

1 **Comparative Analysis of Qualitative Academic**
2 **Advising at the University of Ghana and Ohio**
3 **University**

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ABSTRACT

Aims: Students around the globe face challenges during their academic journey which jeopardize their academic, personal, as well as professional success. Some of these challenges may include wrong course registration, parental problems, financial breakdown, career misinformation and lots more. This has necessitated the establishment of academic advising in higher education institutions. In this study, comparative analysis on the influence of academic advising and the best method of its effective handling was conducted between students in University of Ghana and Ohio University.

Study design: Semi-structured interviews was adopted to dig deep into participants' lives and gather in-depth information about academic advising. The interview schedule was strictly followed and each interview lasted for 20-30 minutes.

Place and Duration of Study: University of Ghana and Ohio University, between July 2023 and September 2023.

Methodology: In analyzing the centrality of student advising comparatively, this study uses Astin's Theory of Student Involvement and Tinto's Theory of Student Departure.

Results: The study revealed that academic advising existed at the University of Ghana and Ohio University but the extent and effectiveness of practice varies between the two. Ohio University has a structured advising system unlike University of Ghana. It was revealed that advisors at the University of Ghana were faculty members and staff of the career center while there were professional advisors at Ohio University who were basically employed to handle student affairs.

Conclusion: Universities should have a centralized office for student advising while each department should establish a committee accessible to all students and that would be responsible for assisting and guiding students throughout their academic journey at the university. Also, the university should also make it mandatory for students to attend advising sessions and more staff members at the Counseling and Career Center should be employed and adequately trained. Nonetheless, the advisor-to-student ratio should be maintained to ensure advisors are not overwhelmed by the number of students they have to advise. In conclusion, majority of the participants asserted that academic advising was beneficial to their academic, professional, and personal lives.

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Keywords: Academic Advising, University of Ghana, Ohio University, Astin's Theory, Tinto's Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Students around the globe face challenges during their academic journey such as inability to fund college or university education; family issues; poor grades; psychological issues; and failure to transition and adapt to their post-secondary institutions. These challenges prevent students from reaching academic, personal, as well as professional success. To help alleviate this issue, universities have put measures in place to cater to the varying needs of post-secondary students. One such measure is the presence of academic advisors with the key role of advising and guiding the students to the right path [1]. Advising is a method of

24 teaching that is resourceful, regular and ongoing. Academic advising can be defined as a
25 systematic or committed program in higher education facilities or community colleges to offer
26 guidance and advice to undergraduate students regarding their major and courses [2]. It is
27 integral part of teaching such that the Academic Advisor plays a key role in assisting
28 students learn to become independent thinkers and capable of self-determination through
29 their exploration of the liberal arts. The chief role of a faculty advisor is to assist students in
30 thinking through their undergraduate liberal arts experience and their educational goals so
31 that they may take full advantage of the resources available at their University [3].

32 Academic advisors have the goal and objective of providing holistic academic-oriented
33 support services to college and university students [4]. The advising relationship develops
34 and changes over the duration of staying on campus, as student needs and concerns
35 evolve. Advisors encourage students to think critically about the benefits of a liberal
36 education. They also assist students in understanding the University's academic regulations
37 as well as the educational resources available at the university [5]. Advisors have an
38 essential role in directing students to additional advising and mentorship resources from
39 across campus. Academic advisors assist students with course registration, career goals,
40 majors, and any academic-related issue [6]. There are other positive benefits attached to
41 academic advising which indirectly may improve student persistence and retention in tertiary
42 education.

43 These include (but not limited to) increase utilization of campus resources, increasing
44 students' overall satisfaction with their tertiary experience, facilitating more frequent student-
45 staff contact outside of the classroom and developing educational and career decision-
46 making skills [7]. It has also been found that interaction with a concerned, caring staff
47 member from one's tertiary institution plays a substantial role in student retention and
48 academic achievement by increasing students' engagement, development, and cognitive
49 growth [8]. Different aspects of advising such as advisor empowerment, advisor
50 accountability, student responsibility, student study skills, student self-efficacy, and
51 perceived support have all significantly connected academic advising to student success.
52 Finally, academic advising has also been positively associated with students' sense of
53 satisfaction and development with the university and it can have an impact on all facets of a
54 student's academic experience—ranging from development to practical application of study
55 skills [9].

56 Higher education facilities should provide students with the essential knowledge in numerous
57 fields and play a vital role in the process of comprehensive development over several
58 aspects of a person's life [10]. Most students enroll with little or no knowledge about the
59 major they have chosen as a practical track for their future careers. Some might face some
60 challenges with their peers or their instructors. These are some of the reasons most, if not
61 all, educational facilities provide academic advising. This advising has been so helpful and
62 supportive throughout their period of pursuing their degree program [11]. The idea of
63 Academic advising has advanced over the years by several researchers, some stated that it
64 represents many activities along a prescriptive developmental continuum. This prescriptive
65 development that is accomplished via advising can be described to be directive,
66 informational, and unidirectional [12]. From a different perspective, It was viewed as an
67 international connection between the enrolled students (advisees) and higher education
68 institutions' workers (named advisors). This is in addition to the procedure via which these
69 advisors follow to offer support and guidance to those advisees in numerous aspects like
70 career choices, ambition, personality development, courses and academic path [13]. Table 1
71 presents previous studies conducted on academic advising in some universities by
72 researchers stating the location, results obtained, conclusion and recommendation.

Table 1: Previous studies on academic advising in some universities

Study	Study Area	Findings	Recommendations	Reference
The effect of academic advising on academic performance of university students in Kenyan Universities	Kenya	Academic performance in university is more likely to be affected by other factors other than academic mentorship. Students' need for academic advising varies with the year of study with students being more likely to seek academic advising during their first and second year of study. The need for academic mentorship does not seem to be influenced by gender.	There is need for universities in Kenya to device methods of actively involving as many students in academic advising as possible. Academic advising should be intensified at the time of registration when students are making decisions on subject and career options and in second year when students are stabilizing in their academic and career decisions. Universities should establish comprehensive academic advising programmes. There is need to improve on the student-mentor ratios for effective academic advising. Academic mentorship could be introduced in high school to ensure smooth transition to university education and career life. Further research is necessary in this area to provide more conclusive evidence.	[14]
University academic advising practices as panacea to educational transformation by universities in Cross River State, Nigeria	Nigeria	Academic advising has value when it leads to an improvement in student learning and achievement and when it supports institutional accountability. In spite of individual differences, students share a unifying desire to make sufficient academic progress	Managers of institutions should urgently address the need to increase capacity to intervene and ideally engage in academic advising as well strengthen academic advising units so as to assist students with current information about academic programmes, prerequisites, requirements, policies	[15]

		towards an educational goal. Very often these students encounter barriers in pursuit of these goals.	and procedures.	
The relationship between academic advising and student success in Canadian Colleges: A review of the literature	Canada	There is very little research showing the direct effect of academic advising on student success, and that only on rare occasion does this research employ rigorous analytical and design methods. It is also argued that the organization and practice of academic advising in Canada is still in its infancy.	There is need for more rigorous analytical and design methods to bridge the critical gap in the literature that college administrators need to be more effectively focus on their student support programs.	[16]
Academic advising problems at Al-Quds University as perceived by students, and its relationship with student's academic performance	Palestine	The findings of the study provide support that shows the importance and impact advising problems has on students in general, and their academic achievement in particular. Academic advising emerged as a significant predictor of academic achievement. A lot needs to be done in the area of academic advising in terms of student needs, expectations, and success rather than through the traditional lens of student satisfaction with the process. This can be done through an effective collaboration amongst the university, advisors, and students, which would lead	Offer enough time for interaction and contact between the student and his academic advisor, and give advisors more authorities and flexibility in dealing with rules and regulations of both electronic and paper academic advising. Concentrate on students as the core of the advising process, and encourage them to exercise more responsibility in the process of academic advising. A need to establish an advanced psycho-educational advising center at the university and activate its activities to offer advising, developmental, and remedial services focusing on the development of the bright and optimistic sides of university students' personalities.	[17]

		them to a feeling of stability.		
Academic advising and its relation to nursing students' self-efficacy	-	The study revealed (43.5%) of the nursing students were satisfied with academic advising. While, (71.5%) of nursing students having high level of self-efficacy. The prescriptive academic advising mode is the most prevailing mode in the study setting. However, students' satisfaction and self-efficacy are higher with the developmental mode.	Staff development programs are strongly recommended to train academic advisors in the modes of advising, with emphasis on the merits of the developmental mode. Academic advisors should be provided with sufficient time for advising sessions to be able to provide their students with all their academic needs.	[18]
The development of academic advising to enable student success in South Africa	South Africa	International and national research indicates that academic advising plays a vital role in improving student engagement and success by facilitating better coordination and integration of support. Academic advising provides students with relevant information, facilitates their conceptual understanding of the university, and allows students the opportunity to form a meaningful relationship with the institution through an advisor and by means of various advising initiatives.	Quality advising in a post-Covid blended future needs to be an integration of high-tech and high-touch initiatives; that is, technology can enhance efficiency and the early identification of students in need of support.	[19]
Management of academic advising in higher educational institutions during COVID-19 pandemic	Saudi Arabia	Students need to enhance their communication skills in the English language. This can be achieved by implementing positive interaction methods.	Encourage academic advisors to build a strong relationship with the students. Encourage the academic advisors to provide the students with IAU regulations and bylaws.	[20]

		Most of the non-English college students consider English as a language for studying courses only. Despite the long time they spend studying their courses in the English language, their aim is limited primarily to passing their courses.	Clarify the information about courses and their requirements for academic advisors. Clarify the information about graduation requirements for academic advisors.	
The importance of academic advising during COVID-19	-	There is no way students will be successful without the extra assistance of an advisor to help them along their way academically. Noticing how crucial an academic advisor truly is will not only help the student, but it will allow for the academic programs overall to be better. It is so important for the foundation of an academic advising program to be ready and willing to cater to every student they may meet in their journey.	Look through this research and see what other information is missing about the field of academic advising. Research on academic advising should be more accessible to students on the college campus.	[21]
Navigating the path to academic success: The impact of student academic advising at a university of technology	South Africa	The concept of academic advising mentioned above could be a useful intervention in assisting struggling students to navigate their academic paths. However, there is also a challenge associated with an inadequate understanding of the academic advising concept and its importance towards contributing to students' academic success. This	Emphasis must be on improving advisors' abilities to ensure they are equipped and competent enough to deal with diverse students to ensure a positive impact on the university.	[22]

		<p>challenge is attributed to the limited number of students that attend academic advising. The implication for this is a serious hindrance in enabling the success of academic advising initiatives.</p>		
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75 Students in colleges and universities without the necessary assistance take courses that do
76 not align with their areas of study. Some students also do not get the attention and access to
77 student services such as academic advising and end up dropping out of school. Much has
78 been written on this topic in Western universities[23-27]. However, there has been limited
79 literature and little research done on academic advising in Africa. Also, comparative analysis
80 between Universities on the adopted methodologies of advising and their influence on
81 students' performance is still rare. In this study, comparative analysis of academic advising
82 between University of Ghana and Ohio University was conducted, in terms of its nature and
83 perceptions, to bridge the gap between advising in the U.S. and Ghana. The findings of this
84 research can inform student affairs practice in Ghana and the U.S. It would also add and
85 expand the literature base in academic advising in this area because little research has been
86 done especially in the Ghanaian context.

87

88 2. METHODOLOGY

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90 2.1 Theoretical Framework

91 In analyzing the centrality of student advising comparatively, this study uses Astin's Theory
92 of Student Involvement and Tinto's Theory of Student Departure. Astin's Theory of Student
93 Involvement states that students are more likely to succeed if they are actively involved in
94 activities in school. He asserts that active participation includes "those who participate
95 actively in student organizations, spend considerable time on campus, interact often with
96 faculty outside of the classroom, and devote considerable time to studying" [28]. Students
97 who are actively involved in campus activities tend to enjoy the environment and this creates
98 a positive correlation between the environment and student, and this is where academic
99 advisors come in. Advisors provide students with access to these resources to enable them
100 to succeed and adjust well to campus.

101 Tinto's Theory of Student Departure explains student retention. Tinto attributes student drop-
102 out to "academic problems, failure to integrate socially and intellectually with the culture of
103 the college or university, or a low level of commitment to the college or university" [23]. He
104 states that students enter college from different socio-economic backgrounds and if these
105 students have difficulty adjusting to their environment, they are forced to withdraw or transfer
106 to another institution. Higher education institutions need to provide opportunities and
107 resources for students to ease their transition and assist them to adjust to their new
108 environment. Colleges, through advisors, have a huge role to play here by checking up on
109 students, especially those at-risk of dropping out and providing them with resources such as
110 tutoring, study coaching, supplemental sessions, and information about student
111 organizations. If detected early, students having a hard time adjusting to campus are
112 assisted with the proper resources. It is important to note that the move to campus is

113 sometimes a big change in students' lives and creating a community and family for these
114 students is necessary, so they feel welcomed in their new environment.

115 **2.2 Study Area**

116 The University of Ghana was used as a case study for a university located in Ghana. The
117 University of Ghana was formerly known as the University College of Gold Coast and was
118 the first university established in 1948. Ghana is a country found in the western part of
119 Africa. It is bordered by Togo, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso. Although English is the official
120 language, Ghana is a multilingual country with Twi being the dominant language spoken.
121 Ohio University was used as a case study for a University in the United States of America.
122 The United States of America is a former British colony known for being the home of diverse
123 languages and ethnicities. The U.S. has English as its official language and is made up of
124 fifty states. The American educational system was modeled after the British although the
125 U.S. has changed certain aspects and adapted it to their system. Higher education in the
126 U.S. dates back to the 17th century with the establishment of Harvard College in 1636 and
127 College of William and Mary in 1693, which were modeled after Oxford and Cambridge
128 universities in the UK.

129 **2.3 Sampling and Interview Method**

130 Three Ghanaian undergraduate students at the University of Ghana and three American
131 students at Ohio University were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews was adopted to dig
132 deep into participants' lives and gather in-depth information about academic advising. The
133 interview schedule was strictly followed and each interview lasted for 20-30 minutes.
134 Purposeful sampling method was used in the study and selection criteria were being a
135 student at the University of Ghana and Ohio University. The year of study in school was not
136 a criterion for selection and the study was based on constructivism and phenomenology.

137 Coded transcripts was opened using Microsoft Word to analyze the interview data. Coded
138 from the open codes was focused and compared the codes across the participants. Seven
139 major themes emerged: 'Definition of Academic Advising', 'Presence of Advising at the
140 University of Ghana and Ohio University', 'Sources of Information about Advising', 'Student
141 and Campus Involvement', 'Personal, Academic, and Professional Development',
142 'Challenges', and 'Suggestions'.
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144 **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

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146 For the University of Ghana, Ruby, Tilly and Lizzy were interviewed. Ruby is a second-year
147 Economics and Information Studies student who resides on campus. Tilly is a third-year
148 student majoring in Geography and Economics and commutes to campus. Lizzy is also a
149 third-year Education and Information Studies student. While Tilly and Lizzy are commuters,
150 Ruby is a resident on campus. For Ohio University, Christina, Jackie and Sophie were
151 interviewed who are all first-year undergraduate students. Christina and Sophie are currently
152 undecided, and Jackie is a Pharmacy student. All three participants are residents on
153 campus.

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155 **3.1 Definition of Academic Advising**

156 When asked what the participants understood by “academic advising”, Ruby stated that,
157 “when you’re in school, like, in your course of studies, if you need any form of advice, be it
158 academic, or any other thing like that’s related to schoolwork you like, you can get some tips
159 or get someone to talk to”. In the same vein, Tilly said that advising meant having someone
160 guide you in your academic journey, especially in majoring and minoring courses. Lizzy also
161 describes advising as: “We have personnel, who encourage students in the courses they
162 have to offer, like, whether it matches with their dreams and goals. And also like, the
163 resource persons that are set for basically university students to help them achieve their aim
164 in the university, the courses they’re supposed to take, and then the majors and also how
165 they can help to financially be stable in order for them to accomplish their four years in the
166 university”.

167 **Comparing the response of Christina (from Ohio University) with the previous respondents**
168 **(from University of Ghana), She stated thus:** “academic advising would just be a one-on-one
169 meeting, to help a student with a transition or help a student get resources and just talk
170 about classes and how they’re doing”. Similarly, Jackie described advising as guiding
171 students in their academic journey. Sophie also suggested that academic advising involved
172 assisting students in college. It is clear from the above that the participants had an idea of
173 what advising was and one theme in all these descriptions was academic assistance.

174

175 **3.2 Presence of Advising at the University of Ghana and Ohio University**

176 Two out of the three Ghanaian students asserted that academic advising was present at the
177 University of Ghana. On the one hand, Tilly and Lizzy mentioned the presence of course
178 advisors, faculty members, and the Counseling and Career Center. Tilly mentioned course
179 advisors – instructors and professors in every department on campus, who assisted students
180 struggling in their classes and who were figuring out their majors and minors. It is worth
181 noting that students at the University of Ghana gain admission with a combination of three
182 programs. And as they proceed to their second year, they drop a program. In their fourth
183 year, they decide to do major, minor, or combine major in the two programs. Let me give an
184 example: a first-year student enters the university with a Political Science, French, and
185 Linguistics combination. They take classes in each of the programs and drop Linguistics in
186 their second year. They continue to take classes in Political Science and French and decide
187 to either major in Political Science or minor in French or do a combined major in Political
188 Science and French. Consequently, the course advisors (faculty) help students determine
189 their strengths and courses to drop and major.

190 Additionally, Tilly mentioned the Career and Counseling Center which complements the work
191 of course advisors. Tilly said:

192 “For the Career and Counseling Center, that is a very broad place, they deal with a
193 whole range of issues, a whole lot of things. So, they guide in your career path, your
194 personal life. So generally, the center is actually like, the go-to-place for most
195 students, but the course advisor is the closest, so you get to meet the person in
196 class right after class you can talk to him or you can go for his break sessions or his
197 recess session, you can go to him. But the career center is a major place where you
198 can go for every other issue concerning your life on campus”.

199 Tilly, however, stated that she never used the course advisors. Furthermore, Lizzy indicated
200 the use of faculty members in her department – Department of Education and Humanities
201 and the career center, who serve as advisors. Faculty members help students facing

202 challenges with their classes. Just like Tilly pointed out, the Career and Counseling Center is
203 another advising office used by students. The center assists students with their majors,
204 minors, and classes to add and drop. Lizzy further delineated the roles of faculty members
205 as advisors and the career office. She said:

206 "We also have an office for lecturers may be if you are having difficulty in the course
207 you're studying, you can seek an advice from a lecturer, depending on the course
208 you are studying. But then if you want to may be any advice on...may be you're
209 traumatized, or you have some psychological problems in the course you are
210 studying, for that, you can go to the Career and Counseling office".

211 Lizzy used the career center once but said she usually met with her professor because she
212 was a course representative for the class and hence, had direct contact with the professor.
213 Lizzy also called staff at the career office academic advisors. Tilly and Lizzy both posited
214 that sessions at the career center were free.

215 Ruby, on the other hand, asserted that there were no academic advisors at the University of
216 Ghana. She, however, stated that she spoke to her peers whenever she had any questions.
217 Ruby also mentioned that she was sometimes referred to Teaching Assistants and "if she
218 was lucky, maybe a lecturer". She alluded to the fact that her peers and sometimes
219 Teaching Assistants were very helpful in answering her academic questions.

220 All the three participants at Ohio University revealed that academic advising existed in their
221 university which they used and continue to use. While Christina meets with her advisor about
222 five or six times, Jackie has monthly meetings with hers every semester. Sophie attends
223 advising meetings every two months. Christina took me through a typical advising session:

224 Yeah, so it just kind of depends on what I want to talk about. But I'm, usually I'll send
225 an email asking the question, and if they respond and answer the question in my
226 email, then usually I'm good. But if I want more clarification and want to talk about a
227 topic, then I'll schedule a meeting. And then from there, we'll usually meet on teams
228 and just talk about, I've had meetings about schedule changes about joining
229 organizations, tutoring, stuff like that. So, it just kind of depends on what I want to
230 talk about.

231 **On comparison,** Christina mentioned that anytime she had a question, she emailed her
232 advisor to schedule a meeting. Her meetings also included professional and personal issues.
233 Jackie delineated the scope of advising and stated that there are staff members who serve
234 as advisors; thus, advising was not done by faculty members. Jackie detailed her advising
235 session:

236 "Usually, in my advising sessions, I go to the emails that an academic advisor might
237 send me, and then I'll click the scheduled appointment, logo, and schedule your
238 appointment. And then teams will or outlook and teams will notify you when your
239 meeting is coming. And you can slowly join into the meeting from the app, then we
240 usually ask me, how's my day? How am I doing? And then it's usually like casual
241 talk. And then eventually, soon after we start talking about like class, classes
242 grades, how do I feel about classes, and then my three goals for the semester, or
243 just in general? And if I need to improve anything, and if I'm doing good or anything
244 talk about that and why. And then we go into like just you know, a conclusion and
245 then the session is over".

246 Jackie continued by pointing out that she used advising because it helped her create and
247 achieve goals. And she also felt good using this resource.

248 Like Jackie, Sophie also mentioned that advisors were not faculty members. Moreover, she
249 attended advising sessions with staff from a centralized advising office and not a
250 departmental advisor. Sophie's advisor used the developmental advising style where the
251 advisor and advisee co-construct goals together and the advisee plays a major role in the
252 decision-making process. Sophie added that she met with her advisor when she had
253 questions about her classes.

254

255 **3.3 Sources of Information about Advising**

256 Tilly got information about the career center in her first year through a staff member who
257 attended the same church as she did. The staff member told Tilly about an upcoming career
258 fair at the center and encouraged her to attend. Tilly said she went to the center and out of
259 curiosity, read posters about the center. She became interested in the activities of the career
260 center and decided to volunteer. Tilly indicated that she loved volunteering and working with
261 NGOs so having the opportunity at the career center was not new to her. Meanwhile, Lizzy
262 detailed how she got to know about the center. She revealed that the university creates
263 email addresses for students in their first year. She received an email with resources
264 students could use to help them transition and adjust to the university. Lizzy saw the
265 Counseling and Career Center as one resource and went ahead to ask other students for
266 the location of the center because she figured staff at the center could assist her with her
267 academic needs.

268 **In contrary**, Christina revealed that she met her advisor during orientation in her first
269 semester, who also introduced her to another advisor. Christina, again, mentioned that she
270 preferred meeting with the second advisor because the second advisor was younger and
271 was more relatable. Both Jackie and Sophie stated that they received emails from their
272 advisors at the beginning of the first semester as first-year students.

273

274 **3.4 Student and Campus Involvement**

275 On student and campus involvement, Ruby mentioned she was not involved in campus
276 activities because there was a lack of information about clubs and organizations on campus.
277 While Tilly was involved in church activities and volunteered at the career center performing
278 clerical jobs, Lizzy was a course representative, Deputy Chairperson of a financial
279 committee, and the second deputy Counseling Director.

280 Similarly, Christina is a member and Technology Chair of Chi Omega, a sorority. She is also
281 a member of Phi Chi Theta, a business fraternity. Jackie belongs to CRU – a religious
282 organization and AWLC – an organization at the Women's Center. Sophie was not able to
283 join a club or organization because of the pandemic but she wishes to join one when the
284 school begins in-person classes and activities.

285

286 **3.5 Personal, Academic and Professional Development**

287 Ruby stated that the interactions with her peers and sometimes Teaching Assistants helped
288 in her academic journey. However, it was not the case for her professional life. Furthermore,
289 Tilly spoke about an experience with a session at the career center where a staff member
290 discussed the 'add and drop' process at the university as Tilly was not cognizant of it. She
291 also mentioned another experience when she was struggling with her Economics class and
292 was given some resources – group study – by another staff. It is important to note that these
293 meetings at the center were usually informal.

294 In the same vein, Lizzy said that these meetings:

295 ...taught me a lot professionally and the use of Excel, PowerPoint, like really
296 polished me in those areas. So, with a number of skills and training, I think it really
297 helped me shape me personally and boost my self-confidence totally – yes. So right
298 now, I get into, I get to volunteer with other startup businesses and other NGOs,
299 because of the skills that I have; sometimes they go like they want a volunteer who
300 knows how to do this or that. I just apply for it, I get it.

301 Lizzy also recounted an experience at the career center in her first year when she wanted to
302 change her major to Fashion Designing. Staff at the center told her there was no such
303 course at the University of Ghana and since she wanted to be a lecturer and fashion
304 designer, it was better she maintained her major in Education and Information Studies and
305 advised she could later do a Master's in Fashion Designing and Ph.D. in whatever program
306 she was interested in. She pointed out that but for the staff at the center, she would have
307 wasted money to transfer to another university.

308

309 Christina pointed out that her advising sessions had been helpful. She stated that it was a
310 good thing to have someone to discuss her issues with. Her advisor gave her resources
311 such as tutoring for classes she struggled with. Moreover, her advisor supported and
312 encouraged her to push through her challenges. Through advising sessions, Christina had
313 her future aspirations mapped out.

314 Meanwhile, Jackie posited that the meetings with her advisor had been effective because
315 they helped her mental health by creating and achieving personal and healthy goals. The
316 meetings also made her prioritize her goals and stay organized. Academically, Jackie and
317 her advisor discussed her classes and grades and if she needed assistance in any of her
318 classes. Again, Jackie met with a career coach who helped figure out her career path as a
319 Pharmacist and any other profession aligned with her course of study.

320 Like Christina and Jackie, Sophie also admitted that her advising sessions were useful. Her
321 advisor provided her with information about her classes and what they entailed. She said:

322 Yeah, so last semester, I was having trouble with like, figuring out what I wanted to
323 do. And so, my advisor helped me and like, guided me through what some of the
324 classes might look like that I might like, because I don't know exactly what I wanted
325 to do. So that's why I'm taking like different classes this semester because she told
326 me some of the classes that I might like, and she just explained what they would
327 involve those classes, which helped.

328 The advisor helped her determine classes she could take to figure out her major since she
329 was undecided in Health Sciences. Again, Sophie was interested in Physical Therapy and

330 discussed her career aspirations with her advisor. Her advisor recommended some classes
331 she could take that aligned with her goals, which she took.

332 **3.6 Challenges**

333 According to Ruby, one major challenge for first-year students was the lack of information on
334 resources for student success. She lamented that the university was not regulated although
335 the university organized matriculation ceremonies every year to welcome first-year students.
336 Ruby asserted that these ceremonies were not compulsory; as such, students did not
337 usually attend. Ruby again pointed out that she preferred interacting with her peers instead
338 of faculty because she was more comfortable with her peers. She also said that faculty
339 members were not always available to assist students, and some did not have the answers
340 to students' questions. Ruby mentioned, "But for the University of Ghana, I don't know what
341 because I just don't know what the issue is, like, you can just go, you won't even meet your
342 lecturer the whole four years, you just go sit in class, no one will even know you're present to
343 you just do your thing and leave". This lack of relationship between students and faculty
344 members is present in most Ghanaian universities where there is a traditional top-down
345 leadership style and students are supposed to respect their professors creating a fearful
346 environment.

347 Moreover, Tilly mentioned course advisors – faculty members – being unavailable and
348 having limited time to answer students' questions. She indicated that was the reason she
349 used the career center because the staff at the center were always available to help. Tilly
350 also mentioned she had no issues or challenges using the center's resources. However, a
351 challenge first-year students face was difficulty in navigating their academic life on campus.
352 She mentioned that the orientation or matriculation the university organized to welcome first-
353 year students was not helpful. She said to bolster this point:

354 there's orientation, but the orientation doesn't cover much and we're many –
355 everyone from different faculties come, sit at the same place. And they only talk
356 about how the university is, give you brochures, how beautiful the university is. Like
357 they don't really give us like anything, they just give you like the tip of the iceberg like
358 nothing.

359 Lizzy had little to say about the challenges she faced. The only challenge she mentioned
360 was being shy in her meetings. Christina asserted that she did not always get answers from
361 her advisor. Christina detailed an experience with a career coach,

362 I met with a career coach. And I was asking her about my major, and for next
363 semester and internships that I could get, potentially, and it wasn't the most helpful
364 just because she basically told me to do a Google search on internships near me.
365 And I had already been doing that. And I had kind of gone into the meeting, hoping
366 that she would give me more than just that. So probably just not really getting full
367 information

368 Christina understood the lack of information because there could have not been much
369 information on that particular topic or question. Jackie mentioned that she did not have any
370 issues but then she found herself rescheduling her meetings because sometimes things just
371 come at her at once. Sophie also posited there were no challenges.

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373

374 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

375

376 4.1 Conclusions

377 It is evident from the above that academic advising is practiced at the University of Ghana
378 and Ohio University. However, the extent of its practice varies between these universities.
379 While the Ohio University has a structured advising system, the University of Ghana does
380 not. It is also important to mention the role of students in being proactive and seeking
381 information on advising and other resources. Sometimes, universities do their job in making
382 advising resources available, students, however, do not utilize these resources. This
383 research is just the beginning of future research that would be conducted in this area of
384 advising to expand our knowledge about this resource across universities and countries. In
385 conclusion, the respondents understood the definition of academic advising. Only one
386 Ghanaian respondent did not ascertain the presence academic advising at the University of
387 Ghana. Sources of Information about advising were relevant. Also, respondents revealed
388 lack of information on resources for student success as a major challenge during their first
389 academic year.

390

391 4.2 Recommendations from the Study Participants

392 Ruby proposed that universities should have a centralized office for student advising. She
393 indicated that the academic advisors should not be faculty members because students
394 usually do not feel comfortable meeting with their instructors. To explain this point, Ruby
395 stated:

396 Like maybe the way the lecturer teaches, are you going back to that same lecture to
397 complain that you don't like the way he teaches, no, you can't do that! So, it should be like
398 totally different people, people who actually understand like, maybe counselors – people
399 who are able to relate with students, because the way lecturers relate to students are not the
400 same as the way counselors relate to students, you know, so they should be different people
401 who are experienced, like who know what they are doing. Not lecturers? Lecturers? No, no,
402 no, no!. This forms a major challenge earlier stated by the respondent having issues in their
403 first year of academic studies.

404 In the same vein, Tilly suggested that every department should establish a committee
405 accessible to all students and that would be responsible for assisting and guiding students
406 throughout their academic journey at the university. Lizzy, however, stated that the university
407 has done its part in establishing the career center and sending emails to students. The
408 responsibility to succeed falls on students to be proactive in using the center as well as other
409 resources.

410 Christina indicated that there should be compulsory monthly advising meetings. She noted
411 that students do not always need to have a problem to meet with their advisors. Students
412 could have their monthly meetings to discuss anything, and this would also serve as a
413 platform for advisors to provide more resources to students. Also, she stated that enforcing
414 the monthly meetings would encourage students to use the resource. Christina concluded by
415 encouraging students to use campus resources. Additionally, Jackie posited that students
416 need to regularly check their emails because the university usually sends out emails about
417 resources to boost student and campus involvement. Jackie cautioned students not to be
418 scared to ask for assistance. Sophie also encourages advisors to reach out to students more
419 to provide the resources they need.

420 **4.3 Recommendations for the Institutions in the Two Countries**

421 Academic advising has a major role in student persistence, success, and retention. And as
422 seen from above, advising is beneficial to students' personal, academic, and professional
423 growth. The University of Ghana should employ staff members who would serve as advisors
424 and go-to people for questions students have about their academic, professional, and
425 personal lives. The university should also make it mandatory for students to attend advising
426 sessions. Because the University of Ghana is large and has a huge student population,
427 academic advising can be decentralized so that in each department and college, there is a
428 group of student affairs professionals who would serve as academic advisors. The university
429 can also employ and train more staff members at the Counseling and Career Center.
430 Similarly, the Ghanaian government should liaise with the Ministry of Education and
431 university stakeholders on ways to becoming student-centered and establish student affairs
432 as a profession at the University of Ghana.

433 The Ohio University should enforce mandatory meetings with academic advisors and
434 decrease the advisor-to-student ratio to ensure advisors are not overwhelmed by the number
435 of students they have to advise. Reducing the advisor-to-student ratio also leads to advisors
436 paying more attention to their students. Questionnaires and interviews should be conducted
437 in each department and college at both universities to determine what students need and
438 what can be done to reach and encourage the student population to utilize resources on
439 campus.

440

441

442 **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

443

444 **Doreen Tutera** designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol,
445 wrote the first draft of the manuscript, managed the analyses of the study, read and approved
446 the final manuscript.

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