Alternative Pathways to University Admission: An Examination of Academic Advising within the Niagara College/Brock University "Partners Program"

Report 10 | RFP-006: Student Services

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Abstract

This study examined the nature and impact of focused academic advising in the Partners Program for a group of students considered “conditionally acceptable” to university, in that their high school GPA was below the admission score for Brock University. As a collaborative effort to increase opportunities for students to attend university, Niagara College and Brock University entered a partnership arrangement whereby applicants to Brock who did not receive direct admission from high school, but whose entering grades were near the admissions cut off, were recommended to enrol in the one-year General Arts and Science – University Transfer program at Niagara. Upon successful completion of the program they would automatically transfer to Brock with one or two transfer credits for those whose GPA met the criterion.

An essential part of the Partners Program (PP) is academic advising by a jointly appointed Niagara College and Brock University academic advisor. Quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources in previous studies underscored the centrality of human contact in advisement, and indicated that there should be one person advising on all aspects of academic matters. It also confirmed students’ preference for individual over group advising sessions. Both individual and group sessions discuss important common issues such as orientation, time management, goal setting, and reading and writing in the social sciences, among others. A key to the success of academic advising involves the advisor building relationships with students, their professors and other people, and units that provide support services for students.

The “conditionally admissible” students of this study benefited largely from developmental and intrusive approaches to academic advising. Students were helped in the areas of intellectual growth, setting educational goals, enhanced self-esteem, conducting a realistic self-appraisal and improving communication. Overall, students stated that the advisor made a big difference to them in terms of the overall support provided, knowledge of programs at Niagara College and Brock University, and willingness to explore career options and requirements with them. Early exploration often led to changes in students’ goals, program and destination. A comparative analysis of PP and Non-Partners Program (NPP) students’ GPA for their first year in university (2008/09) suggests that academic advising in the Partners Program contributed to PP students’ persistence through their first year.

A major concern that surfaced from interviews with the PP students and more strongly from both interviews with the Partners Program Academic Advisor (PPAA) was enforcing student participation in the advisement program, especially the workshops. To address this challenge, a joint (Niagara and Brock) working group has designed a hybrid bridging program of six hours of in-class and six hours of online activities that focuses on academic expectations in the college and university environments and the differences between both. The program is mandatory, will have a fee, and will be implemented as a pilot in September 2011.

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Introduction

The 21st century is often referred to as the "knowledge age" because wealth and well-being are based upon the ownership of knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge to create or improve goods and services. Savage (1995) sees this knowledge focus as the third wave of human socio-economic development and quite different from the two previous waves. The first wave was the Agricultural Age, with wealth defined as ownership of land. In the second wave, the Industrial Age, wealth was based on ownership of capital (i.e., factories and manufacturing). We know from the decline of the manufacturing sector in our local communities across Ontario and North America that this age is over, with brawn increasingly giving way to brain (mind).

James Martin (2006) advances the idea that "twenty-first-century cathedrals may be cathedrals of the mind" (p.338) rather than cathedrals of stone that marked previous ages and required more brawn than brains to build. He sees this century as a time of knowledge explosion: "the quantity of usable knowledge is rising fast, and knowledge capability is approximately doubling every year" (p.402). He goes on to say that living well in this "knowledge century" requires that great education be available. Great education may be available in Canada and in Ontario particularly, but is it accessible to all who want it and make use of it? Over the years, access to education has been the subject of a variety of political platforms (AUCC, 2008), government reports (Rae, 2005) and academic research (Berger, 2007;Drewes, 2008; Malatest, 2008;Parkin& Baldwin, 2009). Clark, Moran, Skolnik and Trick (2009) historically document and project a growing demand for higher education in Ontario and note that such "education is increasingly focused on degrees rather than diplomas or other shorter credentials"(p. 46). It has been shown that postsecondary education (PSE) has a positive impact on employment and earnings (CCL, 2007, 2009; Lapointe, Dunn, Tremblay-Cote, Bergeron & Ignuczak, 2006; Zeman, 2010).In their 2007 and 2009 reports on education in Canada, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) indicated that, even in periods of high unemployment, those with a degree had three times lower unemployment rate than those with a high school diploma. In their study for the Human Resources and Skills Development department of the Canadian government, Lapointe et al. (2006) showed that there will be a high demand for graduates in the labour market up to 2015 and that demand will be highest for those with college or apprenticeship certification. Further, Zeman, McMullen and de Broucker's (2010) Statistics Canada report using 2006 census data revealed that on average university graduates in both Canada and Ontario are in the highest earnings group, earning more than twice above the median employment earnings. The next highest group was college graduates.

Although Clark et al. (2009) say it is difficult to demonstrate a positive relationship between PSE and higher incomes "with any certainty" (p. 28), they convey the view of economists that "education is positively related to economic productivity…improving productivity [and] helping employers identify credentials for certain baskets of knowledge and ability" (p.29). Social benefits that accrue from education have been well documented (Malatest, 2008) and include: greater civic participation, improved lifestyle choices, improved parenting skills, lower demands on the criminal justice system and increased tax revenues. While governments, colleges and universities put much needed effort into policies and programs to increase the quantity and quality of graduates for the labour market, there is more to a quality of life than work and more

to society than economic productivity. As Bok (2010)states, “there is more to education [knowledge] than becoming a productive member of the workforce and more to schools and universities than producing human capital” (p.178). Acquiring knowledge through education must also “help students to see through superficial answers and to appreciate the complexity of the quest for meaning and fulfillment” (p.170), and help students decide how they can lead a fuller, more satisfying life. He points to a number of research studies which show that, as students progress through their higher education studies, interest in intellectual and aesthetic and political pursuits rises, civic activity increases, and moral reasoning improves. So on all accounts, PSE and getting a degree matters. However, a larger question remains: is PSE accessible to all who desire it and make use of it? This study of academic advising in the Partners Program explores one facet of this accessibility question. The Partners Program is a collaborative program between two institutions in Ontario that has the goal of increasing accessibility to university – and PSE in general – for high school students with grades below the admission cut off at Brock University. The purpose of this study is important given Drewes’ (2008) conclusion in his report on access that, compared to other provinces, Ontario high school graduates with low grades have a more difficult time entering university.

Project Purpose and Objectives

This HEQCO-supported study focuses on access for students with low high school grades. It focuses specifically on the academic advising provided in the Partners Program (PP) in order to enhance the academic success of “conditionally admissible” students in gaining admission to university and prepare them for success in university. This study is not an evaluation of the PP. The main purpose of the project includes an investigation of the nature of the academic advising performed by the Partners Program academic advisor (PPAA), and the admission of students to Brock University from the PP. The mission of the program is to support students as they move from “conditionally admissible” status to admission at Brock. “Conditional admission” applies only to those students receiving recommendation from Brock University to enrol in the one-year General Arts and Science-University Transfer (GAS-UT) program at Niagara College (a list of acronyms pertaining to this study appears in Appendix A).

The main objectives of the project are to:

- Describe and document the nature of the academic student advisement that the PP students receive while at Niagara College;
- Identify and describe those aspects and strategies of academic advising for first-year students that have the potential for transferability to other institutions;
- Identify the impact of advisement in the PP on participants’ academic success measured via student grades, satisfaction, and student and faculty perceptions;
- Compare the academic success rate of students in the PP and students who are not in the Partners Program (NPP) but who have also taken a one-year pre-university GAS-UT program at Niagara College; determine the cost effectiveness of the focused advisement program.

The Brock/Niagara Partners Program

The Partners Program is one of many collaboration endeavours between Brock University (St. Catharines campus) and Niagara College (Niagara-on-the-Lake and Welland campuses). These institutions are the only public institutions in the Niagara Region and are making efforts to work together in different ways to facilitate students pursuing PSE. Articulation agreements are one example of such collaboration; the PP is an example of this type of collaboration, designed to increase access and completion. The Niagara-Brock agreements aim to deliver seamless programs for students moving across the two institutions and seem to be successful in increasing both participation and graduation rates.

The PP began in 2007 and provides an opportunity for high school applicants who did not meet the academic admission standards of Brock University to be referred to Niagara College's Pre-University program, and receive a conditional offer to Brock University for the following year, with the possibility of transfer credits. Admission is guaranteed for students who pass all courses at Niagara College and achieve a minimum 70 per cent cumulative average. Students achieving a cumulative average of 75-79.9 per cent receive one transfer credit (a full course exemption at Brock); students with a cumulative average of 80 per cent receive two transfer credits. This program is an example of a dual admission program (Atkinson, 2008).

If students do not meet any of these conditions, they can still continue in PSE without interruption. Students are given four options:

1. Continue in the second year of the General Arts and Science-University Transfer (2-year diploma) program and reapply to Brock University under the Brock-Niagara Articulation program. Currently this does not carry all of the same benefits as the PP.

2. Repeat course work to improve grades and reapply to Brock. The application is subject to review; students would not be part of a PP cohort.

3. Apply to another program at Niagara College.

4. Complete the program requirements and graduate with a one-year certificate or two-year diploma in General Arts and Science – College Exploration from Niagara College.

The PP began with 25 students entering the GAS–UT program stream at Niagara in 2007. There were 32 students in 2008 and 27 students in 2009; thus a total of 84 students were accepted into the program over the first three years of its existence.

How the Program Works

- Qualified students receive a letter from Brock University's Registrar in early to mid-June recommending to them the opportunity to enrol in Niagara College's General Arts and Science-University Transfer one-year certificate program and receive a conditional offer of admission to Brock. This guarantees admission to eligible Brock University programs

for those who are successful in their studies at Niagara College. Each year, since the beginning of the program in 2007, Brock sends out approximately 500 letters to applicants who were unsuccessful at direct admission, which yield, on average, a six per cent uptake.

- Applicants who accept this letter offer apply directly to Niagara College.

- Niagara provides the application to the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS) for these students and pays their application fees. At that point, they become Niagara College students, and receive all of the same incoming student correspondence and materials as any other Niagara applicant.

- Niagara contacts the PPAA with the list of students and the PPAA contacts students at the end of June. With this, initial contact advisement has begun.

- Once enrolled at Niagara College, the PP students take the same courses as students in the GAS-UT program: Introduction to Philosophy I and II, Introduction to Psychology I and II, Introduction to Sociology I and II, History of Western Civilization I and II, Canadian Literature I, Computer Applications I, Writing Strategies, and Research Design and Methods. Students are integrated into the UT streams; they are not segregated in any way for classes and are not always identifiable to the UT professors as PP students.

- Participants who successfully complete the one-year program at Niagara College are considered for a wide range of four-year honours and major programs at Brock University. Most students tend to enrol in Psychology, Sociology or History.

Benefits of the Program for the Student

Students receive:

- Guaranteed admission to Brock University, if academic conditions are met.

- One or two full transfer credits to Brock, if academic conditions are met.

- Time for gradual transition over a year from high school to the larger, more impersonal university.

- A supportive environment for those who wish to continue academic studies with university as their goal, but prefer not to return to high school.
- Exemption from additional application fees; Niagara pays the OCAS fee, and the Ontario Universities' Application Centre(OUAC) fee for the following year's admission to Brock is waived.

- Opportunity to improve in their particular area of academic need.

- Opportunity for intensive individual academic advising.

- Access to academic supports at both Niagara College and Brock University. These include subject tutoring, English language workshops for second language students and university preparation workshops. For example, sessions on academic integrity are led by Brock staff from Brock's Student Development Centre.

- Access to all the accommodations support for students with disabilities.

- Access to Niagara College entrance scholarships.

- Access to bursaries for financial need.

- Access to grants for First-Generation students.

- Access to Niagara College residence.

Students have access to all Student Services at Niagara College and some services at Brock University.

Academic Advisement in the Program

What distinguishes the group of PP students during the year at Niagara College is the focused academic advising that is available to them. Such support service is deemed key to the success of the program. Therefore, an academic advisor jointly appointed by both institutions1 (Niagara and Brock), devotes approximately 20 per cent of his/her time advising these students through primarily individual face-to-face meetings, emails, small group sessions and workshops. While participation is not mandatory for students, they are expected to use the advisor's services. Minimal expectations are to attend the workshops and to meet individually with the advisor at least twice per semester (four times annually in September, December, January and April). This expectation was introduced in the second year of the program. Most students have more individual contact; the number of contacts with a student throughout the year can be as high as 12-15 (this includes telephone, email, hallway meetings and social networking).However, the average number of actual office visits is 2.45. Still there is the rare student who has no advisor office contact throughout the year. In the first year of the program (2007/08) nine workshops were offered; in the second year (2008/09) 13 workshops were scheduled between September and March. Based on attendance patterns and student responses over these two years, the number of workshops was reduced to five in 2009/10: Orientation, Setting Goals, Time Management, Reading in the Social Sciences and Writing in the Social Sciences.

The advisor's formal responsibility for advising the PP students begins with the initial contact in late June (initiated by the student, parent or advisor) and ends with a conversation affirming

[1]The model of a jointly appointed academic advisor has its genesis in an earlier College University Consortium Council (CUCC)-supported project on articulation between Brock and Niagara. The institutions determined the model to be so successful that they continued the joint position after the CUCC funding ended.

PSE destination and program choice (or not) the following April. However, the advisor often continues to be informally available to those students who go on to Brock or remain at Niagara the following year. In fact, students often come to see the PPAA at their own initiative in preference to their departmental/program advisor who is new to them. The PPAA has an office at the University and at the College; this facilitates contact by students at both institutions.

Literature Review on Academic Advising

Postsecondary Student Academic Advising

The traditional focus of academic advising within PSE has been to help students select courses to fulfill academic requirements for their program. The literature calls this prescriptive advising (Franklin & Parker, 1996; Gordon, Habley & Grites, 2008). This has meant primarily knowing the institution's program regulations, program content, courses and timetables and helping students put together an educational plan and course schedule so they can graduate in a timely manner, preferably within the time allotted for completing the credential (degree, diploma, certificate). As access to PSE has broadened and students have become more abundant and diverse, this prescriptive approach to advising has proven inadequate.

Prescriptive advising has widely been replaced with developmental academic advising. This latter approach facilitates students' growth by using available information about the self and students' interactions in their environment to make decisions about their educational plan and overall future (Creamer & Creamer,1994; Crookston, 1994;1972; King, 2005; Raushi, 1993). Such an approach to advising is evident in the National Academic Advising Association's (NACADA) (2006) description of academic advising as an educational process that "…engages students beyond their own world views, while acknowledging their individual characteristics, values, and motivations as they enter, move through, and exit the institution" (p.7). A main outcome of academic advising is to help students "craft a coherent educational plan based on assessment of abilities, aspirations, interests, and values, using complex information from various sources to set goals, reach decisions, and achieve those goals" (p.8). This concept is elaborated upon by the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education who states that the primary purpose of an academic advising program is to assist students in the development of meaningful educational plans. Here the strategic and directional word is "meaningful."

More recently, intrusive academic advising (Garing, 1993; Thomas & Minton, 2004), which extends the developmental approach to one in which the advisor is even more proactive, is promoted as being more effective in the current environment of PSE institutions with very diverse student populations. It is called "intrusive" because advisors are required to seek out and bring students into the advisement relationship, a relationship which presumably leads both parties to share responsibility for the student's success or failure. Earl (n.d.) contends that an important advantage of this mode of advising is that the student must make a conscious decision about the academic situation, even if that decision is a 'no'. This type of advisement is credited with enhancing students' academic skills and increasing retention rates, and is seen as "essential to college retention programs" (Thomas & Minton, 2004, p. 2). Although the language might be resisted as being negative, the intent is to be interventionist in order to identify

difficulties – personal or academic – that are interfering with students' academic progress, and to identify and put strategies in place to support them.

Impact of Academic Advising

In the sixth national American College Testing (ACT) survey on retention practices in all types of U.S. colleges – 2 and 4 year, public and private – Habley and McClanahan (2004) identified academic advising as one of three categories of factors that contributed most to student retention in colleges; the other two categories were first-year support programs and learning support. The largest number of institutions (72.1 per cent) identified improvement/ redevelopment of their academic advising practices as having the greatest impact. In a more recent and similar survey of 305 community colleges, Habley, Valega, McClanahan and Burkum (2010) also report findings similar to Habley and McClanahan, in that academic advising was among the top nine practices that made the greatest contribution to student retention. In this case, it was specifically having an academic advising centre available to students on campus that had the greatest impact.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) devotes several questions to academic advising. In its 2007 report, NSSE consistently found that "almost three quarters of students (including first year and seniors) rate their advising experiences as good or excellent" (p.23). Several findings were relevant to this study:

- Students who met with their advisor more frequently were more satisfied with advising and also were generally more satisfied with their institution;

- Students who met with their academic advisor at least twice during the academic year were more engaged on all five NSSE benchmarks: active and collaborative learning, level of academic challenges, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences and supportive campus environment;

- More frequent contact with their academic advisor was also related to greater self-reported gains in personal and social development, practical competence, general education and more frequent use of deep approaches to learning.

Fike and Fike (2008) in their study of 9,200 first time in-college students in a community college done over a four-year period, found that participation in the student services program was one of seven predictor factors of student persistence. The program required students to meet regularly with their advisors, complete mid-semester grade checks and complete a long-term plan of study. Similarly, in their publication about student success in postsecondary education in the United States, Swail, Mellen, Gardnerand Reed (2008) and Swail (2006) identified and elaborated on academic advising as one of three types of advising important for student success in college and university in the United States. Lastly, Bahr (2008),in his study of academic advising in the community college system, determined that advising appeared to be actively beneficial to student achievement; advising appeared to be more beneficial for those students who faced greater disadvantages in regards to academic preparation; and advising

appeared to increase the likelihood of students transferring to a four-year higher education institution.

Grayson and Grayson (2003), in their review of research on retention in both Canada and the United States, identified academic advising as a key area of activity for policies and practices that contribute to student retention. They made recommendations underscoring the importance of the academic advisor within PSE and the positive impact of his/her work. Several studies undertaken with Canadian and American student populations, and especially with at-risk students, have shown that high engagement with academic advisors has a positive impact on students' educational experiences (Grayson & Grayson, 2003; Arms, Cabrera & Brower, 2008). At the University of Windsor (2006), the evidence from various repeated surveys (NSSE, Globe & Mail University Report Card, Northstar Qualitative Assessment, Manitoba Survey of Undergraduates) regarding the impact of academic advising was persuasive enough that the university created a three-tier advising system to improve academic advisement services.

In surveying students about access to and persistence in PSE, Berger (2007) identified that indecision about a career path was given as the second most significant barrier for high school students not pursuing PSE and a significant reason for them dropping out of college or university. Helping students decide on a career path and thus developing their educational plan is a major priority for the academic advisor, who takes a developmental, intrusive or integrated approach to his/her work. It is the career path that determines the student's major, hence the courses to be taken, and the motivation to continue and succeed.

Despite the well documented advantages of academic advising, the service is not well used by university or college students. The most recent all-Canada survey of first-year undergraduate university students (CUSC, 2007) showed that only 39 per cent of students reported using the academic advising service offered by their institutions, though those who actually did use it expressed a high level (85 per cent) of satisfaction. What is interesting is that students' appreciation for academic advising grows as they move through their university years, and so the graduating student survey (CUSC, 2009) shows that 76 per cent of students used the service with about the same level (77 per cent) of satisfaction. Usage is even higher in Arts and Humanities (81 per cent) and Social Sciences (81 per cent). Such gains in usage and satisfaction suggest that students recognize the benefits of academic advising. When compared to the system as a whole, Brock's first- year students reported 38 per cent usage and a satisfaction level of 89 per cent, which is close to the national level in both cases.

One item on the Ontario college system's annual student satisfaction survey (KPI survey) addresses advising services, but it is clouded by other related issues of general counselling and native counselling. The system pattern, however, is clear. Whereas a high number of students see advising services as important, few use the service; but those who use it are satisfied or very satisfied. The 2008, 2009 and 2010 surveys for Niagara College showed that, for each of those three years, between 80 and 91 per cent of students did not use the campus advising services; but 70 per cent of responding students said that the availability of such service was important. Of those who actually used it, between 68 and 74 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied (OCAAT, 2008; 09; 10).

The Academic Advisor

Academic advisors may take any of the following three approaches to their work, or an integrated approach using all three:

a) Prescriptive approach –giving students information about academic regulations, departmental expectations, program requirements, course scheduling and graduation requirements so they can plan appropriately to graduate in a timely manner. In this approach the advisor is more obviously an authority figure representing the institution.

b) Developmental approach – encouraging students to share decision-making in putting together their educational plan and take responsibility for their own academic success; being more of a facilitator connecting the student with information and resources rather than an institutional purveyor of rules and regulations.

c) Intrusive approach – being proactive and intentional about contacting students and working with them, in a caring and beneficial relationship, so they can develop their goals for success in their PSE program. Intrusive advising is a personal as much as a professional approach; it incorporates intervention strategies that allow the advisor to establish connections with the students that help them stay motivated. This approach is recommended as effective with at-risk students based on studies that show that probationary students attain a higher Grade Point Average (GPA) when intrusive advising is used (Abelman & Molina, 2001; Cruise, 2002; Gordon, 2006). This approach builds on and extends the developmental approach to being proactive in seeking out students who need support.

Thomas and Minton (2004) list the characteristics of the intrusive advisor as one who:

- Knows the institution.
- Knows the resources of the institution and the staff of the various programs.
- Is trained in all relevant areas that have a direct impact on the student's well-being and success.
- Is available to be reached by the student as needed.
- Monitors advisee progress with and without the student.
- Maintains clear boundaries with the student.

Jennifer Varney (n.d.) adds that the intrusive advisor:

- Is not afraid to initiate contact with students using email, IM, telephone and personalized mail.

Many agree with Habley and McClanahan (2004) that one of the primary factors contributing to students' persistence in studies is having quality contact with a concerned person on campus. There is also general agreement with the conclusions of Lotkowski, Bobbinsand Noeth (2004) that academic advising is one of the few ways that affords such quality interaction, especially in a large college or university. For the PP students their academic advisor (PPAA) is that concerned person.

Research Questions

The key research questions investigated were:

1. What is the profile of the Partners Program student?
2. What is the nature of the focused academic advisement provided to the Partners Program students?
3. What advisement strategies/activities are most effective from the students' perspective?
4. What is the impact of focused academic advisement in the Partners Program on students?
5. Is the student advisement program cost effective?

Methods

In this section the participants, data collecting instruments and data collection procedures are described. A mixed method design was used for the study; both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The quantitative data are student data supplied by the students through a questionnaire and GPAs from institutional records. The qualitative data are interview data from all but one group of participants and journal entries from the PPAA. In the analysis section the quantitative and qualitative data are presented. The student survey and GPA data are presented first; next are the analyses of the interviews and the PPAA's journal, and lastly program cost analysis.

Participants

The sample for the project was voluntary. The principal researcher and class instructors informed the students (PP and NPP) about the project in class and invited them to participate. Additionally the principal researcher and the PPAA met with the PP students. All who responded formed the student sample. They included 71 PP students and 57 NPP students. The coordinator of the GAS program identified eight faculty members to be involved and the

principal researcher contacted them by email and in person. All eight agreed to participate. The PPAA was a resource to the research team early in the project process providing information that helped in the implementation of the project. The other participants, all of whom were invited by the principal researcher, included the Dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Niagara College within which the GAS program resides, a counsellor from the Counselling Services division at Niagara, and the one full-time academic advisor who joined the GAS unit late in the 2009/2010 year. The PP students were from the three years of the program (2007-2009). From the 84 PP students enrolled in the program over these three years, 71 were available over the period of study (March 2009-June 2010). Of these 71,44 (62%) responded to the survey and 20 of these respondents (54.5 per cent) were interviewed. The NPP students had taken the same GAS-UT courses over the same three-year period as the PP students.

Data Collection Instruments

The purpose of the survey was to collect students' feedback on academic advising. To do so a questionnaire was developed using information from the literature, the CAS Standards and Guidelines for academic advising, GAS-UT faculty, the PPAA and the research team. An early draft of the questionnaire was field tested for face validity and ease of completion with a group of Niagara College year-one students in a different program from the project participants. Minor revisions were made from the field test feedback for the final version, with slight modifications for PP and NPP groups. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. Section I contains mostly Likert scaled items and also some non-scaled items about different aspects of academic advising: sessions, strategies, activities and benefits. Section II contains demographic items such as age, gender and program enrolment status.

The student interview guide was for the PP students only and had 10 items that probed their reasons for taking the program, their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of advisement, their decisions regarding continuing in PSE after the PP year and how advisement helped them in making this decision.

The Faculty interview guide had eight items that were starters for a semi-structured interview (more like a conversation) that aimed to get information on how faculty approach academic advising, their view of academic advisors, and their opinions about the PP students in their classes.

The interview guide for the PPAA was developed partly from insights from his journal and from the CAS Standards. The same guide was used both years, with two questions added the second year about changes made in advisement since the first year.

The staff (counsellor and advisor) interview was open and conversational and aimed to obtain information that would provide a wider institutional context for academic advising done by the PPAA and information that staff thought should be included in a handbook for the PPAA.

Data Collection Procedure

Ethics clearance was received from both Niagara College and Brock University. This was necessary because student participants were at both institutions and the PPAA is a joint employee of both institutions. As shown in Table 1 below, data collection spanned the time period March 2009 to June 2010. Quantitative data using the survey technique and a questionnaire were collected from the students; students' GPAs were collected from the Registrars' office at both institutions. Qualitative data using the interview were collected from the PP students, the PPAA, and faculty and staff. Additionally the PPAA's journal was collected twice, once each year, for analysis. The student questionnaire, "Niagara/Brock Academic Advising Survey" was administered as print and online versions in March/April 2009 and 2010, close to the end of each academic year.

Lessons were learned from the data collection process with students in 2009 leading to modifications in the process in 2010; less time between the survey and the interview was one modification. This resulted in more PP students participating in the interview. Initially in 2009, a print survey was administered in class with the support of the program coordinator and a faculty member. Unfortunately, on the day of scheduled administration, the class was cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. As very few PP students were present, invitations to participate in the survey were sent electronically to the remaining PP students by email.

In 2010, there was more time available to work with the PP students. They were informed of the project early in the academic year during their orientation session in September, and were reminded periodically during the year. Early in March 2010, all PP students were invited via email to participate. Respondents were scheduled in groups of three for both the survey and interview towards the end of March and into early April. Students completed the electronic survey via Survey Monkey, and then were interviewed in groups by two of the researchers. Three follow–up contacts by telephone and email over a two week period yielded no response from those who had missed their appointments. The NPP students received the electronic survey via Survey Monkey. In total 44 PP and 57 NPP students completed the survey.

Only PP students were invited for an interview. They were interviewed once in March/April, after completing the survey questionnaire. Some students were interviewed individually and some in small focus groups, depending on their preference. Three students were interviewed by telephone. In total 20 PP students were interviewed, representing 54.5 per cent of the survey respondents. As an incentive to participate in the study, all student respondents were entered into a draw according to yearly cohorts, for an HMV certificate valued at $50.00. Each of the eight faculty members was interviewed once. The PPAA was interviewed twice during the course of the study; likewise, his journal was analyzed twice. All interviews were taped and transcribed; scripts were edited twice for language clarity. The edited scripts were then sent to participants for their review.

Table 1. Data collection times

2009				2010			
March	**April**	**May**	**June**	**Feb**	**March**	**April**	**June**
Student Survey Student interview	Student Survey Student interview	Faculty Niagara Counsellor interviews	PPAA Journal PPAA interview	Niagara Academic Advisor Interview (new in GAS)	Student Survey Student interview	Student and Academic advisor interviews	PPAA Journal PPAA interview Student grades

Data Analysis

Survey Monkey produced descriptive statistics for the survey data. Due to the small number of participant responses, scales were collapsed from a 5 or 6-point scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree, and N/A) to a 4-point scale (agree, neutral, disagree, and N/A). Excel was used to analyze GPA scores, followed by SPSS to conduct t-tests. Atlas-ti was used for managing and coding the interviews and the journal scripts.

Survey Analysis

The number of students who completed the survey is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Student participants who completed the survey

Year	Partner Program Students		Non-Partner Students	
	Enrolled	Completed Survey	Enrolled	Completed Survey
2007/08	25	6	40	16
2008/09	32	23	43	28
2009/10	27	15	52	13
Total	**84**	**44**	**35**	**57**

Student demographics. The demographics of the PP students who participated in the survey ranged in age from 16-20 years; whereas, the NPP students ranged from 21-35 years. The age difference between the PP and the NPP students is to be expected. Whereas all the PP students are recent high school graduates the NPP students vary in graduation date from high school. Among the NPP students are many mature students; some graduated from high school many years ago and are entering the PSE system for the first time; some are returning to college to complete programs begun earlier. The NPP group also includes students from

various programs across the college who are taking GAS courses for interest or to fulfill their GED requirement.

By far the majority of the respondents in both the PP and NPP groups were female, single and white Caucasian. The younger PP group had more ethnic and racial diversity than the older NPP group. This convenience sample makes no claims that this finding is representative of the College population.

When asked about their transfer credits, the majority of the PP students who went on to Brock indicated they did not receive any transfer credits. At the time of the survey, some students would not have known about their transfer credit status; institutional data proved to be more reliable. The NPP students were not asked this question.

Transfer credits. Institutional data was employed to confirm the actual amount of transfer credits received. In each year of the program about 50 per cent of the PP students who went on to Brock received one or two credits for their college year. The mean of their Niagara average GPA over the three years was 69 per cent. A 75 per cent average is required to receive one transfer credit from Brock. From both the survey and interview data it was noted that students are not always aware of or remember what transfer credits they received, if any. Some were confused, expecting that by taking the Partners Program they would automatically receive transfer credits.

Table 3. PP Students and transfer credits

	Cohort 2007/08	Cohort 2008/09	Cohort 2009/10
Received two credits	2	1	1
Received one credit	5	5	3
Received no credit	7	8	5
Went on to Brock	14	14	9

Academic advising. Part 1 of Section 1 of the survey asked general questions about the advising sessions such as frequency of contact with an academic advisor. While PP students reported varied use of the advising service, by the third year of the program students were using the services more frequently than in the first year the program was offered. This was distinctly different from the sample of NPP students who responded to the survey. As many as 50 per cent of them reported never contacting an advisor compared with only 13 per cent of the PP students. The feedback on frequency of use confirms that PP students met more frequently with an academic advisor than NPP students. This is to be expected because the PP students received academic advising as part of their program, and the PPAA was intentional about contacting them.

Some survey participants enrolled at Niagara, particularly NPP students, used sources other than the academic advisor for advice: the Registrar's Office, faculty members, program coordinators, and/or the Student Disabilities Service. In the 2009/10 year of the program, no PP

student used sources other than the PPAA for academic advising; NPP students took advantage of Niagara College Counselling Services (50 per cent), program advisors (72per cent), faculty members (45 per cent) and other sources (28.6 per cent). These percentages reflect that students generally use multiple sources for advice.

The length of most of the individual advising sessions ranged from less than 10 to 20 minutes. Overall, by the third year of the program, more PP students were having longer individual sessions with the academic advisor. In the first year 12.5 per cent reported meeting at least one time for 30-60 minutes; in the third year more than twice as many (26.7 per cent) reported meetings of this length. This could be a function of memory; the survey was more immediate for these students. It could also be that by the third year of the program, the PPAA had an advisement plan from the beginning of the year with specific requirements in place.

All participants (PP and NPP students) indicated a preference for face-to-face individual communication. Approximately one-third of the students also found email useful; very few participants indicated a preference for telephone consultations, and none preferred social networking systems such as Facebook. Participants preferred individual sessions first, followed by group sessions such as workshops second, and lastly meeting the advisor with friends.

Advising topics. When asked which of seven topics they discussed with their advisor, participants mostly discussed academic issues. The next most frequently discussed topics were appropriate pre-requisite courses, career planning and personal issues. The other three topics– social issues, financial issues and other (capturing various concerns) – were discussed less frequently(Appendix B1).

Group advising sessions (Workshops).Workshops available at Niagara College to PP and NPP students included Orientation, Setting Goals, Time Management, Writing in the Social Sciences and Reading in the Social Sciences. When asked about their participation in each, the majority of NPP participants selected the “N/A” response category more than the “disagree” or “agree” categories, whereas the majority of the PP participants agreed that all of the workshops were helpful (Appendix B2). The N/A response was appropriate for the NPP students because they were not expected to attend.

Academic advising needs. The needs of students for academic advising were assessed through 10 sub items. Participants indicated that their strongest need was for the academic advisor to have an office where he/she could always be located and is open, inviting and highly accessible. Students further expressed that they would like to have one person provide centralized college/university transfer information. The majority of respondents also indicated that they do not need help with understanding university language or in setting academic goals. Approximately one-third of the participants indicated a need for someone to talk to about academic plans, and another one-third indicated there was no need to do so, while the remaining third were neutral or undecided (Appendix B3).

Characteristics of an academic advisor. In terms of the characteristics of an academic advisor (Q11 in Appendix B4), the majority of participants indicated that the behaviours of their academic advisor were positive. The profile of the academic advisor that emerged was of an

individual that was motivational, caring, and respectful and who encouraged personal decision-making. The lowest level of agreement was with their ability to provide personal problem assistance, which was to be expected since the academic advisor's role was always intended to focus on academic rather than on personal issues. PP students rated advisor characteristics more highly than NPP students, and in general the 2009/10 cohort rated advisor characteristics more highly than earlier PP cohorts.

Benefits of academic advising. The data in Appendix B5 shows that the majority of the participants benefited from academic advising. All cohorts agreed that academic advising was beneficial in the six areas listed in the questionnaire: intellectual growth, helping with educational goals, enhanced self-esteem, conducting a realistic self-appraisal, improved communication, developing a satisfying lifestyle and appreciating a mix of individual and group sessions. The PP groups reported more benefit than NPP students, and a higher percentage of the 2009/10 cohort agreed the advising was beneficial than was the case with earlier cohorts.

Goal for enrolling in present program. The majority of the PP and NPP students indicated that their goal in enrolling in their program was for university preparation. However, over the three cohorts of study the percentage of PP students whose main goal for enrolling in their program was university preparation decreased to a small extent with each cohort year: 100 percent for the 2007/08 cohort; 92 percent for the 2008/09 cohort; and 87 percent of 2009/10 cohort. At the same time the percentage of participants who indicated their main goal was preparation for further college study also decreased: 75 percent for the 2008/09 cohort; 8 per cent for the 2008/09 cohort; and 33 per cent for the 2009/10 cohort. Some of the possible factors contributing to this pattern are discussed in the PPAA interview section of this report.

GPA Analysis: Grade Comparisons

The grade point average of all PP students and a comparison sample of the NPP students were compared in terms of their Niagara College grades, graduation rate, and their average grade after one year at Brock University. At Niagara College both groups were enrolled in the General Arts and Science program. Students were compared by class average mean (*M*), and in terms of the number of graduates. Students' GPA in the PP 2007/08 and 2008/09 cohorts increased by 8 and 4 points respectively between secondary school and Niagara College, while the GPA of students in the 2009/10 cohort dropped 8 points between secondary school and Niagara College. Drops in GPAs doubled after the first year of university. Secondary school grades were not available for the NPP groups. GPA's of the 2006/07 and the 2007/08 NPP cohorts dropped approximately 15 points between Niagara College and Brock University. GPA's for NPP students for the same years also dropped to a similar extent to the PP mean GPA drop(see Appendix C).

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to identify the impact of moving from Niagara College to Brock University on GPA scores of PP students and NPP students (see Appendix D). For the 2007/08 groups there was a significant difference in GPA from the time the students were at Niagara College to when they were at Brock. The mean decease in GPA scores was 14.86 for the PP group and 15.87 for the NPP group with a 95 per cent confidence interval.

For the 2008/09 students a *t*-test of the GPA scores of the PP group also revealed a statistically significant decrease in GPA score between Niagara College and Brock University (mean 14.65 GPA decrease). While there was no significant decrease for the NPP group, the small group size (*n*=6) makes the statistic weak.

The data showed 100 per cent retention for the 2007 and 2008 PP cohorts for their first year at Brock among survey respondents, despite their low grades; whereas, the retention rate for the NPP cohorts was 80 per cent. Since the 2009 PP cohort begins at Brock in September 2010 grades and retention rates for this group are unknown.

Interview Analysis

The purpose of the interviews was to elucidate the survey data by gathering more information from students, faculty and the PPAA about their perception and experience of academic advising. A total of 27 interview transcripts (see Table 4) were read twice before they were coded using the Atlas-ti software program. Some student interviews were group interviews; all others were individual.

Table 4. Interview data sets

Faculty and Advisors	Transcripts
Faculty advisors	7
Coordinators	1
Counsellor	1
Academic Advisor	1
Dean	1
PPAA	2
Students	14

Two sets of codes were used in the analysis: a priori codes and emergent codes. A priori codes for the student interview were drawn from interview questions only. A priori codes for faculty/advisor/counsellor interview analysis were drawn from the research questions and interview questions. Emergent codes were developed to capture unexpected codes in the transcripts. For code agreement the researchers individually coded a sample of the transcripts. Constant comparison among the codes and transcripts were undertaken so that adjustments to the codes were made to better represent the questions or ideas provided by the participants.

Student Interview

All 20 PP students who volunteered and appeared as scheduled were interviewed individually or in small focus groups, in person or by telephone. Ten questions were used to guide the interview; they addressed: reasons for taking the program, early communication about the program, strong and weak points of the program, advisement help, and personal impact of the program. In response to the interview questions, many students said they would likely not have persisted with their education at this time if it were not due to the Partners Program. From the 33 statements about "strengths of the advisement" that students received, more than half (57.5per cent) suggested that the PPAA was "supportive, encouraging, approachable, available all the time (at least through email), knowledgeable about the programs and really caring about the students." One student summed it up thus:

> [The PPAA] was honestly phenomenal. Like, he was available to every student at any time they needed him. He really talked to me, like, get on track with what I wanted to do, and what I needed to do to get there, and what the easiest way to get there was.

An example of several statements about the importance of human contact in the advising process is: "it's just nice having somebody there because it's a very lonely sort of journey. So to have somebody there that you can like talk to, and just simple things, it's really helpful." Most students stated that the advisement program was well organized. The biggest criticisms came from the 2007/08 students who noted that the academic advisor should have an office at Niagara College, where they would always know where to find him. As mentioned earlier, this situation existed during the first year of the program when the advisor was hired part way through the academic year; the situation was rectified in subsequent years.

All 20 students interviewed claimed that they had made a decision about their future educational plans. Fifteen said that the PPAA had helped them in this decision-making process, either by reassuring them that they were on the right track or opening up new possibilities. The other five said they had already decided before they came to Niagara. When asked for suggestions to improve the advisement program, they offered the following: 1) make advising mandatory at least once or twice each term; 2) make workshops more engaging; 3) provide an office for the academic advisor, and 4) replace some of the courses with something that would prepare them more for university.

All 20 students were unanimous in stating they would recommend the Partners Program to their friends in high school because they felt better prepared for university in terms of studying skills, time management skills and earning better grades. Further, the transition period was beneficial, the professors were supportive, and it opened up more options for them. One student's comments sum up the group's perception of the program's benefit to them:

> I already recommended it to a few of my friends who are going to M…right now, for the trades. I already told them that the environment is different….

> The students-professor relationship is a lot closer than it is in high school. They actually care what you want… The advisement is the opposite of the kind we had in high school… My academic advisor, we still keep in contact just to see how I am going through Brock right now…. As an academic liaison, he was very approachable, very helpful, and very knowledgeable.

In addition to the expected themes from the interview questions, the following significant themes emerged: confusion about the Partners Program including eligibility criteria for transfer credits; the importance of human contact; and the preference for one-on-one advising. Students ranked the three most beneficial workshops as: time management, goal setting and orientation.

Faculty Interview

Five groups who provide advising services to students at Niagara College were interviewed: academic advisors, program coordinators, faculty members (faculty advisors), counsellors and deans (see Table 4). Some faculty members are designated program advisors, but students go to the faculty member who is their professor for a particular course. Information generated from the interviews with these participants was used in preparing the Partners Program Academic Advisor's Handbook. This section reports the interview with the eight faculty members.

***Student Profile*.** PP students are in the same classes as NPP students. The wide range of NPP students and large class sizes make it difficult to always identify the PP students. However, they are described by one faculty member as:

> Interested in learning; they are already getting good marks, the ones that I am talking about, they come to clarify concepts, and I get emails from them saying I was thinking about this and what about that? So, so far as strictly academic advising, the partners I found to be coming to my office for just this year, enjoy learning.

***Nature of Focused Advisement*.** Faculty members advise students on both course-based issues and program-based issues. In course-based advising sessions, faculty members answer course-related questions and help students with their learning skills such as note taking and essay writing. In program-based advising sessions, faculty members talked about credit transfer, articulation programs, college/university choices, application process for universities and course scheduling. Referrals for use of other student services available at Niagara are often made if non-academic issues are involved. Among all the non-academic issues that were raised by students and required referrals elsewhere, personal issues and financial issues were found to be most common. Students tend to consider the faculty member as their first choice for seeking help because faculty members are more familiar to them than academic advisors or counsellors. Nonetheless, students are referred to Counselling Services or other services when the topic is not academic in nature.

Advising Strategies. Faculty members who are designated program advisors send out general invitations at the beginning of the year to let students know that they are available. It is the students' responsibility to make appointments for advising sessions. After the midterm grades are communicated, students who have received U (unsatisfactory) and N (not attending) are encouraged to see either the program coordinator or a faculty program advisor. This is not mandatory, so many students let the opportunity go by. In these cases advisors cannot enforce visits for advisement. The faculty advisors' personalities play an important role. Some advisors tend to make students feel obligated to see them for advising, others do not. This year especially (2009/10), faculty advisors have been working closely with the PPAA to keep him informed of the PP students' in- class performance so that the PPAA has a better understanding of the students and the academic challenges they are facing.

Advisor's Role. The understanding of the academic advisor's role varied among faculty members based on their experiences and past/present roles. There are various individuals involved in advising students, including counsellors in Student Services and faculty in programs. In the GAS-UT program, some faculty are designated by assignment to provide advising, while others advise informally as a part of their teaching role.

One faculty member who did not have a designated advisory role offered that an academic advisor should be well informed, be able to address the concerns that students have, be able to give them advice, and make the connections that students need. Another faculty member, who had been a designated advisor for the program, was more explicit about the advising sessions:

> We talk about identifying career options,… school choice, articulation programs, choice of major, transfer credit, support systems when they get to university, referral, referral services within the college, and within the Niagara region actually.

Another faculty member commented that an academic advisor knows the students' strengths and weaknesses and is able to help students with career planning and finding the right career path. Lastly, a shared concern was that faculty members were doing advisement without time allocated in their workload, except for those who were designated program advisors.

Suggestions in Regards to Advising. Most faculty members think that more academic advising should be available to the students, and suggested that this could be accomplished by either increasing full-time advisor positions or grouping all the students and assigning each faculty member a group, "so that faculty members know exactly who he/she is looking after."

Another faculty member suggested that a holistic approach would be more beneficial for students' success:

> I never see that [advising] as divided from academic, social, emotional, culture, life. They intertwine and can't always separate all those because too many of those factors intertwine and are interdependent, but we very much, currently, look at just academic, in our role right now. And our role right now is only defined in terms of academic advisement.

Partners Program Academic Advisor's Interview

After initial coding of both PPAA interviews (Table 4), the interview responses were organized according to the research questions: student profile, nature of advisement provided, effective strategies, advisement impact, and three additional themes: role of the academic advisor, frustrations of the advisor, and suggestions for changes. Those results are summarized below.

Student Profile. The interviews with the PPAA made clear that most students arrive at Niagara College without an understanding the nature of the Partners Program. They are clear on one thing, it will help them get to Brock, and they are excited about that opportunity. As the year progresses, some realize that university is not for them but they have the alternative of staying at Niagara; there is a shift in their educational and career goals. When that shift happens, the motivation of those students seems to increase. Most of those who struggle to make the grade are then "motivated to finish the year knowing that they did have this other path that they were going to be at college in September." In general, students find it difficult to meet deadlines, choose their programs at Brock, accept that they must take courses they do not like and understand that different professors teaching the same course may grade differently.

The PPAA interviews suggested that students need help in the following areas: setting academic goals; understanding the language of the university, (for example, "They don't understand how averages are calculated"); and completing self-assessments of their problems. The PPAA said that some students "have the ability to self-assess their problems but most of them don't. They want to have their hands held throughout the whole process. "Students also lack understanding of the Partners Program, although they had supposedly received the program brochure and have had telephone conversations about it before enrolment, and more conversations and discussions about it during their first week of orientation at the College. Even after all this, "a few of them still don't seem to comprehend it" (PPAA). They are also confused about transfer credits. Most of them need help in accessing information about universities' admission policies and about institutional processes in general: "We use a lot of university language, university lingo, college lingo that the students don't understand" (PPAA).

Nature of Focused Advisement Provided. Human contact is very important to the students and their success, and they prefer face-to-face individual advisement sessions. While the PPAA encourages students to make their own decisions, mandatory meetings are still important. By the third year of the program (2009/10) it was mandatory that students meet with the PPAA twice per semester, at the beginning and the end of the term, yet according to the PPAA "there were one or two, maybe three students this year [2009/10] that I didn't meet with or maybe I met with once in September and didn't see them again." The most necessary workshops for the students, from the PPAA's perspective were: orientation, reading in the humanities, reading in the social sciences, writing in MLA and APA, time management and goal setting. However, in general the workshops were not well attended when offered. As with the requirement that students attend a minimum number of advising sessions, the PPAA would like to see the workshops be mandatory, but cannot enforce this without attaching some reward. The best attended workshop was orientation during the first week of the program. A mandatory Bridge

Program is proposed as a solution to the challenge of attendance and participation in the advisement program.

Effective Advisement Strategies/Activities. Effective advisement strategies/activities identified by the PPAA included one-on-one meetings, email communication, probing questions, the orientation workshop, initiating contact with the students, being personal, being present for them to talk to, listening, opening up possibilities and options for them, and self-reflection exercises in which students complete and use career goal sheets and time management sheets.

Impact of Focused Advisement on PP Students. The PPAA found that over the course of a year, students had benefited from advisement with respect to the following areas in particular: intellectual growth, setting educational goals, enhanced self-esteem, making realistic self-appraisal, developing a satisfying and productive lifestyle, and improving communication. Overall, students "open up much more…I think it goes back to being personal with them" (PPAA). He believed that the new advising strategies that he implemented in the 2009/10 year helped. One of these advising strategies was having students fill in a career goal sheet. Although at least half of the students did not state a goal, those who did were excited about going to university. However, from the PPAA's perspective, the most meaningful outcome of advising for students is when they "find the programs that fit right for them and the program they are going to thrive in" This too gives the PPAA the greatest job satisfaction, "helping borderline students find programs that fit them and for which they have a passion" (PPAA).

Advisor's Role. In the first interview, the PPAA saw the role as providing academic/career advising and keeping the students on track with their studies. This fits the prescriptive approach to advising. By the second interview, a year later, that view had changed to "helping students find the programs that work for them." In this role there are high points and low points, success stories and frustrations. Developing a good relationship with the students' professors was an important part of the role; the PPAA did more of this with each successive year, and in the third year could see the positive difference this made with students' success. The PPAA learned more about the students and could be a better liaison between students and faculty; he was more developmental and intrusive in this approach.

Frustrations of the Advisor. There were several frustrations in the role, some with students and some with the system:

1. Communication
    - Students not checking their emails regularly and not keeping appointment.

2. Inadequate contact with students
    - "I don't have any dedicated contact time with these students where I see them weekly in a classroom. It's not mandatory that they meet with me, so it's basically … my success or my contact with them depends on how much they want to have contact with me" (PPAA).
    - No mechanism to enforce student attendance at advising sessions.

3. Motivating students who seemed not to care
   - "Some students seemed to be at college only because their parents want them there, and so lack interest in their studies" (PPAA).

4. Students' lack of information about the program, even after several explanations
   - "I had met with him six times, and in each one of those times we had touched on the program and the student was still not getting it" (PPAA).
   - Letting go when the advisor just had to give up on a student.

5. The organization
   - The organization's "red tape" takes a long time to make changes; "but I think anyone that works at an institution would have that frustration, right up to the President" (PPAA).

Changes and their Effectiveness. Three significant changes were made in the advisement program during the 2009/10 year (the third year of the PP program and the second year of the PPAA's tenure):

1. Earlier interventions with students: the PPAA spoke with students earlier in the year, especially those whose grades and attitudes indicated they may not succeed in the program and so would not make it to university. They were able to explore program options at the college in time to apply for competitive programs by the closing date of February 1st. This likely impacted the higher number (nine or one-third of the entry group) who went into other programs at Niagara. This exploration seemed to "motivate them to finish the year knowing that they did have this other path, that they were going be at college in September" (PPAA).

2. The self-reflection exercises (career goal and time management) motivated students to move beyond those two immediate issues to think about "stuff like living on their own and doing chores around the house…" Several students implemented the time management strategy.

3. More regular contact with the students' professors provided more information about the students' progress, goals and potential:

> I met with the professors biweekly. You know you talk to four professors and they all said [the same thing]…, like "she is not university material. She may want to look at staying here for another year." Then I could at least have her explore those [college programs]. That was a big benefit this year" (PPAA).

At the time of the second interview (June 2010), there was discussion at Niagara and Brock of how to make the workshops more inviting, engaging and effective, and how to make student participation mandatory. The suggestion was to replace the workshops with a Bridging Program that would serve the purposes of the workshops but be more formally structured and would be mandatory for the PP students. The PPAA expressed the hope that "this will make them [students] take it a little more seriously." Throughout both interviews with the PPAA three issues surfaced consistently. These issues are noted below and ranked according to the most

significant first, along with solutions suggested and reasons that may limit their implementation (Table 5).

Table 5. Key issues and solutions from the PPAA's interview

Rank.	Issues	Solutions	Challenges/limitations in implementing solutions
1	Students' lack of knowledge about the Partners Program	Increase the awareness of the program at high school level Explain to students during their individual advising sessions	Advertising the program widely is not desirable; Brock wants to keep it small Local high school counsellors receive the information; most of the students are from outside of the local region. Some students are still uninformed at the end of the year, even after receiving explanations many times during the year.
2	Limitation of relying on email when students do not check their email regularly	Make advising mandatory	Grades might motivate students to attend advising sessions. Discussion is ongoing as to how to enforce participation in advisement.
3	Poor attendance at workshops (group advising sessions).	Make attendance at workshops mandatory	A *Bridge Program* is proposed. When approved, it will be mandatory and will have a fee. It will replace the workshops.

The Partners Program Advisor's Journal Analysis

The academic advisor's records of individual interactions with PP students over two years of the Program were supplied to the researchers in electronic text format. Each journal record was organized by the date of office visit. The number of office visits per student ranged from 1 to 5 averaging 2.45. Additional contacts through email were also recorded.

Coding Process. The coding process consisted of a systematic analysis of the academic advisor's records of advisement sessions with each student using Atlas-ti. The students were anonymous to the coders. A complete thought was used as the unit for coding and hence for analysis; coding of this journal data was done independently of students' interview or survey data. Codes, which represented the meaning of the text, were a mixture of a-prior and emergent codes. A priori codes were drawn from the literature, faculty interviews and three of the research questions.

The codes developed from the research questions include:

- Student Profile - What is the profile of the PP student? (Research Question 1)
- Advisement Nature - What is the nature of the focused academic advisement provided to the PP student)? (Research Question 2)

- Advisement Impact - What is the impact of focused academic advisement on the PP students? (Research Question 4)

The researchers individually coded a sample of the journal records for six students twice until code agreement was reached. Emergent codes were developed using a low level of abstraction to ensure the wording represented, as specifically as possible, the situation coded. Forty-two codes were developed and grouped under the three overarching themes from the research questions: student profile, advisement nature and advisement impact. Each thematic area contained sub themes.

Student Profile. Student Profile consisted of six subthemes: Achievement, Communication, Financial, Learning, Personal, and Courses (see Table 6).

The data from the PPAA's journal (Table 6) suggest that the profile of the PP student differed between the two years. Students from the 2008/09 year can be characterized as having more problems with achievement, communication, personal problems, learning issues and difficulty with required courses. Overall, coded issues occurred less frequently during advising sessions for the 2009/10 group compared to the 2008/09 group. For the 2009/10 group of students, achievement issues were discussed three times compared to 31 times for the 2008/09 group; communication issues appeared six times compared to 33 times; and personal issues were recorded 13 times for the 2009/10 group compared to 45 times for the 2008/09 group. The topic of course problems surfaced five times in advisement sessions for the 2009/10 group compared to 21 times for the 2008/09 group.

Table 6. Student profile code frequencies

		2008/09	2009/10
Achievement	Failing grades	13	1
	Assignment planning	7	1
	Makeup exam/rewrite	6	0
	Missed assignments	5	1
	Total	31	3
Communication	Appointment cancellation	11	4
	Workshop question	16	2
	Lack of email checking	6	0
	Total	33	6
Personal	Confusion	10	0
	Health issues	9	0
	Fear/worry	6	1
	Avoidance	6	1
	Awareness	6	0
	Attendance	5	2
	Self-esteem	3	0
	No career plan/goal		9
	Total	45	13
Courses	Philosophy	8	3
	History		0
	English	4	0
	Psychology	4	2
	Total	21	5
Learning	Career planning	52	25
	Learning problem	2	7
	Poor study habits	2	3
	Lack of interest	1	3
	Total	57	38

Academic Advisor's Profile. The profile of the academic advisor's behaviour that emerged from the journal analysis suggests that the advisor primarily acts in the capacity of an information sharing resource, provides direction and helps students engage in strategic planning while enabling shared responsibility. Advisor actions were subdivided into three types: (1) advice; (2) constructing connections; and (3) shared responsibility. Each advisor action category contained a number of different codes. The "advice category" referred to the nature of advice that the academic advisor provided such as direction, encouragement, information sharing, performance improvement, problem-solving, reviewing documents, strategic planning and warnings. The "constructing connections" category contained two codes reflecting the advisor's actions in contacting faculty or departments (contact others) and referral. The shared responsibility code contained a mix of the advice and constructing connections codes.

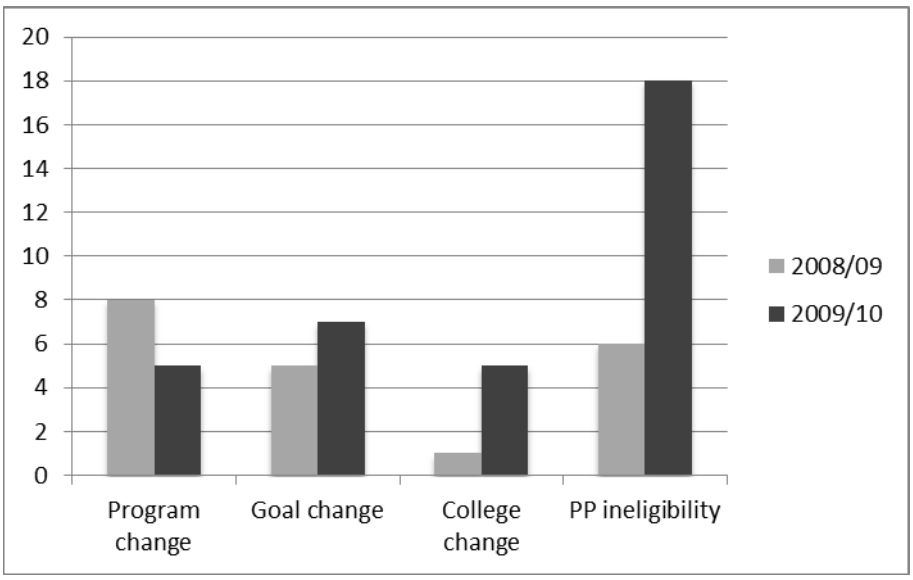
Table 7. Partners Program academic advisor's actions

	Cohort			Cohort	
Advice	**08/09**	**09/10**	**Connections**	**08/09**	**09/10**
Information sharing	54	17	Contact others	9	2
Direction	22	17	Referral	5	2
Encouragement	14	3	Total	12	4
Strategic planning back up plan	8	17			
Problem-solving	2	3	Shared responsibility	20	25
Performance improvement	1	12			
Reviewing documents	1				
Total	102	69			

A difference in the nature of academic advisement was seen between the two student cohorts. The most frequent action of the academic advisor for the 2008/09 group was information sharing and providing direction; whereas, in the 2009/10 group the advisor more frequently stimulated students to take shared responsibility for their learning and counselled students to consider a backup plan. Data from the PPAA's interview indicate that an intentional change in the approach to advising was made during the second year of advisement, from traditional to more developmental and intrusive, prompted by experience of and reflection on the first year's work.

The impact theme pertained to outcomes of the student's academic success and plans during the year. This theme consisted of codes such as program change, goal change and university ineligibility. In the two editions of the PPAA's journal, the frequency with which students discussed goal/career change was similar. However, the number of times students discussed changing to a different college program or their lack of academic success leading to ineligibility for transferring to Brock increased in the 2009/10 student cohort (see Fig.1). This finding points to the outcome of more frequent and earlier student advisement sessions, especially to discuss changing to a college program rather than pursuing university. This finding is corroborated by data from the PPAA's second interview.

Figure 1. Student outcomes



Advisement Program Cost Analysis

The program cost analysis was more than simply a quantitative exercise. Three factors were considered in determining cost-effectiveness of the program: financial, student destination and relationship building. This last dimension is probably best illustrated by the case study at the end of this section.

The argument can be made that the shared student model is effective because the one joint advisor position is able to service the needs of students at both schools. Other schools operating a program similar to the PP would require a dedicated advisor at each campus. Also, since the joint advisor is familiar with both institutions, he/she is equipped to give quality advice on both institutions' programs and student services. Ideally, the advice given will ensure the majority of PP students will move onto either Niagara or Brock and most importantly, make a smooth transition into their new program.

In terms of dollars, the Partners program is quite cost effective. Because each institution pays half of the joint advisor's salary, and only 20 per cent of that salary is dedicated to the Partners Program, the return on investment is quite substantial.

Included in calculating costs are: the PPAA's salary, the OCAS application fees that Niagara College pays for each student, supplies, travel, brochures and related costs. Both institutions share expenses for salary and materials. As previously mentioned, the jointly appointed advisor spends approximately 20 per cent of his/her time with students in the Partners Program. The computation below (Table 8) shows a substantial return on investment (ROI). Given the total

revenue that these students bring to both institutions by way of fees and grants, and the low cost of the advisor, it can be concluded that the approach is cost effective.

Table 8. Return on investment per student for two years, 2008-2010

	Niagara College		**Brock University**	
	2008/09	2009/10	2008/09	2009/10
New student intake	32	27	14	14
Expenditures				
Salary, Benefits ($)	10,500	10,500	6,000	6,000
OCAS applications	7,220	6,080	N/A	
Brochures/Materials	850	850	600	600
Total expenses ($)	18,570	17,430	6,600	6,600
Expenses per student ($)	580.31	645.55	471.43	471.43
Revenue				
Tuition & grant – new intakes ($)	217,600	183,600	109,200	109,200
Tuition & grant– students ($) retained from last year	20,400	40,800	N/A	N/A
Total revenue ($)	238,000	224,400	109,200	109,200
Return on investment (ROI) ($)	219,430	206,970	102,600	102,600
ROI per student ($)	**6,269.42**	**6,271.82**	**7,328.57**	**7,328.57**

However, money does not tell the whole story. Besides the recruitment factor, the dimension of retention for a year or more can also be added to the return on investment picture. The literature shows that it costs more to recruit new students than to retain current students (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993 in Pike &Pike, 2008). Therefore, the Partners Program students who move on to Brock or remain at Niagara and enrol in another program constitute a monetary saving to both institutions. The destination of students (Table 9) shows that over the three years of the program, 70-81 per cent of students are retained in the PSE system. Interview data confirmed that some students would not have entered the system otherwise.

Table 9. Partners Program students' actual destinations 2007-2009

	2007	2008	2009	Totals
Began PP	25	32	27	84
To Brock University	14	14	9	37
To other Niagara College programs	3	8	9	20
To another university	1	0	0	1
To another college	2	4	1	7
Withdrew from the PP	5	6	5	16
Unknown	0	0	3	3
Retained in PSE (%)	80	81	70	

In addition, as approximately 75 per cent of the PP cohort is comprised of "out of region students," the vast majority would have never attended Niagara College. This is important to note because each year Niagara will receive a new cohort of PP students and a carryover of students from the previous year.

An easily overlooked and unintended benefit to both institutions is the home source of the PP students. Approximately 75 per cent of the PP cohorts are "out of region students" and mostly from the GTA. The vast majority would not have attended Niagara College, let alone continued on to another two year program within the college. This is important to note because each year Niagara will receive a new cohort of Partners Program students and can expect that about 25 per cent of them (see Table 9) will remain at the college and enter two or three-year diploma programs. These numbers will compound year after year. Similarly, without the Partners Program, these students would have never been able to attend Brock as they did not meet academic admission requirements upon original application. These students are staying in the system. In a small way the Program is contributing to relieving the pressure on GTA institutions and bringing young people into the Niagara region that might otherwise have never lived in Niagara.

Further, there can be an argument made that the shared advisor model has some specific advantages. The one joint advisor provides a continuing contact for students moving across the two institutions. Literature indicates that sustained quality contact with a concerned person is highly valued by students (Habley & McClanahan, 2004), and student interviews confirm their need for human contact, preferably with the same person. On many campuses, especially larger ones, the academic advisor is the only person with the time to devote to students individually, especially on related academic matters. The joint advisor has knowledge and understanding of both institutions and so is equipped to help students navigate the systems to access individuals, programs and student services. Ideally, the advice given will ensure the majority of PP students will move on to either Brock or Niagara and most importantly, make a smooth transition into their new program. The PPAA works in a wider context of institutional collaboration. He also works with other students and faculty in articulation programs, so he is in a good position to advise Niagara and Brock students about such programs across both institutions in a way that

departmental or program based advisors cannot. One of the problems that both students and faculty identified in their interviews was that noone seems to have information about all the articulation programs. The PPAA holds that information for both Brock and Niagara.

In the developmental and intrusive approaches to academic advising, relationship building is seen to be a major focus of the advisor; the relationship between student and advisor is a crucial element in student growth (Crookston, 1994; Gordon et al., 2008). In the PP the academic advisor builds a relationship that encourages and supports students in their decision making and in moving on, and has influence beyond one particular year. The following case illustrates the value of relationship building in the PP.

Peter's story as told by the PPAA

Peter[2] began as a Partner Program student at Niagara College in September 2009. He contacted me early in August to inquire about the program and to ensure he was enrolled in the correct courses. In September, during my first face-to-face meeting with Peter, he quickly explained that he had to do well at school because his parents expected nothing less. He confided that both of his brothers were university graduates and had moved on to successful jobs. Throughout the conversation he kept referring to his father. After he finished I explained that it was important that he was going to school for himself, and not anyone else. If he did not find the motivation from within to do it for himself he would have a difficult time being successful. The first half of the fall semester went by and Peter was struggling with his studies. His struggles may have been caused by an active social life, lack of motivation, or personal issues, for his professors told me they did not think he was struggling with the course material. Over our next few meetings Peter began to open up to me about his struggles, fears, and his future. He was dealing with many personal issues at home and felt the pressure from his father to succeed was actually bringing him down.

Around the end of the semester Peter was stopping by my office more frequently. He would pop in on Mondays and, led by his inquiries, we'd have a conversation about the weekend. Sports was always a mutually enjoyed topic. Mixed into these conversations were discussions about college, personal life, and his career. Peter would often tell me he had a test approaching and was worried about his performance. As I know a weakness of his is time management, I would ask when he was planning to study and if he had made a schedule that he would stick to.

Throughout these conversations something happened to Peter. Suddenly his grades were improving and by the end of the first semester he had raised his average to 70%. More importantly, he was talking about his future, his career, and his grades. There was no mention of his father. Our relationship continued throughout the winter. Before spring exams Peter was stopping by my office regularly to tell me how long he had studied the night before. I was especially impressed that he commented on his schedule he had made, making himself study every night until 9 p.m., and then go out with his friends. Some of the things we had discussed were sticking!

[2] Name has been changed.

After all final grades were submitted Peter's father called me. I thought it was odd to be receiving a call from him so late in the year, especially given the fact that Peter had met the admission requirements to transfer to Brock. He said he was calling to thank me for the work I did with his son. He commented that Peter mentioned me quite a bit at home, and he felt that I was one of the reasons he succeeded at Niagara.

In the spring before Peter started at Brock he called to ask about what courses he should be registering in. I told him what he needed to register in, but advised that he would need to meet with his department advisor at Brock. He quickly said he wanted to work with me and did not want a new advisor. He then asked where my office at Brock was and if it was okay if he stopped by every now and then. Later in the spring, when he had selected his courses, he called to thank me and told me when he is on campus next he wanted to take me out for lunch, and "I am not taking no for an answer!"

Results and Discussion

This section outlines some of the limitations and challenges of this study. This is followed by an integration of the quantitative and qualitative data, done according to Cresswell (2008), in answering the five research questions. In addition, the results for three themes – role of an academic advisor, frustrations of the PPAA, and suggestions for changes in the advisement program – that emerged from the interview data are presented.

Limitations and Challenges

There are some limiting factors to be mindful of in interpreting the results of this study. As mentioned earlier, there was difficulty encountered in administering the survey in 2009, despite a data collection strategy involving the program coordinator and class instructor that seemed to promise a high response rate. This difficulty was mitigated in 2010.

The ability to make comparisons between PP and NPP groups and between PP cohorts was made difficult if not impossible for several reasons. Comparing GPAs between PP and NPP students is compromised, for instance, by the likelihood that they took different high school courses. Given that they applied for admission to Brock University, it is likely that all PP students would have taken University-bound (U) courses in high school; it is likely that most, if not all NPP students took College-bound (C) courses. Furthermore, those NPP students going on to Brock from Niagara would have met the minimum admission standard of 70 per cent GPA in their high school College-bound courses, while most of the PP students likely did not obtain the minimum 70 per cent in their University-bound courses.

Another problem in terms of data analysis relates to the sample size. Since yearly student cohorts were small for the PP students, the three-year sample was collapsed into one group for PP and another for NPP. Thus, some possible observations relating to the differences between yearly cohorts have been lost. In addition, the number of students who completed the survey

was a subset of the overall student population that was used for reporting GPA and was derived from institutional data. One possible explanation for the lower than expected student response to the survey may very well be a cultural one, in that the culture of research is less pervasive, so college students are less keen about and less familiar with participating in research. Some faculty members explained this phenomenon as an attitude of mistrust and compared it to a generally low response rate to the annual college satisfaction survey (KPI). Another explanation for low response in this study is that the survey and interview came close to the end of the program year when students were completing course evaluations in all of their classes; students may have had survey fatigue. Given that some of the questions on the survey assumed a year of program experience, it was not feasible to administer the survey much earlier.

Research Questions Themes

There were findings from all data sets that addressed four of the five research questions as indicated in the table below.

Table 10. Comparison among data sets by themes

Issues	PPAA journal	PPAA interview	Faculty, Advisor, Counsellor interviews	Student interview	Student survey
Student profile	x	x	x	x	x
Nature of the advisement	x	x	x	x	x
Effective strategies	x	x	x	x	x
Impact of advisement	x	x	x	x	x
Academic advisor role		x	x		
PPAA frustrations	x	x		x	
Suggestions for change		x	x	x	

Research Question 1. What is the profile of the PP student?
Information to build the PP student profile came primarily from the student survey and was augmented by the other data sources (see Table 10). The typical demographic profile that emerged from the combination of the three cohorts was of a single, white, female between 16 and20 years, with a high school GPA of 66, a Niagara College GPA of 69 and for those who already had a year at Brock, a GPA of 60. She is most likely to be from outside of the Niagara Region, specifically from the GTA, and likely to receive one or no university transfer credits from Brock. She began the year at Niagara with little understanding of the PP program, but saw it as a better alternative to returning to high school for a year to improve her chances for admission to university, or staying out of the education system altogether.

By the end of the year's involvement in the PP she had made a career decision, either for the first time or had had an earlier decision confirmed, and so had a program direction for moving on to university or staying at college. For a destination the overwhelming odd is that she would

have chosen Brock University or Niagara College. While she says she does not need help with understanding university language or in setting academic goals, her academic advisor indicates otherwise.

The PPAA's journal data suggest a difference in the profile of the two PP student cohorts that formed the sample of the study. Students in the 2008/09 cohort seemed to have more problems generally than those in the 2009/10 cohort. In general, PP students are confused by the PP at the beginning of the year, and a few remain confused right to the end. Students are not clear about the number of credits that will be transferred to Brock University, what program they can enrol in at Brock, and the grade requirements for ensuring admission. Some students did not keep their advisement appointments, and attendance in group sessions (workshops) was consistently low. These two factors help to explain students' lack of information or uncertainty. Some faculty members described the PP students as keeners but others felt that they were unmotivated because they assumed automatic admission to Brock. The PPAA indicated while there was generally low motivation among the students, with few exceptions, they were focused on getting to Brock. Students confirmed this mentality in their interviews, expressing an appreciation for the PP as a better choice than returning to high school or going to work.

Research Question 2. What is the nature of the focused academic advisement provided to the PP students?

The advisement program consists of individual sessions with students and group sessions through a structured program of workshops. Human contact is the key commonality in describing the nature of the advisement. Students preferred individual to group sessions. They stressed in their interview and survey responses that they need to "have someone to talk to." Academic issues and pre-requisite courses were the most frequently discussed topics in individual sessions. While the majority of the students agreed that all of the workshops were helpful, they identified five as the most helpful: orientation, setting goals, time management, writing in the social sciences and reading in the social sciences. The PPAA agreed, but was emphatic that all were necessary and added the importance of attendance and participation. The PPAA also believed that students were more in need of help with university language and setting academic goals than the students perceived to be the case.

Further, an important aspect of advisement is building relationships with students' professors and with support service units to which referrals can be made.

Focussed advisement in the program has shifted over two years from being more of the traditional prescriptive approach, that is giving information and providing direction(Gordon, Habley, &Grites,2008), to more of the developmental and intrusive approaches (Creamer & Creamer,1994; Crookston, 1994; 1972; Garing, 1993; Gordon, Habley & Grites,2008).

Research Question 3. What advisement strategies/activities are most effective from the students' and the PPAA's perspectives?

Findings from the student interview and survey and the PPAA's interview indicate that individual face-to-face meeting is the most effective advisement strategy. The PPAA suggested that individual advising session allows students to talk about personal and private concerns, such as course grades. Some students stated in the interview that individual conversation is the best

way they learn. This is supported by their desire to have the same advisor who can provide all information that they need and who is accessible by email, if not in person. It is significant to note this finding among a younger group of students, despite the anticipation of social networking being a welcome and frequently used technology in academic advising (Gordon, Habley & Grites, 2008). The PPAA adds to advisee/advisor conversation exercises that engage students in planning and self-reflection, and being proactive with early intervention (i.e., going after a student). While students prefer individual to group sessions, they support workshops that are well organized and offer engaging activities. Both students and the PPAA found that effective group advisement sessions were those that dealt with orientation to the program and institution, setting goals, time management and writing in the social sciences.

Research Question 4. What is the impact of focused academic advisement in the PP on students?

The survey data showed that all students benefited from the focused academic advising in the following areas: intellectual growth, help with setting educational goals, enhanced self-esteem, conducting a realistic self-appraisal, improving communication, developing a satisfying lifestyle, and appreciation for a mix of individual and group advising sessions. These benefits became even clearer when students acknowledged, in their interview, that they greatly benefited from the program and they would recommend the PP to their friends in high school. From the students' perspective, the PPAA made a big difference in terms of: giving them overall support; providing information about programs at Niagara College and Brock University; and exploring career options and requirements with them. Early exploration led students to make goal changes, program changes and destination changes. An unexpected and important finding was a higher persistence rate among PP students (100 per cent) compared to NPP students (80 per cent) at the end of the first year of university, despite low GPAs. This would suggest that there are other factors of transition besides grades to be considered in student perseverance and that the focused academic advising that the PP students received might have had an impact with respect to those factors.

Research Question 5. ***Is the academic advisement program cost effective?***

The findings indicate that the PP is cost effective, considering a number of factors: students ascertaining their destination and career direction, the income students bring to both institutions, the return on investment from income over expenses, the reduced cost by sharing resources, the arrival of students to the Region from elsewhere, and the continuing relationship between advisor and advisee.

Emergent Themes

In addition to the five research questions important information surfaced from the data analysis. This was organized into three themes.

1. **Role of an academic advisor**

Students would like an academic advisor to be positive, motivational, caring, and respectful and someone who encourages them to make their own decisions. While there was some variation in the interview data on this theme, there was general agreement that an academic advisor should

know the students and be able to refer them to the appropriate services when non-academic issues are involved. The PPAA recognized that over the two years of his work he had shifted from giving information and directions to a more proactive, action-oriented and holistic view of the advising role. He regarded success as helping students to find a career direction for which they had a passion and a program in which they could thrive.

2. Frustrations of the Partners Program Academic Advisor

The most persistent frustration was contacting students. While email was the most convenient strategy for initiating contact, its effectiveness was lost if students did not respond. Other frustrations were students not participating in activities and an organizational system that moves slowly in making changes.

3. Suggestions for changes to the focused advisement program

One change that students suggested – an office for the PPAA at Niagara College - was addressed in the second year of this study. It is a shared office with the GAS academic advisor. They collaborate on office hours so each can have individual sessions with students. The issue of student participation in the program is being addressed by the development of a mandatory *Bridge Program*. Further, faculty would like to see more advising for all students and suggest that either all faculty members do advising and have it as part of their workload, or more academic advisors are hired.

Conclusion and Recommendations

By way of conclusion we assess the achievement of the objectives and outcomes of the research study, reflect on the research process, and submit four recommendations.

Objectives and Outcomes

The nature of the focused academic advisement offered to the Partners Program students has been described from the literature on traditional, developmental and intrusive approaches to student advising as well as using the data from five data sources. There is evidence that students are more likely to use advisement services when the advisor is proactive and intentional about contacting students. A jointly appointed academic advisor was a financial advantage to both institutions and a benefit to the students who could access information about universities and programs from the one person. While the impact on students' academic performance as measured by GPA was not apparent -students regressed from college to university - their persistence rate during the first year of university was higher than that of comparable NPP students. What is clear is that students were motivated to stay with postsecondary studies upon discovering that they were ineligible to go to university but had the option and opportunity of proceeding to a college program.

All PP students who proceeded to university persisted in their studies throughout the year, while more NPP students were prone to dropout during their first year. There was no data to relate

this difference directly to the impact of advisement. Consistently across the years, more PP students availed themselves of the academic advisement services than NPP students and there was high satisfaction with the advisement process. Students provided evidence that the PP allowed them to continue their studies immediately after high school, when otherwise they might have gone to work.

Given the small sample size, no generalizations can be confidently made to add insights to the literature on academic advising. But two new dimensions of this study that are significant to note are the multiplicity of data sources that corroborated one another on the findings, and the advantages of having a joint advisor in a partnership program. It is also clear that "conditionally admissible" students prefer individual face-to-face contact with their advisor to technology-mediated interactions. This may be an important area to explore, as the literature suggests that there will be much more use of technology such as Facebook and Myspace in student advising. Gordon, Habley & Grites (2008) state, it is not a question of whether but a question of how. However, this study raises an additional question, "Will online advisement through social networks be as effective with academically weaker students as individual face-to-face contacts?" The "conditionally admissible" student who was profiled in this study was clear on her preference for individual and human contact. This student was characterized as 16-20 years old, female, white, with university as her destination point. She is often uncertain about the details of the PP and vague about university transfer credits received.

A very practical and immediately useful outcome of this study is the creation of the PP Academic Advisor's Handbook, which can be used by the advisor as well as other parties at both of the partnership institutions for insights into the PP. The Handbook includes the institutional context of academic advising at both institutions and strategies that work best with PP students.

Insights about the Research Process

Insights about the research process include challenges of sample size, identifying comparable groups of NPP students, communication and data collection times. While we designed the study to keep yearly cohorts of both PP and NPP students separate and began the process in that way, it became clear during the first data collection in 2009 that small sample sizes would not allow for any meaningful analysis according to yearly cohorts. Students in the first year of the program (2007/08) were not available. Thus, the sample that might have been ideally six cohorts was integrated into two groups: PP and NPP groups. It was even more difficult to identify and access comparable groups of NPP students. The one certain factor of comparison was that they were in the same GAS-UT program classes with the same professors as the PP students. However, NPP students were more heterogeneous than PP students with respect to age, high school academic background, program enrolment status and reasons for taking the GAS-UT program. Given these realities, a purely descriptive design focusing only on PP students might have yielded equally reliable data to answer the research questions with confidence.

Whereas the PPAA was a direct and reliable communication channel to the PP students it was more difficult to reach the NPP students even with the cooperation of their professors and the

GAS-UT program coordinator. One does not know if collecting the student data close to the end of the program year diminished responses, nor if the incentive of an HMV certificate increased responses. Lastly, the lag time between collecting data in 2009 and 2010 provided an opportunity to make some adjustments in the data collection process, but the expected advantage of early analysis was not the case because the 2009 sample was so small. These are all issues that require careful consideration should a similar study be undertaken.

Recommendations

Some recommendations that would have been made in the first year of the study were already addressed by the second year, so are not included here. It is recommended that:

1. While the academic advisor position continues, it be a joint appointment between the two partnership institutions.

2. There be some continuation of the focused advisement for the PP students during their first year at Brock. This may take the form of formalized liaison between the PPAA and the academic advisors of the departments in which the students enrol. While it is done voluntarily now, the understanding is that the students integrate into the regular departmental advisement system once they get to Brock. However, some PP graduates choose to continue an advisement relationship with the PPAA. This supports findings from the literature that report the positive impact on students of a sustained relationship with the same academic advisor (Habley & McClanahan, 2004).

3. There be a strategy for enforcing the minimum required number of individual advisement sessions with the PPAA.

4. Adjustments be made to the advisement program so that the students see all the advisement activities including the workshop series as a serious and integral part of their PP year. The most intractable challenge seemed to be motivating students to attend individual and group advisement sessions.

To address this challenge a mandatory Bridge Program has been proposed. A joint working group of individuals from Niagara College and Brock University has developed the parameters of the program, with details of content to be determined in time for a pilot to begin in September 2011. The program will be a hybrid combining in-class and online activity and will examine differences and expectations in lectures, class sizes, participation, academic reading and writing, and exam preparation at the university relative to a college environment. Emphasis will be placed on student independence and time management skills required for success in the PSE environment. The program will consist of three 2-hour sessions in-class and approximately six hours of online activity, with in-class sessions scheduled every other week. Scheduling will be done by the Registrar's Office at Brock. The program will be led by a Brock Learning Skills Instructor. Students will have access to the instructor for consultations for the duration of the academic year. Attendance in the program

is mandatory and there will be a fee. Students must attend as a condition of their acceptance to Brock.

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Appendix A. Acronyms

ACT	American College Testing
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
CUCC	College University Consortium Council
CUSC	Canada University Survey Consortium
GAS	General Arts and Science
GED	General Education
GPA	Grade Point Average
HEQCO	Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NACADA	National Academic Advising Association
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement
OCAS	Ontario College Application Service
OUAC	Ontario University Application Centre
PP	Partners Program
PSE	Postsecondary education
ROI	Return on investment
UT	University Transfer

Appendix B: Survey Data

Table 1. Topics discussed with academic advisor

Topic	PP %	NPP %
Pre-requisite courses	54	50.4
Academic issues	86	61
Social issues	18	9
Career planning	33	44.3
Personal issues	13.8	7
Financial issues	15	5
Other	9.7	22

Table 2. Group Advising Sessions

	Disagree		Neutral		Agree		N/A	
	PP	NPP	PP	NPP	PP	NPP	PP	NPP
Orientation	0	0	6.7	22.2	86.7	44.5	6	33.3
Setting Goals	0	0	0	25	93.3	25	6	50
Time Management	0	12.5	0	25	86.3	12.5	13.7	50
Writing in the Social Sciences	0	0	13.3	37.5	93.4	12.5	50	50
Reading in the Social Sciences	0	0	37.5	20	66.7	12.5	13.3	50

Table 3. Academic Advising Needs

Need	Disagree		Neutral		Agree		NA	
	PP	NPP	PP	NPP	PP	NPP	PP	NPP
Someone to talk to about academic plans	26.7	20	20.7	30	53.0	50	0	0
Help in setting academic goals	30	40	34.8	30	33.2	40	2	0
One person for academic advise than several professors	17.5	30	5.3	20	75.2	50	2	0
One person about college/university transfers	6.6	10	9.6	10	83.8	80	0	0
Help with the language of the university	39.5	10	31.2	30	23.7	50	5.6	0
Program planning maps	3.5	0	16.5	20	80	80	0	
Meeting in an open, inviting and highly accessible office	4.3	0	6.3	0	89.4	100	0	0
Group meetings to review program requirements	7.4	10	30.3	60	60.3	30	2	0
Help getting information about admission policies for universities	10.4	22.3	26.6	33.3	52.5	44.4	10.3	0
Doing own self-assessment with an academic advisor's guidance	5.8	0	24.9	60	35.4	40	33.9	0

Table 4. Academic Advisor Characteristics

Q11	Topic	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	N/A	F
1	Recalls basic information about me					
	PP	3	23.4	81.3	0	
	NPP	0	10	60	30	10
2	Listens to me					
	PP	1.1	4.3	90	0	
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
3	Available					
	PP	4.1	11	84.7	0	
	NPP	0	20	50	30	10
4	Program information					
	PP	0	11.4	88.5	0	
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
5	Encourages decision-making					
	PP	6.2	1.5	92.3	0	
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
6	Provides direction					
	PP	4.4	8.7	76.9	10	
	NPP	0	10	60	30	10
7	Sufficient meeting time					
	PP	3.8	2.9	92.3	0	
	NPP	0	10	50	40	10
8	On time for meetings					
	PP	0	6.2	93.8	0	
	NPP	0	10	50	40	10
9	Personal problem assistance					
	PP	3.4	16.6	48	32	
	NPP	0	10	50	40	10
10	Comfort level					
	PP	0	4.6	95.6	0	
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
11	Motivational					
	PP	0	14.3	86	0	
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
12	Caring					
	PP	0	4.8	95.2	0	
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
13	Problem-solving assistance					
	PP	9.3	19.5	79.5	2	
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
14	Record keeping					
	PP	8.2	33	45	13.8	
	NPP	0	40	20	40	10
15	Respect					
	PP	4.7	7.6	87.7	0	

Q11	Topic	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	N/A	F
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
16	Creativity					
	PP	1.4	11.4	87.2	0	
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
17	Goal setting assistance					
	PP	4.3	15.2	76.5	4	
	NPP	0	0	70	30	10
18	Personalizes advice					
	PP	4.2	11.7	84.1	0	
	NPP	0	0	3.5	3	
19	Vital to my academic success					
	PP	7.0	18	75	0	
	Cohort D	10	20	40	30	10

Table 5. Benefits of Academic Advising

Q12	Topic	Disagree		Neutral		Agree		N/A	
1	Assists my intellectual growth	PP	NPP	PP	NPP	PP	NPP	PP	NPP
2	Helps me set my educational goals	0	0	29.2	10	70.8	60	0	30
3	Enhances my self-esteem	1.4	0	32.6	30	66	40	0	30
4	Helps me conduct a realistic self-appraisal	7.3	0	30.4	30	62.3	40	0	30
5	Helps me improve my communication	11	0	27.8	30	61.2	40	0	30
6	Helps me to develop a satisfying lifestyle	10.9	0	25.4	3.3	63.7	44.4	0	3.3
7	Appreciate a mix of individual and group sessions	6.7	20	39.0	10	54.3	40	0	30

Appendix C. GPA for PP and NPP students

	GPA (M) Secondary School	GPA (M) Niagara College	GPA (M) Change Secondary School to Niagara College	GPA (M) Brock University First Year	GPA (M) Change Niagara to Brock
PP 2007/08	67	75	8	60.14	-14.86
NPP 07/08	unavailable	81.75		65.87	-15.87
PP 2008/09	66.96	73.59	4	58.93	-14.65
NPP 2008/09	unavailable	61.57		58.17	3.5
PP 2009/10	66.01	58.12	8	unavailable	
NPP 2009/10	unavailable	53.23	unavailable	NA	

Appendix D: T- tests of GPA scores

T –test of 2007-08 Partners Program Student GPA Change between Niagara College and Brock University

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Niagara GPA	75.000	14	4.9147	1.3135
	Brock GPA	60.143	14	8.3284	2.2259

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Niagara GPA - Brock GPA	14.8571	5.8554	1.5649	11.4763	18.2380	9.494	13	.000

T- test of 2007-08 Non Partners Program Student GPA change between Niagara College and Brock University

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Niagara GPA	81.733	15	5.1335	1.3255
	Brock GPA	65.867	15	9.9776	2.5762

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Niagara GPA - Brock GPA	15.8667	8.4589	2.1841	11.1823	20.5510	7.265	14	.000

T- test 2008-09 Partners Program Students GPA Change between Niagara College and Brock University

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Niagara GPA	73.587	15	3.7021	.9559
	Brock GPA	58.93	15	8.353	2.157

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Niagara GPA - Brock GPA	14.6533	6.0121	1.5523	11.3239	17.9827	9.440	14	.000

T-test 2008-09 Non Partners Program Student GPA change between Niagara College and Brock University

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Niagara GPA	61.667	6	22.3040	9.1056
	Brock GPA	58.167	6	4.7924	1.9565

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Niagara GPA - Brock GPA	3.5	18.4689	7.5399	-15.8819	22.8819	0.464	5	0.662