depth to support qualitative analysis. Consistent with the study's constructionist orientation, the study assumed meaning is socially constructed, and participants' interpretations provide meaningful insight into how academic notice policies are understood and enacted in practice.

Limitations

The findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of the study design. First, this basic qualitative study was conducted at a single large public research university in the western United States. The institution's decentralized advising structure, academic-standing policies, organizational arrangements, student populations, and advising roles shaped the context in which participants made sense of academic notice. The study did not seek statistical generalizability or causal claims (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Instead, it provided an in-depth, contextually grounded account of policy interpretation and enactment within one institutional setting. Therefore, readers

should consider similarities and differences between this setting and other institutional environments when assessing the findings' transferability.

The institution's quarter-based academic calendar also shapes how readers interpret the findings. Compared with institutions operating on a semester system, the shorter academic terms may create different timelines for identifying academic difficulty, communicating academic standing decisions, implementing advising interventions, and evaluating students' progress toward returning to good academic standing. Within this compressed timeframe, advisors may have fewer opportunities to engage students in sustained academic recovery planning before subsequent academic standing decisions occur. Although participants described challenges with intervention timing and opportunities for student support, the study did not systematically compare quarter-based and semester-based institutions. Therefore, I cannot determine whether the patterns identified in this study were attributable to the quarter system or to other institutional and organizational conditions. Interpret the findings with attention to the institution's academic calendar, particularly when considering their transferability to institutions operating under different academic term structures.

Second, the study centered the perspectives of 13 academic advising professionals with experience supporting students on academic notice. Their accounts provided insight into professional interpretation, organizational practice, discretion, policy agency, relational approaches, and perceived conditions of student support. However, students were not participants. Therefore, the study cannot establish how students experienced the advising practices participants described, whether students interpreted communication as validating or stigmatizing, or how students perceived differences across advising units. Therefore, references

to student experiences were interpreted as participants' perceptions rather than direct evidence of students' perspectives.

Third, the findings relied primarily on participants' retrospective accounts of their practices and experiences. Interviews provided insight into how participants understood and described academic notice, but they did not directly capture every advising interaction, decision, or organizational process. Participants may also have differed in what they recalled, emphasized, or considered significant, and subsequent experiences or professional interpretation may have shaped their accounts. Cross-case comparison, analytic and reflexive memoing, systematic engagement with coded excerpts, and attention to variation and boundary evidence strengthened the analysis. However, it did not eliminate the interpretive character of participants' accounts. Therefore, the findings remained grounded in participants' descriptions rather than direct observation of academic notice advising encounters.

Fourth, the study represented a particular period in the institution's academic-notice practices. Policies, terminology, advising structures, staffing levels, intervention systems, and organizational relationships can change over time. Therefore, the findings reflected the institutional and organizational conditions participants described during the study period rather than a permanent characterization of the institution. Future policy changes, organizational structures, or capacity could alter how academic notice is interpreted and enacted.

Finally, my professional background as an academic advisor at the study site provided contextual knowledge that informed my understanding of participants' descriptions. It also created the possibility that assumptions shaped by professional experience could influence interpretation. I intentionally excluded my own advising unit to reduce potential role-related

influence from preexisting professional relationships, but this also omitted an organizational perspective that might have added variation to the dataset.

Consistent with the study's constructionist orientation, the study did not assume complete separation between the researcher and the interpretive process, and such separation was not possible. Reflexive memoing, systematic coding, cross-case comparison, attention to evidence that complicated emerging interpretations, and excluding my home advising unit from the participant pool supported analytic transparency and helped make my positionality visible throughout the research process.

Delimitations

This study focused on professional advising personnel who worked with undergraduate students and had experience supporting students on academic notice. The study intentionally excluded faculty advisors, peer mentors, students, and graduate advising contexts to maintain the focus on professional undergraduate advising practices related to academic standing processes. I intentionally excluded my unit from the study as a sampling boundary. The study was also situated within a single institutional context to support an in-depth examination of how a shared academic notice policy was interpreted and enacted across a decentralized advising environment. Finally, the study examined policy interpretation, communication, professional judgment, organizational context, and relational advising practice rather than assessing student outcomes or evaluating the effectiveness of a specific intervention program.

Summary

This chapter described the methodological approach used to examine academic notice as a policy process interpreted and enacted within a specific institutional context. Grounded in a social constructionist ontology and epistemology and a social constructionist understanding of

meaning-making, the study employed a basic qualitative design. It drew primarily on semi-structured interviews with 13 advising professionals. I used institutional documents as contextual resources rather than independently coded data.

Analysis proceeded iteratively through close engagement with interview transcripts, first-cycle in vivo coding, second-cycle focused coding, analytic and reflexive memoing, and cross-case comparison and synthesis. These procedures supported the development of the eight cross-case findings presented in Chapter 4. Trustworthiness was supported through systematic documentation, repeated engagement with data, analytic and reflexive memoing, cross-case comparison, attention to variation and boundary evidence, contextual grounding, and direct participant quotations. Chapter 4 presents the findings and demonstrates how academic notice was interpreted, communicated, and enacted across the advising contexts represented in the study.

Chapter 4 - Findings

In this basic qualitative study, I examined how academic advisors constructed meaning around academic notice policy, enacted those interpretations in advising practice, and drew on asset-based, validating, and equity-minded approaches when supporting students experiencing academic difficulty. Consistent with the study's social constructionist orientation, the analysis focused on advisors' sensemaking and enactment of academic notice within their institutional context. This framing positioned academic notice not as a self-executing designation, but as a policy whose practical meaning is shaped through organizational structures, professional interpretation, communication practices, and relational engagement.

This chapter presents findings from a cross-case analysis of participant interviews. By focusing on advisors' sensemaking and enactment practices, the findings illuminated how participants understood the purpose and function of academic notice, how formal policy was translated into day-to-day advising practice, and how advisors navigated institutional expectations while supporting students experiencing academic difficulty.

The following three research questions (RQs) guided the study:

RQ1. How do academic advisors make sense of the purpose and function of academic notice policies within their institutional context?

RQ2. How do academic advisors interpret and enact academic notice policies in their day-to-day advising practice?

RQ3. How do academic advisors draw on asset-based, validating, and equity-minded frameworks to navigate tensions between institutional expectations and relational care when supporting students on academic notice?

The eight cross-case findings are presented within three broader analytic domains: (a) policy meaning, enactment, and professional judgment; (b) decentralization, consistency, and organizational context; and (c) relational meaning, accountability, and recovery. These domains provide an organizational structure for grouping conceptually related findings and clarifying their connections to the study's three RQs. The first domain brings together findings concerning how advisors understood and enacted academic notice policy and exercised professional judgment; the second organizes findings related to how policy enactment occurred within a decentralized advising environment and the resulting patterns of consistency and variation; and the third groups findings about how advisors navigated relational care, accountability, and students' academic recovery. Although the domains broadly correspond to the areas of inquiry represented in the research questions, they were not treated as separate findings or additional analytic claims. Instead, they provide a structure for presenting the eight cross-case findings and showing how they collectively address the research questions.

The organization of the findings also reflects the study's social constructionist orientation and its use of validation theory and critical theory as interpretive lenses. From a social constructionist perspective, the domains highlight how advisors' interpretations, professional interactions, and organizational contexts shaped the meaning and enactment of academic notice policy. Critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011) provided a lens for examining how institutional structures, policy expectations, and organizational arrangements shaped professional discretion and the conditions under which advisors supported students on academic notice. Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) highlights the relational dimensions of advising, including how advisors affirm students' experiences, recognize their strengths, and balance supportive relationships with institutional accountability. Although these theoretical perspectives informed

the interpretation of findings across the three domains, the domains were developed to organize patterns identified through cross-case analysis rather than to function as predetermined theoretical categories.

Description of Research Participants

Thirteen advising professionals participated in the study, representing varied professional roles, experiences, and undergraduate advising contexts within the institution's decentralized advising structure. Participants included academic advisors, assistant directors, and directors. They represented the following advising units: STEM, health sciences, social and behavioral sciences, arts and humanities, professional programs, and university-wide or exploratory advising. This variation was important because participants worked in advising units that differed in organizational structure, student populations, curricular requirements, staffing, and local advising practices, as described in Chapter 3. To protect confidentiality within the single-institution setting, participants were identified by pseudonyms. I also included participants' academic units and position titles, which were described using broader categories. Table 4.1 provides selected professional characteristics, including current position, advising context, years of advising experience, years of experience in higher education, and perceived discretion, to contextualize participants' perspectives without unnecessarily identifying individual participants.

Table 4.1 ***Participant Profiles***

Pseudonym	Current position	Advising context	Years of advising experience	Years of higher education experience	Perceived discretion
Brigitte	Assistant director	Social and behavioral sciences	14	17	A great deal
Carmen	Academic advisor	STEM	8	10	Moderate
Parker	Director	STEM	20	22+	A great deal
Eric	Director	STEM	11	12	A great deal
Jessica	Director	Professional school	16	20+	Moderate
Jim	Director	STEM	4	14	A lot
John	Assistant director	Health sciences	11	11+	A lot
Nigel	Director	University-wide/ exploratory majors	25	29	A great deal
Roxanne	Director	Health sciences	21.5	23.5	No response
Sandra	Academic advisor	Health sciences	6	9	Moderate
Steve	Academic advisor	Social and behavioral sciences	11	19	Moderate
Taylor	Academic advisor	University-wide/ exploratory majors	9	9	A lot
Tiffany	Academic advisor	Arts and humanities	16	16	A great deal

Participants brought considerable professional experience to the study. Their reported experience as academic advisors or advising administrators ranged from 4–25 years. Their broader higher education experience ranged from approximately 9–29 years or more.

Participants' professional backgrounds also extended beyond academic advising. Prior roles included admissions, orientation, career advising, international student services, residence life, institutional research and assessment, multicultural education, registration services, and other student affairs and administrative positions. Several participants had also progressed from student-facing advising positions into assistant director or director roles. These varied professional trajectories provided contextual differences in organizational responsibility and experience through which participants encountered and enacted academic notice policy.

Participants also varied in how they characterized the professional discretion available to them when working with students on academic notice. Of the 12 participants who responded to this screening item, four described having moderate discretion, three reported having a lot of discretion, and five reported having a great deal of discretion. I used these screening responses descriptively to contextualize participants' professional roles and experiences, not as categories for comparative analysis. Participants' interview accounts provided a more nuanced understanding of discretion, including how decision-making authority varied according to organizational position, local procedures, and the academic-standing decision being made.

The participant group reflected variation in professional experience, organizational position, advising context, and perceived discretion. This variation provided perspectives from professionals working under different organizational conditions and with different levels of responsibility for interpreting, communicating, and operationalizing academic notice policy. These characteristics provided important context for interpreting similarities and differences across participants' accounts and kept the study focused on how academic advisors made sense of and enacted academic notice policy. I used participant characteristics to contextualize the findings rather than to establish demographic representativeness or relationships between

participants' background characteristics and their interpretations or practices. The screening survey (see Appendix B) collected professional and educational background characteristics relevant to participants' advising roles and policy-enactment contexts but did not collect detailed social identity characteristics. Therefore, the study did not examine relationships between advisors' social identities and their interpretations or enactment of academic notice policy.

Overview of Findings

The cross-case analysis generated eight findings that demonstrate how participants made sense of the purpose and function of academic notice, interpreted and enacted policy in advising practice, and navigated tensions between institutional expectations and relational care. As shown in Table 4.2, each finding contributes primarily to one research question while also informing additional research questions, reflecting the interconnected nature of participants' experiences and interpretations. The subsequent presentation organizes the eight findings within three analytic domains to foreground their conceptual relationships and connections to the research questions.

Table 4.2 ***Cross-Case Findings***

Cross-case finding	Primary RQ contribution	Additional RQ contribution
Policy Becomes Practice Through Local Interpretation and Operationalization	RQ2	RQ1
Consistency Is Valued at the Level of Guardrails, Not Uniform Practice	RQ1	RQ2
Discretion Is Distributed, Stage-Dependent, and Bounded	RQ2	RQ1
Academic Notice Advising Balances Care and Accountability	RQ3	RQ2

Organization of the Findings

I organized the eight cross-case findings into three analytic domains based on conceptual relationships identified during cross-case analysis. After focused coding, I used analytic synthesis matrices to compare patterns, variation, contextual explanations, and relationships among emerging findings across participants. Table 4.3 presents the findings organized by analytic domains addressing related dimensions of academic notice policy and practice: policy meaning, enactment, and professional judgment; decentralization, consistency, and organizational context; and relational meaning, accountability, and recovery. Although the RQs informed analysis, the domains do not correspond exclusively to individual RQs because several findings contribute to more than one research question. Therefore, the domains provided an organizational structure for presenting conceptually related findings and preserve the eight cross-case findings as the study's primary analytic claims.

Table 4.3 ***Organization of Findings by Analytic Domain***

Analytic domain	Findings
Policy Meaning, Enactment, and Professional Judgment	• Policy Becomes Practice Through Local Interpretation and Operationalization • Discretion Is Distributed, Stage-Dependent, and Bounded • Policy Agency Varies by Organizational Position and Responsibility
Decentralization, Consistency, and Organizational Context	• Consistency Is Valued at the Level of Guardrails, Not Uniform Practice • Organizational Capacity Shapes Uneven Academic Notice Support
Relational Meaning, Accountability, and Recovery	• Communication and Relationships Construct the Meaning of Academic Notice • Academic Notice Advising Balances Care and Accountability • Academic Recovery Is Developmental, Nonlinear, and Broader Than GPA Restoration

I used the analytic domains to organize related findings rather than replacing the eight cross-case findings as the study's primary analytic claims. Presented in RQ order, the domains move from advisors' interpretations and enactment of academic notice policy, to the organizational conditions shaping enactment within a decentralized advising structure, and finally to the relational practices through which academic notice was communicated and experienced in advising interactions. Collectively, the eight findings demonstrated how academic notice was understood and enacted through interacting institutional, organizational, professional, and relational dimensions.

Analytic Domain I: Policy Meaning, Enactment, and Professional Judgment

The first analytic domain focuses on how academic notice policy was interpreted and enacted through local practice, professional judgment, and organizational responsibility. This domain includes three findings: (a) Policy Becomes Practice Through Local Interpretation and

Operationalization; (b) Discretion Is Distributed, Stage-Dependent, and Bounded; and (c) Policy Agency Varies by Organizational Position and Responsibility. These findings primarily address RQ2 and also contribute to RQ1.

Policy Becomes Practice Through Local Interpretation and Operationalization

Participants described academic notice as a policy whose practical meaning emerged through local interpretation and operationalization, not through formal policy language alone. Although institutional policy established common academic-standing parameters, advising units translated those parameters into local procedures, requirements, communication practices, and intervention structures. Participants' accounts showed that academic notice became practice through interactions among formal institutional expectations, local organizational contexts, and the interpretive work of advising professionals.

The institutional shift from the designation academic probation to academic notice illustrated how this translation occurred in practice. Participants described the terminology change as part of a broader shift toward a more supportive framing of students' academic standing. They indicated it prompted local advising units to reconsider how they communicated and implemented the policy. Their accounts show how local advising units interpreted and operationalized an institutional change, deciding how to communicate the revised framing to students and incorporate it into academic notice practice.

Translating Institutional Expectations Into Local Advising Practices

John, an assistant director, provided a clear example of this translation from institutional meaning to local practice. John explained that the institutional shift in how academic notice was framed changed how their unit approached students experiencing academic difficulty. They shared, "We're here to support; we're not here to penalize. We took that to heart." As the campus

moved toward a more supportive approach, John described how their unit streamlined its academic notice process to make it more student-friendly.

One specific change in John's advising unit was removing the dean's signature from the academic notice email sent to students. Advisors in John's unit agreed communication from trusted advisors was sufficiently formal and better aligned with a supportive approach. John's account illustrated how a campus-level shift toward a more supportive framing of academic notice was interpreted locally and translated into concrete changes in procedures and communication. Rather than simply implementing an institutional expectation as given, the unit interpreted what that expectation meant for its work with students and adjusted its practices accordingly.

Adapting Student-Facing Practices Within Institutional Constraints

Carmen, an academic advisor, described how their professional judgment allowed them to adapt student-facing practices even when institutional terminology remained outside their authority. Reflecting on the period when the institution still formally used the term "academic probation," Carmen explained:

> I know I can't change it in the letter, because the language does not reflect it, and I know I cannot change it on the website. That's why it's called the Academic Recovery Workshop, the self-reflection Worksheet, instead of the Academic Probation Workshop. So that's kind of how the terminology changed in that aspect.

Carmen's account showed a different form of policy enactment from John's. Although Carmen could not initially change the formal terminology in institutional materials, they could reshape the practices around that terminology through workshop design, worksheet language, and other student-facing interventions. Therefore, local interpretation occurred within formal

institutional constraints: advisors could give policy different practical and relational meaning through implementing options available to them, even when they lacked authority to alter the policy itself. When the institutional terminology was officially changed later, Carmen explained, "It's official now, I can change this terrible letter on the website." The distinction illustrated how changes in formal institutional policy could expand the scope of what advisors could modify locally.

Across cases, participants described additional ways institutional parameters translated into local advising practices. Sandra, an academic advisor, described adapting centrally generated academic-standing information to the classifications and processes used within their unit. Taylor, an academic advisor, described a different intervention structure in which students placed on academic notice were required to meet individually with their assigned advisor. Taylor characterized academic notice as "an internal process our office runs," through which the office reaches out to students whose GPA fell below the threshold. Taylor further explained, "We meet with students individually, and it's required. I would assume it is probably a little different depending on the school."

These accounts demonstrated that local operationalization did not take a single form across advising units. A common academic-standing trigger could be linked to different communication practices, classifications, meeting requirements, and student-facing interventions, depending on the local advising context. Taylor's required individual meeting, for example, showed how a common institutional parameter became a unit-defined process for student recovery. Therefore, variation in local practice did not reflect variation in the underlying academic-standing threshold; rather, it reflected differences in how common institutional parameters were organized and enacted.

Boundaries of Local Policy Interpretation and Operationalization

Steve's account as an academic advisor helps clarify this distinction. According to the institution's academic notice policy, students with a term or cumulative GPA below 2.0 are subject to formal academic notice. Steve described this element of the policy as comparatively fixed, saying, "With academic notice, the policy is pretty straightforward. We don't have really any flexibility within the office if they are within one of two GPA thresholds, they're put on academic notice. And that's true in all student cases." At the same time, Steve emphasized that the fixed nature of the academic-standing threshold did not eliminate local interpretation. They explained, "There is some uniformity in policy across units, but a lot of what we do to interpret the nuances of these policies is internally within our particular advising office." Therefore, Steve's account identified where local interpretation became most visible. Though the formal classification threshold remained comparatively fixed, advising units interpreted and operationalized the practices surrounding that threshold through procedures, support structures, requirements, communication, course sequencing, and responses to academic notice.

Across participants, academic notice emerged not as a policy transferred unchanged from institutional text to advising practice, but as a policy given operational form within local advising contexts. Institutional rules established common academic-standing parameters, but they did not fully determine what academic notice looked like in practice. Advising units translated those parameters into communication, procedures, classifications, meeting structures, and student interventions. The form that translation took varied by local context and by the policy and practice aspects advisors were authorized to shape.

Therefore, local interpretation operated not by replacing or overriding formal policy, but within the operational space available around it. Academic notice is best understood as an

enacted policy: institutional rules established parameters, and organizational and professional interpretations gave those parameters operational form. Through local communication practices, procedures, requirements, and intervention structures, institutional expectations became concrete advising practices through which students encountered academic notice. This distinction raised the next analytic question: where, when, and by whom could professional judgment be exercised?

Discretion Is Distributed, Stage-Dependent, and Bounded

Participants described professional discretion not as unrestricted individual autonomy but as judgment that varied across stages of the academic notice process and among institutional actors. Advisors, assistant directors, directors, faculty members, and other decision-makers exercised different forms of authority depending on the decision at hand. At the same time, their judgment remained bounded by policy, evidence, precedent, equity considerations, and organizational roles. Across participants' accounts, discretion emerged as a distributed, context-dependent process through which academic notice policy was interpreted and enacted.

The scope of discretion varied according to the stage of academic notice and the type of decision being made. Jim, director, distinguished between formal academic notice and the later stage of disqualification, explaining there was "not as much gray area" when determining academic notice, and decisions at the disqualification stage involved "much more gray area." Jim's account revealed discretion was not equally available at every decision point. Formal academic-notice classifications could leave little interpretive space, and later disqualification decisions could allow greater professional judgment. As a result, discretion was not a fixed amount of authority an advisor possessed; its availability varied by decision.

Discretion also varied across the organizational process. John described having "flexibility within our very specific constraints." When working with students who were subject to disqualification, uncertainty could move a decision beyond the individual advisor. John explained in cases where documentation did not clearly warrant an exception, "We'll first discuss this with our assistant director and director and, if needed, with our chair if we can't reach a decision. And I say that flexibility within strict guidelines." John also described less formal collective deliberation. When an advisor had a student at risk of disqualification, they shared, "we're all discussing them, even if casually at a meeting. The person might make a decision, but we will all always talk about it." John's account indicated discretion was organizationally distributed rather than residing exclusively with an individual advisor. Depending on the nature and uncertainty of a student's case, decision-making authority could remain with the frontline advisor, become collective, or escalate to other organizational actors.

The boundaries surrounding discretion became especially evident when professional judgment clashed with a controlling policy interpretation. Sandra described working with a student whose formal academic standing appeared inconsistent with the student's demonstrated improvement. Sandra explained:

> There have been times when there technically is supposed to be disqualification, but they've done better in their courses. Their cumulative GPA is still below 2.0, but their quarter GPA they've been improving for two quarters. They're doing really well, where I feel like, okay, maybe I should put them on academic notice.

After consulting leadership about the student's improvement, however, Sandra recalled the director responded, "This is what the policy is, so they have to stay on subject to disqualification." However, Sandra also described other classification decisions that remained

open to interpretation, explaining the determination could be “up to me, we would go through the list, and I would decide, I think it’s this, I think they’re under this category.”

Sandra’s account illustrated how discretion could expand and contract within the same advisor’s work. When policy left classification open to interpretation, professional judgment was required to determine the appropriate outcome. When leadership identified a controlling policy rule, however, that decision space contracted and the advisor’s preferred interpretation no longer governed the outcome. Rules did not eliminate professional judgment; rather, judgment operated within the spaces policy and organizational interpretation left open.

Other participants further showed that discretion extended beyond formal policy and leadership authority. Eric, director, described approaching exception decisions for students subject to disqualification with a presumption that existing policy and committee decisions should stand unless additional evidence warranted reconsideration, and also considered precedent. Tiffany, academic advisor, similarly described attempting to be “as flexible as possible within the bounds so that it’s equitable and not completely violating policy.” These accounts demonstrated discretion could be constrained not only by formal rules and organizational authority, but also by evidence, precedent, and concerns about equitable treatment across comparable cases. Professional judgment could, therefore, be substantial without becoming arbitrary or unrestricted.

Across cases, discretion functioned as a distributed feature of policy enactment, varying by decision stage and authorized actor, and was bound by formal policy, evidence, precedent, equity considerations, institutional standards, and organizational authority. Its availability expanded and contracted according to the stage of academic notice; the actor authorized to decide; the evidence available; and the policy, precedent, and equity considerations that bounded

what could be done in an individual student case. The relevant unit of analysis was, therefore, the decision process rather than the discretion a particular advisor possessed. This finding showed how professional judgment operated in enacting existing academic-notice policy: advisors interpreted circumstances. They made decisions within an organizationally structured decision space whose boundaries shifted across stages, actors, and cases.

Policy Agency Varies by Organizational Position and Responsibility

Participants differed in their opportunities to shape not only individual advising interactions but also the local structures through which academic notice policy was enacted. Advisors with specialized responsibilities and participants in formal leadership positions described greater opportunities to revise procedures, communications, workflows, and other aspects of policy implementation. In contrast, other advisors primarily exercised agency within individual student interactions. These differences demonstrated that policy agency was connected to organizational position, assigned responsibility, and decision authority rather than being equally available to all advising professionals.

Carmen provided a clear example of policy agency within the study institution. As an academic advisor with the specialized role of academic notice manager, Carmen oversaw the academic-notice process within their department. Although advisors in the unit shared responsibility for advising students, Carmen's specialized assignment placed them in a position to oversee how academic notice was administered. Carmen described changing the local workflow after encountering student information that was hard to access. They explained, "When I first came into the office, I would ask, 'How would you know if a student is on academic notice?'" Carmen recalled that colleagues responded, "Well, there's an Excel sheet." Carmen then explained their reaction, "I was like, I'm not gonna be pulling an Excel sheet every single

time." Carmen also described redesigning components of the academic-notice process after assuming responsibility for it: "When I came in here to revamp everything as I was starting, the self-reflection worksheet is something I revamped and created." Carmen's account illustrated how specialized responsibility could provide an advisor with opportunities not only to enact academic-notice policy but also to redesign the local mechanisms through which it was implemented.

Other participants demonstrated different forms of agency when implementing organizational policy. Tiffany described an advising role that extended beyond individual student interactions into internal policy development. Although their "main role is to advise students," Tiffany explained they "also help create some of the policies internally, updating, working with faculty, more of the admin side." Tiffany's account showed participation in policy development was not limited to those holding director-level positions. Instead, an advising role could include opportunities to contribute to internal policy and work with faculty to shape the organizational conditions through which advising policy was enacted.

Eric provided another variation in which responsibility for policy implementation was connected to organizational process revision. They described substantial unit-level responsibility for operationalizing the academic-notice policy. As Eric explained, "My office puts the holds on. My office takes them off. So, [if] we're not processing according to the policy. It's not happening." Eric also described reviewing cases to determine whether policy had been applied appropriately and consistently with established precedents and reported the office was "revamping some of the ways we handle this." Their account showed how responsibility for implementing policy could position advising staff not only to apply institutional requirements but

also to identify inconsistencies and help revise the organizational procedures through which those requirements were enacted.

Jim's prior experience at another institution illustrated the greater reach that policy agency could achieve when organizational responsibility was connected to formal governance structures. In a previous director role, Jim oversaw advising and student retention responsibilities, including an intervention program for students placed on academic probation. They described the existing intervention as resource-intensive and student participation as inconsistent. In response, Jim explained, "One innovation that I came up with was I transformed it into a class." They also described creating a peer mentor program as part of the redesigned intervention. The change extended beyond informal advising: students placed on academic probation were automatically enrolled in the course, a change that required approval through institutional governance structures. Jim reported, "We were able to force-register them in the class; we got that through the Registrar and Academic Senate at the institution." Although this reform occurred outside the institution examined in this study, Jim's prior professional experience provides a variation illustrating how access to formal governance structures could extend policy agency from local procedural redesign to formal institutional change.

Roxanne, director, provided an important boundary to the finding by showing that a formal leadership title did not necessarily correspond to greater involvement in reshaping academic-notice processes. Although they served as a director, they described becoming less directly involved in academic notice as their responsibilities expanded. Roxanne explained, "In the last few years, I have been less and less involved with it" and noted they had "been really hands-off with students." Responsibility for the academic-notice process had shifted to others within the unit. Roxanne explained, "I have two academic advisors who handle most of it" and

"the advisors have taken on more of that role, and now that I have an assistant director in place, she's sort of been handling [it]," referring to students reaching the point of disqualification. Their account complicated any assumption that organizational rank necessarily produced greater policy agency. Rather, as responsibilities shifted within the unit, proximity to the sites where academic-notice practices and decisions were shaped also changed.

Across these accounts, policy agency was neither inherent to advising work nor determined solely by professional title. Instead, its form and reach depended on how participants' responsibilities connected them to the organizational sites where academic-notice practices and decisions were made. Carmen's specialized responsibility created opportunities to redesign local academic-notice tools and workflows. Tiffany's role included participation in internal policy development, and Eric's implementation responsibilities provided a position from which inconsistencies could be identified and procedures revised. Jim's prior institutional experience illustrated the greater reach policy agency could achieve when organizational responsibility was connected to formal governance structures. Roxanne's account, however, demonstrated organizational rank alone did not ensure active involvement in reshaping academic-notice processes when responsibility for that work had shifted elsewhere.

Together, these accounts demonstrated academic-notice policy was enacted not only through participants' interpretation and application of existing requirements but, for some participants, through their capacity to reshape the local practices and organizational structures through which those requirements were implemented. Therefore, policy agency was differentiated less by title alone than by specialized responsibility, organizational positioning, relationships, and access to decision-making structures. Therefore, participants could function as policy actors when their professional roles gave them opportunities to move beyond applying an

existing process and to influence or redesign the conditions under which academic-notice policy was enacted.

Domain I: Policy Meaning, Enactment, and Professional Judgment Synthesis

Across the three findings, academic notice emerged as an enacted policy whose practical form depended on local operationalization, whose application involved distributed and bounded professional judgment, and whose conditions could sometimes be reshaped by participants positioned to exercise policy agency. Together, these findings primarily addressed RQ2 by demonstrating that academic notice was interpreted and enacted through organizational and professional processes rather than through the direct application of formal rules alone. They also contributed to RQ1 by showing that participants' understandings of the purpose and function of academic notice were shaped through the institutional and organizational contexts in which they enacted the policy. The variation evident across these processes raises a related question about how decentralization shaped consistency and organizational capacity across advising contexts.

Analytic Domain II: Decentralization, Consistency, and Organizational Context

The second analytic domain focuses on how decentralization and organizational context shaped the meaning and enactment of academic notice across advising units. This domain included two findings: (a) Consistency Is Valued at the Level of Guardrails, Not Uniform Practice; and (b) Organizational Capacity Shapes Uneven Academic Notice Support. The first finding primarily addressed RQ1, and the second primarily addressed RQ2; both findings also contributed to understanding the relationship between institutional context and policy enactment.

Consistency Is Valued at the Level of Guardrails, Not Uniform Practice

Participants generally valued consistency in the institutional expectations and decision principles governing academic notice, but they did not equate consistency with identical practices across advising units. They described a need for common terminology, policy parameters, and decision standards. They also recognized that differences in academic programs, student populations, organizational structures, and local contexts required flexibility in how units communicated and implemented academic notice. Across participants' accounts, consistency was therefore understood as maintaining shared institutional guardrails while allowing contextually responsive approaches to student support.

Participants sought greater coherence in how academic notice policy was understood, while preserving room for local enactment. Nigel provided an example of an advising director who explicitly asked for consistent interpretation and rejected overly punitive and overly permissive approaches to academic notice. When speaking about how academic notice policy was implemented at their institution and whether they would change how it was implemented, Nigel described the decentralized system, saying: "I would say it is inconsistent. We have way too many academic units, each with its own interpretation of the policy, its own idea of what should be done, and different practices for how to do it." They reported some units have remained highly punitive, and others appear unwilling to impose meaningful consequences on students placed on academic notice. Nigel then shared there should be "at least a consistent interpretation of the policy." They added, "a middle ground would be ideal, with a consistent understanding of the policy and, ideally, more consistent practice." Nigel's account established the need for greater consistency, primarily in policy interpretation. When considered alongside

the other cases, however, this desire for consistency did not translate into a preference for identical procedures across units.

John illustrated this variation by showing how common institutional rules can coexist with legitimate local variation. While discussing how academic notice functioned in advising practice at their institution and whether they would change anything about its implementation, John explained, “There are still very strict policies that everyone follows.” At the same time, they shared they appreciated the decentralized approach and would prefer not to centralize policy implementation. Having worked in two different departments at the institution, John had experience with academic notice in both settings and observed, “The student population has very different needs, and the way it’s applied in either department wouldn’t work for the other.” John’s account established an important counterpoint to Nigel’s concern about inconsistent interpretation. Nigel identified a lower boundary on acceptable variation: decentralization should not produce incompatible understandings of what the policy means. John identified the opposite boundary: consistency should not require centralized or identical enactment when student populations, curricula, and degree requirements differ.

Tiffany further established the boundary on procedural uniformity by identifying a structural reason that identical practices may be inappropriate across units. When discussing how their unit implemented academic notice and how it differed from implementation elsewhere, Tiffany explained that the institution had attempted to streamline academic notice through a university-wide policy and consistent terminology. However, they noted local implementation varied because “those internal things are different because different schools have different requirements for progress.” Tiffany explained academic progress in their unit was tied to a sequenced set of major-specific course requirements that units do not share. Therefore, their

account illustrated a practical limit to uniformity: even when terminology and institutional policy are shared, procedures for monitoring and responding to academic progress may need to differ because the curricular structures used to evaluate progress differ.

Across these cases, participants did not frame consistency as requiring the same procedures. Nigel showed why some consistency was necessary by identifying the problems that arise when units interpret the same policy differently. John showed why complete uniformity was undesirable by emphasizing differences in student populations and academic contexts. Tiffany showed why complete uniformity could also be structurally impractical when units relied on different curricular and progress requirements. Together, these accounts showed that participants wanted coherence mainly through shared institutional guardrails and expectations, while preserving room for differentiated local enactment. Common guardrails could promote transparency and coherence, and context-sensitive enactment allowed units to respond to meaningful differences in curricula, organizational structures, student populations, and individual circumstances.

Organizational Capacity Shapes Uneven Academic Notice Support

Participants described meaningful differences in the organizational conditions under which advising units enacted academic notice policy. Staffing, time, expertise, specialized roles, relational continuity, referral networks, and intervention infrastructure shaped the proactive, individualized, specialized, and sustained support units could provide. These accounts demonstrated variation in academic notice support reflected not only differences in advising philosophy or local practice but also differences in organizational capacity that created uneven possibilities for supporting students across a decentralized advising environment.

Caseload, staffing, time, and scale significantly affected the level of proactive contact and follow-up participants described as possible. Steve illustrated how advising caseload can constrain the scale of academic notice intervention. They explained, “the quarter goes by extremely fast, which makes it challenging to incorporate multiple intervention points within the same term.” Ideally, students who remain on academic notice or are at risk of disqualification would have “an additional appointment.” They described an advisor-to-student ratio of approximately “1 advisor per 650 to 700 students.” This ratio shaped the unit’s ability to provide proactive intervention. Steve explained, “It does make it challenging to do a significant amount of proactive advising with at-risk student populations. Unfortunately, based on the ratios, many students fall through the cracks.” Although Steve identified additional intervention as desirable, the unit’s advisor-to-student ratio limited how consistently the unit could implement it. They also identified limits in the specialized expertise an academic advisor can provide, noting, “I’m not an expert on study skills. I’m not an expert on mental health. I’m not an expert on financial wellness and support.” Referrals could connect students with additional expertise, but advisors could not ensure students subsequently engaged with those resources. Together, these examples demonstrated how time, caseload, and access to specialized support can constrain the intensity and continuity of academic notice intervention.

Sandra provided a contrasting example in which a specialized organizational role expanded the unit’s capacity for individualized and sustained support. Their advising unit had a student support coordinator, a role described as distinct from academic advising and more closely aligned with wellness coaching or case management. The coordinator connected students with campus resources and provided support related to wellness, time management, and study skills. Students at different stages of academic difficulty may have been required to meet

individually with the coordinator rather than participate only in a workshop. Sandra explained when additional support may benefit a student, “I’ll choose to put them on a waitlist, subject to disqualification, so they can meet with our student support coordinator, who has more time to meet with students.” They further explained that the coordinator “can follow up more than us academic advisors.” Therefore, this specialized role expands the unit’s capacity to provide individualized contact and continued follow-up for students experiencing academic difficulty.

When comparing Steve’s situation to Sandra’s, the differences in academic notice support were not merely a matter of individual advisor preferences. Steve acknowledged the importance of additional intervention, but the unit’s caseload limited the proactive follow-up it could sustain. In contrast, Sandra worked within an organizational structure that allowed a specialized staff member with greater capacity for individual contact and follow-up to handle some of these responsibilities. This comparison shows how organizational design shaped whether students had additional layers of support available.

Parker, director, offered a different perspective and showed organizational capacity cannot be reduced to the number of academic advisors or the availability of specialized staff. In this unit, faculty expertise is intentionally incorporated into reviewing students experiencing significant academic difficulty. Parker explained, “We really want a faculty member to chime in on this and give us a department-level recommendation on what we should do with the student.” Faculty members contributed detailed disciplinary and curricular knowledge that academic advisors may not have independently possessed. As they explained, faculty “really know the curriculum to the level that we sometimes can’t understand; it’s very technical, our courses are very complicated.” This expertise allowed faculty and academic advisors to consider academic patterns that may not have been apparent from grades and course lists alone. Parker asked, “How

would we know that? As advisors, that's not necessarily something that we can glean just from grades and courses." In this case, faculty participation expanded the unit's capacity by providing disciplinary expertise that academic advisors could not independently reproduce.

Relational continuity represented another form of organizational capacity. Nigel described an assigned-advisor structure in which students began developing relationships with an assigned advisor before experiencing academic difficulty. Nigel explained, "their advisor is this person that's assigned to care about their success," emphasizing the importance of "building that relationship" because "when they end up on notice, there's already a little sense of trust, there's already a relationship built." In this case, relational continuity was not solely an interpersonal practice developed in response to academic notice; an organizational structure also supported it by establishing advisor–student relationships before academic difficulties arose. Therefore, the assigned-advisor model created a form of continuity capacity, allowing academic notice intervention to occur within an existing advising relationship rather than requiring that relationship to begin when the student entered academic difficulty.

These cases demonstrated organizational capacity did not operate as a single continuum from less to more resources. Instead, units possessed different configurations of staffing, time, expertise, specialized roles, relational continuity, and intervention infrastructure. Steve's case illustrated constraints created by scale and caseload; Sandra's indicated how specialized staffing can expand individualized follow-up; Parker's demonstrated how distributed faculty expertise can augment the knowledge available for academic notice intervention; and Nigel's illustrated how an assigned-advisor structure can create relational continuity before academic difficulty occurs. Different organizational configurations, therefore, enabled some forms of support and constrained others. The evidence did not establish that units with certain resources necessarily

provided better advising or produced better student outcomes. Rather, it showed students' opportunities for proactive, individualized, specialized, and sustained intervention could differ depending on the organizational environment in which academic notice was enacted.

Across cases, uneven academic notice support, therefore, reflected more than differences in advising philosophy or local unit preferences. Decentralization allocated responsibility for academic notice intervention across organizational environments with varying capacities to enact it. What students could receive under a formally common policy depended partly on organizational capacity, including time, staffing, expertise, relational continuity, specialized roles, referral networks, and intervention infrastructure. Therefore, organizational capacity was multidimensional: different combinations of resources could expand, supplement, or constrain how units responded to students experiencing academic difficulty. In this way, decentralization did not merely permit local variation in academic notice practice; it situated students within differently configured organizational environments, producing uneven possibilities for support across the institution.

Domain II: Decentralization, Consistency, and Organizational Context Synthesis

Across the two findings, decentralization emerged as a source of contextual responsiveness and a condition that produced consequential variation in academic notice support. Participants generally sought consistency in institutional guardrails, policy interpretation, and expectations rather than identical procedures across units. At the same time, the capacity to enact context-sensitive support was not equally configured across organizational settings. Staffing, time, expertise, specialized roles, relational continuity, referral networks, and intervention infrastructure shaped the support available to students. Together, these findings demonstrated decentralization did more than allow for procedural variation: it situated a formally common

academic notice policy within organizational contexts that differed in how they enacted the policy and what forms of intervention they could sustain.

Consistency Is Valued at the Level of Guardrails, Not Uniform Practice primarily contributed to RQ1 by showing how participants understood consistency within a decentralized institutional context, and Organizational Capacity Shapes Uneven Academic Notice Support primarily contributed to RQ2 by demonstrating how organizational capacity shaped policy enactment. Both findings also illuminated how institutional context conditioned the support available to students experiencing academic difficulty. These organizational conditions provided the context within which advisors communicated the meaning of academic notice, balanced care with accountability, and understood students' processes of academic recovery.

Analytic Domain III: Relational Meaning, Accountability, and Recovery

The third analytic domain focused on the relational and student-facing dimensions of academic notice advising. This domain includes three findings: (a) Communication and Relationships Construct the Meaning of Academic Notice; (b) Academic Notice Advising Balances Care and Accountability; and (c) Academic Recovery Is Developmental, Nonlinear, and Broader Than GPA Restoration. These findings primarily addressed RQ3 and also contributed to RQs 1 and 2.

Communication and Relationships Construct the Meaning of Academic Notice

Participants described academic notice as a policy status whose practical meaning for students was shaped through communication and advising relationships. Through language, tone, explanation, normalization, reassurance, transparency, and relational connection, advisors sought to help students understand academic notice without minimizing the seriousness of their academic standing. Participants' accounts demonstrated the meaning advisors communicated to

students emerged not only from the formal policy designation but also through the relational and communicative practices they used to interpret and explain that designation.

Participants used language to separate academic difficulty from students' worth or capacity and to reframe the institutional meaning attached to academic notice. When discussing how their institution implements academic notice, Nigel noted changes in the institution's approach to communicating academic difficulty to students. They said, "When I first got here, those were very punitive; now they're very much with the language. We've noticed that you're struggling, and we're here to help. So, how can we help you?" Nigel contrasted this with the former framing, stating, "You're not doing well, so you better do better or else." They described this as a positive shift in how academic notice was communicated within the unit and the institution. The policy status itself may remain institutionally defined, but its practical meaning for students is mediated through the language advisors use to explain it.

Taylor illustrated a related but distinct form of interpretive work: clarifying what an institutional message does and does not signify. Taylor explained when discussing the academic notice email with students, they begin by stating, "This is not a notice of dismissal. You are not being kicked out. It does not appear on your transcript." Taylor then explained the notice is part of an internal process through which the office contacts students with a GPA of 2.0 or below and communicates, "It looks like last term posed some challenges for you." Taylor framed academic notice as serious but fixable and emphasized the office's role in helping students navigate a path toward stronger academic standing. This example demonstrated the interpretive work involved in translating an institutional status for students. By explicitly stating what academic notice does and does not mean, the advisor prevents potentially negative interpretations and still conveys that academic difficulty requires attention.

Relational conditions also shaped how students could engage with the meaning communicated through academic notice. Sandra described using normalization and relational safety in academic recovery workshops. Students are told, “We have so many students who are placed on academic recovery. This meeting, this workshop is to get you back on track.” Sandra shared, “I’ll let them know everyone has their own path. Don’t compare yourself to your friends. We’re here to support you.” They also described using Mentimeter to let students respond anonymously to more personal questions. They shared students “share more personal things. They’re able to see a lot of students have similar challenges, similar struggles.” For Sandra, anonymous participation created conditions in which students could recognize that academic difficulty was not an isolated experience and could disclose challenges with less fear of judgment. Therefore, communication worked differently when the relational environment enabled disclosure and normalization.

Jessica, director, added a variation on this relational dimension by distinguishing the existence of support from students’ ability to experience it as accessible. Jessica described the shift from “academic probation” to “academic notice” or “academic recovery” as a “positive step” that aligned with a “holistic, proactive, and appreciative advising” approach. Jessica also emphasized “building meaningful relationships involves more than directing students to an office or making resources available. Students may be given information about institutional resources before they need it, yet that information may not resonate until difficulty arises.” Jessica’s account suggested information availability is not equivalent to relational accessibility: building relationships can help connect students to resources and support in ways that information alone may not.

Participants also emphasized humanizing communication did not necessarily mean using gentler language or shielding students from consequences. Roxanne provided a boundary case. Reflecting on becoming less lenient over time, Roxanne said, “Being nice to them doesn’t benefit them.” Instead, they shared, “sticking to the policies as closely as possible as a means to helping them succeed.” Roxanne emphasized the importance of communicating the seriousness of students’ situations so they could make necessary changes and avoid delays in their progress. In this account, support meant being clear about institutional requirements rather than letting reassurance obscure the consequences of continued academic difficulty.

Later in the interview, Roxanne described one-on-one conversations designed to help students understand “what is actually going on” and consider options that remained aligned with their larger goals. This complicated any assumption that relational or humanizing communication must always be pleasant or reassuring. An advisor may need to communicate that a current path is no longer viable, a requirement is firm, or remaining in the same major may not support a student’s longer-term goals. Such candor is not necessarily punitive. When oriented toward helping students understand their circumstances and make informed decisions, directness can itself function as a form of support. Humanizing the intervention, therefore, does not require minimizing its seriousness.

Across cases, academic notice did not reach students as a self-explanatory policy status. Participants functioned as translators of institutional meaning, actively constructing an interpretive narrative through which students could understand that status. They clarified what it meant, what it did not mean, why it mattered, and what possibilities remained. Language could reduce stigma and challenge punitive interpretations, and relational conditions could position students for disclosure, reflection, and seeking help. At the same time, participants described

candor, transparency, clear expectations, and consequences as necessary to preserve the intervention's institutional seriousness. Therefore, academic notice acquired practical meaning through advisors' communicative and relational work. Humanizing that meaning did not necessarily require softening institutional expectations; candor and consequences could themselves function as relational forms of support.

Academic Notice Advising Balances Care and Accountability

Participants described relational care and accountability as complementary, rather than as opposing, dimensions of academic notice advising. They sought to validate students' experiences, preserve student agency, and provide individualized support, and also communicate institutional expectations, consequences, and students' responsibilities within the academic recovery process. Across participants' accounts, effective support did not require removing expectations or boundaries; instead, advisors described navigating care and accountability together while supporting students experiencing academic difficulty.

Brigitte, assistant director, provides a clear example of how relational support operated alongside explicit academic expectations. When discussing academic notice appointments, Brigitte described the meetings as opportunities for building relationships, particularly because some students may be meeting with an advisor for the first time. Brigitte shared:

> A lot of the appointments are just kind of getting to know them, and them getting to know what we do, and us saying you're not in trouble, this isn't the principal's office, we're here to support you through this.

This reassurance was paired with an explicit discussion of academic expectations. Brigitte explained advisors work with students on an academic agreement and "let them know what grades they need, highlight potential resources that we talked about during the meeting, and then

at the very end, discuss what happens if they don't go back into good standing." Brigitte's account illustrated that reassurance did not replace institutional expectations. Framing the appointment as supportive created space to build relationships, and the academic agreement made performance expectations, available resources, and possible consequences explicit.

Taylor extended this pattern by demonstrating how support can involve reciprocal responsibility and student participation in academic recovery. When meeting with students on academic notice, Taylor begins by asking the student to explain what occurred and considers academic and nonacademic circumstances. Taylor explained, they "ask the student to debrief to gain more insight, then I assess the reason for the performance, whether it was a content comprehension issue or whether it was something beyond school entirely." Based on the student's responses, Taylor can guide the conversation and connect the student with appropriate resources. The conversation then moves toward student agency. Taylor explained they "usually ask the student to name three goals that they'd like to work on, and then we workshop them into SMART [specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound] goals. Then we set a follow-up appointment, which also doubles as their mandatory advising appointment." Here, the student is not simply given a plan. Instead, they are expected to reflect on what occurred, identify goals, translate them into actionable steps, and participate in ongoing follow-up. Therefore, accountability operates not simply as compliance with institutional requirements but as structured participation in one's own academic recovery. In Taylor's account, relational support enabled accountability by positioning the student as an active participant in identifying and carrying out the next steps.

Jessica introduced a more consequential form of accountability, showing that relational availability can persist even as academic circumstances worsen. After meeting with a student on

academic notice, Jessica described adding a calendar note to follow up if they have not heard back. They shared they usually send students on academic notice they previously met with a message saying, “I hope everything is going well. I’ve thought about you recently. Let me know if you would like to check in.” This continued outreach keeps the advising relationship open. At the same time, Jessica described situations in which students did not fully recognize the seriousness of their academic standing until facing possible disqualification. Recalling one such student, they explained they communicated directly to the student, saying, “We’re very serious; this is the plan. We are not saying no, but this is what the disqualification looks like. This is what we would like you to do.” Jessica’s account showed how relational availability can coexist with direct communication about institutional consequences. The discussion of disqualification conveyed the seriousness of the student’s situation and also clarified what a possible path forward might entail. Accountability did not close the advising relationship; instead, direct discussion of consequences was paired with information that preserved the student’s ability to make informed decisions about what to do next.

Eric pushed the finding further by showing relational care does not necessarily require continued enrollment as the immediate outcome. When meeting with students who have appealed a disqualification decision, they described inviting students to tell their stories and identify anything that might not have been adequately represented in their appeal materials. Eric shared they ask the student, “Is there anything that you feel like didn’t accurately capture your experience? Or let’s start from scratch and give me the rundown on everything?” However, listening to and understanding the student’s circumstances did not necessarily result in continued enrollment. After considering a student’s situation, Eric shared they may conclude the student “could use some time to address these mental health concerns, financial concerns, take some

time, get it right, and come back, and we'll welcome you back. I'll shake your hand when you walk across that graduation stage." Eric's account complicated any assumption that relational care necessarily requires continued enrollment or additional flexibility. Even when a pause was considered appropriate, the advising relationship could remain intact. In this example, the student's circumstances were heard, future return remained possible, and longer-term graduation continued to be framed as an attainable outcome. As this boundary case shows, a pause or alternative pathway was presented as compatible with continued support rather than as withdrawal of care.

Across these accounts, student agency connected relational care and accountability. Relational support created opportunities for students to explain their circumstances, reflect on what had occurred, identify resources, consider alternatives, and participate in decisions about what came next. In this way, validation created conditions for students to reflect, choose, and act. Accountability gave those conversations direction by clarifying academic expectations, requiring student participation and follow-through, and communicating the consequences attached to continued academic difficulty. Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of institutional requirements, accountability framed them as active participants in identifying and implementing the next steps in their academic recovery. Therefore, participants did not generally describe care as the absence of expectations, nor did they equate accountability solely with punishment. Instead, relational care often created the conditions for action, and accountability clarified what meaningful movement forward required. Care likewise did not necessarily mean continued enrollment or repeated flexibility. At the boundary of the finding, candid redirection, time away, or formal consequences could coexist with an ongoing advising relationship and a longer-term pathway toward academic recovery.

Academic Recovery Is Developmental, Nonlinear, and Broader Than GPA Restoration

Participants understood academic recovery as a developmental and often nonlinear process that extended beyond immediate improvement in a student's GPA. They described recovery in terms of student agency, learning, connection to resources, changes in behavior or decision-making, and developing practices that could support more sustainable academic progress. At the same time, participants recognized these broader developmental understandings remained bounded by the institution's formal measures of academic standing, demonstrating a distinction between the developmental process of recovery and the institutional endpoint of returning to good standing.

Participants' accounts reflected three interconnected dimensions of academic recovery: (a) institutional, (b) developmental, and (c) trajectory recovery. Institutional recovery was reflected formally in a student's GPA and return to good academic standing. Developmental recovery involved changes that could precede or support numerical improvement, including identifying barriers, seeking support for mental health or basic needs, changing unsustainable circumstances or study strategies, setting goals, developing self-awareness, and assuming greater ownership of academic decisions. Trajectory recovery involved constructing a viable longer-term academic path when an immediate return to good standing or uninterrupted enrollment was not realistic, including changing majors, temporarily withdrawing, completing coursework elsewhere, or later returning to the institution. Across these dimensions, participants did not make GPA irrelevant; rather, they described developmental and trajectory changes as processes through which formal academic recovery could become possible.

Therefore, academic recovery could begin before improvement became visible in a student's GPA. When working with students on academic notice, Steve emphasized positive changes students had made even when the previous quarter had not produced the academic outcome they wanted. Steve shared they tell students, "Even though the previous quarter did not go the way they wanted academically, they were still doing good work by diagnosing the issues and trying to address them so they would not continue into future quarters." Steve's account illustrated developmental recovery: reflection, recognition of underlying barriers, and changes in strategy could represent meaningful progress before a student's GPA showed numerical improvement. Such developmental progress was not equivalent to formal academic recovery, but it could constitute part of the process through which formal recovery became possible.

Taylor's account further demonstrated how institutional and developmental recovery could operate simultaneously. Taylor explained "it's all about numbers. The GPA is what we look at" and "in terms of academic standing, this is the minimum of what you need." However, when meeting with a student on academic notice, Taylor described debriefing the previous quarter, assessing academic and nonacademic barriers, providing referrals, collaborating with the student to create SMART goals, and scheduling a follow-up meeting. In this account, academic standing remained numerically defined, and the advising process that supported improvement was developmental. Institutional and developmental recovery were, therefore, not competing definitions of recovery: GPA marked the formal institutional outcome, and reflection, resource use, goal setting, and changed behavior represented processes that could help students move toward that outcome.

Participants also described recovery as potentially nonlinear. A change in major or academic pathway, time away from the institution, or a later return could sometimes form part of

a constructive longer-term trajectory rather than represent the end of academic recovery. Sandra illustrated this possibility when describing work with students on academic notice who continued to struggle academically. Sandra explained they might tell a student, "You're not doing so well; we don't want to disqualify you. But we recommend that you voluntarily withdraw, or withdraw from the quarter, take classes at a community college and then come back when you're ready." Sandra's account demonstrated recovery did not always require continuous enrollment at the institution. In some circumstances, temporary withdrawal could represent one step within a longer academic trajectory when continued enrollment was unlikely to support progress. From this perspective, the relevant question was not simply whether a student remained continuously enrolled but whether the student could construct a more viable pathway toward future academic progress.

The broader developmental understanding of recovery did not eliminate institutional standards or make every positive change, pause, or departure evidence of academic recovery. Brigitte provided an important boundary to the finding. When discussing the tension between being supportive and also addressing the possibility that a student might not be able to continue at the institution or complete a degree, Brigitte explained, "The recovery part is getting them back into good standing, and that's the goal, and keeping that in mind is, how are we gonna do that?" Brigitte's account reinforced that academic recovery retained a formal institutional endpoint. Developmental progress and changes in academic trajectory could support recovery, but institutions still determined good academic standing through established performance standards.

Across cases, participants distinguished between the institutional measurement of recovery and the developmental processes that could make recovery possible. For some students,

that process followed a relatively direct path toward improved academic performance and good standing; for others, it could include changes in strategy, use of resources, a different major, temporary withdrawal, coursework at another institution, or a later return following disqualification. These different pathways demonstrated why recovery was nonlinear without making its institutional boundaries irrelevant. Developmental progress did not replace formal academic recovery; instead, it could have indicated students were building the conditions necessary for more sustainable academic progress.

Therefore, academic recovery was institutional and developmental. Formal recovery remained connected to academic performance and a return to good standing. At the same time, participants also understood recovery as involving students' growing capacity to identify the circumstances contributing to academic difficulty, engage appropriate resources, revise strategies and goals, and make sustainable decisions about their academic trajectories. Therefore, the finding distinguished between how recovery was institutionally measured and how participants understood the processes through which students could move toward it: recovery could be developmental and nonlinear in process while remaining numerical and status-based in institutional measurement.

Domain III: Relational Meaning, Accountability, and Recovery Synthesis

The findings revealed academic notice functioned as a relationally mediated status shaped by advisors' communication, validation, and engagement with students. Advisors did not merely convey policy but helped students interpret the implications of academic notice, balancing institutional expectations with support. Relational care and accountability complemented academic advising, allowing students to discuss their circumstances, reflect, and

identify next steps. This approach emphasized student agency, with validation encouraging reflection and accountability keeping students engaged in their recovery process.

Academic recovery was seen as institutional and developmental, with good standing serving as a formal measure. In contrast, developmental changes like identifying barriers and reconsidering academic pathways could precede or support numerical improvement. Overall, the findings showed how advisors used validating, student-centered practices while upholding institutional expectations, demonstrating that care and accountability can coexist in supporting students facing academic challenges.

Cross-Finding Synthesis

The eight findings collectively highlighted four broader patterns in how academic notice was interpreted and enacted within this study's decentralized advising context. The first pattern was that academic notice functions as an enacted policy rather than a self-executing one. Although institutional rules established essential parameters, those parameters gain practical meaning through organizational structures within advising units; the professional judgment of academic advisors, assistant directors, directors, faculty members, and other institutional actors; and the communication and relationship-building through which advisors engage students. Therefore, academic notice becomes a practice shaped by the interaction among formal policy, organizational context, professional interpretation, and student-facing enactment.

The second pattern was that variation in enacting academic notice is structured, not random. Differences in advising practices did not stem solely from advisors' individual preferences; they also reflected broader differences in organizational context and capacity, decision authority, professional discretion, and policy agency. Advising units varied in terms of caseloads, curricular requirements, staffing structures, available resources, and local

implementation practices. Decision authority also shifted throughout the academic notice process among academic advisors, assistant directors, directors, faculty members, and other institutional actors. Participants generally valued common institutional guidelines, even when they did not advocate for uniform procedures across all units. As a result, variation existed within an organizationally structured decision space rather than being characterized by unrestricted local autonomy.

The third pattern indicated institutional accountability and relational support are not inherently opposed. The findings revealed boundaries and support operated together at multiple levels throughout the academic notice process. Institutional guidelines established common expectations and allowed for contextualized practices. Professional discretion enabled advisors and other institutional actors to address individual circumstances and remain within the bounds of policy, evidence, precedent, equity considerations, and organizational authority. In student-facing practices, relational care and validation could coexist with accountability, transparency, and clear communication regarding institutional expectations. Participants could view recovery as a developmental, nonlinear process while still acknowledging the formal institutional endpoint of returning to good academic standing. Across these findings, support did not require removing boundaries; instead, advisors negotiated boundaries and relational support together when enacting academic notice.

The fourth pattern highlighted that students' encounters with a formally common policy are influenced by the organizational and relational contexts in which it is enacted. Organizational capacity shapes the types of interventions and continuity advising units can offer. At the same time, advisors' communication and relationships help construct what academic notice means in students' encounters with the institution. As a result, academic notice can be understood not

merely as a written rule or academic status, but as the way advisors articulate academic challenges, communicate their seriousness, validate students' experiences, preserve student agency, and support progress toward recovery. The practical meaning of academic notice, therefore, emerged from the interplay of policy, organizational conditions, professional actions, and relational practices.

The findings delineated interconnected levels of the academic notice policy process. Domain I showed how formal policy is translated into practice through interpretation, operationalization, discretion, and policy agency. Domain II showed how decentralized organizational structures shape the conditions for enactment, including consistency and variation across advising units. Domain III showed how communication, relational care, accountability, student agency, and developmental understandings of recovery give enactment a student-facing form. Collectively, the domains suggested academic notice moves from institutional policy through organizational and professional enactment to relational and developmental advising practices.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Implications

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to existing literature and the research questions (RQs) guiding this study. In this chapter, I interpret the findings, explain their significance, consider how they confirm, extend, or complicate existing scholarship, and identify implications for academic advising practice, institutional policy, and future research. The discussion is organized around the three RQs, so the findings established in Chapter 4 remain the study's primary analytic claims. In contrast, Chapter 5 elaborates on their meaning in relation to prior scholarship and the study's theoretical frameworks. Because several findings contributed to more than one research question, the discussion also considers relationships among policy meaning-making, enactment, organizational context, and relational practice where appropriate.

Summary of the Study

In this basic qualitative study, I examined how academic advisors made sense of, interpreted, and enacted academic notice policies within a decentralized advising environment, and how they navigated the relationship between institutional expectations and relational care when supporting students experiencing academic difficulty. The study followed a constructionist orientation and examined academic notice as a policy whose meaning and practice are shaped by institutional context, organizational structures, professional interpretation, and interaction. Critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011) and Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) provided complementary lenses for considering the relational, organizational, and equity dimensions of academic notice advising.

The study was conducted at a large public research university with a decentralized academic advising structure. Thirteen participants with experience supporting undergraduate

students on academic notice represented multiple advising contexts and organizational roles. I generated the data primarily through semi-structured interviews and analyzed them through iterative qualitative coding, focused analysis, memoing, and cross-case synthesis. The analysis moved from participant-level patterns to eight cross-case findings, which Chapter 4 organized within three analytic domains reflecting the RQs and conceptual relationships among the findings. Because the study centered the perspectives of academic advisors and other advising professionals, the findings described how participants understood and enacted academic notice and the student-facing conditions they described; the study did not directly examine students' interpretations of those experiences.

Summary of Major Findings

The study resulted in eight findings that addressed how participants made sense of the purpose and function of academic notice, interpreted and enacted policy in advising practice, and navigated tensions between institutional expectations and relational care. Chapter 4 organized these findings into three analytic domains that reflected the RQs and conceptual relationships among the findings. The first domain, Policy Meaning, Enactment, and Professional Judgment, examined how advisors interpreted academic notice policy, translated it into local practice, exercised professional discretion, and helped shape its implementation. The second domain, Decentralization, Consistency, and Organizational Context, examined how shared institutional expectations interacted with local practices and differences in organizational capacity across advising units. The third domain, Relational Meaning, Accountability, and Recovery, focused on how communication and advising relationships shaped the meaning of academic notice and how advisors balanced relational care, accountability, and broader understandings of academic recovery.

Across the three analytic domains, the findings positioned academic notice as an institutional practice shaped by policy, organization, professional enactment, and relational mediation. Formal policy established common parameters, but participants described those parameters as acquiring practical meaning through local operationalization, professional judgment, decision authority, organizational capacity, communication, and relational engagement. The findings also showed that variation across advising units was structured rather than arbitrary; participants generally valued consistency in institutional guardrails over identical procedures, and relational care and accountability could operate together within formal institutional boundaries. Chapter 5 builds on these findings by discussing what they mean for each research question and the existing literature.

Discussion of Findings

This section interprets the eight cross-case findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the study's three RQs, existing literature, and theoretical frameworks. The discussion examines how the findings collectively extend, support, or complicate existing understandings of academic notice policy, policy enactment, decentralized advising, and relational student support. The discussion is organized by research question, consistent with the study's purpose of examining how academic advisors make sense of academic notice, interpret and enact policy in advising practice, and navigate institutional expectations and relational care through asset-based, validating, and equity-minded approaches.

Although the findings are discussed in relation to the RQs they most directly address, several findings contributed to more than one research question. This overlap reflects the interconnected nature of policy meaning-making, enactment, organizational context, and relational practice identified across participants' accounts. Therefore, the discussion considers

relationships among findings where appropriate and maintained the RQs as the primary organizational structure.

RQ1: Making Sense of the Purpose and Function of Academic Notice

RQ1. How do academic advisors make sense of the purpose and function of academic notice policies within their institutional context?

The findings indicated that academic advisors made sense of academic notice through the interaction of formal institutional expectations and the organizational contexts in which they worked. Participants did not describe the purpose and function of academic notice as residing entirely within the written academic-standing rule. Instead, institutional policy established shared parameters and local procedures; unit responsibilities, organizational capacity, professional experience, and participants' positions within the institution shaped how the policy was understood in practice. Therefore, academic notice acquired meaning as an organizationally situated policy: advisors understood its purpose through the institution-wide standards it represented and the local responsibilities, resources, student populations, curricular structures, and decision-making processes through which they encountered it.

Differences in policy agency and organizational position also illuminated RQ1. Participants did not occupy the same positions relative to policy. Some primarily interpreted and implemented existing requirements, and others had authority to influence local procedures, practices, or implementation conditions. These differences suggested sensemaking was connected not only to professional beliefs or experience but also to organizational responsibility and access to decision-making structures. The purpose and function of academic notice were, therefore, understood from positions embedded within a larger institutional and organizational system.

This study explored how formal academic notice policy becomes enacted in academic advising practice. Participants did not describe academic notice as a self-executing policy whose practical meaning followed automatically from its written requirements. Instead, interactions among established institutional parameters, local organizational structures, and the practices through which advising units operationalized those parameters shaped its enactment. Within these contexts, institutional actors exercised professional judgment in response to individual students' circumstances. In contrast, the location and extent of that judgment varied by decision stage and level of organizational authority. Some participants, depending on their position and responsibilities, also described having the authority to influence or reshape the local practices and conditions through which academic notice was enacted.

Academic notice policy requires interpretation as it moves from formal institutional requirements to advising practice. Spillane et al. (2002) conceptualized policy implementation as a sensemaking process in which institutional actors interpret policy through prior knowledge, professional beliefs, and contextual cues rather than mechanically applying policy as written. Consistent with this perspective, the literature positions academic advisors as policy-implementing agents and educators whose professional judgment and meaning-making mediate how they interpret and enact institutional policy (Crowe, 2020; Lowenstein, 2005; McGill, 2019). The findings of the present study supported this perspective by demonstrating that formal academic notice policy became actionable through local procedures and professional interpretation. Participants described institutional policy as establishing common parameters, and advising units gave those parameters operational form through locally developed procedures, requirements, communication practices, and intervention structures. Therefore, the present study

confirmed existing policy-enactment scholarship and extended it by illustrating how policy translation occurs specifically within academic notice advising.

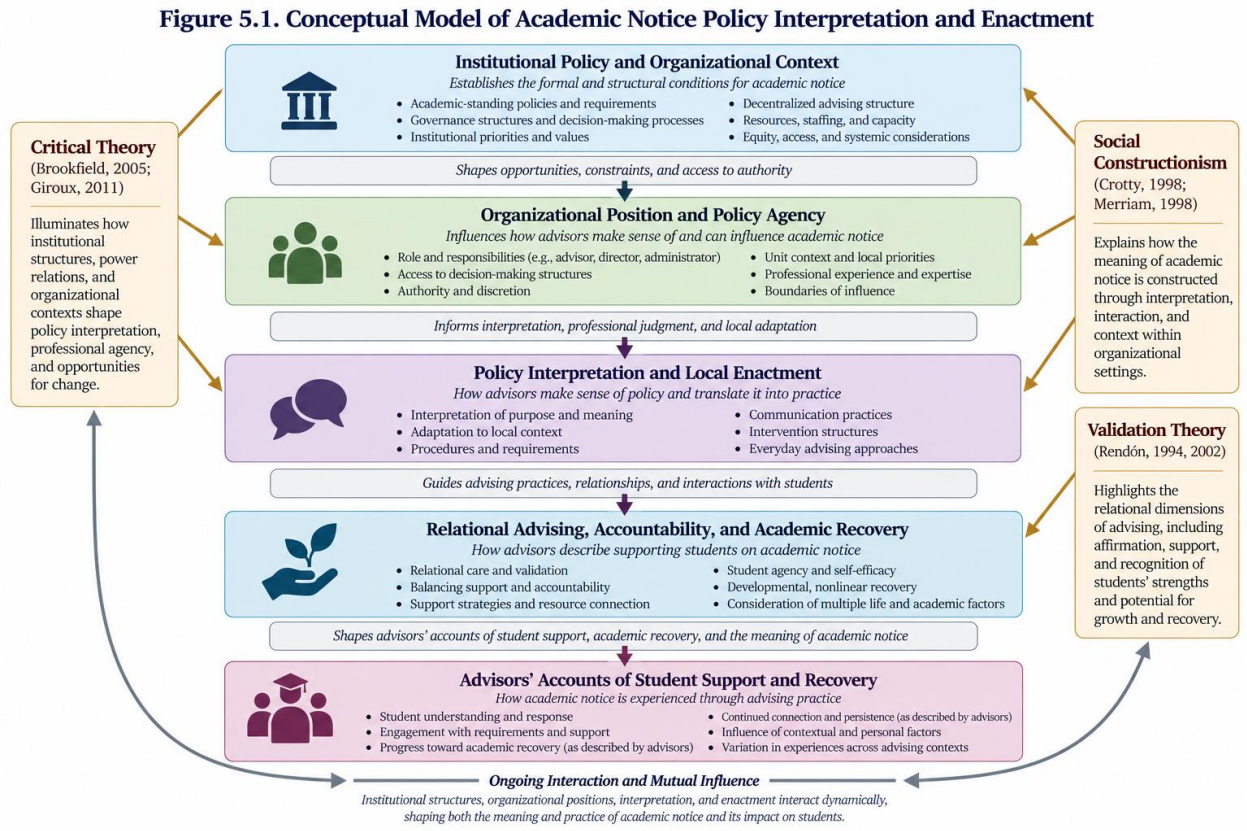
Academic notice policy is enacted within organizational contexts that shape how institutional actors interpret and apply it in practice. An academic advisor's interpretation of academic notice, therefore, does not occur in isolation. Honig (2006) argued policy implementation is not a linear translation of policy intent into practice but a complex, interactive process involving actors, organizational routines, institutional contexts, and local conditions. Consistent with this perspective, the findings of the present study demonstrated academic notice enactment was embedded within advising units characterized by different roles, procedures, decision structures, capacities, and distributions of authority; participants' professional judgment operated within these organizational arrangements rather than independently of them. Decision authority, bounded discretion, organizational capacity, and, for some participants, policy agency shaped how institutional policy was interpreted and operationalized. The present study confirmed existing policy-enactment scholarship and extends it by identifying the organizational processes through which academic notice acquired practical form. Policy interpretation, in this sense, was not merely an individual cognitive process; it was embedded within the organization.

Viewed through critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011), these differences in organizational position, decision authority, and policy agency highlighted how institutional structures shape not only the enactment of academic notice but also the positions from which institutional actors make sense of its purpose and function. Participants did not interpret policy from equivalent organizational locations; their roles afforded different forms of access to decision-making structures, institutional authority, and opportunities to influence local implementation. Therefore, a critical interpretation extends the sensemaking perspective by

suggesting meaning-making is not only contextual but also structured by institutional relationships of authority. Understanding how advisors make sense of academic notice requires attention to the organizational contexts through which policy is interpreted and the different positions from which institutional actors participate in that interpretation.

Figure 5.1 illustrates these relationships by presenting a conceptual synthesis of how institutional structures, organizational position, professional agency, policy interpretation, and relational advising practices interact in the enactment of academic notice. Grounded in the study's eight cross-case findings and informed by its theoretical perspectives, the model highlights the interconnected nature of institutional expectations, professional judgment, and student support as described by academic advisors. The model represents relationships identified through participants' accounts rather than establishing causal relationships or directly measured student outcomes.

Figure 5.1 ***Conceptual Model of Academic Notice Policy Interpretation and Enactment***



Note. The model synthesizes relationships identified across the study's eight cross-case findings. Social constructionism provided the ontological and epistemological foundation, while critical theory and validation theory informed interpretation of structural and relational dimensions. The model reflects advisors' accounts of policy enactment and student support, not independently observed student experiences or outcomes.

The findings positioned advisors and other institutional actors as active participants in policy enactment rather than as neutral transmitters of academic notice requirements. At the same time, their agency operated within formal institutional parameters and organizational structures that constrained and enabled what they could do. Therefore, academic notice is best understood as an enacted policy whose practical form emerges through the interaction of

institutional rules, organizational structures, professional interpretation, decision authority, discretion, and agency.

This interpretation is important because it shifts attention from academic notice as a written policy to academic notice as an enacted institutional practice. Understanding how academic notice functions, therefore, requires examining not only what institutional policy requires but also how advising units operationalize those requirements, where decision-making authority resides, how professional discretion is structured and constrained, and which institutional actors can influence local implementation. Institutions seeking to understand or improve academic notice may therefore need to examine the organizational and professional processes through which policy becomes practice, rather than focusing solely on the formal policy itself.

RQ2: Interpreting and Enacting Academic Notice in Advising Practice

RQ2. How do academic advisors interpret and enact academic notice policies in their day-to-day advising practice?

The findings indicated advisors enacted academic notice by translating formal institutional parameters into local procedures, professional decisions, and student-facing interactions. Day-to-day enactment involved more than communicating a student's academic status or applying a written rule. Advisors interpreted institutional expectations, assessed individual circumstances, exercised professional judgment within bounded decision spaces, explained requirements and consequences, connected students with resources, and participated in local intervention structures. The location and extent of discretion shifted across stages of the academic notice process and among actors authorized to make academic notice decisions.

Therefore, professional discretion was distributed, stage-dependent, and bounded rather than a fixed amount of freedom possessed by an individual advisor.

RQ2 further revealed enactment varied across advising units within common institutional guardrails. This variation reflected organizational context, capacity, decision authority, local procedures, and differing levels of policy agency, rather than individual advisors' preferences alone. Communication and relational practice also shaped enactment. Advisors translated institutional meaning through language, explanation, validation, transparency, and discussions of available pathways. Therefore, academic notice was enacted simultaneously through organizational processes and student-facing relationships.

Professional discretion in academic notice enactment was distributed, stage-dependent, and bounded. Existing literature has examined how discretion and professional judgment operate within policy enactment. Lipsky (2010) conceptualized frontline professionals as actors who exercise discretion under conditions of ambiguity and constraint and translate formal policy into practice. McGill (2019) similarly emphasized that academic advisors exercise professional judgment within institutional and organizational contexts that shape, constrain, and enable their work. The findings of the present study supported these perspectives and add greater specificity to how discretion operated within the academic notice process. Discretion did not reside solely with an individual advisor or remain constant throughout the process. Rather, its location and extent shifted with the decision stage and the actor authorized to make a particular decision. At the same time, professional judgment remained bounded by formal policy, available evidence, precedent, equity considerations, institutional standards, and organizational authority. These findings complicated an individualized conception of discretion by suggesting professional discretion is better understood as a decision-making process than as a fixed attribute of an

individual advisor. Therefore, in this study, professional judgment operated within an organizationally structured decision space whose boundaries shifted across stages, actors, and student cases.

Professional discretion and policy agency represent related but distinct dimensions of academic notice enactment. Policy-enactment scholarship treats implementing actors as active rather than passive participants in translating policy into practice, but the literature reviewed in this study paid less attention to differences in actors' capacity to reshape the organizational conditions through which implementation occurs. The findings of the present study extended this literature by showing that some participants did more than interpret academic notice policy or exercise judgment within existing structures. Depending on their organizational position and responsibilities, some participants described influencing local procedures, practices, or conditions through which academic notice was enacted. These findings distinguished professional discretion, which involves exercising judgment within an existing organizational and policy structure, from policy agency, which refers to an actor's capacity to influence or reshape the local practices and conditions through which policy is enacted. This distinction suggests institutional actors may actively participate in policy enactment and possess varying levels and forms of authority to shape the structures within which enactment occurs.

The findings of the present study revealed structured variation in enacting a common institutional academic notice policy across advising units within a decentralized organizational environment. Participants generally valued shared institutional expectations, standards, and boundaries, without requiring identical procedures across advising units. Differences in enactment were not described solely as products of individual advisor preference but were also shaped by organizational context and capacity, decision authority, bounded professional

discretion, and local implementation structures. The central distinction emerging from these findings was that consistency does not necessarily require uniformity, just as variation does not necessarily indicate inconsistency. Instead, academic notice enactment occurred within common institutional guardrails and allowed differences in how advising units operationalized those expectations in their local contexts.

Variation in policy enactment is expected in complex educational systems and does not necessarily indicate inconsistency or implementation failure. Honig (2006) argued policy implementation occurs through interactions among actors, organizational structures, resources, and local conditions, making variation an inherent feature of implementation across complex educational contexts. Similarly, Spillane et al. (2002) demonstrated that implementing actors interpret policy through different contextual cues, prior knowledge, and professional understandings. The findings of the present study supported these perspectives and provide greater specificity regarding the organizational conditions that structured variation in enacting academic notice. Shared institutional guardrails, the distribution and boundaries of professional discretion, differences in organizational capacity, and variations in policy agency shaped differences across advising units. Participants generally valued consistency in institutional expectations, terminology, standards, and boundaries without requiring identical local procedures. Professional judgment occurred within an organizationally structured decision space in which discretion shifted according to decision stage, authorized actor, and mechanisms of constraint. Staffing, time, expertise, relational continuity, and intervention infrastructure further shaped the forms of academic notice support available within advising units, and institutional actors differed in their capacity to influence local practices and organizational conditions depending on their positions, responsibilities, and access to decision-making structures. These

findings showed variation in academic notice enactment was not simply a product of individual advisor preference or arbitrary differences among advising units; instead, organizational conditions structured variation within a common institutional policy environment.

Decentralized advising structures can create opportunities for contextual responsiveness in enacting academic notice policy. Weick's (1976) loosely coupled systems perspective helps explain how organizational units can remain connected to broader institutional structures and develop distinct local practices in response to their contexts. McGill (2019) similarly emphasized that academic advising is embedded within organizational structures that shape, constrain, and enable professional practice. Consistent with this perspective, participants described advising units characterized by different curricular environments, student populations, local procedures, responsibilities, and organizational structures. The findings suggest decentralization created space for advising units to contextualize enacting academic notice within these local conditions rather than requiring identical procedures across the institution. Such variation did not necessarily depart from institutional policy; local practices could differ and remain within common institutional parameters. Therefore, the findings extended the loosely coupled systems perspective to academic notice advising by illustrating how decentralized organizational structures can provide space for contextualized policy enactment within a shared institutional policy environment.

Participants generally located desired consistency at the level of institutional guardrails rather than identical procedures across advising units. Existing policy-enactment literature recognizes implementation varies across organizational contexts. Still, the literature reviewed in this study gave less attention to how practitioners distinguish consistency in institutional expectations from uniformity in local procedures. The present study extends this literature by

showing participants generally valued shared terminology, expectations, standards, and boundaries and also recognized the need for local flexibility in how academic notice support was enacted. Participants' concerns about consistency, therefore, did not necessarily translate into a desire for centralized or identical procedures across advising units. Instead, they sought common institutional reference points and recognized curricular requirements, student populations, and organizational contexts could warrant differences in local implementation. These findings suggest that institutional consistency in a decentralized advising environment may reside in shared guardrails and decision principles rather than procedural sameness.

Organizational capacity shaped the conditions under which advising units could translate local flexibility into support for academic notice. Honig (2006) identified organizational resources, professional roles, institutional priorities, and capacity as conditions that can enable or constrain policy implementation. Kitchen et al. (2021) similarly situated validation within broader institutional systems, emphasizing that validating support depends not only on individual relationships but also on coordinated and sustained organizational practices. The study extended these perspectives by identifying specific dimensions of organizational capacity that shaped how advising units enacted academic notice. The findings showed that staffing, available time, professional expertise, specialized roles, relational continuity, referral networks, and intervention infrastructure shaped the forms and levels of support advising units were positioned to provide. Participants described different combinations of these resources across organizational contexts, suggesting local flexibility did not operate under equivalent organizational conditions. Therefore, the present study adds specificity to existing understandings of organizational context by identifying the forms of capacity through which decentralized academic notice support was enacted.

Contextual flexibility and equity are not synonymous. Existing literature has demonstrated that organizational conditions and discretionary practices can have equity implications, particularly when institutional actors exercise professional judgment amid uneven resources, competing demands, and organizational constraints. Lipsky (2010), for example, cautioned that discretion exercised under conditions of workload pressure and limited resources can reproduce inequities rather than necessarily mitigate them. Equity-minded scholarship has similarly highlighted the institutional and structural conditions that shape different opportunities for support rather than locating responsibility solely within individual students (Bensimon, 2005; Museus, 2021). The findings of the present study extended this concern to decentralized academic notice advising by demonstrating that advising units operated with different forms and levels of organizational capacity. Differences in staffing, time, expertise, relational continuity, referral networks, and intervention infrastructure shaped the forms of academic notice support that units were positioned to provide. Consequently, the opportunity to contextualize academic notice within local advising environments did not necessarily mean all units were equally positioned to translate that flexibility into the same forms or levels of student support. This finding complicated any assumption that decentralization or local flexibility is inherently equitable or beneficial. The potential for equity in contextual flexibility depends, in part, on whether advising units have the organizational capacity to translate this flexibility into meaningful student support.

Critical theory further illuminated the organizational conditions surrounding this variation in policy enactment (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011). Viewed through this lens, differences in discretion, policy agency, and organizational capacity are not simply procedural differences among advising units; they also reflect how the institution distributes authority,

resources, and opportunities to shape implementation. Participants exercised professional judgment from different organizational positions, and advising units lacked equivalent staffing, time, expertise, relational continuity, or intervention infrastructure. Therefore, a critical interpretation shifts attention from whether individual advisors enact academic notice effectively to the institutional conditions that enable or constrain that enactment. This perspective matters for understanding equity because a formally common policy can operate in organizational contexts that provide different capacities for student support.

The findings on institutional guardrails, professional discretion, organizational capacity, and policy agency showed that variation in academic notice enactment within a decentralized advising environment was structured rather than arbitrary. Participants generally valued consistency in shared institutional guardrails and recognized a need for contextualized local enactment, and professional discretion remained bounded by decision authority and organizational structures. At the same time, advising units operated with different levels and forms of organizational capacity, meaning opportunities for local flexibility did not necessarily translate into equivalent capacities to provide meaningful academic notice support. These findings extended existing understandings of decentralized policy enactment by demonstrating that contextual flexibility and institutional coherence can coexist. Still, flexibility alone does not ensure equitable conditions for student support. Effective decentralized academic notice enactment may, therefore, require coherence without uniformity: common institutional expectations, standards, and boundaries combined with sufficient local capacity to respond meaningfully to different student, curricular, and organizational contexts.

Academic advisors translate institutional meaning within the student-facing enactment of academic notice. Existing academic advising scholarship has positioned advisors as educators

and institutional intermediaries who help students interpret academic experiences, institutional requirements, and available pathways (Crowe, 2020; Lowenstein, 2005; McGill, 2019). The present study extended this perspective by showing that participants did more than relay the formal requirements associated with academic notice. They described using tone, language, normalization, explanation, questioning, transparency about resources and options, and relational connection to frame academic difficulty and communicate what academic notice meant within various student circumstances. Through these practices, participants translated formal institutional expectations into language and explanations intended to make the policy understandable and also communicate its seriousness and possible next steps. Therefore, their accounts suggested advisors do not merely transmit academic notice policy; they translate its institutional meaning into student-facing interactions. How academic notice is explained and relationally framed consequently becomes part of its enactment rather than a communication process separate from the policy itself.

A common institutional policy does not necessarily produce common conditions of student-facing enactment. Policy-enactment scholarship provides a foundation for understanding this variation. Spillane et al. (2002) showed that implementing actors interpret policy through professional beliefs, prior knowledge, and contextual cues, and Honig (2006) emphasized that implementation occurs through interactions among actors, organizational structures, resources, and local conditions. The present study extended these perspectives by showing how variation in organizational and relational enactment operated within a common institutional academic notice policy. Participants described differences in advising-unit capacity, local procedures, professional interpretation, communication practices, relational approaches, and intervention structures. Their accounts suggested that students within the same formal institutional policy

environment could experience academic notice under different organizational and relational conditions. Therefore, a common policy does not necessarily produce equivalent student-facing conditions of enactment because its practical form is shaped by the organizational contexts and the professional and relational processes through which it is enacted.

The findings on local operationalization, professional discretion, and policy agency support, extend, and complicate existing scholarship on policy enactment and professional judgment. Consistent with Spillane et al. (2002), Honig (2006), Lipsky (2010), and McGill (2019), the findings demonstrated that formal policy does not move directly from written requirements into practice; instead, institutional actors interpret and enact it within specific organizational contexts. The present study extends this literature by showing how these processes operate specifically within academic notice advising. Policy became practice through local interpretation and operationalization, and professional discretion shifted with the stage of the decision-making process while remaining bounded by institutional policy, evidence, precedent, equity considerations, and organizational authority. Participants also possessed different forms of policy agency depending on their organizational positions and responsibilities, with some able to influence or reshape the local practices and conditions through which academic notice was enacted. Collectively, these findings demonstrated that day-to-day academic notice enactment emerges through the interaction of formal institutional parameters, organizational structures, professional interpretation, decision authority, discretion, and policy agency.

RQ3: Navigating Institutional Expectations and Relational Care

RQ3. How do academic advisors draw on asset-based, validating, and equity-minded frameworks to navigate tensions between institutional expectations and relational care when supporting students on academic notice?

The findings indicated participants generally did not resolve the relationship between institutional expectations and relational care by choosing one over the other. Instead, they described practices through which validation, transparency, accountability, and student agency could operate together. Advisors could recognize students' experiences and circumstances, communicate in nondeficit-oriented ways, and support reflection and remain clear about academic standards, possible consequences, and the requirements associated with recovery. In this sense, care did not require removing expectations, and accountability did not necessarily require punitive enforcement.

Student agency emerged as a particularly important connection between care and accountability. Validating and relational practices could create conditions for students to reflect, disclose concerns, consider alternatives, and make informed decisions. At the same time, accountability positioned students as active participants responsible for navigating choices and institutional expectations. The findings also indicated organizational conditions shaped advisors' ability to enact validating and equity-minded approaches. Differences in staffing, time, expertise, relational continuity, referral networks, and intervention infrastructure meant advisors across units did not necessarily work under equivalent conditions. Therefore, the findings positioned equity-minded academic notice support as a relational and an organizational responsibility.

Relational Care and Institutional Accountability as Interdependent Practices

Academic notice occupies a space between institutional accountability and student support, requiring advisors to communicate academic expectations and support students experiencing academic difficulty. Rather than describing relational care and institutional accountability as inherently competing responsibilities, participants in this study generally described practices through which the two could operate together. The findings complicated a binary understanding of care and accountability by demonstrating how participants negotiated these responsibilities through transparent communication, validation of students' experiences and circumstances, preservation of student agency, clear expectations, and developmental approaches to academic recovery. Relational care did not require removing institutional expectations or consequences, just as accountability did not require punitive or impersonal approaches. Instead, participants described forms of academic notice advising in which care shaped how accountability was communicated and enacted, and accountability could also function as care when students received clear, transparent information about their circumstances, responsibilities, consequences, and available pathways forward.

Existing literature has long highlighted a tension between institutional accountability and student support in academic notice and advising practice. Barouch-Gilbert (2022) characterized academic notice as occupying a regulatory and developmental space in which institutional monitoring and expectations coexist with opportunities for reflection and growth. Developmental advising scholarship similarly positions advisors as institutional intermediaries who support student development while communicating and upholding institutional expectations (Crookston, 1972; Grites, 2013). The findings of the present study aligned with this literature but offer additional insight into how participants negotiated these responsibilities in practice. Participants generally did not position relational care and institutional accountability as mutually exclusive.

Instead, their accounts indicated responsibilities often viewed as conflicting can become interdependent in advising practice. Relational care could shape how institutional expectations were communicated and enacted, and accountability could remain part of a supportive and developmental advising relationship. Therefore, the findings complicated an oppositional understanding of care and accountability by suggesting the central issue may not be whether advisors choose between the two, but how they enact them together.

Validation does not require removing institutional expectations. Rendón (1994) conceptualized validation as a proactive process through which institutional agents affirm students' capacity and rightful place within higher education. Subsequent validation scholarship has similarly emphasized relational, proactive support that recognizes students' strengths, experiences, and capacity to succeed (Rendón et al., 2000; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Viewed through validation theory (Rendón, 1994), participants' accounts showed how validating practices could work alongside communicating academic standards, consequences, and recovery requirements. Participants described affirming students' experiences and circumstances and remaining transparent about institutional expectations and the actions students needed to take to move forward. Therefore, the findings extended existing understandings of validation by illustrating how validating practices can operate within enacting an institutional policy that retains formal standards and consequences. In this context, validation did not require removing institutional expectations; instead, it shaped how students were positioned in relation to those expectations as individuals capable of understanding their circumstances, making decisions, and actively participating in their academic recovery.

Student agency connects relational care and institutional accountability. Developmental advising scholarship positions students as active participants in the advising process. Crookston

(1972) and O'Banion (1972), for example, conceptualized developmental advising as collaborative and educational, emphasizing student autonomy, shared responsibility, reflection, and active participation in decision-making. The study's findings align with this perspective while also illustrating the boundaries within which student agency operates during academic notice. Participants described helping students reflect on their circumstances, identify available options, make informed decisions, and take responsibility for determining how to move forward within institutional requirements. However, meaningful student agency did not necessarily involve changing academic standing thresholds, eliminating institutional consequences, or determining whether continued enrollment would be permitted. Instead, students could exercise agency by understanding institutional expectations, identifying personal and academic priorities, considering available pathways, deciding on academic strategies or enrollment options, and developing a realistic plan for moving forward. In this sense, student agency was meaningful but institutionally bounded.

This distinction matters, especially through critical theory and validation theory. Critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011) highlights the unequal distribution of authority between students and institutions, including the power to set academic standards, determine eligibility for continued enrollment, and define successful academic recovery. Validation theory (Rendón, 1994) emphasizes recognizing students' capacity to make decisions and actively participate in their educational experiences, even within institutional constraints. These frameworks suggest preserving student agency requires more than encouraging students to assume responsibility for their academic outcomes. It also requires advisors to communicate honestly about which institutional requirements are nonnegotiable, clarify where students have meaningful choices, and avoid presenting institutionally constrained options as unrestricted opportunities for self-

determination. Therefore, relational care can support student agency without obscuring institutional power, and accountability can encourage students' active participation without placing sole responsibility for academic recovery on students whose choices are shaped by institutional conditions.

Institutional accountability does not necessarily require punitive enactment. Prior research has shown academic probation or notice can acquire punitive and stigmatizing meanings through how academic difficulty is communicated and institutionally framed. Barouch-Gilbert (2015), Brady (2017), and Rodriguez (2019), for example, documented how communication surrounding academic difficulty can contribute to confusion, shame, stigma, and deficit-oriented interpretations of academic status. The findings of the present study aligned with this literature and offer insight into how participants navigated communicating accountability in their advising practice. Participants described communicating the seriousness of students' academic circumstances, institutional expectations, potential consequences, and recovery requirements. They also used language and relational practices that framed academic notice as an opportunity for reflection, action, and potential recovery. These findings distinguished punitive enactment from relational accountability. Communicating expectations and consequences honestly was not inherently punitive when staff validated students' circumstances, made institutional expectations transparent, and allowed students to retain agency in determining how to move forward. Therefore, accountability could function within a relational and developmental advising approach rather than in opposition to it.

Academic Recovery as a Developmental and Institutionally Bounded Process

Academic recovery can be developmental in process and remain institutionally bounded in its formal measurement. Foundational developmental advising scholarship conceptualized

advising as an educational process involving reflection, decision-making, goal setting, and student development rather than solely the enforcement of institutional requirements (Crookston, 1972; Frost, 2000; O'Banion, 1972). More recent scholarship has continued to emphasize advising's educational and developmental dimensions. McGill (2021) identified caring relationships, meaning-making, and informed decision-making as central processes through which academic advising contributes to students' academic identity development. Lowenstein (2020) similarly emphasized advising as an educational activity extending beyond the transmission of requirements, although his learning-centered approach differs from traditional developmental advising. Within the specific context of academic recovery, Morris and Harris (2022) described academic probation policies as encompassing disciplinary, interventionist, relational, and instructional dimensions, illustrating how institutional requirements and student support coexist. The findings of the present study built on these perspectives by showing that participants understood academic recovery as involving processes that could extend beyond immediate grade point average (GPA) restoration. Participants described reflection, changes in academic strategies, changes in major, temporary withdrawal, pauses in enrollment, or altered academic trajectories as potential parts of constructing a more viable path forward. These developmental processes did not eliminate institutional standards or make every change, pause, or departure evidence of academic recovery. Good academic standing remained the formal institutional endpoint against which recovery was ultimately measured. Therefore, the findings distinguished the developmental process of recovery from its institutional measurement: academic recovery could be developmental and nonlinear in process while remaining status- or GPA-based in institutional measurement.

Relational care within academic notice advising did not necessarily require preserving a student's current academic trajectory or continued enrollment. Developmental advising scholarship emphasizes student reflection, decision-making, and active participation (Crookston, 1972; O'Banion, 1972), and validation theory emphasizes institutional practices that affirm students' capacity and recognize their experiences (Rendón, 1994). The findings of the present study added an important boundary to this interpretation of care. Participants described circumstances in which supporting a student involved candidly discussing whether continued enrollment, a particular major, or a current academic pathway remained viable. In these situations, relational care involved helping students understand institutional realities and consider alternative pathways, rather than offering reassurance that would minimize the seriousness of their circumstances. Therefore, care did not necessarily mean continued enrollment or continuation along a student's existing academic trajectory, just as accountability did not necessarily require punitive enforcement. Instead, participants' accounts suggested relational care could include difficult and potentially disappointing conversations when grounded in transparency, respect for students' circumstances, and preserving their agency in determining how to move forward.

Communication and Relational Practices Construct the Meaning of Academic Notice

The meaning of academic notice is not contained entirely in formal policy text but is socially constructed through interpretation, interaction, and communication. Berger and Luckmann (1966) conceptualized meaning as produced and reinforced through social interaction and discourse, and Weick (1995) emphasized sensemaking as an ongoing process through which organizational actors construct meaning from institutional circumstances. Spillane et al. (2002) similarly demonstrated that implementing actors interpret policy through prior knowledge,

professional beliefs, and contextual cues rather than simply transmitting policy as written. The findings of the present study aligned with these perspectives and showed how these processes operated in academic notice advising. Participants described interpreting the purpose and meaning of academic notice and communicating that meaning to students through explanations, language, relational framing, and advising interactions. Therefore, academic notice acquired student-facing meaning not solely from its formal institutional definition but also through the professional and relational processes by which advisors interpreted, explained, and enacted it. The findings provided an empirical account of how policy meaning is constructed and communicated within academic notice advising.

Student-centered research demonstrates why communication and relational framing matter in the student-facing enactment of academic notice. Barouch-Gilbert (2015), Brady (2017), and Rodriguez (2019) documented confusion, stigma, shame, punitive interpretations, and threats to academic identity or belonging when academic standing was communicated in ways students experienced as impersonal, unclear, or deficit-oriented. Rodriguez (2019) provided direct evidence that students can experience academic probation as stigmatizing and consequential for their confidence, sense of belonging, and academic identity. This study added an advisor-centered perspective to this literature. Participants described practices like normalizing academic difficulty, using supportive and non-deficit-oriented language, clarifying institutional expectations, explaining available options and resources, and building relational connections with students. Although this study did not directly examine students' interpretations of these practices, participants' accounts identified student-facing advising practices through which the meaning of academic notice is communicated and relationally framed. Therefore, these findings complemented student-centered research by identifying professional practices that

may challenge or reinforce the punitive and stigmatizing meanings of academic notice documented in prior studies.

Humanizing the student-facing enactment of academic notice does not require minimizing the policy's seriousness or its institutional consequences. Validation, strengths-based, and developmental advising scholarship emphasizes affirming students' capacities, recognizing their experiences and strengths, and supporting reflection and development, rather than defining students primarily by academic difficulty or deficit (Rendón, 1994; Schreiner, 2013b; Yosso, 2005). The findings of the present study aligned with these perspectives and showed how humanizing practices operated alongside institutional expectations. Participants described normalizing academic difficulty, validating students' circumstances, and using relational, non-deficit-oriented communication, while also communicating academic standards, potential consequences, recovery requirements, and the seriousness of students' academic circumstances. These practices did not remove the regulatory dimensions of academic notice; rather, they shaped how those dimensions were communicated and relationally framed in student-facing interactions. The findings distinguished humanizing policy enactment from minimizing policy. As a result, academic notice could be communicated as serious and consequential without letting academic status define the student's capacity, worth, or potential for recovery.

Organizational Conditions Shape Relational and Equity-Minded Advising

Organizational capacity shapes the conditions surrounding student-facing encounters with academic notice. Honig (2006) emphasized that policy implementation occurs within organizational conditions, including professional roles, institutional priorities, available resources, and capacity, that can enable or constrain the work of implementing actors. Kitchen et

al. (2021) similarly extended validation beyond individual interactions by situating validating practices within broader organizational systems and coordinated institutional practices. The findings of the present study demonstrated how these organizational conditions operated within academic notice advising. Participants described advising units with different combinations of staffing, available time, professional expertise, relational continuity, specialized roles, referral networks, and intervention infrastructure. These differences meant relational and validating advising practices did not occur under equivalent organizational conditions across units. Therefore, participants' accounts suggested the student-facing enactment of academic notice is shaped not only by advisors' communication and relational practices but also by the organizational capacity surrounding those interactions. The findings extended an interpersonal understanding of academic notice support by demonstrating that the conditions for relational, sustained, and responsive support are themselves organizationally structured.

Understanding how academic notice becomes a student-facing institutional practice requires consideration of both organizational and relational processes. Policy-enactment scholarship emphasizes the organizational contexts, structures, resources, and professional interpretations through which institutional policy becomes practice (Honig, 2006; Spillane et al., 2002). In contrast, validation, developmental advising, and student-centered scholarship emphasize relational interactions, belonging, communication, and the meanings associated with academic difficulty (Museus, 2021; Rendón et al., 2000). The findings of the present study connected these levels by demonstrating that organizational and relational processes operate together in the student-facing enactment of academic notice. Participants described organizational capacity as shaping the conditions under which advising support was available. At the same time, their accounts of communication, validation, transparency, and relational framing

illustrated how academic notice was translated within student-facing interactions. Therefore, neither level alone fully accounts for how academic notice becomes an enacted institutional practice.

An ecological perspective provides a useful way to conceptualize this interaction. Kitchen et al. (2021) situated validation within an ecological framework that recognizes interactions among individuals, relational processes, contexts, and institutional conditions, rather than locating validation solely within individual advisor–student relationships. From this perspective, the findings suggest academic notice operates across interconnected levels: formal institutional policy sets broader parameters, and advising-unit structures and organizational capacity shape the conditions of enactment. Advisor–student interactions provide the relational context in which institutional expectations are communicated and framed. These levels are not simply sequential but mutually connected, with organizational conditions shaping relational possibilities and relational practices giving student-facing form to institutional policy. This ecological interpretation integrates the policy, organizational, and relational levels and helps explain how academic notice becomes a student-facing institutional practice.

Together, critical theory and validation theory clarify why navigating institutional expectations and relational care cannot be understood solely as an interpersonal advising task. Critical theory highlights the institutional conditions in which those practices occur, including differences in authority, organizational capacity, and access to resources that may enable or constrain advisors' ability to provide sustained and responsive support (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011). Validation theory shows how advisors can affirm students' capacity, recognize their experiences, preserve agency, and communicate institutional expectations in relational, non-deficit-oriented ways (Rendón, 1994; Rendón et al., 2000). These frameworks suggest

equity-minded academic notice support depends on how advisors engage students and on the organizational conditions that shape what forms of engagement and support are possible. Relational care and institutional accountability are, therefore, not solely matters of individual advisor practice but are embedded within broader institutional structures.

The findings on relational care and accountability, communication and relationships, academic recovery, and professional discretion show how participants navigated institutional expectations and relational care in the day-to-day enactment of academic notice policy. Rather than describing care and accountability as responsibilities that required advisors to choose one over the other, participants described practices through which the two could operate together. Validation and relational communication allowed students' experiences and circumstances to be recognized without eliminating institutional expectations; transparent communication allowed advisors to convey seriousness and consequences without necessarily enacting accountability punitively; and preserving student agency positioned students as active participants in determining how to move forward. Participants also described academic recovery as potentially developmental and nonlinear, yet bounded by formal institutional standards and decision-making structures. Collectively, these findings suggested relational care and institutional accountability can function as mutually reinforcing dimensions of academic notice advising when accountability is enacted transparently, relationally, and in ways that preserve student agency.

Synthesis Across the RQs

Across the three RQs, the findings provided an integrated explanation of how academic notice becomes a student-facing institutional practice. Formal academic notice policy establishes common institutional parameters, but participants described those parameters as becoming operational through advising-unit structures, professional interpretation, organizational capacity,

and relational communication. Therefore, students do not encounter academic notice solely as a written policy or academic status. Rather, participants' accounts suggested academic notice reaches students through the organizational and relational conditions in which it is enacted, including communication practices, advisor relationships, available resources, local procedures, and intervention structures. These conditions shape how institutions communicate expectations, what support is available, and how each advising unit frames academic difficulty. A formally common academic notice policy, therefore, does not necessarily produce common conditions of enactment; its student-facing form emerges through the interaction of formal policy, organizational context and capacity, professional enactment, and relational communication.

The findings concerning local policy operationalization, relational care and accountability, developmental understandings of recovery, organizational capacity, and communication demonstrated how formal academic notice policy becomes a student-facing institutional practice through organizational, professional, and relational enactment. Academic notice reaches students not simply as a formal academic status but through the interaction of institutional policy, organizational context and capacity, professional interpretation and enactment, and relational communication. Advising-unit structures and resources shape the conditions under which support is available, and advisors' language, explanations, validation, transparency, and relational practices shape how institutional expectations are communicated and framed in student-facing interactions. Therefore, a formal policy does not necessarily produce equivalent student-facing conditions of enactment.

This interpretation suggests understanding academic notice solely through formal policy design or institutional outcomes may overlook the organizational and relational processes through which the policy becomes practice. Although this study did not directly examine

students' experiences, participants described variation in the organizational and relational conditions through which academic notice was communicated and enacted. Understanding academic notice as a student-facing institutional practice, therefore, requires attention not only to what the policy formally requires, but also to organizational capacity, professional enactment, relational continuity, communication practices, and the resources and interventions available within the contexts through which students encounter the academic standing process.

Integrated Theoretical Synthesis

Across the three RQs, critical theory (Brookfield, 2005; Giroux, 2011) and validation theory (Rendón, 1994) provided complementary lenses for interpreting academic notice as a multilevel institutional practice. Critical theory highlighted the organizational structures, distributions of authority, resource conditions, and potential inequities within which those relational practices and policy decisions occurred. Validation theory helped explain the relational processes through which participants affirmed students' capacity, recognized their experiences, preserved agency, and communicated institutional expectations during academic difficulty. Used together, the frameworks connect the structural and interpersonal dimensions of academic notice rather than treating either level as sufficient on its own.

This integrated interpretation also clarifies relationships across the answers to the RQs. Advisors made sense of academic notice from organizational positions that afforded different forms of authority and policy agency; they enacted policy within decision structures and advising units characterized by different capacities; and they navigated institutional expectations and relational care through practices like validation, transparency, accountability, and preserving student agency. Formal policy, organizational context, professional enactment, and relational communication, therefore, operated as interconnected dimensions of the same institutional

process. The student-facing form of academic notice emerged through interactions among these dimensions, not from formal policy or advisor–student relationships alone.

The frameworks illuminated a central contribution of the study: relational care is organizationally conditioned, and institutional policy is relationally mediated. Validation is not only something an individual advisor does because organizational capacity can expand or constrain opportunities for sustained, responsive, and validating support. Likewise, policy is not only an institutional rule because local interpretation, professional judgment, communication, and relationships shape its practical, student-facing meaning. Together, these interpretations support understanding academic notice as a policy-shaped, organizationally situated, professionally enacted, and relationally mediated institutional practice.

Implications for Practice

The findings have several implications for academic advising practice. First, treat academic notice as an advising process rather than solely a status notification. Advisors are not simply responsible for informing students they have crossed an academic-standing threshold. They help interpret institutional expectations, explain consequences and options, support reflection, and translate policy into something students can navigate. Institutions and advising units should, therefore, recognize academic notice communication and follow-up as substantive professional practice that requires judgment, relational skills, policy knowledge, and access to appropriate resources.

Second, advisor development should distinguish supportive accountability from either punitive enforcement or permissiveness. Participants' accounts suggested advisors can communicate the seriousness of academic notice, clarify institutional expectations and consequences, validate students' circumstances, and preserve student agency. Professional

development on academic notice can therefore focus on transparent communication, nondeficit-oriented language, reflective questioning, explaining viable pathways, discussing institutional boundaries directly, and supporting students in making informed decisions. Such preparation should not encourage advisors to avoid difficult information. Instead, it should help advisors communicate institutional expectations and consequences without reinforcing unnecessary stigma or allowing supportive intentions to obscure formal requirements. Advisors should also distinguish between nonnegotiable institutional requirements and decisions in which students retain meaningful choice, supporting student agency and acknowledging the limits imposed by academic standing policies and institutional decision-making authority.

Third, advising practice should preserve the distinction between developmental progress and formal academic recovery. Participants described reflection, strategy changes, altered academic pathways, pauses in enrollment, and other developmental processes as potentially meaningful parts of recovery, even though good academic standing remained the formal institutional endpoint. Therefore, advisors may benefit from recognizing developmental progress without misrepresenting a student's academic status. This distinction can support realistic conversations in which advisors acknowledge a student's growth while keeping institutional standards clear.

Fourth, advisors and supervisors should attend to relational continuity and communication as components of policy enactment. Language, tone, explanation, and opportunities to ask questions shape how advisors frame academic notice in student-facing encounters. When possible, advising practices should create meaningful opportunities for students to understand why they are on academic notice, what institutional expectations apply, what options are available, and what forms of support are available. Continuity in advising

relationships may further support disclosure, reflection, and seeking help, although the organizational feasibility of continuity varies by unit capacity.

To support translating these findings into advising practice, Appendix E includes examples of research-informed practice resources I developed from the study's findings. These resources include an academic notice communication template, a student self-reflection, an academic recovery planning worksheet, and an advising conversation guide. The resources are not intended to prescribe a uniform model of academic notice advising; rather, they provide adaptable examples for communicating institutional expectations and supporting student reflection, agency, validation, and access to resources. Institutions and advising units should adapt the materials to their policies, organizational contexts, available resources, and student populations.

Implications for Policy and Institutional Practice

At the institutional level, the findings suggest that evaluating academic notice solely by reviewing the written policy provides an incomplete picture of how the policy functions. Institutions seeking to assess or redesign academic notice should examine the full implementation system: how the policy is interpreted across units, how local procedures operationalize institutional requirements, where decision authority resides, how discretion is bounded, which actors possess policy agency, what communication students receive, and what organizational resources surround the student-facing encounter. Therefore, policy review should include implementation conditions rather than treating local enactment as an automatic consequence of written policy.

A second implication is the need for coherence without unnecessary uniformity. Participants generally valued a shared terminology, expectations, standards, and decision

boundaries and also recognized legitimate reasons for local variation. Institutions with decentralized advising structures may therefore benefit from establishing common guardrails that clarify the meaning of academic notice, core academic-standing expectations, relevant decision principles, roles and escalation pathways, and minimum communication standards, while allowing units to contextualize interventions for different student populations and curricular structures. The goal is not procedural sameness for its own sake but identifiable, transparent, and defensible variation within common institutional parameters.

Third, institutions should assess whether advising units have sufficient and reasonably comparable capacity to deliver academic notice support. Local flexibility has limited value if some units lack the time, staffing, expertise, relational continuity, referral networks, specialized roles, or intervention infrastructure needed to translate flexibility into meaningful support. Therefore, equity review should move beyond asking whether all students are technically subject to the same policy. Institutions should also ask whether students encounter comparable opportunities to receive understandable communication, timely access to academic advising, appropriate referrals, sustained follow-up, and meaningful interventions under that policy.

Fourth, institutions should make decision authority and policy agency visible. The findings showed discretion changes across decision stages and actors, and some institutional actors can reshape local implementation and others cannot. Ambiguity about who may decide, waive, escalate, interpret, or redesign aspects of academic notice can confuse advisors and students. Clearly documenting decision roles, boundaries, evidence requirements, escalation pathways, and where policy responsibility lies may improve coherence without eliminating professional judgment.

Finally, institutions should evaluate how they enact academic notice for students, not just policy compliance and academic outcomes. Important institutional questions include what message students receive when placed on notice, who explains the status and consequences, whether communications use stigmatizing or deficit-oriented language, whether students can ask questions and reflect, what resources are available and proactively communicated, and whether organizational capacity differs substantially across advising units. These questions recognize that a common formal policy does not necessarily create common conditions of enactment. Therefore, institutional quality depends partly on how policy, organizational capacity, professional practice, and relational communication operate together.

These institutional implications also suggest opportunities for leaders to pursue improvements at different levels of organizational investment. As an immediate, relatively low-resource step, institutional leaders could convene representatives from academic advising units to review existing academic notice communications, identify procedural ambiguities, and establish shared expectations for explaining academic standing requirements and consequences. This work could include developing a common reference guide that distinguishes institutional requirements from areas of local discretion, clarifies decision-making authority and escalation pathways, and provides adaptable communication templates. Institutions could also use existing advising meetings or professional development opportunities to discuss challenging cases, share effective practices, and identify recurring barriers to student support. The practice resources provided in Appendix E offer examples institutions could adapt for these purposes. Such actions would not require eliminating local advising practices or immediately restructuring existing systems. Instead, they would provide greater clarity and coordination within decentralized structures while preserving flexibility to respond to different student populations and curricular contexts.

More substantial improvements would require institutional leaders to address the organizational conditions that shape how advising units enact academic notice. One approach would be to establish an ongoing cross-unit working group with representation from academic advising, advising leadership, and other institutional stakeholders responsible for academic standing decisions and student support. This group could examine differences in local implementation, review student communication and referral processes, identify gaps in advising capacity, and recommend improvements to institutional procedures. Institutions could also develop coordinated systems to identify students on academic notice, support timely outreach, document follow-up, and connect students with appropriate resources, while allowing individual advising units to determine how best to provide relational and developmental support. These efforts would require attention to staffing, technological infrastructure, decision authority, and distributing resources, rather than assuming all advising units have equal capacity to meet the same expectations.

Institutional leaders should also consider how they would evaluate improvements. Beyond monitoring academic standing outcomes, institutions could assess whether students receive timely, understandable communication; have access to advising and relevant resources; understand available pathways; and have opportunities to participate meaningfully in academic recovery planning. Comparing implementation conditions across advising units could help identify differences in access to support without assuming that identical procedures are necessary or appropriate. These recommendations represent potential applications of the study's findings. Institutional improvement can begin with achievable changes in communication, coordination, and procedural clarity, then progress toward more comprehensive efforts to address organizational capacity, equity, and the student-facing enactment of academic notice.

Implications for Future Research

The present study identifies several directions for future research. The most immediate need is to examine academic notice directly from students' perspectives. This study centered on advisors' interpretations and descriptions of student-facing practice. Participants identified communication, relational framing, organizational capacity, continuity, and available interventions as conditions likely to shape students' encounters with academic notice. However, the study did not test how students themselves interpreted those conditions. Future research should examine how students understand academic notice, which advising practices they experience as validating or stigmatizing, how they interpret accountability, and how organizational differences across units affect their perceptions of support, belonging, agency, and recovery.

Second, future research should compare how academic notice is enacted across different institutional and organizational models. This study examined one large public research university with a decentralized advising structure. Comparative research across centralized, decentralized, and hybrid advising systems could clarify which features of variation are associated with organizational design and which are more broadly observed across institutional contexts. Such studies could also test the idea of coherence without uniformity by examining how institutions establish shared guardrails and permit contextualized implementation.

Third, organizational capacity warrants more focused investigation. The findings identified staffing, time, professional expertise, specialized roles, relational continuity, referral networks, and intervention infrastructure as dimensions that shape the forms of support advising units can provide. Future studies could examine how these dimensions interact, which capacities matter most for student-facing practice, and whether differences in capacity are associated with

help-seeking, engagement, academic recovery, persistence, or other student outcomes. This line of inquiry could move the study of academic notice beyond individual advising behavior toward a fuller examination of the organizational conditions that support or constrain advising practice.

Fourth, researchers should examine the distinction between professional discretion and policy agency in other settings and among other institutional actors. Future research could investigate how advisors, directors, faculty members, deans, student support professionals, and central administrators differ in their authority to interpret policy, make individual decisions, create local procedures, and reshape implementation conditions. Such research could refine the concept of policy agency and clarify how formal and informal authority operate within academic advising organizations.

Fifth, future work should continue examining the relationship between validation, accountability, and student agency. The findings suggest that validation and accountability can mutually reinforce when students are treated as capable participants who receive transparent information and retain meaningful decision-making agency. Research that includes advisors and students could test this interpretation and examine when accountability is experienced as supportive, punitive, developmental, or stigmatizing. Longitudinal studies could also explore how these relational meanings change across stages of academic difficulty and recovery.

Finally, future research should examine the relationship among academic notice, academic disqualification, and institutional retention measures. Although academic notice is intended to identify academic difficulty and provide opportunities for recovery, institutions also establish academic standing requirements that may result in disqualification when students do not meet expectations for continued enrollment. This creates an important tension between institutional efforts to promote student persistence and policies that may restrict students' ability

to remain enrolled. Future studies could investigate how academic standing policies influence retention and graduation outcomes, how institutions distinguish voluntary departure from academic disqualification when reporting retention, and whether advising interventions or opportunities for continued enrollment affect students' academic trajectories. Longitudinal and multi-institutional research could also examine how these relationships vary across student populations, stages of academic standing, and institutional policy structures. Such research would extend the present study by connecting advisors' interpretations and enactment of academic notice to the institutional outcomes and policy consequences that shape students' opportunities for continued enrollment and degree completion.

Conclusion

This study began with a question focused on the movement from policy to practice: what happens after an institution establishes an academic notice policy and that policy enters the everyday work of academic advising? The findings demonstrated that formal policy does not simply arrive in practice unchanged. Institutional requirements establish parameters, but organizational structures, local procedures, professional interpretation, decision authority, discretion, and policy agency give those parameters operational form. In a decentralized environment, that enactment varies across advising units in structured ways. Participants valued consistent institutional guardrails without requiring identical procedures, and differences in organizational capacity shaped the forms and levels of support units were positioned to provide.

The findings also demonstrated that academic notice is enacted relationally. Advisors do more than transmit academic-standing information. Through language, explanation, validation, transparency, accountability, and building relationships, they help construct the meaning of academic notice in the student-facing encounter. Relational care and institutional accountability

were not necessarily competing responsibilities. Participants described ways the two could operate together when students' circumstances were recognized, expectations were communicated clearly, and students remained active participants in determining how to move forward. Academic recovery, similarly, could be developmental and nonlinear in process and remain bounded by formal institutional measures of good standing.

The findings provided an integrated explanation of academic notice as an enacted institutional practice. Formal policy establishes broader parameters. Organizational context and capacity shape the conditions under which implementation occurs, and professional judgment, discretion, and policy agency shape decisions and local practices. Relational communication gives institutional expectations student-facing meaning. A common academic notice policy, therefore, does not necessarily produce common conditions of enactment because students encounter that policy in different organizational and relational contexts.

This study's central contribution is consequently a shift in analytic attention. Understanding academic notice requires more than asking what the written policy says, whether advisors comply with it, or whether students eventually return to good academic standing. It also requires examining how policy becomes practice, how authority and discretion are organized, what capacities surround implementation, how accountability is communicated, how student agency is preserved, and how organizational and relational processes work together in the student-facing encounter. From this perspective, academic notice is not just a rule or only a relationship between the advisor and student. It is an institutional practice shaped by policy, organizationally situated, professionally enacted, and relationally mediated.

For academic advising and higher education practice, this interpretation suggests that improving academic notice cannot be accomplished through policy revision, advisor training, or

resource referral in isolation. Institutions must consider the system through which the policy is implemented: shared guardrails, organizational capacity, decision-making structures, professional judgment, communication practices, and opportunities to validate relationships. Attending to these interconnected conditions provides a stronger basis for developing academic notice processes that retain institutional standards and support students through transparent, humane, and contextually responsive advising practice.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Email

Dear [Advisor],

My name is Jenn Maitland, and I am a doctoral candidate in Student Affairs in Higher Education. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation that examines how academic advisors interpret and support students placed on academic notice.

I am inviting academic advisors who currently work with undergraduate students to participate in this study. Participation involves a one-on-one interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes, conducted in person or via Zoom at a time convenient for you. The interview will focus on your experiences, perspectives, and approaches to supporting students during periods of academic difficulty.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All information shared will be kept confidential, and identifying information will be removed from transcripts and reports to protect participants' privacy.

If you are interested in participating, please complete this brief screening survey at the following link:[Insert Qualtrics Screening Survey Link]

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at jmaitland@ksu.edu regarding your rights as a research participant.

Thank you for considering this request and for the important work you do in supporting students.

Sincerely,

Jenn Maitland
Doctoral Candidate, Student Development in Higher Education
Kansas State University
XXXXX@email.edu

Dr. Christy Moran Craft, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Associate, Graduate School
Graduate Coordinator & Professor, College of Education
Kansas State University
XXXXX@email.edu

Appendix B – Qualtrics Screening Survey

Dissertation Study: From Policy to Practice: Academic Advisors' Interpretations of Academic Notice and Student Support

Introduction

I appreciate your interest in participating in this research study. The purpose of this brief screening survey is to determine eligibility for participation in a study examining how academic advisors interpret, communicate, and support students placed on academic notice. The survey should take approximately 2–3 minutes to complete. Your responses will be used only to determine eligibility and, if you qualify, to contact you regarding participation.

Screening Questions

1. Are you currently employed as an academic advisor or director who oversees the work of academic advisors?

* Yes
* No

(Display logic: If "No," display message: "Thank you for your interest. At this time, the study is limited to academic advisors or advising directors.")

2. Do you currently work directly with undergraduate students as part of your advising role?

* Yes
* No

(Display logic: If "No," display message: "Thank you for your interest. This study focuses on advisors who work directly with undergraduate students.")

3. As part of your advising role, do you have experience interpreting, communicating, or implementing academic notice (or academic probation) policies with students?

* Yes
* No
* Unsure

(Display logic: If "No" or "Unsure," display message: "Thank you for your interest. This study focuses on advisors who work directly with students on academic notice.")

4. When working with students on academic notice, how much discretion do you typically have when working with students on academic notice?

*None at all

*A little

*A moderate amount

*A lot

*A great deal

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

*Associate degree (e.g., AA, AS)

*Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)

*Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MBA)

*Doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, EdD)

*Professional degree (e.g., JD, MD, DDS)

6. How many years have you worked as an academic advisor/advising director?

[Text entry]

(This question is descriptive and does not determine eligibility.)

7. What is your current job title?

[Text entry]

8. What advising unit do you work in?

Arts

Biological Sciences

Business

Education

Engineering

Campuswide Honors Collegium

Humanities

Information & Computer Sciences
Nursing
Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
Physical Sciences
Public Health
Social Ecology
Social Sciences
Undergraduate/Undeclared

9. How long have you worked in your current role?
[Text entry]

10. How many years of experience do you have working in higher education?
[Text entry]

11. Please list all of your prior roles/titles in higher education
[Text entry]

12. Are you willing to be contacted to schedule a 45–60 minute interview about your advising experiences?
* Yes
* No
(Display logic: If "No," end survey after thank-you message.)

13. If you are eligible and interested in participating in an interview, please provide your first and last name.
Name: [Text entry]

14. If you are eligible and interested in participating in an interview, please provide your email address.
Email Address: [Text entry]

15. What type of interview format do you prefer?

*In-person interview

*Zoom interview

Closing Message

Thank you for completing this screening survey. If you are eligible and selected to participate, Jenn Maitland (the researcher) will contact you with additional information about the study and to schedule an interview.

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Interviewer Note
This interview is semi-structured. Not all questions will be asked in every interview. Questions may be reordered, and follow-up probes may be used depending on participant responses.

Introduction & Informed Consent

- Thank the participant for their time.
- Explain the purpose of the study and the role of the participant.
- Inform them that responses will be confidential and that they may skip questions or stop at any time.
- Confirm informed consent and permission to audio-record.

#	Interview question	RQ alignment
1	Can you briefly describe your role as an advisor, your advising unit, and the work you do with students on academic notice?	Background/context; supports RQ1–RQ3
2	How is academic notice implemented within your unit, and in what ways, if any, does that differ from other units at your institution?	RQ1, RQ2
3	How do you understand or interpret the purpose and meaning of the academic notice policy for students?	RQ1
4	What factors shape how you interpret academic notice policy in your work?	RQ1, RQ2
5	Can you walk me through what typically happens when you work with a student placed on academic notice?	RQ2
6	How do you decide how to apply the policy in individual student situations, and how much flexibility do you feel you have?	RQ2
7	How do you approach advising conversations to support students' confidence, motivation, or sense of belonging when they are on academic notice?	RQ3
8	Can you describe a time when institutional policy expectations conflicted with what you felt was best for a student? How did you navigate that situation?	RQ2, RQ3

#	Interview question	RQ alignment
9	In your experience, are there patterns in which students are placed on academic notice, and how do you work to support students who may face additional barriers?	RQ1, RQ3
10	Based on your experience, how does academic notice policy function in advising practice within your institution, and what, if anything, would you change about how it is implemented?	RQ1, RQ2

Closing

Thank the participant.

Reiterate confidentiality.

Ask whether they would like a summary of the findings.

Appendix D – Informed Consent

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
University Research Compliance Office

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Informed Consent
comply@k-state.edu | 785-532-3224

PROJECT TITLE:
From Policy to Practice: Academic Advisors' Interpretations of Academic Notice and Student Support

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE:	March 2026	**PROJECT EXPIRATION DATE:**	December 2028	**LENGTH OF STUDY:**	2 years, 9 months

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Christy Craft, Ph.D.

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Jennifer Maitland

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: [redacted]

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION: Lisa Rubin, Ph.D. rubin@ksu.edu

PROJECT SPONSOR: An external sponsor does not fund this research.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

Participants are being asked to take part in a research study on academic advising. The purpose of this study is to explore how academic advisors and advising directors interpret and enact academic notice policy within their advising practice. The study seeks to understand how policy language is interpreted, translated into advising interactions, and shaped by these interpretations in the support provided to students experiencing academic difficulty.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and the collection of institutional documents for contextual purposes.

Interviews will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted either in person or via Zoom, depending on participant preference and availability. With participants' consent, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Participants will be invited to share documents they use in their advising work related to academic notice, such as student communications, advising materials, or recovery plans. The researcher may also collect publicly available institutional documents. These materials will be used to provide context and, when appropriate, to support interview discussion. They will not be treated as a data source separate from interviews.

BIOLOGICAL SAMPLES COLLECTED (Describe procedure, storage, etc.):

No biological samples will be collected in this study.

[Select a statement from the drop down menu]

Not Applicable.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

There are no alternative procedures. Participation in this study is voluntary.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

This study involves minimal risk. Some participants may feel mild discomfort when discussing experiences related to advising or student challenges. Participants may skip any question or stop participating at any time.

BENEFITS ANTICPATED:

Participants may not receive direct personal benefit from participating. However, your participation may help researchers and institutions better understand how academic advising supports students and may contribute to improvements in advising practices.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

Participant's identity will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The participant's name and any identifying information will be removed from transcripts and replaced with a pseudonym. Identifying details (e.g., unit names) will be removed or generalized by the unit type (e.g., STEM, Social Sciences, Professional programs).

All digital files will be stored on a password-protected computer and secure storage system accessible only to the researcher.

Only aggregated findings or anonymized quotes will be used in publications or presentations.

Signed consent forms will be stored separately from interview data.

Data will not be shared with supervisors or departments.

The information or biospecimens that will be collected as part of this research could be used for future research studies or distributed to other investigators for future research studies without additional informed consent.

Is compensation or medical treatment available if an injury occurs? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and acknowledge that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

PARTICIPANT NAME:			
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:		**DATE:**	
WITNESS TO SIGNATURE: (PROJECT STAFF)		**DATE:**	

Appendix E – Practice Resources for Academic Notice Advising

The following resources were developed as research-informed applications of the study findings. They are intended as adaptable examples, not prescriptive or empirically validated interventions. Institutions and advising units should revise terminology, academic-standing requirements, timelines, resources, and procedures to reflect their own policies and organizational contexts. Across the resources, the emphasis is on clear institutional expectations, student reflection and agency, validating and asset-based communication, access to support, and purposeful follow-up. The materials are designed to preserve accountability while avoiding unnecessarily punitive or deficit-oriented framing.

Resources Included

Resource 1. Academic Notice Student Communication Template

Resource 2. Academic Recovery Self-Reflection

Resource 3. Academic Recovery Planning Worksheet

Resource 4. Academic Notice Advising Conversation Guide

Resource 1. Academic Notice Student Communication Template

Purpose: To communicate academic standing clearly while emphasizing partnership, student agency, available support, and concrete next steps.

Subject: Academic Progress Review: Your Academic Notice Success Plan

Dear [Student Name],

We are reaching out because your academic record indicates that you are currently on academic notice. [Institution/college] requires students to [insert academic-standing requirement]. We want to make sure you understand what this status means and partner with you as you plan your next steps.

Understanding Your Academic Standing

To return to good academic standing, you will need to [insert requirement] by [insert timeframe, if applicable]. [Insert concise and accurate description of consequences or next review point.] Academic notice is an important status, but it is also an opportunity to identify what affected your academic progress and develop a plan for moving forward.

Your Next Steps

☐ Complete the Academic Recovery Self-Reflection before [date/appointment].

☐ Schedule or attend an advising appointment/workshop to review your academic standing and recovery plan.

☐ Review your upcoming course schedule and consider whether changes could better support your academic goals.

☐ Identify academic, personal, financial, health/wellness, or other resources that may support your progress.

Planning for the Next Term

Academic recovery can involve more than improving a GPA. Consider what you learned from the previous term, what worked well, what you would like to change, and what support may help you make sustainable progress. Your advisor can help you plan your courses, develop academic strategies, and connect with campus resources and other options relevant to your circumstances.

How We Can Support You

You do not have to develop this plan alone. [Advising office] is available through [appointment/chat/email information]. Additional support may be available through [academic

support], [basic needs], [counseling/wellness], [disability/accessibility services], [career services], and other campus or community resources.

We look forward to working with you on your next steps.

Sincerely,

[Advising Office/Advisor]

Resource 2. Academic Recovery Self-Reflection

Purpose: To help students identify strengths, experiences, challenges, goals, and support needs before or during an academic notice advising conversation.

1. Strengths and Positive Experiences

Before considering what you want to change, reflect on what went well last term. This may include an academic accomplishment, a strategy that worked, a relationship or resource that helped, progress toward a personal goal, or something you are proud of.

_____

_____

_____

What strengths, habits, relationships, or resources helped contribute to these positive experiences?

_____

_____

2. Factors That Affected My Academic Progress

Which factors affected your academic experience during the previous term? Select any that feel relevant. You may also add something not listed.

☐ Study strategies or preparation for coursework

☐ Time management or balancing multiple commitments

☐ Course difficulty or understanding course content

☐ Course load or course selection

☐ Class attendance or participation

☐ Access to technology, books, transportation, or other academic resources

☐ Sense of belonging or connection

☐ Questions about major, career, educational goals, or institutional fit

☐ Work or financial responsibilities

☐ Health, wellness, stress, or concentration

☐ Housing, food, caregiving, or other basic-needs concerns

☐ Family, social, or relationship circumstances

☐ Adjustment to college or other life transitions

☐ Other: _____

Which of these factors most affected your academic progress, and what would you like your advisor to understand about your experience?

_____
_____
_____

3. My Goals
Why is continuing your education important to you at this point in your journey?

_____
_____

What is one short-term academic or personal goal you want to work toward during the next term?

_____
_____

What longer-term goal or direction would you like your current plan to support?

_____
_____

4. Changes and Strategies
What is one thing you plan to continue because it is working well?

_____
_____

What are one or two changes you want to make during the next term?

_____
_____

What could make these changes difficult, and what might help you respond if that happens?

_____
_____

5. Support and Connection
What people, programs, or resources could help you work toward your goals?

_____
_____

What would be most helpful for you to discuss with an academic advisor?

_____
_____

Is there anything else you would like your advisor to know so they can better support you?

_____

Resource 3. Academic Recovery Planning Worksheet

Purpose: To create a shared, student-centered plan that combines clear academic-standing expectations with reflection, strategies, resources, and follow-up.

Understanding My Academic Standing

Current academic standing: _____

Academic requirement(s) I need to meet: _____

Timeframe or next review point: _____

Important institutional consequences or considerations I need to understand:

_____

_____

What I Am Working Toward

My academic goal for the next term is:

_____

_____

A strength, successful strategy, or resource I can build on is:

_____

_____

My Academic Recovery Plan

Course planning or enrollment changes I will consider:

_____

_____

Academic strategies I will use or strengthen:

_____

_____

People, offices, or resources I plan to connect with:

_____

_____

Preparing for Challenges

A challenge that could interfere with my plan is:

_____

_____

If I encounter this challenge, I will:

_____

_____

I will contact my advisor or another support person when:

_____

_____

Support Resources

- ☐ Academic support/tutoring: [insert resource]
- ☐ Faculty/instructor/TA office hours
- ☐ Basic needs/financial support: [insert resource]
- ☐ Counseling/wellness/health services: [insert resource]
- ☐ Disability/accessibility services: [insert resource]
- ☐ Career/major exploration: [insert resource]
- ☐ Other campus or community support: [insert resource]

Follow-Up

My next step after this meeting is: _____

My next advising check-in or review point is: _____

Additional notes:

_____

_____

_____

Resource 4. Academic Notice Advising Conversation Guide

Purpose: To provide optional prompts for advisors conducting academic notice conversations. This guide supports professional judgment rather than requiring a uniform script.

1. Connect and Validate

• How are you feeling about your academic experience right now?

• Before we talk about what needs to change, what went well last term?

• What are you most proud of, even if the term did not go the way you hoped?

2. Understand the Student's Experience

• What do you think contributed most to your academic results?

• Were there circumstances inside or outside the classroom that affected your progress?

• What have you already tried, and what did you learn from those efforts?

3. Clarify Academic Standing and Expectations

Explain the student's current standing, relevant institutional requirements, timeline, decision points, and potential consequences in clear language. Check understanding rather than assuming the student understood the policy explanation.

• What questions do you have about your academic standing?

• How would you explain what needs to happen next in your own words?

4. Identify Strengths, Resources, and Options

• What strengths or successful strategies can you build on?

• Who or what has been helpful to you before?

• What resources or changes might make the biggest difference next term?

• Are there academic, financial, health/wellness, family, work, or other circumstances we should consider as we build the plan?

5. Develop a Student-Owned Recovery Plan

• What feels like a realistic goal for the next term?

• What will you do differently, and what do you want to continue doing?

• What is one concrete action you can take first?

• What will you do if the original plan is not working?

6. Establish Accountability and Follow-Up

• What are you committing to before our next check-in?

• When would it be helpful to reconnect?

• What would signal that you should contact us sooner?

Close by summarizing the student's plan, confirming institutional expectations, identifying support resources, and clarifying the next point of contact. Validation and care do not require removing expectations; the goal is to communicate those expectations in ways that preserve dignity, agency, and access to support.