

**Social Organization Analysis of the Role of Academic Advising:
A Case Study at the University of Liberia**

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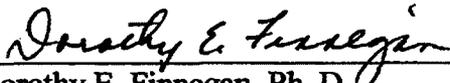
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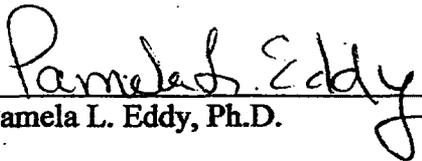
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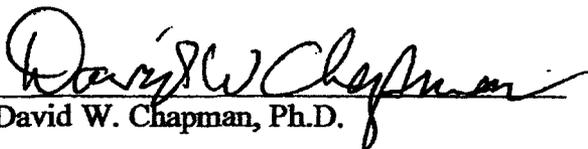
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Abstract

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING: A CASE STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA

Positive educational experiences deliberately sought through advising can lead to increased academic success, improved college experiences, and long-term benefits as graduates become contributing citizens in society. However, much of the research on the role of and advantages related to academic advising has been limited to American colleges and universities. This ethnographic case study conducted at the University of Liberia examined the organizational role of advising from student, faculty, and staff perspectives, and explored the culture, college experiences, and academic progression of students prior to and after the establishment of the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center particularly among freshmen and seniors. The purpose of this study was to identify the role of advising services in a Liberian higher education setting, to understand the relationships between social organization and advising interactions, and to explore applications of advising approaches in non-Western cultural contexts. Nine faculty, 10 staff, and 20 student participants were interviewed.

The findings suggest that postwar challenges in Liberian higher education and the University of Liberia's shifting perspective on student-centeredness have been the primary elements that have shaped the barriers and opportunities found in the role of advising and college student experience. Implications of this study have expanded our knowledge of academic advising in a non-Western, postwar culture, and highlighted the significance of applying social organization analysis and metaphor to understand complex structures and processes involved in higher education advising processes. As

Liberia and other similar developing countries look for ways to improve educational experiences, inspire social consciousness, contribute to national development and workforce needs, address remediation and rehabilitation concerns, enhance student persistence and retention, and improve academic success, academic advising could be a key solution in the process.

Keywords: academic advising, social organization, West Africa

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Chapter One

Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region in the world, but is also rich with natural resources (Alibrandi & Bull, 2005; Morley, Leach, & Lugg, 2009; World Bank, 2008). As the population continues to expand in this region, methods to improve the current state of sub-Saharan Africa's developing countries become critical to discover in order to enhance their participation in the current and future global economy. For years, scholars have declared that education is key to economic and social development of countries (Beckloff, 2008; Biao, 2009; Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2005; Chapman & Austin, 2002; Cogan, 1982; Gordon, 1996; Jennings-Wray, 1982; Morley et. al, 2009; Neves, 2008; Ojogwu, 2010; Thulstrup, 1998; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2007). Specifically, higher education provides nations with the ability to address multiple societal and economic needs. However, heretofore development efforts have focused on primary education and adult literacy. Although these services are critical to development needs, without higher education, countries cannot produce skilled teachers and professionals to provide basic education and economic stimulation.

Development Efforts

Several international organizations and agencies play a significant role in addressing the diverse barriers and challenges faced by the world's underdeveloped countries. These agencies include United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), European Union (EU), and others. At the United Nations

Millennium Summit in September 2000, many of these groups collaboratively produced a report entitled the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to address concerns surrounding international development. These world leaders created development goals that targeted eight areas of human development: *poverty and hunger; primary education; gender equality; child mortality; maternal health; disease control; environment sustainability and global partnership* (United Nations, 2000; UNDP, n.d.). The MDGs offer a new perspective for development emphasizing the importance of “lifelong learning as a human development model” (Neves, 2008, p. 73). The MDGs report identifies quantitative targets for achieving development by 2015 (Ojogwu, 2009; Turrent & Oketch, 2009).

However, although the MDGs provide a framework of success goals and indicators to achieve international development, the lack of focus and research on the role of higher education in these endeavors will continue to delay the development process. The main priority outlined in the MDGs still focuses on primary education as a means to development and ignores the potential contributions of higher education to produce professionals and stimulate economic growth in the development process. The subsequent neglect of tertiary education in the MDGs priorities has crippled higher education institutions in these countries. Lack of funding and support from these international organizations and respective governments has left institutions with weakened infrastructures, little to no research capabilities, and an inability to hire and retain quality faculty and staff, which has contributed to brain drain (Bloom et. al, 2005; Collins & Rhoads, 2010; Fields, 2007; Lindow, 2009; Morley et. al, 2009; Sayndee, n.d.; World Conference on Higher Education, 1998).

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa continue to struggle to improve social and economic conditions. Education is often associated with the development of economic growth and serves

as the basis for many strategic plans of developing countries particularly in African nations (Bloom et. al, 2005). Addressing concerns in higher education is essential to international development efforts because it can supply citizens with critical workforce skills in order to meet national development needs (Morley et al., 2009). Thus, improvements in the higher education sector of this region is vital to its development efforts (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC], 2004; Collins & Rhoads, 2010; Morley et. al, 2009).

Liberia

Liberia, located in sub-Saharan Africa, has a unique history in that it was established by African American expatriates. This country provides an example of a developing nation striving to achieve Millennium Development Goals. It is one of the poorest countries in the world with an annual per capita income of \$160 (U.S. State Department, 2008; World Bank, 2010). Since its civil war and its aftermath of political instability that lasted from 1989 until 2003, Liberia continues to struggle to repair the socio-cultural environment and is using education as a major force in reconstruction (Fields, 2007; Government of Liberia, 2004; International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2008). Yet, data are only available for primary education participation rates while secondary and higher education participation rates in Liberia are respectively low in comparison to regional averages for sub-Saharan Africa or simply unavailable. As of 2011, primary education had a gross enrollment rate of 96% with a 66% completion rate. However, net enrollments rates are still low, 41.1% for primary education. Secondary education had a gross enrollment rate of 44.8%, but a net enrollment of 14%. Figures for tertiary education enrollment are estimated at 1.5%, but tertiary and secondary education net enrollment and completion rates are not available (UNESCO, 2011; UNESCO, 2012 United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2010; World Bank, 2011).

An educated citizenry capable of leading a developing country to become global partners is critical. Therefore, improving its higher educational system to produce quality graduates and a strategic workforce are a priority for Liberia's redevelopment, specifically in the critical fields of education, agriculture, and engineering (USAID, 2012). A priority in the redevelopment process, education is recognized as key to addressing issues of access, equity, literacy, economic development, health, job training, and overall human development (Government of Liberia, 2004). By creating research opportunities that can positively impact the charge to produce quality graduates and expand educational opportunities, steps are taken towards reaching redevelopment goals. Liberia provides a unique opportunity to extend our knowledge of applications of an American-based education system combined with West African concepts.

The University of Liberia

The University of Liberia (UL) is the leading higher education institution in the country. UL enrolls approximately 23,800 students, but produced only 2,441 graduates during the 2011-2012 academic year. Based on an American higher education model, undergraduate students seeking a bachelor's degree follow a general education curriculum during the first two years based upon their college of enrollment; they then may pursue any of the 28 majors offered through six undergraduate colleges located on two campus locations: Liberia College - College of Social Sciences and Humanities, College of Business and Public Administration, William R. Tolbert, Jr. College of Agriculture and Forestry, William V.S. Tubman Teachers College, T.J.R. Faulkner College of Science and Technology, and College of General Studies. Like many institutions of higher education in the developing countries in Africa, the University of Liberia struggles with the lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, outdated curricula, and brain drain as a result of the civil war. In spite of these challenges, the university is currently in the process

of restoration and gradual redevelopment. However, insufficient resources will continue to impact students' progression through the higher education system and the institution's ability to meet national development and workforce needs. As UL attempts to address components of redevelopment plans, it is a critical time to examine how the implementation of various student service programs, such as academic advising, may contribute to academic success resulting in higher graduation rates, which in turn would add to the country's stability and effect positive societal change. Advising literature has shown that advising services can aid with student success, retention, and graduation rates. Positive educational experiences manifested through advising can lead to long-term benefits as graduates become contributing citizens in society. For this reason, UL administrators recognized the institution's dire need for student services in career and academic advising and in 2010 established the Student Career and Advisement Center (SA2C3)(see Appendix A).

Academic Advising

Research has shown that academic advising can improve student academic and social success, college experience satisfaction, increase GPAs, and improve retention and graduation rates in the United States (Abdussalam, Chen, & Khan, 2007; Bahr, 2008; Hale, Graham, & Johnson, 2009; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003; Pan, Guo, Alikonis, & Bai, 2008; Rice et al., 2009; Schwebel et.al, 2008; Smith & Allen, 2006). However, the role of academic advising outside of the United States has escaped scrutiny. Academic advising research can provide not only the requisite understanding of its impact on student success, but also on the role it plays to meet the goals of the university. Through these student services, the level of college graduates may be improved. In a country that employs the American education system as a model, research on the program may provide insight into the

application of similar academic advising strategies, perceptions of advising and its impact on student success for student populations in non-Western cultures, and the means by which an advising center can enhance student experiences and thus contribute to graduation and eventually workforce development.

As the main provider of higher education in the country, UL is the natural venue to address education development initiatives. As Liberia and other developing sub-Saharan African countries look for ways to improve their educational experiences, inspire social consciousness, enhance student persistence and retention, and improve academic success, academic advising could be central to the process. The information gathered from this study can provide insight into applications of academic advising from a non-Western cultural perspective and expand current advising literature.

There are several ways to study academic advising. Most studies emphasize program effectiveness and application of Western-based theories. As a professional advisor, I am familiar with the various approaches to advising and theories that pertain to American higher education institutions. I have a professional interest to expand our knowledge of advising application beyond Western perspectives. During two prior visits to the University of Liberia in 2009 and 2010, I learned from top administrators that the university is in dire need of student services. From a review of multiple approaches to research, I have found that using a social organization lens provides the most appropriate strategy to explore academic advising in Liberia because it examines various characteristics of interactions that help define aspects of an institution. As such, advising is an evolution of these characteristics (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2011a). Holistically analyzing the elements of the social organization provided a clearer definition of advising at the University of Liberia. Exploring the

role of advising from a social organizational perspective enabled me to understand the various components that interact with advising in a Liberian higher education organization, and provide a another perspective of the profession.

Problem Statement

Social organization analysis allows for exploration of various forms of human interaction within organizations that translate to social action (Ahrne, 1994). Social organization is the intersection of human behavior and organizational activities within patterned structures (Udy, 1983). According to Gören Ahrne (1994), four features of human interaction define organizations: *affiliation, collective resources, substitutability of individuals, and recorded control*. In order to fully explore beliefs, values, and attitudes behind the social structure of a university center, I added a fifth feature of human interaction, organizational culture. From my cultural background as a Sierra Leonean-Liberian-American, I intuitively knew that the Liberian higher education system would not mirror the images found in the Western perspectives of higher education.

Using a modified version of Ahrne's (1994) conceptualization of social organization, the problem of this ethnographic case study at the University of Liberia was to analyze the organizational role of advising from student, faculty, and staff perspectives, and to explore the culture, college experiences, and academic progression of students prior to and after the establishment of the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center particularly among freshmen and seniors. Given this research problem, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the advisement center and academic policy structure impact the affiliation of students at UL to address the needs of students, especially with regard to access and retention of students?
2. How do these innovations in advising impact university human, fiscal, and physical resources?
 - a. Do they enable students to understand and move through academic requirements efficiently?
 - b. Do the benefits for the students and the degree programs outweigh the cost?
3. How does advising promote the sustainability of the university?
 - a. Are students more efficiently placed in appropriate courses thereby ensuring enrollments in departments?
 - b. Is it likely that majors will be more sustainable and therefore the contingent of faculty more stable?
 - c. To what degree is the quality of the college education experience impacted?
4. How does advising contribute to enforcing and promoting university policy as well as supporting the mission and goals of UL and the country?
5. How does (and possibly will) advising help to shape the UL institutional culture?
 - a. Is it likely that advising will produce more efficiency and effectiveness for both students and faculty and therefore increase satisfaction with the organization?
 - b. In what ways do students, faculty and staff members perceive the cultural climate, socialization experience, and environment at the university and SA2C3?

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was three-fold: 1) to identify and begin to understand the integral role academic advising serves in Liberian higher education using ethnographic case study methods; 2) to understand the intimate relationship between social organization and interactions that occur from advising; and 3) to investigate applications of advising approaches and models in a non-Western cultural setting. Researching areas, such as academic advising, can have the ability to provide insight into strategies to improve college student experiences, campus services, promote student development and retention, and enhance the quality of graduates and contributing citizens. Using ethnographic case study methods, social organization analysis and metaphor, this study sought to gain a better understanding of Liberian culture and higher education, to identify the organizational role of academic advising at UL from the perspective of students, faculty and staff, and to explore the college student experience. Situating advising within the Liberian culture addresses the counsel offered by Burton (2010), “As the field of academic advising reaches beyond Western borders and into other cultural traditions, the theories applied to advising must reflect the values, philosophies, and societal norms of each culture” (p. 1).

Therefore, the data demonstrate elements of advising models and approaches that are unique to this African cultural setting. This study may have significant implications for the improvement and expansion of advising services for students in Liberian higher education as well as other similarly-situated universities. This study should inform policy on the use of advising as a cost-effective education program to improve student success and institutional alignment with national development needs. In addition, this study will contribute to the limited body of literature available on international academic advising.

Limitations and Delimitations

I conducted this ethnographic case study from early January to late April 2011 at the University of Liberia. This limited timeframe did not allow me to observe a complete cycle of advising services that occur during the course of a full academic semester. However, during this time, I interviewed students, faculty and staff associated with the SA2C3 advising program and observed activities associated with UL advising. Thus, I delimited the study to advising only and did not extend it to other student support services provided by the university that may impact college student experiences and academic progression. This case study focused on the University of Liberia, therefore results may not apply to other institutions. The SA2C3 was established Fall 2010, therefore staff participants did not have a full scope of the effectiveness or challenges associated with the advising program at the time. Also, incomplete information is available on the UL system. Accurate demographic information and data regarding the student, faculty, and staff population as well as academic offerings, academic performance, graduation rates, and enrollments rates were not available.

I intended to conduct a purely qualitative study at UL, however a contingency of the institutional review board approval at UL included the use of survey to collect initial data from student participants. The data collected from the survey were used (see Appendix B) to select participants for in-depth interviews; the survey data are not included in this dissertation because the survey went beyond the original scope of this study.

Major threats to this study included my own personal characteristics and bias. Although the official and instructional language in Liberia is English language, cultural and language differences between the participants and myself may have influenced the results of this study. In order to begin to overcome these cultural differences, I visited UL from December 2008 to

January 2009 and in March 2010 to learn about the institution's curricular requirements and Liberian culture prior to this investigation. Participant interviews did not begin until March 2011. The first two months of the investigation were spent immersing myself into the culture of the institution and fostering relationships with individuals within the community. Further, my mother is from Liberia and I am a first-generation American. My mother previously served as the Director of Student and Personnel Services at the Ministry of Education of Liberia, which included counseling, physical education, health services, and student exchange services for the national primary and secondary school systems. She served as a peer reviewer to check accuracy of the interview transcriptions. In addition, I have several relatives who have attended the University of Liberia. From their experiences, I have had the opportunity to closely familiarize myself with Liberia's educational system.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Prioritizing higher education initiatives will position Liberia to attain human and economic growth. Research endeavors on Liberian higher education will help expand the current knowledge of the tertiary education system and facilitate the improvement of educational opportunities that contribute to national development. Analysis of the intricacies of Liberian higher education requires the dissection of the various components that make up tertiary schools. This study explored the role of academic advising at Liberia's primary higher education institution, the University of Liberia. Using social organization analysis helped to gain an in-depth understanding of the role advising plays to shape interactions among students, faculty and staff. This review of literature provides an overview of the history, the current state of and the education system in Liberia as well as defines the National Academic Advising Association's understanding of the role of advising in tertiary education. Research has not been found that has explored the functions of academic advising in Liberian higher education. Providing a broad overview of available literature establishes the foundation and context for this study.

History of Liberia

In 1822, the colony of Liberia, meaning "land of the free," was established by free African Americans from the United States under the sponsorship of the American Colonization Society and other liberated slaves rescued at sea. The capital Monrovia, named after the sitting U.S. President James Monroe, illustrates the historical relationship that this African country has with the United States. Liberia eventually declared independence from the U.S. on July 26, 1847. Not surprisingly, the freed slaves (commonly known as Americo-Liberians) who settled in the new Republic encountered opposition from indigenous Africans as they attempted to acquire

the territory. A power struggle between the Americo-Liberians and various tribes has been ongoing since the 1820s. The main goal of the Americo-Liberians was to maintain dominance and control (Sawyer, 2005). In order to maintain their authority, Americo-Liberians excluded indigenous Liberians from citizenship until 1904 and denied them the right to vote until 1948 (Ballah & Abrokwa, 2003; Dunn-Marcos, Kollahlon, Ngovo, & Russ, 2005). Today, Liberian culture is a mixture of Americo-Liberian influence as well as that of traditional tribes. Sixteen tribes populate Liberia: the Golas, Kissis, Vais, Belles, Grebos, Krus, Bassas, Krahn, Mendes, Deys, Lormas, Gbandis, Mandingos, Gios, Manos, and Kpelles (Olukoju, 2006).

Liberia was a one-party state under the True Whig Party governed by Americo-Liberians until 1980. On April 12, 1980, an indigenous Liberian Master Sergeant named Samuel K. Doe seized power during a *coup d'état*. During this time, most top government officials who were of Americo-Liberian descent were executed or imprisoned and replaced by the People's Redemption Council and other members from Doe's Krahn ethnic group. For nine years, Doe's reign perpetuated fraud, violence, and abusive power (U.S. Department of State, 2008). On December 24, 1989, the National Patriotic Front rebels, headed by Charles Taylor, an Americo-Liberian descendant, invaded Liberia from Cote d'Ivoire and civil war proceeded until 1996 (Ballah & Abrokwa, 2003; U.S. Department of State, 2008). More than 300,000 Liberians lost their lives and millions fled to neighboring countries (Ballah & Abrokwa, 2003). Following this violent period and several peace treaties between an interim government group and warring factions, a special election was held on July 19, 1997. Charles Taylor won the election because most voters feared the return of war if they did not vote for him as the new leader. Six years later, conditions had not improved in the country.

From 1989 to 2003, Liberia suffered through corruption, ethnic tension, civil war, and political instability under Taylor. Throughout this violent period the economy, government, education system, and infrastructure deteriorated (Adebajo, 2002; Hoffman, 2007; Pham, 2004; Teferra & Altbach, 2003; U.S. Department of State, 2008). Unemployment and illiteracy reached 75% and the infrastructure continued to weaken (U.S. Department of State, 2008). On August 11, 2003, after much pressure from the U.S. and other international officials, President Taylor resigned and fled into exile in Nigeria. The UN took over security of the country in October 2003 until the October 11, 2005 presidential election. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first democratically-elected female president, was inaugurated in January 2006. The country has remained politically stable since the 2005 elections. Since then the government of Liberia has focused its efforts on security sector reform, job creation, donor investment, improving foreign relations, and providing basic education and other essential human services in an effort to meet their MDGs (U.S. Department of State, 2008).

In a country whose history was once marked by Western hegemony through political dominance of Americo-Liberians, Liberia reveals the *mélange* of groups that make up the country today: traditional tribes of indigenous Africans and Americo-Liberians. Not only must these groups continue to learn to coexist, but they also have to address the larger issue of emerging within a modern global society. As the country explores options for development and growth of the economy, it is a critical time to examine how educational research in the higher education sector may contribute to Liberia's future stability. Education is a priority in the development process because it is recognized to be the key to addressing the aforementioned issues in addition to access, equity, literacy, health, job training, and overall human development (Government of Liberia, 2004). By creating research opportunities that can positively impact the

charge to produce a skilled citizenry and expand educational opportunities, steps are taken towards reaching development goals. Liberia will be better equipped to strive towards human development and economic growth by prioritizing higher education research initiatives.

The Current State of Liberia

Today the average life expectancy of Liberia is 56.7 years. The gross national income per capita income is \$200, and 76% of the population lives below the national poverty line of \$1.00 USD per day (World Bank, 2011). Out of a four million estimated population, the CIA reports an 85% unemployment rate (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010). According to less stringent international definitions of unemployment, Liberia currently stands at 3.7% unemployment (World Bank, 2010). However, the Report on the Liberian Labour Force Survey 2010 (Liberian Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, 2011) emphasizes that vulnerable employment rates are more relevant than unemployment rates. Vulnerable employment is defined as individuals who are self-employed or with unsustainable jobs. These types of employment constitute 77.9% of the 1.1 million individuals aged 15 and above who are employed. Out of the percentage of those employed 68% of the workforce is employed in the informal sector, which primarily includes agriculture and wholesale/retail trade. The country relies heavily on the mining of iron ore and exportation of rubber. In 2008, the country's foreign debt stood at \$3.4 billion and climbing (U.S. Department of State, 2008). Liberia has one of the highest debt-to-GDP ratios in the world (International Monetary Fund, 2010). Excessive debt only expounded other variables, which further strains the current economy.

Following the two Liberian Civil Wars (1989-1996 and 1999-2003), the economy collapsed. The Liberian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita had fallen from "\$1,269 in 1980 to \$163 in 2005 – an 87% decline" (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs of Liberia,

2007, p. 1). UNESCO has outlined several factors that are currently impacting the economy including the destruction of the infrastructure, industry increasing housing and service prices, the expansion of immigrant communities acquiring control of the lucrative trades, and the return of expatriate Liberians. During the wars, many Liberians fled to safety, however, since the wars have ceased, many refugees have begun to return home and have struggled to find work. Further, one-third of the population relocated to the capital and abandoned abundant agricultural lands in the interior (UNESCO, 2007).

In response to dire financial crises, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) have agreed that Liberia qualifies for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). In 2010, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund provided debt relief in the amount of \$4.6 billion (International Monetary Fund, 2010). External debts have been reduced to sustainable levels and financial support made available to help fund projects (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs of Liberia, 2007; World Bank, 2010). In addition, the country has been able to receive sizable grants from other international agencies, but without appropriate research there is no assurance that funds are being appropriately allocated.

Benefits that could be produced by investments in higher education have only been rhetorically supported. Only recently are efforts to financially back higher education coming to the forefront of development agendas (Bloom et. al, 2005; Collins & Rhoads, 2010; Fields, 2007; Lindow, 2009; Morley et. al, 2009; Sayndee, n.d.; World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). The World Conference on Higher Education in 2009 called for more investment in higher education to expand knowledge and research in society. Research can help address declining retention and enrollment, lack of technological resources and gender disparities in higher

education (Biao, 2009). Expanding knowledge of Liberian higher education can help address the demands to produce an educated citizenry and contribute to national development needs.

Liberian Education System

To better understand the connections between development, societal needs and education it is important to examine the history and current state of a country's educational system (Cogan, 1982). As a country established by African Americans, the educational system closely imitates the American model. Kindergarten/pre-primary education is available to children from age two to six. Primary education (6-11 years of age), which has been free and compulsory since 1912, lasts six years and is equivalent to elementary education. However, the literacy rate of 59.1% among Liberians ages 15 and older and 75% among Liberian youth ages 15 to 24, demonstrate that the education requirement has not been enforced due to a lack of resources and educational gaps as a result of the war. Junior secondary education (12-14 years of age), which is equivalent to junior high school, lasts three years. Senior Secondary (15-17 years of age) or what is considered senior high school in the American educational system lasts for three years (Mangesi, 2007; UNESCO, 2011). Upon graduation from a senior secondary school students are awarded the West African Examination Council (WAEC) Certificate. The West African Exams are required for admission into a Liberian higher education institution.

Types of higher education include universities, colleges, and junior colleges. Upon graduation from a higher education institution students can earn the following credentials: Associate's degree (two-year program), Bachelor's degree (four-year program or five-year program in law), Master's degree (two-year program post-baccalaureate), or Doctorate (seven-year program post-baccalaureate in medicine).¹ Higher education is decentralized and each higher education institution sets its own standards, and degree-granting institutions are chartered

¹ The Doctor of Medicine is the only doctoral degree offered at the University of Liberia.

by the National Legislature. Each institution has its own Board of Trustees and all are under the authority of the Ministry of Education, and the National Commission on Higher Education (Mangesi, 2007; Seyon, 2003; UNESCO, 2010). Most higher education institutions are found within the vicinity of Monrovia because of the lack of accessible roads throughout the country. Prior to the civil war, there were two public higher education institutions, including the University of Liberia, four private institutions, and two teacher preparatory institutions that operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Combined enrollments for these recognized institutions were 6,000 with 4,000 students enrolled at UL (WCHE, 1998).

Although the other institutions do serve the higher education needs of the population, the University of Liberia (UL), located in Monrovia, provides more than 54% of the country's higher education. UL was established in December, 1851 as Liberia College and was incorporated by an Act of the Legislature of Liberia. In 1951, the Legislature of the Republic chartered the University of Liberia. The university was chartered with the merger of Liberia College and the William V.S. Tubman Teachers College. By 1989, when the war broke out, 7,000 students were enrolled at UL, and by 1999 enrollment rose to 10,000 students (Seyon, 2003). Currently, UL enrollment has reached over 23,000 students. UL was one of few higher education institutions able to withstand the destruction of the war and to increase accessibility even though the quality of education has been greatly hindered by the declining economy.

UL is one of the largest, most influential and oldest degree-granting institutions in West Africa and offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in the social sciences, humanities, agriculture, education, forestry, physical education, mathematics, natural sciences, law, and medicine (University of Liberia, n.d.). The mission of the university is "to prepare well qualified men and women for teaching, research, public and private service, and to contribute to the

achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for sustainable human development” (University of Liberia Day Presentation, 2007, p. 4). However the university is currently not meeting workforce needs because student performance has declined during the postwar climate.

Following the civil war, 90% of the universities facilities, computers, and books were damaged or stolen. In addition, the university has experienced the effects of brain drain and lost 78% of its teaching, research, and administrative staff (Fields, 2007; Sirleaf, 2009; World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). The fragile education system is due to lack of resources, weak government commitment, poor infrastructures, and a very frail economy (Powell, 2007). Unfortunately, the effects of the civil war have hindered the institution’s ability to produce human resources and contribute to economic development. According to former university president, Dr. Al-Hassan Conteh, it is imperative to restore the activities of the university, especially increasing research efforts, in order to spearhead the post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts (University of Liberia Day Presentation, 2007). Though the university is also taking steps to strengthen its academic programs and resources it still must overcome many adversities from the civil war. From its ability to sustain accessibility its role is critical in the restoration process.

The goals and objectives of the university are to:

generate strategic plans for the five undergraduate colleges, three professional schools, three graduate programs and all the administrative and support departments of the University to guide its way forward through the 21st Century; create a framework for devising new academic programs, centers and institutes in response to the post-war challenges in Liberia; reexamine the Long Range Plan of the University by comparing it with realities of the transitional period with the view of updating it to an implementable

program for relocation of the University to its Fendell Campus by Year 2011; review the current resource support and input arrangements by identifying sources and means of supporting the University through workable mechanisms; review the current framework of administration of the Graduate Programs by reassessing their structures and relationship to the existing colleges with the goal of organizing new graduate administrative structure; review the charter of the University and recommend changes in the purview of the postwar needs of the country; and review the current scope of region and international cooperation in order to recommend new institutional arrangements, in context of current global trends and needs of the University (University of Liberia Goals and Objectives, n.d., para.1).

Of these goals and objectives, the immediate priorities include campus renovations; rehabilitating faculty, staff and students; supplying water and electricity to critical campus locations; procuring and replacing equipment and technology, refurbishing the library; settling salary arrears and faculty health benefits; securing transportation for all campus constituents; enhance research activity; improving campus security; publishing a university catalog; and addressing retention rates through accelerated education programs. Long-term goals of the institution include relocating to Fendell campus; securing laboratory supplies; enhancing recruitment of distinguished scholars; developing international partnerships for interdisciplinary curricula; establishing scholarships for medical students, and forming partnerships and exchange programs with international institutions (University of Liberia Goals and Objectives, n.d., para. 4).

In 1975, UL created the *Long-Range Development Plan 1976-1987*, a university development plan that links higher education to national education, economic, and social

development. When the document was developed, national planning was in a period of “infancy in Liberia, comprehensive national plans or national development strategies have not yet been formulated” (University of Liberia, 1975, p. 1). The concerns addressed in the 1975 long range plan are still appropriate and even more critical today. Major issues addressed include rapid growth in student enrollment, limited financial resources, insufficient faculty and staff salaries, limited research capacity, underprepared students, and student attrition. In an effort to contribute to national development and strengthen the university the need for research and student services was emphasized. “Research will be accorded a significantly higher priority among the activities of the University as a means of self-improvement of the faculty and with the objectives of localization of educational curricula and direct contribution to the solution of the country’s economic and social problems” (University of Liberia, 1975, p. 24). The plan pushed for locally developed research efforts to address issues appropriately and within the context of Liberia’s needs.

The *Long-Range Development Plan 1976-1987* also prioritized the need for student services. The long-term plan stated that adequate advisory services were needed to address the academic and social problems of students. It was proposed to expand an advising system by appointment of a faculty member to advise students and strengthen the *Guidance and Counseling Office of Student Affairs*.

[With an] open-door admissions policy...students were left free to enter the college of their choice without any measures designed to direct them to programs for which they were reasonably adequately prepared or to areas of specialization for which national needs are greatest. Under such a system, the allocation of University resources among various programs is almost entirely determined by student choices which are not always

based on proper understanding of the nature and requirements of the studies they wish to pursue or on a realistic assessment of their own abilities. (University of Liberia, 1975, p. 33)

University issues with poor student support services further led to high dropout and failure rates among UL students.

As UL revisits the *Long Range Development Plan 1976-1987* it must also align previous goals with their new mission to contribute towards the efforts of the MDGs. The Liberian MDG report was published in January 2004. In relation to educational policy reform, the goals aim to achieve the following:

access, equity, relevance and efficiency; universal primary education; special attention and emphasis on women and girls education, as well as education and training for disadvantaged groups; adult literacy, on the job training, non-formal education, distance learning and other forms of out-of-school education; special incentives and support for science and technology education, and training to meet the man-power needs of Liberia; professionalized and licensed staff in all categories; reduced private cost of education; and partnership for education for all. (Government of Liberia, 2004 p. 16)

All of these goals and targets were created to measure human progress within definitive timeframes (Government of Liberia, 2004). The report emphasizes primary education and fails to recognize the role of higher education in development. Therefore, the emphasis undermines the value of research among Liberia's higher education institutions to address development goals.

According to the *Contribution to the Needs of Assessment- Education by the Ministry of Education of Liberia* (2004), the broad categories of infrastructure, access, and updated policy are viewed as priorities in education in post-conflict Liberia. This working paper was developed

by the UN, World Bank and the Ministry of Education of Liberia in an effort to address issues in the post-conflict education system. Recommendations for higher education include support for accelerated learning programs, non-formal education programs for literacy, equipment and materials to support vocational and technical training, access, recordkeeping, quality of teaching, and curricula reform. Student support services, such as academic advising, can help address many of these critical areas, however, educational and development efforts will be ineffective if culture appropriateness is not taken into consideration. As most literature forcefully emphasizes, Western-based approaches to student services, academic advising efforts may be ineffective due to the lack of cultural consideration.

Higher education in conjunction with academic and career counseling provides individuals with the requisite skills to connect engaging academics with societal needs that can help rebuild their communities. Although Liberia is based upon an American educational system, cultural differences need to be taken into account in order to create an effective educational system. Only educational research initiatives will allow us to begin to explore these options. Consideration of the social and cultural aspects of Liberian culture will create an education system that is more effective and socially just (Beckloff, 2008). These ideals can transcend the organization and translate to greater social ideologies.

In addition, professionals within higher education institutions must understand the need to produce qualified educators in demanding fields, improve retention among students, collaborate with potential employers to meet workforce needs, and work with media to address attitudes towards work ethic (Jennings-Wray, 1982). Students and alumni need to understand how their education is connected to national and economic goals of the country. Not only does it highlight personal purpose and meaning, but it also enhances community involvement and

commitment, combines academic and an appreciation for physical work, builds work ethic and community responsibility, and creates community role models (Cogan, 1982; Ojogwu, 2010). Higher education can mediate national and community needs. Research can aid in the development of effective educational programs and has the potential to bridge efforts among primary, secondary and tertiary education. By examining the historical context, the country can learn from past mistakes and take advantage of exploring strategies to address national development and provide individuals with meaningful life skills that can re-establish a sense of purpose. Academic advising should seek to bridge the gap between students' academic and career goals as well as contribute to institutional efforts to address MDGs.

The World Conference on Higher Education in 1998 and other scholars documented the following concerns facing African higher education: *shortage of resources, deterioration of staff conditions and decline in quality of teaching and research as consequence of brain drain, growing demands for access, funding, pressures of globalization, exclusion of indigenous education, and the rise of private higher education* (Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative, 2009; Assié-Lumumba, 2006; Bloom et. al, 2005; Lindow, 2009; Morley et. al, 2009; Teferra & Altbach, 2003; World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). In Liberia's postwar climate, education is already crippled. Oftentimes, where opportunities were already scarce these structures were completely destroyed by war, particularly in the interior (UNESCO, 2007). Education research can help address some of higher education's priorities to strengthen education quality, increase the availability of trained faculty and staff, update educational policy, promote collaboration, address retention and success of women in higher education, and explore ways to integrate new technologies in the curriculum (Ojogwu, 2010; World Conference on Higher Education, 1998). Since the war ended, student enrollment has increased at all levels of

education. In the absence of advising research, the effectiveness, quality and development of student success in higher education institutions may remain stagnant.

Research production is the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa (Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative, 2009; Biao, 2009), however it is required if national development concerns are to be addressed in third world countries such as Liberia. Slowly but surely, higher education has entered the limelight to establish strategies that will enable societal development. Universities can help bridge the divide between government demands and community needs (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC], 2004), particularly through advising services. As UL attempts to address components of redevelopment plans, it is a critical time to examine how implementing various student service programs, such as academic advising, positively impacts Liberian higher education.

Academic Advising

Academic advising is a critical element to student success in higher education and socializes students to the “institution’s culture, values, and practices” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2001 1a p. 2). Research has shown that academic advising can improve college student academic and social success, college experience satisfaction, increase GPAs, enhance learning, and improve retention and graduation rates in the United States (Abdussalam, Chen, & Khan, 2007; Bahr, 2008; Gardiner, 1994; Hale, Graham, & Johnson, 2009; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Kiker, 2008; Kuh, 2008; Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003; Metzner, 1989; Pan, Guo, Alikonis, & Bai, 2008; Rice et al., 2009; Schwebel, Walburn, Jacobsen, Jerrolds, & Klyce, 2008; Smith & Allen, 2006). These outcomes are only enhanced by increased frequency and quality of advising services (Gardiner, 1994; Kuh, 2008; Metzner, 1989). Although primarily based in the Western context, there could be similar potential benefits

in a non-Western culture, but minimal literature exists regarding the veracity of the application in this context. Academic advising assists students in their curricular and career exploration and help students develop socially, emotional, and academically in the college environment. Connecting student interests to academic offerings and career opportunities also helps familiarize students to college resources and enhances satisfaction with the college student experience (Metzner, 1989).

Advising services exist in a variety of capacities to meet the needs of diverse structures and organizations of higher education institutions. The relevant literature pertains to defining the role of advising according to the National Academic Advising Association: *The Global Community for Academic Advising* (NACADA). Examining NACADA's fundamental framework for advising served as the foundation upon which I analyzed the structure, organization, and purpose of the SA2C3. In addition, the role of advising in higher education, specifically regarding retention, persistence, success, and career development that impact Ahrne's organizational structure elements of *affiliation*, *collective resources*, *substitutability*, and *recorded control* are pertinent to this study. Pascarella and Terenzini (1995) remind us that students spend most of their college experience outside of the classroom; therefore it is important to explore the interactions that contribute to students' personal and academic development within informal settings among faculty and administrators as advising is one of the most impactful interactions that improve college student success. This service oftentimes provides students with initial and personal exposure to college faculty and staff. Through these interactions institutions have the opportunity to address the complexities of new student transitions, academic and career exploration and student cognitive and social development.

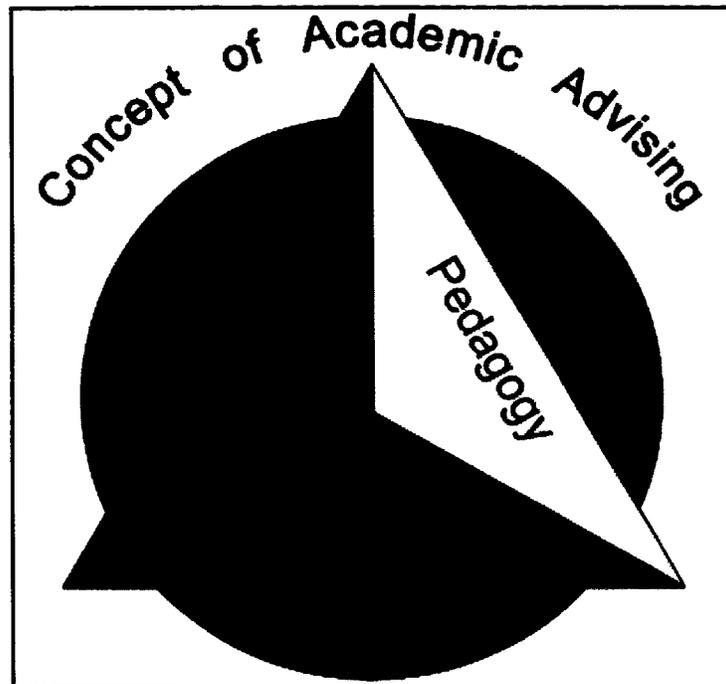
Pillars of Academic Advising

NACADA deems three documents as its Pillars of Academic Advising: *Concept of Academic Advising*, *Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising*, and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education's (*CAS Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising*). "These sets of guiding principles affirm the role of academic advising in higher education...they should be used as starting points and references for a discussion of academic advising" (NACADA, 2006, Introduction section, para. 2). Because a multitude of Western-based psychosocial and cognitive theories are applicable to the practice of academic advising, a discussion of these pillars provides the necessary background to understanding a global definition of the role of academic advising. The history of Liberia and description of the educational system provide the context of the study. This section details the nuances of each pillar to clarify the principles of advising.

Concept of Academic Advising. The *Concept of Academic Advising* is made of three components: *curriculum (what advising deals with)*, *pedagogy (how advising does what it does)*, and *learning outcomes (the result of academic advising)*. According to NACADA (2006), academic advising engages students in the discussion of a broad understanding and purpose for their higher educational experience as well as the minutia of academic policies and procedures. As with a well-thought series of coursework that progresses students' intellectual development in a traditional curriculum, the advising curriculum provides students with intentional exposure to campus resources, institutional culture, academic requirements, goal-setting exercises, the institution's mission, development of problem-solving skills, as well as helping students integrate and make meaning of their curricular and co-curricular experiences. "Through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community, to

think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students, and to prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and a global community” (NACADA, 2006 para.7). Each of these activities constitutes the building blocks in which advising supports students with their transition and success in higher education.

Figure 2.1 Concept of Academic Advising



Source: National Academic Advising Association (2006).

NACADA (2006) embraces “advising as a teaching and learning process” in which students develop intellectually, socially, emotionally, as well as acquire new skills (para. 8). The *pedagogy* or method by which the curriculum is taught includes wide variety of approaches, delivery methods and counseling styles. Advisors must have the ability to orient students to the academic culture, facilitate discussions regarding educational planning, build rapport with students, as well as document and evaluate these formal and informal interactions. In order to evaluate these interactions, advising must have specified *learning outcomes* that articulate goals

and objectives for these student interactions. In other words, “what students will demonstrate, know, value, and do as a result of participating in academic advising?” (para. 9). These outcomes provide a roadmap for the student and advisor as they work towards goals of advising. Learning outcomes include results that enhance awareness of information, personal development of skills, as well as cognitive developments (Martin, 2007). Specific examples include: enhancement of decision-making skills; constructing meaning of educational experiences; ability to identify appropriate campus resources; familiarity with academic requirements and policies; and ability to intersect academic, career and personal goals.

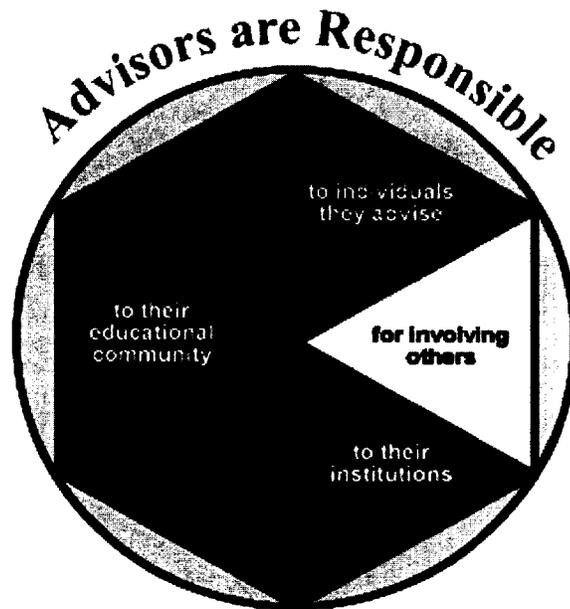
For the purposes of this study I define academic advising according to the National Academic Advising Association’s (NACADA) definition from *The Global Community for Academic Advising*.

Academic advising, based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframe. (NACADA, 2006, Summary section, para. 6)

Statement of Core Values. NACADA recognizes the various types of advisors (professional, faculty; and student peers), approaches to advising, and institutional types which collectively create a diverse field of advising. Therefore, the *Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising* reflects these diverse responsibilities and “affirms the importance of advising within the academy and acknowledges the impact that advising interactions can have on individuals, institutions and society” (NACADA, 2005 para. 2). The core values outline six

expectations for the role of the advisor: 1) *Advisors are responsible to the individuals they advise*; 2) *Advisors are responsible for involving others, when appropriate, in the advising process*; 3) *Advisors are responsible to their institutions*; 4) *Advisors are responsible to higher education*; 5) *Advisors are responsible to their educational community*; and 6) *Advisors are responsible for their professional practices and for themselves personally*. The *Concept of Academic Advising* defines the components of the advising process and these responsibilities represent underlying philosophies of the profession.

Figure 2.2. Statement of Core Values



Source: National Academic Advising Association (2005).

Advisors are responsible to the individuals they advise. At the heart of the profession lies the role of the advisor to interact, guide, and counsel students. This is accomplished through collaborative development of goals, exploration of student self-awareness and the establishment of mutual trust and respect. This core value highlights the role of the advisor to communicate pertinent information and the importance of advisor accessibility and availability to students in

need. It is grounded in the ontological precepts that the students they serve are diverse in their identities, beliefs, and social, emotional and educational needs; are motivated to learn and must take responsibility for their decisions and behaviors; have the ability to succeed when individual goals are identified and determination applied; and “use a variety of techniques and technologies to navigate their world” (NACADA, 2005, Declaration section, para. 1). The most important outcome of this responsibility is that the advising process “fosters individual potential” (NACADA, 2005, Exposition section, para.1). Advisor’s ability to identify the unique needs and abilities of students enables him/her to recommend appropriate resources to help students define their educational plans, appreciate the educational process, and successfully transition into the postsecondary experience.

Advisors are responsible for involving others, when appropriate, in the advising process.

The nature of advising is collaborative. “Advisors serve as mediators and facilitators... [and] recognize their limitations and make referrals to qualified persons when appropriate” (NACADA, 2005, Declaration section, para. 2). This intricate network of student support ensures that student needs are addressed holistically and exposes students to a plethora of institutional resources that contribute to their development. Therefore, advisors must gain a broad understanding of institutional resources and services and serve as the link to build appropriate connections that address students’ developmental and support needs.

Advisors are responsible to their institutions. As described in the *Concept of Academic Advising*, advising is guided by the mission, culture and values of the institution. The advisor is responsible for familiarizing students with the institution’s academic requirements, policies and procedures. Advisors serve as the intermediary agents between the institution and students to ensure that the institutional mission is upheld. In some cases, the in-depth knowledge advisors

have regarding students' needs position them to intervene on behalf of students or recommend institutional change to improve the student experience. Therefore, advisors must also maintain objectivity in their positions regarding the institution and student opinions.

Advisors are responsible to higher education. More broadly expressed, "advisors honor academic freedom" (NACADA, 2005, Declaration section, para. 4). Advisors have the flexibility to apply a variety of theories and advising approaches necessary to support student success, thus the success of the institution. Advising draws on theories from "student development, cognitive development, career development, learning, decision-making, multiculturalism, retention, personality, moral development, adult development...sociological, organizational, psychosocial and person-environment interaction" (Williams, 2007 p. 1). However, much of the research exploring these theories is based in a Western-context that limits its applicability to a global audience.

Advisors are responsible to their educational community. It is critical that advisors familiarize themselves with program opportunities and services that are available in their surrounding communities beyond campus boundaries. Awareness of these resources position advisors as the means to promote community engagement among students and integrate the importance of community values within educational missions. These off-campus co-curricular offerings include study abroad, community engagement/service learning, transfers between institutions, as well as a host of volunteer and internship career opportunities. Building these connections across institution walls allows advisors to help students understand and strengthen the relevancy of their education to larger societal issues.

Advisors are responsible for their professional practices and for themselves personally. It is imperative that advisors continue to engage in professional development, "establish

appropriate relationships and boundaries with advisees, and create environment that promote physical, emotional and spiritual health” (NACADA, 2005, Declaration section, para. 6).

Advising requires continuous training in order to meet the ever-changing needs of students and technology. In addition, it is the responsibility of the advisor to stay abreast of strategies, theories and techniques that impact the profession. This expectation for personal and professional excellence improves an advisor’s effectiveness to positively impact student success; build extensive collaborative networks with other administrative offices and faculty members; develop a robust understanding of academic policies and procedures; address student development programming needs; assess and evaluate service outcomes; and foster enthusiasm for helping students reach their highest potential, spark their academic interest, and guide them to success on their academic journey.

CAS: Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising. The final pillar of academic advising describes the guidelines necessary to implement and/or assess quality advising programs. “The goal of CAS is to promote standards for various aspects of the higher education endeavor that foster student learning and development, quality assurance, and professional integrity” (White, 2006, para. 1). The CAS Standards address the quality of and establishes standards for the advising *mission; program; organization and leadership; human resources; ethics; law, policy, and governance; diversity, equity, and access; institutional and external relations; financial resources; technology; facilities and equipment; and assessment and evaluation*. These standards for program excellence also include Student Learning and Development Outcome Domains: *intellectual growth, effective communication, enhanced self-esteem, realistic self-appraisal, clarified values, career choices, leadership development, healthy behavior, meaningful interpersonal relationships, independence, collaboration, social*

responsibility, satisfying and productive lifestyle, appreciating diversity, spiritual awareness, and personal and educational goals. In a culture of increased accountability and limited resources, assessing the extent to which outcomes are achieved is essential to ensuring that advising goals and student needs are met at the highest quality (White, 2006). “Few will doubt that quality academic advising leads to better educated students and citizens. By using the CAS Standards and Guidelines, we are demonstrating our commitment to this ideal” (White, 2006, para.16). The first two pillars emphasized the process of advising and the role of the advisor. This section outlines an ideal template for developing and improving academic advising programs.

According to the CAS Standards and Guidelines (2011), academic advising programs must have a clear *mission* that aligns with that of the institution, promotes student learning and development, and meets the unique needs of the student found in that population. Alignment with the broader institutional mission ensures that the work of advising *program* is promoting the values of the institution and assisting students to develop a meaningful experience and reach their potential. Programs should ensure that it utilizes collaborations with internal and external constituents, assess and address challenges and opportunities that impact student progress, and achieve targeted learning outcomes by administering a host of theory-based approaches and techniques. The *organization* (organizational structure) of the advising program should be conducive to the needs and goals of the institution. *Leadership* should ensure that the programs goals and objectives are clear along with expectations of the staff, develop a strategic plan that identifies long and short-term goals to champion the program, use data to guide decision-making processes and programs, and have the necessary competencies to provide effective management and supervision. Quality advising must also have sufficient *human resources* to fulfill the goals

and mission of the program. This includes professional development needs, appropriate training and education and staff size to meet the needs of the student population.

Ethics refers to “the attempt to think critically about what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, in human conduct...Advisors have the potential to do much good for their students and also for their institutions, but the potential to do much harm exists as well” (Lowenstein, 2008, p. 37). Ethical standards address conflicting concerns of the institution, must be modeled by the staff, and promote a safe environment for all members of the community. In addition, these policies and procedures should comply with *law, policy, and governance* of the institution. These regulations outline the limitations of all institutional agents and protect them from various liabilities. As such, advising programs should also advocate *diversity, equity, and access*. In order to build meaningful relationships with students, advising programs must create environments that are welcoming and inclusive of all diverse backgrounds and beliefs, as well as promote activities that celebrate multiculturalism. As with the core values, advising programs must foster *institutional and external relations*. Successful advising programs require the collaborative efforts of the community to engage in student support. In addition to human resources, advising programs must have sufficient *financial resources*, responsible budgeting and allocation practices, adequate *technology* to perform responsibilities, and *facilities and equipment* that are appropriate to facilitate advising services and maintain confidentiality. Finally, advising programs must articulate a strategy for continuous *assessment and evaluation*. Data collected from these reviews provide the necessary information to create cycles of quality enhancements. Now that the role of advising according to international standard has been established, the next section will review the limited literature available on advising in Africa.

Academic Advising in Africa

Wesley Habley (2009) argues that NACADA has made little advances in scholarly research since 1979. Without the contributions of research to the advising profession, the worth and contributions of advising in higher education will continue to be under-recognized and unappreciated. Overlooking academic advising as a fundamental part of the college experience will promote the ongoing limited support of student services. Not only is more research needed in the United States, but research examining the need for academic advising outside of the United States is scarce, particularly in Africa.

In 2002, UNESCO, in collaboration with the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS), developed a manual to assist developing countries with the creation, implementation, and evaluation of student affairs programs and student services. IASAS is comprised of student affairs and service professionals from around the world who seek to provide support to countries that aspire to improve their higher education institutions through student service programming efforts that address learning, retention, access, graduation rates, career placement, and civic development. This initiative was spearheaded with the intention that support services improve higher education institutions, which then translates to “the improvement of the social, cultural, political, economic and environmental aspects of the global society...Student affairs and services provide a healthy return to national economies as the investments help to assure students’ success in higher education and their subsequent contributions to the national welfare” (UNESCO, 2002 p. 1-2). The manual recognizes the importance for countries to incorporate national and institutional values in their general model; however their broad international definition of academic advising and career services provides the template for global initiative in order to prioritize the support of student services. Their

efforts to promote student services also supports the need for institutional research in student service programs such as academic advising to contextualize appropriate programming efforts.

A more recent document developed by IASAS in collaboration with UNESCO discussed the emerging field of student affairs services in post-conflict countries (Shea & Baghirova, 2009). “The primary need for student services such as registration, housing, counseling and career development has been highlighted as immediate needs in many post-conflict/disaster countries” (p. 60). They recognized the significant contributions student services could have towards national development initiatives, however research in these student affairs fields “has been a missing element in reconstruction efforts to date” (p. 61).

Based on a comprehensive literature review, little research exists that explores academic advising in Africa. Steven Aagard (1991) examined the effects of academic advising on perceived relevance of graduate education in agriculture for national development goals in Tanzania and Malawi. He found that the presence or absence of academic advising did not affect perceptions of academic relevance in connection to national development goals. Much has changed in the advising professions in the Western context since Aagard’s study that researched East African culture. In addition, the cultural context of West Africa greatly differs from its eastern and southern counterparts. The lack of literature on academic advising in Africa creates great opportunity to see how the effects of advising translate into other cultural settings that may greatly benefit from the advantages of academic advising services.

A study in South Africa focused on the benefits of a tutoring and mentoring program to provide students with academic and psychosocial support in order to enhance student success (Page, Loots, & du Toit, 2005). Although some literature focuses on the effects of academic mentoring in South Africa both in higher education and pre-undergraduate programs, it does not

necessarily encompass all aspects of academic advising. However, mentoring is a major component to academic advising and some of these studies have supported the need for academic and career mentoring in educational institutions, especially in tertiary education (Essack & Juwahn 2007; Maitland, 2008; Page, Loots, & du Toit, 2005).

More recently, a study on the effects of advising on student performance explored the impact of advising programs at Kenyan Universities (Muola, Maithya, & Mwinzi, 2011). The researchers concluded that there is a need for more student participation in advising programs in higher education, and academic and career mentoring need to occur at earlier stages in student transitions. They recommended further research in the advising arena. Studies in South Africa and East Africa examine similar goals for advising to address retention concerns and national development issues that plague many African countries; however more research is necessary to understand how the role of advising differs in various cultural regions of Africa.

Social Organization

Social organization “describes the collection of values, norms, processes and behavior patterns within a community that organize, facilitate, and constrain the interactions among community members” (Mancini, Martin, & Bowen, 2003, p. 319). In other words, social organization is a network of human interactions connected by common goals, order, and boundaries of an institution. These institutions include, but are not limited to corporations, religious groups, communities, societal institutions, social networks, and even family structures. It entails a broad scope of various group dynamics all defined as organizations. “The sociological perspective assumes that social factors...are especially useful in explaining the regularities in the way people act” (Lindsey & Beach, 2000, p. 4). Several theories from sociology and anthropology compose the concept of social organization including the works of Radcliffe-

Brown, Levi-Strauss, Weber, Malinowski, Marx, and Durkheim (Firth, 1954, 1955; Lindsey & Beach, 2000; Smircich, 1983). Applications of this concept were initially examined by Shaw and McKay (1942) as social disorganization theory which related to the extent at which members of a community attempted to control crime and social deviance in order to preserve social harmony (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005; Small, 2002).

Although all models of social organization integrate multiple perspectives, most accentuate a particular lens such as culture, structure, or processes. Sociological and anthropological debates have argued whether social organization concepts are embedded in cultural elements or structural elements (Brown & Barnett, 1942; Goodenough, 1969). Goodenough (1969) argued that if the researcher examined a phenomenon that involved familiar components, then analyzing the details of social processes would provide rich information. However, if the researcher examined an unexplored and undefined phenomenon, then explaining the intricacies of the cultural components dominates the investigation. For the purposes of this study, both are essential to understanding social processes that define organizations.

Vast amounts of literature exist in the field of advising. However, applications of advising in non-Western contexts are limited. Several researchers support the need to include cultural examinations and ethnographic methodologies to fully encapsulate components of social organization, and broaden definitions of social organization beyond social disorganization theory (Goodenough, 1969; Lindsey & Beach, 2000; Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005; Small, 2002; Smircich, 1983). “[Another] central theoretical challenge is differentiating social organization structure from social organization processes. Generally, *structure* refers to interconnecting parts, a framework, organization, configuration, and composition; *process* refers to a course of action, functions, operations, and methods of work” (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005, p. 573). Ahrne’s

(1994) concept of social organization successfully merges multiple theories to describe social organizations that consider both structures and processes.

According to Udy (1983), various typologies of social organization are more similar rather than divergent. The many social organization models that exist vary in emphasis on *causation* and *focal units* (Udy, 1983). He defines *causation* as the outputs of human behavior produced by an organization. Social organizational models either heavily attribute the cause of human behavior to *psychological/cultural* aspects of the organization or *ecological/morphological* aspects. *Focal units* refer to the source or focus of human behaviors, “i.e., that point at which cultural and morphological inputs are converted into behavioral outputs” (p. 274). *Societies, organizations, aggregates, and groups serve as focal units of human behavior.* Udy (1983) suggests that social organization models should be integrated to help bridge the gap between cultural and structural elements. Combinations of these concepts can provide harmonious conceptual analysis of elements found in both sociology and anthropology. The integration of various aspects of social organizations provides a more comprehensive analysis of social behavior and interaction.

As a social institution, education provides some of society’s basic needs and is essential to providing societal socialization. “Socialization is defined as the lifelong process by which we learn our culture, develop our sense of self, and become functioning members of society” (Lindsey & Beach, 2000, p. 12). Higher education institutions attempt to socialize individuals and prepare them to become contributing citizens with the assistance of advising to guide this process. Social organization analysis provides the holistic perspective of this process and explores the contributions of advising within an organization. In higher education, Waggoner and Goldman (2005) used organizational analysis to investigate retention activities sponsored by

student affairs programs that impact the larger organization or university. They realized that much of the current literature limits investigation to program effectiveness and literature exploring the impact of retention activities on the overall educational organization does not exist. Waggoner and Goldman (2005) argued that, “Retention is an organizational activity designed to facilitate the dependency-binding of students with the larger university collective” (p. 87). I would argue that advising is also an organizational activity fostering student progress and assisting them to discover meaning in their educational pursuits. Advising services are dictated by several institutional factors including campus culture and structure (King, 2008). Therefore, an examination of the role of advising demands a holistic and comprehensive approach. One that takes into consideration the components of culture, structure and processes to define advising.

Connecting the activities of a university with the social behavior of the people allows the researcher to take a multi-level approach to understanding the interconnectedness of organization functions and dynamics. More importantly, “effective social organization leads to achieving community results – broad-based shared outcomes desired by community members...the approach becomes more action oriented, rather than merely representing a way to describe community activities” (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005 p. 575). Organizational analysis clarifies the relationship among activities, people, and policies created in these social structures and cultural environment. However, various models of organization analysis serve different purposes due to a diverse selection of foci. In an attempt to capture various cultural and structural features of social organization, this study uses a modified social organization model to explore the role of advising in Liberian higher education.

Summary

Existing research conducted in the United States supports the many contributions of academic advising to positive college student experiences, and provides a clear definition of the role of advising in higher education. Therefore, advising research should be expanded to an international level, especially in developing countries where opportunities for significant positive impact exist. Based on institutional culture and mission, various advising models and delivery methods may be more effective on some campuses than others (Lynch, 2004). By better understanding the institutional needs and cultures of Liberia and its educational system, we can examine how academic advising can be applied appropriately to improve student experiences in Liberian and similar international institutions of higher education.

“Academic advising engages students beyond their own world views, while acknowledging their individual characteristics, values, and motivations as they enter, move through, and exit the institution” (NACADA, 2006, Preamble section, para.2). A modified approach to Ahrne’s (1994) conceptualization of social organizations allowed me to investigate the human interactions shaped by career and academic advising as students enter, move through, and exit an educational organization. The analysis of organizational structure of advising enhances our understanding of how advising is integrated into institutional culture and mission, and allows us to explore a unique perspective of how services are utilized by and impact various constituents of the university (Pardee, 2004). Research in advising will help clarify and validate positive claims of the profession, and inform decisions of practitioners to better serve students (Habley, 2009).

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter details both the conceptual framework that organizes the approach I used in the field as well as the methods used to research the problem of the study. This study sought to analyze the organizational role of advising from student, faculty, and staff perspectives, and to explore the culture, college experiences and academic progression of students prior to and after the establishment of the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center particularly among freshmen and seniors. The review of literature provided the context of this study. To better understand the importance of advising research to enhance higher education in Liberia, a discussion of the current perspective in advising literature was provided. Laying the historical foundation of Liberia allows for contextualization of current educational dilemmas, as well as the identification of potential educational opportunities. This study fills the gap that currently exists in the literature on advising in Liberia and in most of Africa. Exploratory research requires a comprehensive approach to understanding advising in a new cultural setting. Therefore social organizational theory provides an expanded understanding of the role and functions of advising in a non-Western setting. I modified an interactional organization analysis model to capture the diverse components of university structures.

In this chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework, a modified version of Ahrne's (1994) social organization analysis that explores the role of advising among the five human and social interactions that compose the University of Liberia. The tools used in the study follow this section, and identify and describe methods used for data collection and analysis.

Conceptual Framework

Social organizational analysis explores the interactions among people, activities, the environment, communication, culture, and resources. This broad perspective to inquiry can provide rich data when examining the complexities of an educational organization. “Like other organizations, school organizations are deeply routinized. Because these routines determine and direct the behavior of organizational participants, this theoretical perspective holds many implications for practitioners and researchers” (Greenfield, 2005, p. 122). Organizations not only influence the human interaction that occurs internally within their walls, but also transform individual efforts into social action externally in the community (Ahrne, 1994; Greenfield, 2005; Johnson & Fauske, 2005). The collective power of organizations to initiate societal change presents an opportunity for research to understand how social processes begin at the micro-level, especially in educational institutions.

This study used a modified version of Gören Ahrne’s (1994) model of social organization to explore the operations and impact of the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center (SA2C3) on students, faculty and staff at UL. According to Ahrne (1994), four features of human behavior and interaction define organizations: *1) affiliation, 2) collective resources, 3) substitutability, and 4) recorded control*. I argue that a fifth feature also defines an organization, and that is organizational culture. Using this framework of social organizational analysis permitted me to explore how career and academic advising shape and impact the aforementioned features of an educational organization.

Social Organization Analysis

Social organization analysis enables a systematic investigation of people, resources, sustainable practices, policies and regulations, and culture in order to understand how these

features of an organization shape human interaction and the formation of social relations (Ahrne, 1994). It permits the exploration of human interaction and social behavior and the structured patterns of activities that occur within an organization (Udy, 1983). This approach to research enabled me to identify elements that contribute to or challenge the effectiveness of an organization and its members. “The most common approach in studies that attempt to capture social organizational processes is to rely on the individuals as the unit of analysis” (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005, p. 575). In academic advising research, social organization analysis assisted me to focus on the perceptions of advising, the effectiveness of advising and resources, the need for additional resources, the role of advising in an institution, and its perceived impact on interactions among students, faculty and staff. Using my modified version of Ahrne’s (1994) social organization model, I employed five features of interaction to define the organization: *1) affiliation; 2) collective resources; 3) substitutability; 4) recorded control; and 5) organizational culture*. These features captured the multiple complexities that make up a university in order to explore the role that career and academic advising play in the greater organization.

Affiliation. The first feature of Ahrne’s (1994) model involves the membership of the organization; the issues involve how individuals gain access, what attracts members, who are the gatekeepers to membership, and how members are retained. In addition, subcategories define affiliation further. This element of social organization can be associated to students, faculty and staff at UL, however, this study focuses primarily on the affiliation of students. The access, retention, and persistence of students directly impact the retention and persistence of faculty and staff. Interactions can occur within, between, and outside of the organization, therefore affiliation must also explore the responsibilities of members as individuals enter, navigate, and exit the organization.

Career and academic advisors serve as tertiary influences in student affiliation. Effective or ineffective advising services can significantly impact a student's willingness to affiliate and remain affiliated with an institution. To what extent did career and academic advising address access, persistence, and retention of students? Advisors who work with prospective students in addition to currently enrolled students may have the opportunity to explore educational opportunities with prospective students, serve in a recruitment capacity, and communicate an organizational vision to attract students.

Students are not only members, but are also the outputs of the university (Waggoner & Goldman, 2005). Affiliation not only explores dimensions of entry into organizations, but also explores how members choose to remain with an organization. Therefore, to what extent does career and academic advising promote or contribute to student persistence? From entry to navigation within the organization, advisors have the ability assist students with managing the requirements of a field of study. Properly trained advisors may also have the ability to measure a student's aptitude of interest in specific fields.

Another influential factor that impacts affiliation involves resources and interests. To what extent are majors pursued based on personal interests, public interests, or the availability of academic resources? The presence or lack of resources dictates the attraction and retention of student affiliates and limits the advisors ability to effectively obtain desired goals.

Collective Resources. Members continue to affiliate with an organization because organizations provide critical resources or may require members to contribute towards resources. Physical, human, and fiscal resources are necessary for the persistence of the organization. Resource allocation and investments also determine power and indicate organizational priorities. The establishment of the SA2C3 has already proven to be a critical resource for students, faculty

and staff that helps maintain affiliation and retention of these stakeholders. Advisors must have in depth knowledge of the curriculum and academic policies that govern degree attainment. With the establishment of SA2C3 the responsibility for guiding and advising students is now shared with staff, and the burden is lifted from faculty and other administrators who provided informal advising. This shift in responsibility is also a shift in power and resources. “The power of organizations increases with the degree of people’s dependence on organizational affiliation” (Ahrne, 1994, p. 78). What does it mean having a new player in the organization? In order to analyze the collective resources of the SA2C3, it is necessary to explore the rules of resource allocation. The allocation of resources indicates institutional priorities, such as student success, retention, graduation rates, and other university efforts contributing to the MDGs. To what extent do these national development goals and institutional objectives align with student demands?

Resources are not only fiscal, but include human and physical resources involved in the establishment of the SA2C3. Analysis of resource allocation for advising services may also reveal power dynamics among students, faculty and staff. Advisors are required to work with students, faculty and staff from different backgrounds. Therefore, advisors may be able to provide the link between students’ needs and the limitation or framework of the organization.

Recorded Control. Records are maintained on affiliates as a means to monitor performance, maintain compliance within the organization rules and policies, and measure effectiveness of member performance. Control can be maintained by rewarding good behavior and discouraging resistance. Compliance controls and measures are necessary to ensure proper student educational development and establish academic credibility. It may be crucial to incentivize faculty and staff to develop and enforce compliance policy. To be compliant and successfully navigate through and exit the organization, students must understand the policies

and academic requirements of the university. Therefore, the university is responsible to publicize these records and policies. If students do not know the rules, how will they succeed?

Substitutability. To ensure sustainability, organizations must be able to replace members as they exit and to help entering members transition and thrive in their new environment. This feature entails the manner by which students navigate their way through and exit an organization. Academic advising services help the university coordinate and connect students' academic goals and desires to an academic discipline and career. The university itself is charged with producing citizens who can be successors and substitutes in various organizations given the appropriate skills and education. These individuals will also sustain the existence of the university itself. The SA2C3 may serve in an outreach capacity to attract new students, understand societal needs and communicate the merits of the institution. Each of these efforts promotes substitutability of members within and outside the organization, and therefore promotes sustainability of the institution.

Organizational Culture

Sociologist Ahrne (1994) argues that "all four [features of interaction] are required. [The] very combination makes the pattern of interaction into an organization" (p. 26). However, Ahrne (1994) as a sociologist is concerned with behavior. I argue that without a feature of organizational culture interwoven through the model, organizations cannot be adequately defined. Ahrne (1994) stated that, "affiliates must share a common knowledge of activities of the organization" (p. 27). Thus, the affiliates must understand the culture of the organization. Organizational culture can be defined as the "shared assumptions of individuals participating in the organization" (Tierney, 1988, p. 4). From these assumptions a cultural ideology of values, attitudes and beliefs are developed. Integrating Tierney's (1988) framework of organizational

culture permitted a holistic analysis of UL as a social organization. This study has explored both the expressed values, attitudes and beliefs of students, faculty and staff, as well as behavioral outputs that result from values, attitudes and beliefs. The concept of organizational culture includes the investigation of the following: *environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership*.

Tierney (1988) argued that organizations are shaped by internal and external factors such as economic, social, political, and demographic circumstances. All of these conditions influence how we define the culture of an organization. “An organization’s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it” (Tierney, 1988, p. 3). Culture is socially constructed, therefore analyzing the shared beliefs, attitudes and values of the constituents at UL through the component parts of the concept strengthened my exploration of social organization of the SA2C3 at UL. Developing a sense of organizational culture provides administrators with the necessary skills to make informed decisions, gauge conflict, enhance effectiveness and efficiency of tasks, and improve performance (Tierney, 1988).

Environment. The first concept of environment refers to the location of the institution including the surrounding community, as well as the type of institutional structure. UL recently opened a new campus outside of Monrovia. The location of the SA2C3 has implications in the role it plays in the institution. Culture changes if the center is relocated to the new campus in a rural setting versus the current location on campus in the city.

Lastly, environment also encompasses internal organization environments. Besides the physical surrounding and description of the campus, environment also involves campus climate. In other words, how do students, faculty and staff perceive the institutional climate? I further categorized institutional climate by social, academic, political, and professional conditions.

SA2C3 represents an internal sub-environment that reflects differently from the larger campus environment. In order to examine environment we must also understand student, faculty, staff, and external constituent relationships to the SA2C3 and UL environment. Gaining stakeholders input helped me to assess perceived strengths and weaknesses of the SA2C3 and UL environments. Some of these concepts were captured in the features of social organization, but they helped to guide and specify information regarding institutions, departments, or programs.

Mission. The mission of a college refers to the purpose of the organization that drives two components: the *programs* offered and the *audience* served. Change to either component will change the culture of the organization because the mission guides practice. In addition to the components that influence a mission, culture is also shaped in the ways the mission is communicated. To take this a step further, the quantity and quality of the message shapes culture. How has the mission of the institution been communicated to campus constituents? How did it influence decisions of the institution? With regards to quality, what messages were emphasized in the mission? The MDGs are promoted through UL's mission statement, which assumes a sense of national obligation on behalf of the institution.

In my analysis of culture, I explored cultural alignment. In other words, how did national priorities outlined in the MDGs align with or shape institutional priorities? How did the mission of the SA2C3 support or conflict with the overall mission of UL? The degree to which cultures misalign is important to understand because determining the drivers behind these discrepancies help organizations improve effectiveness. What were the drivers that motivated students' selection of a major? Were they guided by national priorities or personal interest? Not understanding cultural alignment may be detrimental to the success of students and effectiveness of advising.

Alignment also applies to student, faculty and staff perceptions and expectations of UL and the SA2C3. Did students see the SA2C3 mission as an information clearinghouse and bridge linking the institution to society? In other words, were students utilizing advising services as an information outlet or simply complying with institutional requirements? Exploring organizational culture provided insight into motivations for student academic pursuits.

Socialization. Tierney (1988) defined socialization as the degree of one's institutional fit. The goal of academic advising is to help students transition into college, therefore, how did the SA2C3 socialize students? What were the contributions of other campus resources such as orientation that help integrate and socialize students into the campus culture. Advising can play an indirect role in guiding students towards these services. It was also beneficial to understand how faculty and staff advisors were socialized into the campus culture. Exploring their integration into the work environment and into the SA2C3 environment helped me to understand how they perceived their role and responsibility as a campus administrator. An advisor's experience with socialization into the campus culture may impact how they socialize students at UL. How did faculty and staff define socialization in relation to how students perceived the need for socialization?

Lastly, the concept of alignment is particularly important when investigating the impact of student services in a postwar climate. Did the ramifications of Liberia's civil war redefine socialization for today's college student? Exploring this cultural concept may create a need for advising approaches that are idiosyncratic to the socialization of post-conflict college students. As previously mentioned, advisors must be equipped with skills to work with students from diverse backgrounds. How did socialization needs change for students with various financial,

educational, or ethnic backgrounds? Advising can successfully meet the needs of students by investigating the cultural factors that are unique to the student and institution.

Information. Culture is created by how we create, receive, and disseminate information. Organizations have multiple ways to communicate with constituents. Some forms of information sharing occur in formal or informal settings or within venues, such as committees, events, etc. The culture of information also involves those who are in charge of communication and styles of communication. The cohesiveness or fragmentation of an institution will heavily impact the culture of information sharing. Information sharing in advising often involves the dissemination of academic policies and degree information. Who was involved in advising policy creation and implementation? Was it a collaborative effort among students, faculty and staff or were there power struggles involved with policy formation, execution, enforcement and interpretation? Social organization requires the analysis of human interactions among campus constituents; therefore I extended information sharing to include verbal, written and non-verbal behaviors for communication. Were there non-verbal behaviors in academic advising that helped inform activities?

Strategy. Strategies describe the decision-making processes, who is involved, and how it is achieved. How were decisions made regarding academic policies and how did those decisions affect advising? How were these policies enforced? What strategies were used to reward or punish individuals who complied or resisted policy? Assessing cultural alignment is particularly important to understand if strategies differed among students, faculty and staff, or between departments and the larger campus community.

Tierney (1988) also described the use of *interpretive strategy*. This approach requires the use of symbolism as a strategy to communicate or influence decisions. Symbols can also include

physical space. An advisor may situate his or her office to strategically conduct an advising session. For example, when working with students collaboratively an advisor may strategically sit beside the student to promote teamwork. On the other hand, if an advisor is disciplining a student, he or she may sit across a desk from a student to create a physical barrier or emphasize a level of authority. Lastly, gatekeepers also serve as strategies. In what ways did advisors serve as gatekeepers to the institution and campus resources?

Leadership. Finally, analyzing leadership styles, communication strategies and values of campus leaders will close the loop on organizational culture. Leaders have the ability to positively and negatively influence campus stakeholders, and the positional power to spearhead initiatives. For this reason it was critical to identify the champions involved in the establishment of the SA2C3. I also defined students as leaders. Upperclassmen or student workers in the SA2C3 can influence the decisions of new or undecided students. Students often look to peers for advice and student leaders provided insight into the culture of UL.

“Once we understand culture’s influence on workplace behaviors, we realize organizational change is cultural change and that all aspects of corporate [or organizational] transformation can be approached with this perspective in mind” (Morgan, 1998 p. 111). The establishment of the SA2C3 at UL impacted the culture of the university and how students, faculty and staff perceived the environment within and beyond the organization. The SA2C3 has the potential to serve as the bridge between UL and other social organizations and strengthen the university’s abilities to meet its objective to produce educated citizens and an essential workforce.

According to Ahrne (1994), affiliates carry out three different forms of interaction. Interactions can occur between individuals within an organization, between individuals of

different organizations, and outside the realm of organizations. For the purposes of this study, I only considered interactions within the organization, in this instance, UL. The scope of this study was to understand the role of the SA2C3 within the organization, and the time limitations to collect data did not allow for an in depth study of interactions outside of the organization.

Advising can help strengthen the cohesion of UL and provide resources that will improve student retention. Advisors also monitor the sanctions of academic policy and help students commit to the goals of the university by educating and integrating students into the culture of the institution.

All aspects of an organization shape the college student experience as well as define the advising process of an institution. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the advisement center and academic policy structure impact the affiliation of students at UL to address the needs of students, especially with regard to access and retention of students?
2. How do these innovations in advising impact university human, fiscal, and physical resources?
 - a. Do they enable students to understand and move through academic requirements efficiently?
 - b. Do the benefits for the students and the degree programs outweigh the cost?
3. How does advising promote the sustainability of the university?
 - a. Are students more efficiently placed in appropriate courses thereby ensuring enrollments in departments?
 - b. Is it likely that majors will be more sustainable and therefore the contingent of faculty more stable?

- c. To what degree is the quality of the college education experience impacted?
4. How does advising contribute to enforcing and promoting university policy as well as supporting the mission and goals of UL and the country?
5. How does (and possibly will) advising help to shape the UL institutional culture?
 - a. Is it likely that advising will produce more efficiency and effectiveness for both students and faculty and therefore increase satisfaction with the organization?
 - b. In what ways do students, faculty and staff members perceive the cultural climate, socialization experience, and environment at the university and SA2C3?

The conceptual framework for this study provided the template for inquiry, data collection, and analysis. However, it is important to note a few assumptions that were made prior to the collection of data regarding the original research questions. The research questions assumed that the SA2C3 was established and fully functioning according to the plans outlined in the Center's proposal (see Appendix A). However, upon arrival it was evident that although the SA2C3 was officially launched, it had not implemented its mission to provide institutional-wide advising services. Because the Center was still in its infancy, these questions are geared more towards current faculty and peer advising services available to students along with the limited initial services provided by the Center. In addition, this study did explore how current faculty advising services, admission processes, orientation, and academic policy impacted student affiliation and access. Retention data were not available nor did they appear to be systematically monitored by the institution, therefore this study explored a new aspect of affiliation that emerged during data collection, the process of sorting as discussed in Chapter Five.

Methods

Social organizational analysis provided the framework to explore the human interactions that define organizations. To capture the complexities that exist within higher education institutions this study looked at interactions among members, resources, policies, sustainable efforts, and culture. The conceptualization of social organization dictated the manner by which data were collected and analyzed. This perspective to inquiry required the in depth investigation within the Liberian higher education environment, therefore ethnographic case study methods were employed to capture data appropriately. Students, faculty and staff were invited to participate in order to understand the role of advising from various constituent perspectives. This section outlines the methods used to gain a better understanding of the UL culture. The effects of the civil war destroyed the infrastructure of the university, thus accessible information regarding the institution and its students were not readily available.

Ethnographic Case Study

A case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Its primary role is to understand an event as it unfolds in real life. In this study, the objective was to seek and gather information about the operations and interactions involved with the SA2C3 within an educational organization, UL. “Case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events” (Yin, 2009, p. 4).

Ethnography is “the art and science of describing a group or culture” (Fetterman 1998, p. 1). Its primary role is to understand culture from the participant’s perspective and reality. Ethnography seeks to discover and gather information about the day-to-day processes in a

cultural group. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), ethnographic research seeks to answer the following questions: “What social actions take place in this particular setting? What do these actions mean to the actors involved at the moment the action took place? How are the actions organized in social patterns? What rules apply? How do these patterns relate to patterns in other dimensions of the setting and in other settings?” (p. 95). These questions provided the framework for exploring the culture of Liberian higher education from the faculty, student, and staff perspective. In addition, ethnographers use theoretical models to guide their research (Fetterman, 1998). In this case, I used organization theory to guide the investigation of the UL culture and structure. Overall, the ethnography allowed me to “interpret the patterned meaning of organizational life,” that is the UL (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 96).

Using an ethnographic case study strategy was appropriate for this study, particularly when advising literature is currently not available for Liberian higher education. This embedded single-case study served exploratory purposes utilizing multiple sub-units of analysis. Embedded case study designs involve the analysis of multiple subunits within the larger case (Yin, 2009). In this study, the case was the SA2C3 at UL while individuals, documents and campus activities serving as units of analysis. Literature involving advising in international settings is scarce, therefore, this study explored the role of advising in a non-Western setting and its impact on interactions among students, faculty and staff. Initiating the study with ethnographic case study research methods allowed me to enter the environment with an open-mind and the ability to learn about various aspects of another culture and organization before analyzing the role that academic advising plays within the educational setting. This approach allowed for the development of research questions, theories, and knowledge of advising as a part of the educational organization.

According to Glesne (2006), case study research tends to use ethnographic approaches to data collection such as extensive observations and interviews. “The strength of case studies is their detail, their complexity, and their use of multiple sources to obtain multiple perspectives. The result is the thickness of description that allows the reader to interpret and decide the applicability of case learnings to other settings” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 105). This multi-layered approach to inquiry provided a comprehensive and detailed framework for exploring the culture of Liberian higher education from the faculty, student, and staff perspective. Thick descriptions gathered from interviews with faculty, students, and staff, the collection and analysis of university and advising documents, and observations of everyday campus events allowed me to formulate further research questions for the organization analysis, as well as contextualize academic advising and more generally the college experience in the Liberian culture. “If academic advising is to be a comprehensive and transformational process, not only for colleges and universities, but for the students themselves, then advising must reflect the cultural norms of the society and culture where it is delivered” (Burton 2010, p. 1). Overall, case study strategies enabled me to “understand complex social phenomena” that is the role and of advising at UL and the college student experience (Yin, 2009, p. 4).

Metaphorical Interpretation

Higher education institutions are complex and multifaceted organizations. Understanding their role in development strategies requires a holistic approach to analyze the interaction of processes that occur within the organization that produce the future workforce. Exploring the various components of organizational processes and the production of an educated citizenry is vital to sustainable development efforts. Scholars use several approaches to organizational analysis, however not all Western perspectives are applicable in non-Western settings. The use

of metaphors to understand an organization allows us to build upon familiar experiences and push beyond our knowledge base to construct new concepts for understanding the way that organizations operate.

Metaphors have been found to be powerful tools to help us to understand complex processes of organizations. Imagery and analogy manifested from our symbolic meanings help us to build stronger connections to images that may be contextual to our experiences and perspectives. The acceptance of using metaphors in research is expanding. This conceptualization allows us to uncover new avenues of analysis and exploration of concepts, and theoretical discovery that is beyond the scope of some traditional processes of inquiry (Fris & Lazaridou, 2006; Humphries & Grant, 2005; McCulloch, 2009; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982; Smircich, 1983; Taber, 2007; Wayne, 2008).

Gareth Morgan (1998) pioneered the use of images to examine organizations. He argues that all organization theory uses metaphors to induce a deeper understanding of complex concepts, and unveil inherent biases that form the lens through which individuals understand, shape, and lead organizations. Morgan (1998) defined metaphors as “a primal force through which humans create meaning by using one element of experience to understand another” (p. 4). Metaphorical logic and interpretation requires the symbolization of familiar elements, and the application of these images to areas to which there may be vague understanding. Morgan argued that metaphors encourage the exploration of similarities at the risk of neglecting differences. However, I argue that this form of reasoning compels us to compare, contrast, and analyze the components that create the similitude of concepts as well as encourage the discovery of new meaning. I use the term *metaphorical interpretation* to define the application of metaphors and the process of analysis to follow. In other words, the application of metaphors creates the

opportunity first to develop meaning and connections with familiar experiences through comparisons, and then to analyze and contrast these experiences to create new perceptions.

Morgan (1998) stated that, “Metaphors lead to new metaphors, creating a mosaic of competing and complementary insights” (p. 6). Therefore, metaphorical interpretation should be an ongoing process. The application of multiple metaphors can improve our ability to explain complex organizations and in some cases cause us to reconsider contradictions found among metaphors. I would take Morgan’s conceptualization a step further and argue that pairing metaphors with other conceptual models can extend and strengthen our processes of inquiry. This study pairs a contextual African metaphor of the *palaver hut* with a social organization model to explore a new role and function of academic advising in a West African institution of higher education. Palaver huts are areas within some rural African communities where individuals congregate to resolve conflict and partake in discussing disputes.

Site Selection

The University of Liberia served as the embedded-single case for this study. The University of Liberia as the site for this study presents a critical case for investigation. As the leading and largest institution of higher education in Liberia, UL is the main producer of college graduates for the country and essential data was collected among participants at this site. The institution enrolls more than 54% of all students in higher education in Liberia. I chose the institution because it hosts the first academic, career, and personal counseling center of its kind in the country. The researcher’s accessibility to the institution and previous contact with administrators and faculty members also made the institution a desirable choice. According to the National Commission on Higher Education of the Ministry of Education of Liberia, UL is classified as a public Category I institution, that is, it grants Baccalaureate degrees and above. It

is the only public institution in this category in Liberia. This urban institution is primarily located in the capital, Monrovia. The commuter campus consists of six undergraduate colleges, three professional schools, and three graduate programs. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals were granted by both the College of William and Mary and the University of Liberia (see Appendix C).

Participants

Liberia is made up of approximately four million people. Of this population 44.1% are aged 0-14, 48.6 % fall between 15 and 54 years, and 7.3% are 54 years of age or older. Only 60.8% of the adult population is literate, and approximately 1.5% of the population is enrolled in tertiary education (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010; UNESCO, 2012; World Bank, 2011). In 2007, 14,616 undergraduates were enrolled at UL of which 3,512 students were women (University of Liberia Day Presentation, 2007). Currently, approximately 23,800 students attend UL, with an average incoming undergraduate class size of approximately 6,000-8,000 students.

A select group of faculty, staff, and undergraduate students at the University of Liberia (UL) were invited to participate in this study. Participants were sought through purposeful sampling of undergraduate students and faculty within the six undergraduate colleges (Liberia College - College of Social Sciences and Humanities, College of Business and Public Administration, William R. Tolbert, Jr. College of Agriculture and Forestry, William V.S. Tubman Teachers College, T.J.R. Faulkner College of Science and Technology, and College of General Studies) and among associated staff.² A contingency of the UL institutional review board approval included the administration of a student survey. The data collected from the

² Students from the College of General Studies were not identified for this study. The College of General Studies does not offer academic programs leading to a bachelor's degree. The college aligns with the curriculum of the other five undergraduate colleges and offers the flexibility of evening and weekend courses for non-traditional students (working adults and students with dependent families). However, faculty members from this college were included.

survey were used (see Appendix B) to select student participants for in-depth interviews; the survey data were not included in this dissertation because the survey went beyond the original scope of this study. More specifically, I used criterion sampling in order to capture rich data from populations that met specific criteria. In criterion sampling the researcher identifies “cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance.... Criterion sampling also can be used to identify cases from standardized questionnaires for in-depth follow-up...This strategy can only be used where respondents have willingly supplied contact information” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). The criteria that I used to identify student participants were as follows:

- 1) Wherever possible one male senior, one male freshman, one female senior and one female freshman student participant chosen from each undergraduate college. I chose to focus on freshmen and seniors to capture college student experiences before and after the establishment of SA2C3 in 2010.
- 2) Wherever possible equal representation of students who had or had not received academic advising services while at UL, and those who had and had not used SA2C3 services in particular.
- 3) Broad representation of majors within five of the undergraduate colleges.
- 4) Sufficient completion of distributed surveys. Students who provided rich descriptions of their advising experiences in open-ended responses were considered for participation.
- 5) Clarity of responses for open-ended questions on the surveys were taken into consideration. Language and grammar were included as criteria in order to reduce potential language barriers during the course of the interview.

As a result, 24 students were invited to participate in the study and 20 students actually completed interviews. Student participants consisted of 12 male and eight female students, as well as eight freshmen, three juniors, and nine seniors (see Appendix D).

Snowball sampling was employed to identify faculty and staff participants. “This is an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases. The process begins by asking well-situated people: ‘Who knows a lot about ____? Whom should I talk to?’” (Patton, 2002, p. 237). I consulted with the UL’s IRB, on-site research advisor, and key informants in order to identify individual faculty and staff members who could provide an in-depth understanding of various student services and academic support functions at the university. These initial conversations helped me determine the types of faculty and staff participants that were most appropriate for this study. As a result, 11 staff members were invited to participate in the study and 10 actually completed interviews (see Appendix D). These staff participants included a peer advisor from the Office of Student Affairs, the University President, the University Registrar, the Director of the SA2C3, four staff counselors from the SA2C3, the Vice President of Student Affairs, and the Vice President of Academic Affairs. Each of these positions was involved with the transition and socialization of students into the university and worked closely with the SA2C3. Six faculty deans from each undergraduate college were invited to participate in the study, and nine faculty members were ultimately interviewed (see Appendix E). Three of the faculty deans invited a professor from their respective colleges to join them during the interview which resulted in the three additional faculty participants from the College of General Studies, Teachers College, and College of Agriculture and Forestry.

Confidentiality and Ethics

Each participant was provided with a pseudonym that will allow only the researcher to determine identity. At the conclusion of the study, the key linking participants with the pseudonym was destroyed. All interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy of information presented. These recordings were stored on digital devices that were password protected. The recordings were erased at the conclusion of the study and will no longer be available for use.

To maintain the integrity of the study I incorporated the following techniques to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity: triangulation (interviews, observations, and material culture), peer debriefing with key informants, member checks following interviews for accuracy, and reflexive journaling to record themes, decisions, questions, and actions. Member checks involve “sharing interview transcripts, analytic thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately” (Glesne, 2006, p. 38). Due to time constraints, member checks were conducted via email after my departure from Liberia (see Appendix F). In order to overcome challenges to technology access and computer literacy, each participant was provided with a free computer course tutorial and email account provided by a local internet café within walking distance of campus. Unfortunately, prior to the completion of member checks the internet café was closed down and other arrangements with on campus resources were explored. Eight participants responded to member check emails. Peer debriefing is the “external reflection and input on your work” (Glesne, 2006, p. 37), while reflexive journaling involves my personal reflection of biases. These procedures helped establish trustworthiness and accuracy of collected data. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and peer-reviewed for accuracy of Liberian colloquial translations.

Data Collection

For the purposes of this study, I utilized observations of campus events, such as admission processes, student registration, and advising sessions (see Appendix G). Interviews were conducted with staff members, faculty, and students (see Appendix D). Documents relating to academic, career and personal counseling services were collected and analyzed to explore the five features of social organization (see Appendix H). I conducted this ethnographic case study from early January to late April 2011.

Participant interviews did not begin until March 2011. The first two months of the investigation were spent immersing myself into the culture of the institution, fostering relationships with individuals within the community, and collecting survey data. These processes were necessary in order to gain trust within the community and to proceed with participant selection. A combination approach to interviewing was utilized, that is, a standardized open-ended interview and an interview guide (see Appendix I). “This combined strategy offers the interviewer flexibility in probing and in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth, or to pose questions about new areas of inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 347). It was important to conduct interviews through conversational techniques. Approaches to ethnographic interviews “must be modified to fit cultural situations as well as the peculiarities of individual informants” (Spradley, 1979, p. 78). One-hour interviews were conducted for each student, staff and faculty member. Each participant reviewed and signed a consent form prior to the interview (see Appendix J).

Direct observations provided insight into day-to-day activities of the institution. “Observations of a neighborhood or of an organizational unit add new dimensions for understanding either the context or the phenomenon being studied” (Yin, 2009, p. 110).

According to Patton (2002), “observation data are to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed” (p. 262). The conceptual framework guided activities and events observed throughout the study (see Appendix K). The primary strategy for observation was as a participant observer, and data collected through holistic field notes. “The participant observer employs multiple and overlapping data collection strategies: being fully engaged in experiencing the setting (participation) while at the same time observing and talking with other participants about whatever is happening” (Patton, 2002, p. 266). As a temporary staff advisor in the SA2C3, I was able to observe events such as academic advising appointments, the registration process, and other related advising and academic activities. Observations of day-to-day student service processes and administrative functions were conducted throughout the study. These observations helped me to gain a better understanding of the daily campus functions and institutional culture. From these observations, questions undoubtedly arose that were then addressed in interviews with appropriate participants.

Document analysis was particularly important yet challenging due to poor record maintenance and archives which were destroyed during the war. “Documents and other unobtrusive measures provide both historical and contextual dimensions to your observations and interviews. They enrich what you see and hear by supporting, expanding, and challenging your portrayals and perceptions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 68). A document summary form was used to help summarize and organize material culture (see Appendix L). Handbooks, curriculum guides, advising and registration forms, newspapers, as well as academic meeting notes and strategic plans are examples of documents collected. Data triangulation among these three methods

(interviews, observations and document analysis) strengthened the trustworthiness and authenticity of results.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing throughout this study and occurred after various phases of participant interviews. Documents, interview transcriptions, and observation notes were analyzed categorically and holistically. Multiple data collection methods were used to strengthen the results of this study. “Developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Therefore, content analysis began with a review of the interview transcripts and primary codes were applied. These initial codes were developed using the categories of the conceptual framework (*affiliation, resources, substitutability, control, and culture*). A second review of the data included a cross-interview analysis of interview transcripts with primary codes (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009), and content analysis of observation field notes and material culture to develop secondary codes that emerged from recurring patterns (see Appendix M). Ethnograph v6, a qualitative data analysis software program, was used to organize data, and develop frequency outputs of recurrent themes. This initiated the synthesis and interpretation of the data. It also allowed for analysis of themes grouped by colleges, gender, academic class, and participant type (student, staff, or faculty).

Summary

Using social organization analysis, ethnographic case study methods, and metaphorical interpretation yielded data that clarified the social interactions related to advising among students, faculty and staff in a Liberian higher education institution; presented an understanding of the aims of advising; provided an in-depth view of Liberian culture in general; explored the priorities and resources of an institution in a postwar climate and the policies implemented to

promote the mission and objectives of the institution; and contextualized the culture of Liberian college students, faculty, and staff. Understanding Liberian culture and the organization of the higher education system facilitated the analysis of the SA2C3 program and elements of advising services that are appropriate in a Liberian educational setting. Social organization provides rich information for practitioners “involved in prevention, intervention, and program development activities” (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005, p. 579). This study produced significant implications for expanding our knowledge of academic advising in other cultures.

Chapter Four

A Case Study Description

This chapter provides an in-depth description of the case, the University of Liberia (UL). The purpose of this study was to understand the organizational role of advising from student, faculty and staff perspectives, and to explore the college experiences and academic progression of students prior to and after the establishment of the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center particularly among freshmen and seniors. Using my conceptual framework to outline the features of UL as an organization and to understand the lived experiences of students' academic progression, this chapter describes the current organizational culture of the university. Advising is shaped by the culture, which determines the structure, resources, policies, demographics and goals of an institution. Describing the institution using Tierney's (1988) cultural framework deepens our understanding of the role of advising and counseling at the University of Liberia and contextualizes the college student experience of the participants. Postwar literature on the university is scarce; thus, many of the descriptions of the current state of the institution are reflections of my observations, interviews, and document analysis. The university is at a turning point as it rebuilds its system under the vision of new leadership and continues to overcome the challenges of providing higher education in a postwar, developing country. This chapter lays the foundation needed to understand the university culture and to contextualize the findings that are presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

Organizational Culture

Tierney (1988) described organizational culture as "the shared assumptions of individuals participating in the organization.... These assumptions can be identified through stories, special language, norms, institutional ideology and attitudes that emerge from individual and

organizational behavior” (p. 4). Culture permeates all facets of organizational actions, roles and functions. In order to understand the role of advising at UL, I must first explain the culture of higher education in Liberia. Through stories, researchers find ways to connect to the reader and share knowledge by contextualizing the shared experiences of the participants. From my interviews, observations and document analyses, I was able to extract a holistic overview and understanding of advising and university life in the Liberian context. Each section describes the culture using questions from Tierney’s (1988) framework on organizational culture in higher education. He argued that an organizational culture framework enables researchers and practitioners to better analyze the underlying barriers, opportunities and congruencies in the organization’s culture and subcultures that impact overall performance of the organization.

Figure 4.1. A Framework of Organizational Culture (Tierney, 1988)

Environment:	How does the organization define its environment? What is the attitude toward the environment? (Hostility? Friendship?)
Mission:	How is it defined? How is it articulated? Is it used as a basis for decisions? How much agreement is there?
Socialization:	How do new members become socialized? How is it articulated? What do we need to know to survive/excel in this organization?
Information:	What constitutes information? Who has it? How is it disseminated?
Strategy:	How are decisions arrived at? Which strategy is used? Who makes decisions? What is the penalty for bad decisions?
Leadership:	What does the organization expect from its leaders? Who are the leaders? Are there formal and informal leaders?

The Environment

The concept of the environment not only entails the physical location and structure of the campus, but also its academic and social climate. The culture of an organization carries influences from its location, infrastructure and campus climate. Additionally, alignment of the overall environment of an institution with the environment and climate of its subunits such as the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center (SA2C3) capture the degree to which the internal organizational culture exists harmoniously. Tierney's (1988) framework of organizational culture also takes into account attitudes towards the environment, which I define here as the institution's "climate." The overall campus environment described in this section is the confluence of perceptions of the physical, academic and social climates of the larger campus as well as the advising center facilities.

The physical environment. Campus culture is partially defined by its physical location and environmental conditions. These conditions and physical surroundings have the ability to positively or negatively stimulate students and other constituents of the campus community (Fleming et al., 2005). As a result, the college environment creates the context of students' academic and social experiences. The physical environment of UL is characterized by its multiple campus locations, prewar and postwar infrastructures, overextended facility capacity, and climatic conditions of sub-Saharan Africa, all of which impact the various undergraduate campus locations and the subculture unit of the organization's advising center.

The University of Liberia consists of four campus sites and several schools. I conducted this study primarily on the undergraduate colleges of the main campus, officially known as Capitol Hill campus, but more informally referred to as Main Campus and the branch campus,

Fendell campus; the study excludes the Medical College campus as well as the Sinje campus, which houses a polytechnic junior college under the auspices of UL's governance. Located in Monrovia, the nation's capital, the Main Campus is an urban commuter campus that is situated within the nation's important political buildings. It sits across from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Capitol building and near the Temple of Justice, City Hall and the Executive Mansion. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the location of the temporary office of the President of Liberia. The Capitol Building houses the bicameral legislative branch of the government. The Temple of Justice accommodates the judicial branch of the government. City Hall is the location of Monrovia City Corporation, the governing body of the capital city. The Executive Mansion is the formal residence and place of business of the Liberian presidency.

With such proximity to the governmental affairs, the campus is vibrant with student involvement in politics, debate and representation of various political parties. The Vice President of Academic Affairs elaborated on the political culture on campus, "Most of the national political parties have their youth who are students here at the university so they try to see who is in control of the students here at the university. All of that plays in our student political life on campus."

The Fendell campus is located 40 minutes outside of the capital in Fendell, Montserrat County. It is the location of the College of Science and Technology and the College of Agriculture and Forestry. This commuter campus is quiet and secluded in comparison to the Capitol Hill campus. In September 2011, the university will open its doors to a \$22 million (USD), newly-constructed campus provided by the Chinese government and located beside the old Fendell campus. This new modern construction will reintroduce on-campus housing options for students and faculty. The new facilities include reliable electricity and pristine tiled floors,

and will have the feel of an academic environment unscathed by war and the hustle and bustle of city life found on Main Campus. Oddly, many of the emergency signs throughout the building are written only in Chinese, a language not spoken in the country.

Prior to the war, UL enrolled approximately 7,000 students. Currently, roughly 23,000 students are enrolled; however, the current campus facilities (Capitol Hill and old Fendell) have not been expanded to accommodate this growing student body. Many classrooms are overcrowded and faculty members have an insufficient number of offices. The climate in Liberia is very hot and humid. The lack of air conditioning in many of the academic buildings makes the conditions uncomfortable and difficult for work. According to a freshman accounting major,

The [classrooms] are very small. Sometimes, the university, we ask that they should help open up the [classrooms] because it's like 75 students in one class. The heat can be too much. You [are] jammed up. Sometimes you come late. When you come one minute or two minutes after your time, you stand up to write. No chair sometimes, no sitting place for you to sit, so we ask the university to help either extend the classes or bring some chairs. Even if a fan can be in place of air condition, it will be fine to make us comfortable because some areas you go you aren't able to sit...the heat.

The Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center (SA2C3) is located on the Main Campus near the Student Affairs Office. This one-room office is partitioned into three areas: the director's office, the counselors' office with five desks, and the student workers' table. The space is unable to accommodate the entire staff, which consists of one director, one faculty liaison, nine advisement and counseling staff members, and three support staff members. As a result, the advisors work in the office in rotating shifts. Some stay in the office, while others patrol the campus to assist students. Within the office, the windows and doors remain open at all

times to catch the breeze but this feature simultaneously reverberates all of the sounds of campus. Further adding to the environmental issues, partitions used to create work space do not allow for any real privacy, which is a problem given the sensitive nature of some student appointments. Consequently, student advisement oftentimes occurs in hushed tones to provide a level of confidentiality for students to freely discuss their concerns. The advising process will be discussed in further detail under Socialization and in Chapter Seven.

The academic climate. The primary purpose of higher education is to engage students in learning activities that will provide them with the requisite tools and skills for a profession/occupation to meaningfully contribute to societal needs. In Liberia, these efforts have been greatly hindered by postwar effects. The devastating results of civil war shape the current academic climate in terms of the weakened state of the university's educational system. However, the timeframe in which I conducted this study captured significant levels of growth, change and restoration reflected in efforts to improve educational quality.

The academic climate of the university can be described as burgeoning. Several participants described Liberia overall as a "non-reading" society that emphasizes rote learning techniques in all sectors of the education system. The de-emphasis on reading is attributed to the lack of access to books and the breakdown of the educational system during and after the war. The quality of Liberian higher education is not reflective of that found in the pre-war period, but this deficit is now mainly due to the lack of available academic resources, brain drain of qualified professors, limited funding sources, inadequate infrastructure, minimal research activities, poor preparation at lower levels of the education system, and outdated curricula. The university however is making strides to improve its educational offerings; recent endeavors include revisions to the curriculum, the gradual return and recruitment of qualified faculty, the

reintroduction of research initiatives, and the development of academic and student services programs. All of these advancements though are based upon available resources, which will be further discussed in the Resource section of Chapter Five.

The social climate. The conceptual framework of this study emphasizes the patterns of social interactions that define organizations. Therefore, addressing the social climate of the institution constitutes a major component of organizational culture. Students' social interactions in a college environment mold a student's role and support network, and integrate a host of diverse perspectives that influences one's social identity (Fleming et al., 2005). The university is represented by its diversity among its student demographics, positive and supportive peer interactions, and vacillating relationships between students and the institutional actors. The campus is ethnically diverse. Students from all 16 Liberian tribes are represented on campus, each with its own student club as well as organizations to represent each county in the country. The student body ranges broadly in age as well as socioeconomic status. Over 80% of the students come from a low socioeconomic background. As Liberia's leading public institution of higher education, student life presents a collage of cultural experiences, given the diversified backgrounds of students from rural and urban parts of the country.

Student camaraderie is evident from campus observations. Students rely on one another for guidance, and support. Friendships form a critical component in the navigation of the university system. They rally around one another in order to strengthen their voice on campus in response to issues that impact their population. As products of the postwar educational system, students have a common bond and unique shared experience that unites them. The social climate among students is marked by collegiality, as well as a collective approach to student success as explained by a junior primary education major:

We have our ups and downs, but we love each other. Yeah, we always...we have this word "Ayah." That word all Liberians [know] it and use it. It's kind of a deep compassion that you feel for your fellow friend, so with that our social interaction is not bad at all.

The overall environment is in a constant state of restoration, not only the physical structure, but the relationships among students, faculty and staff. The institution is a microcosm of the larger society and displays the concern, destitution, corruption, rehabilitation, development and resilience found in all sectors of Liberian society, including higher education with students and faculty at both ends of the spectrum. UL is still in a fragile transition of change and growth. Tension exists from years of deteriorated relationships between students and the faculty, yet everyone recognizes the improvements that have occurred over the past three years since the installation of the university's current president. Prior to the arrival of the new president, the campus was known for frequent student demonstrations, faculty strikes, and unpredictable operating schedules due to these disturbances in campus activity. Today, the institution is stable, able to keep its doors open, begin semesters on time, and provide faculty to teach its courses. However, occasional disruptions and demonstrations, bribery in the classroom, and everyday struggles prompted by limited resources do occur.

Mission

According to Tierney (1988), the mission statement of a university can be used to describe the alignment between the institution's academic programs and the audience it serves. In this case, the mission statement of UL takes it a step further and explicitly aligns with national development initiatives. However, resource limitations prevent the institution from completely

fulfilling its objectives institutionally and nationally. The establishment of SA2C3 attempts to support and strengthen this alignment.

The mission of UL, which is to “prepare well qualified men and women for teaching, research, public and private service, and to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for sustainable human development,” closely aligns with national development goals. The university has assumed the responsibility to provide the country with an educated citizenry. However, the operationalization of the mission is not yet as effective as UL plans to be in the future. The lack of formal career advising, outdated curricula, and the need to examine relevance among academic programs, which have all resulted from limited resources, serve as the missing links between students’ understanding and their subsequent decision-making processes regarding their educational pursuits and alignment with the workforce needs of the nation.

The mission of the institution reflects the priorities of the country, which coincide with the Millennium Development Goals of Liberia that were created in 2004.³ These priorities included targets such as eliminating poverty and hunger; increasing primary education; gaining gender equality; reducing child mortality; ameliorating maternal health; controlling disease; ensuring environment sustainability and initiating global partnership (UNDP, n.d.). The mission statement is published in the *Student Handbook*, which is provided to all new students. Although all academic departments agree and align their work with the mission, the resources are not available to accomplish these overarching goals. Steps are being taken to strive towards these ideals including those components of the vision statement and core values. The vision of UL is

³ The Millennium Development Goals were created in 2000, and the first baseline report developed by the Government of Liberia and UNDP was created in 2004.

to create and sustain an independent institution of higher education where academic excellence thrives in the search of truth and knowledge; where research and teaching are cherished and promoted; where a high premium is placed on academic freedom of creative thinking “out of the box” in a scholastic environment where outstanding students and researchers from Liberia, and around the world are continually challenged and inspired to do their best possible work (University of Liberia, n.d.).

And UL’s Core Values include: excellence, autonomy, truth and knowledge, discipline, creditability, transparency and accountability (UL Student Handbook, 2011).⁴

In addition to the academic departments, the advising center aligns its work with the university mission and vision. More specifically the mission of SA2C3 is “to facilitate student learning and development along with nurturing their ambitions for career success, high-quality advising, and mentoring” (see Appendix A). One of the SA2C3 staff members offered that

The university expects lot of things from the students when they enter. They want to see them be a productive citizen of this nation. They want to mold their minds so that when they get [out] they can be able to represent the university.... Our office is a very friendly office to students. In fact, to anyone for that matter. Whether you are from where, you from Liberia, you from Australia, you from Japan. As long you meet us, we embrace you, and then whatever information we need to give you. We give it unto you with gladness.

The faculty and staff perceive the university as a means to meet national needs and the staff of the advising services as an opportunity to help students thrive in their environment and to provide them with a sense of direction and purpose in pursuing their chosen careers. The development of this center was a response to the growing need for student support services

⁴ Information regarding the creation and adoption of the most recent student handbook was unavailable during data collection of this study.

focused on student development as well as a means to advance the mission of the institution. Advising would provide students with the necessary information needed to make appropriate academic choices that would better meet national development requirements.

Socialization

Socialization is defined by Tierney (1988) as institutional fit and the degree to which the institution assists with members' transition into higher education and their acclimation to campus culture. Socialization in this case study emphasizes student transition and acclimation. In the United States, the orientation process and the role of advising are generally accepted characteristics of the socialization phase of the undergraduate experience. This section outlines the orientation program as well as the current advising system at UL. These programs introduce students to the services and personnel needed to successfully navigate their college experience. However, the lack of a formal advising system limits students' exposure to educational opportunities and their ability to seamlessly integrate into campus culture. The alignment among students' perceived needs and the support services provided through these programs is explored. In addition, the new SA2C3 represents a subculture in the institution as its presence on campus creates a new dynamic in student/institutional interactions. For that reason, its role and function in tandem with the current advising system is discussed in depth in Chapter Seven.

Orientation. According to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2011b), orientation programs are often held in conjunction with advising services as an opportunity to “facilitate the transition of new students into the institution; prepare students for the institutions educational opportunities and student responsibilities; initiate the integration of new students into the intellectual, cultural and social climate of the institution; and support parents, partners, guardians and children of the new student” (p. 5). Student services at UL take

the same approach to orientation and student transition. Students have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with academic offerings, campus buildings, meet peers in their cohort, and finalize the selection of their major within their colleges. The lack of a formal system for advising during orientation does not permit students to have structured interactions with faculty and staff to enhance their understanding of curricular offerings, culture, academic requirements, and their selection of a program of study. All student participants are satisfied with the orientation program with the exception of one student who ranks her experience as poor. On the other hand, faculty and staff describe the process as chaotic because it did not meet its intended purpose to the fullest extent yet.

Upon admission to UL, students are required to attend an orientation program. During this time, they are introduced to the various faculty members of their college, who discuss a variety of topics. Though the presentations vary, most cover general rules, college/department curricular offerings, possible career options, and academic expectations. At the conclusion of the program, students are divided into smaller groups for campus tours. Informally, orientation serves as the first opportunity for group advising among new students. However, due to the high volume of students admitted to the university, many cannot fit into the auditorium to participate fully in the orientation welcome session. The lack of individual academic advising and guidance at this critical point in the transition into the university pushes many students to rely on their peers for advice and support. In addition, the absence of a college catalog makes it difficult for students to familiarize themselves with the various academic offerings.

Students rally around each other in order to navigate their way through the system. Peer advisors try to help, but the sheer magnitude of the lack of understanding is overwhelming. One peer advisor detailed the chasm:

Yeah [orientation] was hectic because it's like students entering the University of Liberia never know their way out. They don't even know where to start from. You tell the people...you try to explain about credit hours to them. They don't know what you call credit hours. They just feel it's something so difficult for them. We start to explain to them what we mean by credit hours; [what] the university life looks like; what we mean by courses, like [for what] you are going to register. If you are going to register [and] you don't pass [your course], it will go against you. They don't know what you call course, you know, and we will try to explain that to them. You know, so it was something like new to them that they felt was just difficult for them to understand. Yeah, so we had all types of headache with them. You ask them, "What will be your major?" [They respond:] "What?" "Are you coming to the University of Liberia? You have made a pass in the placement exam. What will be your major?" [They respond] "I don't know."

Peer counselors are not the only ones who are concerned. The Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry finds the existing system lacking:

The students themselves are confused.... I mean more confused because they don't have a process during orientation. Everything has to be continuous. It can't just be one or two days where people come and talk to 5,000 students in the hall or wherever, so most of the students really don't have any idea how to go about even keeping their own records.

The advising system. Advising at UL is decentralized and informal. Currently, advising is primarily the responsibility of each College. Although not required, most students seek the advice of professors or upperclassmen to select their courses. Due to its informal structure, the amount and quality of advising varies from individual to individual. As previously mentioned, tensions still exist between faculty members and students due to remnant postwar behaviors such

as classroom corruption, and hierarchical cultural clashes. These behaviors conflict within the organizational effort to institute a system that is trying to integrate a student-centered philosophy. These strained relationships can sometimes impact the advising dynamic as students often avoid faculty interactions in preference for peer advice. Although advising is not required, students must obtain course approval from instructors and designated department staff during the registration process. Therefore, the current advising system consists of an unstructured faculty advising system, peer advising system and informal advising networks among students' friends and family. The SA2C3 is still in the infancy stage in regards to implementing a new advising structure. Details of their current role are further discussed in Chapter Seven.

Faculty advice. Faculty advising is prescriptive⁵ and unstructured. Each college has a different approach to advising and to faculty training. All departments rely on the experience of the faculty, while only Teachers College has decided not to allow new faculty to advise until they learn more about the curriculum and working with students one-on-one. All of the interviewed faculty members were once undergraduate students at UL; they all pull from their experiences and institutional knowledge to help guide students through the curriculum. In addition, each department has a curriculum guide that outlines academic requirements and course sequences used to advise students. As a result, all faculty participants referred to advising as a course selection process. When advising, they all review course requirements with students, while only some focus their discussions around career advising and personal student transitions to help students acclimate to academics, such as study strategies, time management, and avoidance of unethical behavior. Most of the student and faculty participants mentioned that they discussed the importance of taking studies seriously and not following friends' advice.

⁵ Prescriptive advising focuses on providing students with institutional guidelines, passive methods of teaching and learning, course selection with little student participation, and curricular decisions are prescribed for the student.

Peer advice. The Office of Student Affairs oversees the official peer advising program. In a traditional sense, a peer advisor is a student who assists their fellow classmates with academic advising matters. In this case, peer advisors assist students with admissions, registration, ID cards, and other areas in which the institution needs their assistance. They are trained by Student Affairs personnel and members of various student service departments. They are not affiliated with the SA2C3, however, the advising center offers peer counseling services and has three peer counselors in the office. Peer counselors in the SA2C3, on the other hand, are upperclassmen juniors and seniors responsible for academic advisement of freshmen. They are trained by SA2C3 staff members to carry out specific duties that include course planning, registration, referral services, orientation programs, and peer mentoring.

As SA2C3 continues to establish its identity on campus, there is current overlap in the responsibilities of the peer advisors and peer counselors. In the absence of an advising center, the peer advisors often provided academic advice to students especially during orientation, which is beyond their scope of responsibilities. Students are required to select a major without the guidance of an academic advisor. It is often the peer advisors who are available to answer questions during the admission and orientation process, thus, they tend to assist students with selecting their program of study. The availability of peer advisors and peer counselors are limited (20 peer advisors and 3 peer counselors), thus students also resort to informal sources for advice.

Friends and family advice. The overwhelmingly large ratio of students to staff makes it difficult to advise all students individually and thoroughly; further the lack of facilities and technology makes group advising difficult to coordinate. Therefore, even more informal systems fill the gap. Most students rely on friends and family members to advise them. Friends informally serve as peer advisors and counselors, while family members represent quasi-

advisors. Without appropriate training in place these ancillary advisors can often disseminate inaccurate information and misadvise students.

Information and Communication

Information and communication are aspects of organizational culture that involve how organizational knowledge is created and disseminated (Tierney, 1988). AT UL, information is created hierarchically beginning with senior administration, and then filtered through faculty, staff and students. The institution is taking progressive steps towards restoring the quality of education offered to its students, therefore information creation consists of policies that are undergoing review, revisions of departmental curricula, new streamlined processes that are being explored, and the implementation of new procedures and services in the best interest of the students and faculty. In an environment with inadequate and unreliable technology, constant changes in efforts to improve the system present unique challenges to information dissemination which include: the coordination of activities on multiple campuses, adequate dispersal of information to large student enrollments, and communication of these changes to students and faculty. These challenges force administration to seek alternative methods of bridging the communication gap through media, open forums and informal networks.

Media. Electronic technology on campus is woefully inadequate and most students are not computer literate. Therefore email communication cannot be utilized to disseminate important information. Currently, the institution relies heavily on campus organs, such as radio announcements, newspapers, bulletin postings, and distributed memos. The President offers a weekly radio segment to keep the campus community abreast of changes in the system, and a regular campus newspaper is distributed regularly. In addition, outdoor bulletin boards and

notices are located throughout campus. However, rain and wind occasionally destroy printed materials, hampering the fragile information distribution.

Open forums. Town hall meetings with students, started by the President, have also served as an avenue of communication. These meetings provide an opportunity for dialogue and a safe, yet appropriate, environment for students to express concern, voice opinions and make contributions to decisions that impact the institution. The President explained his intent in holding these meetings as well as their function:

The town hall meetings – what I like about them so much is of course you hear more complaints than anything else, but to me they are therapeutic. They are really therapeutic... [students] blasted, they blasted, they blasted, but in the end there wasn't a demonstration. There wasn't disruption. They talked about what they wanted to talk about.... That opportunity to vent is what they really, really needed and to tell you the truth whether I did something great about it or not was not the interest anymore because nobody came back to find out what have I done or did I do anything, but they just wanted to vent and I don't blame them. I will continue to do that because once you don't do it they think that I'm not accessible and they bottle these things in and it just explodes beyond control.

Opening the lines of communication to students and providing direct access to senior administrators has improved the dissemination of accurate information and created an environment in which students feel as though their concerns are being heard.

Informal networks. Without the help of a centralized communication system, information dissemination also relies heavily on the assistance of informal networks among student leaders and advising staff members. Officers of the student groups are respected

positions among students and they can use their platform as a means to disseminate important matters. Senior administrators hold weekly meetings with student leaders and some of these student representatives now hold positions on institutional committees as explained by the Vice President of Student Affairs

Since the coming of Dr. Dennis we even increased the opportunity where there was a regular meeting with student leaders every other Friday or Monday. "This is on our plate for the week. We are thinking about this. What is on your plate? What are you thinking about?" To see how best we can also share with them and get their input [on] major decisions of the university. We extended that beyond the ULSU [University of Liberia Student Union] leadership to political parties, to county association leaders, to discipline association leaders, and then we went to the president having town hall meetings on Fendell campus [and] on Capitol Hill campus, and that helped greatly because it gave [the president] an opportunity to one-on-one directly talk to the students and get their input so that bridged the gap.

Advisors are also among those who assist with information dissemination. Their unique position as agents of the institution and advocates of the students allows them to build the bridge of communication between the institution (faculty/administration) and students. Oftentimes, the director of the SA2C3 attends student gatherings across campus to learn about student concerns and bring about awareness on issues to academic affairs and counseling services. He also holds "Conversational Hour" meetings in the Center, inviting guest speakers to discuss topics of concern with students and faculty. Guest speakers have included the Director of Planning and Research, visiting faculty for study skills workshops, the Director General of the National Commission on Higher Education, and the university's Registrar.

Strategy

Traditionally, Liberian culture honors respect for authority. Thus, the strategy or the decision-making processes within UL has been a top-down organizational characteristic. In other words, final decisions regarding academic and social affairs of the institution are made among senior administration and communicated to faculty, then staff and finally students. This model of hierarchical governance is also found in the classroom. The University is not viewed by most as a community of scholars who equally contribute to the development of knowledge, but rather a cadre of professors who command the classrooms. Following this Liberian tradition, students have had no involvement in decisions at the University. However, the new president's philosophy on institutional governance and student involvement is slowly changing the culture of strategy across campus.

According to the *University of Liberia Handbook of Rules and Regulations*, all annual reports from administrative officers and standing committee chairmen must be submitted to the President for final approval. These reports outline the activities and programs of their respective areas. Standing committees allow faculty and staff an opportunity to actively participate in administration and the execution of policies. Committees represent the following functions: testing and evaluation, enrollment management, African studies, alumni affairs, athletics and sports, plant operation, facilities, academics, library, honors and rewards, programs and publicity, research and publication, social activities, and student affairs. All official faculty and staff meetings are presided over by the president. These rules for administration delegate a substantial amount of authority and final decision-making to the university president. Student involvement in institutional governance is not found in the handbook, but their input and participation is valued by the new president.

Students are now involved on campus committees as the institution creates initiatives to improve the quality of the university experience. The changes were implemented by the new administration, and more specifically the new university president. His experience in American higher education institutions developed his appreciation and value of student involvement. In the Liberian context, the president has found that such student participation has been therapeutic for students to voice concerns and feel as though they have been heard. Prior to the president's appointment, frequent student strikes and demonstrations were commonplace on campus as a consequence of not including student input and the lack of student representation on campus committees. Under the new administration, open lines of communication and student access to senior administration have diminished the occurrences of strikes and other disruptive activities. For example, the Vice President of Student Affairs shared his experience during a student strike when the institution raised tuition rates.

There was strike action. Some of the students resisted, but because we had a lot of discussion with students this year in advance before it took place a lot of the other students disagreed with their colleagues. We even did a cost comparison with other schools so we had that information available and that changed the dynamics because the students were involved.

The new president's vision for progress at the University is introducing a new strategy for community members' involvement in planning and operations. Thus, student involvement is rising. However, this change in student participation is not accepted by all faculty and staff as expressed by the Dean of the College of Science and Technology:

Well, one thing I've observed about students here, which I don't believe in even though Dr. Dennis claims to be student-centered. Student-centered means the students can

approach him directly. I don't believe that. I believe in bureaucracy. I believe in channel. So, if a student just walks out of that door "Dean, Dean, Dean, I would like to talk to you." Ok, yes, from which department? "I'm from Chemistry" Ok, please, go to your chairman, take your problem to your chairman, and then if you cannot solve it, then you come to me. Ok, those are some of my rules again. Don't just come to me because if 2,000 students rush to come to me.... In fact, suppose you come to tell me something and at the end of the day I make a decision and didn't get your chairman involved. You know I will be undermining the chairman. The chairman will not have respect for me, so start with your chairman.

Overall, the integration of a student-centered philosophy and changes to decision-making processes has to be made gradually to avoid conflict due to the instability and tension that exists between the institution and students.

Leadership

In the face of postwar challenges, the university and constituents expect improvements in academic opportunities, resources and fulfillment of the mission of the institution. In regards to these expectations, all participants praised the positive changes in university leadership. Leadership was described by participants in terms of the role of the university president. In March 2009, the University of Liberia inaugurated its 13th president Dr. Emmet Dennis. He attended Cuttington University College in Liberia, and earned his master's and doctoral degrees in the US. He joined the administration of UL after 12 years at Rutgers University as Dean of University College and concurrently, his last five years as Vice President of Student Affairs. Due to his experiences in American higher education, he has brought a student-centered approach to UL. His approach to governance and student philosophy is a new model for the

university, which is slowly adopting this new ideology. Each of his initiatives aims to achieve his long-term vision through curriculum development, fundraising, and changing the culture of the student experience.

According to the president:

The university on a long-term basis must be able to provide the bulk of the human capital necessary for the socio-economic prosperity of the country as a premiere state university. That's the obligation. Long term vision in order to do that, the curriculum of the university must be relevant to the developmental needs of the country and those developmental needs are not in silos as our disciplines are in silos. Long term we want to move the curriculum into an interdisciplinary.

All faculty and staff participants complimented the president's efforts and appreciate the impact his initial improvements have made on their work. According to the Dean of the College of Business and Public Administration:

The coming of Dr. Dennis as president has brought some good ... some improvement. Increasing the university's budget has brought improvement. Retooling of faculty to travel abroad is another activity. Making sure faculty are in class on a regular basis. The physical expansion of the university to Fendell is another and a few scholarships and graduate degrees abroad is another.

The Dean of Liberia College concurs:

The current administration [is] trying to be student-centered on this campus, [and] that has brought about positive change and interaction, opens up the students minds and it makes both administrators and lecturers to know what [students] think and what they expect and this makes our job much easier.

Students also finally feel as though they have a voice, open lines of communication and access to leadership. Dr. Dennis attributes the decline in student demonstrations to this new approach leadership style.

Sometimes people think that my student-centeredness means that I'm permissive to students, but what is missing is that that system of operation is equally torturous for the staff and the faculty, who are implementing the process because students get frustrated, the faculty, the staff get frustrated. You have a whole bunch of frustrated people dealing with each other. The alleviation of this kind of thing leads to a more pleasant environment on both sides. Then there are the hierarchical attitudes that exist in this academic environment. The hierarchical attitudes make students the lowest part of the totem pole, then followed by staff the next lowest, and then faculty, and then of course administrators rather than an academic community working together for accomplishing the mission of the university.... Bringing students into the decision-making process is like we say in Liberia, "cursing somebody's ma," so to speak. Students should have a place down there and the two shall never meet. And so the consultative approach to administration is something that we introduced and seems to be working well.

Students appreciate the president's transparency and accessibility. The small changes in leadership are strengthening trust between students and administration. According to a freshman, Accounting major:

Maybe sometimes when you [have] problem you go to the staff. Dr. Dennis his number is not hidden. Sometimes you will use his number to call him, "Oh Dr. Dennis, so and so instructor giving me problems, so and so thing happening." When you know you are on the right point and you call him, he can go there.

A freshman, Secondary Education major agrees,

The faculty [is] improving because you know I just come in. The reason that I'm saying that it's improving the present president of the university really he's working on things. He's trying to change. I can even remember when he told us – it was over air – that he was going to dismiss two of the professors for accepting bribes from students. That encouraged me because that had not been really stressed on in the university here. As we came [upperclassmen] told us, most of the old, old students can tell us we are lucky to this day because the way [they] suffer[ed] here, we will not suffer like that.

The positive student experience has aided the president in his attempts to make changes in policies such as increasing tuition, implementing probation, and publicly reprimanding those involved in corruptive behavior. All of his initiatives have been made to improve the quality of education and to make it known that fraudulent behavior will not be tolerated. His vision to improve the student experience and contribute to national needs led to the creation of the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center (SA2C3).

Summary

In summary, the University of Liberia can be described as an institution on the verge of being a thriving organization in spite of the challenges of operating under postwar conditions. Dissecting each aspect of its organizational culture sheds light on areas of the institution that impact its effectiveness and performance as an organization. The environment is undergoing expansion and gradual improvement physically, academically, and socially with the introduction of new campus facilities and student services. The mission of the institution aligns with national needs, but the current curriculum prevents UL from making a significant impact toward meeting relevant workforce demands.

The new emphasis on student-centeredness has given the institution new direction in the ways in which students are socialized; information and decisions are created, communicated and implemented; and the new approach to leadership involves the entire campus community in order to improve the quality of education and college experience for students, faculty and staff. However, this framework alone does not address the interactive effects of subcultures nor does it capture other aspects of organizational behavior that impact performance of the university. These other features will be presented through an analysis of the institution as a social organization.

Chapter Five

A Day in the Life

Dekonti is a junior at the University of Liberia. She is a 33 year-old, single mother of one son. She is determined to make a better life for her and her immediate and extended family with whom she lives. She wakes up around six in the morning to prepare her son and her younger siblings for the day. It is another hot and humid day in tropical Liberia. Typical sounds fill the air as the city awakens – roosters calling, dogs barking, noisy generators buzzing, ocean waves crashing in the distance, cars honking, and street vendors shouting to attract their next buyer. Everyday Dekonti walks down the dusty dirt road that leads to the main boulevard to begin her trek to school. She goes about her daily routine of flagging down a taxi or “pen-pen” (motorbike). The traffic is congested as usual and what should be a 10-minute drive to campus takes about 40 minutes, but she is used to the commute. After some time, Dekonti is finally able to fight for a seat in the taxi. Tightly packed as four people squeeze in and shift their bodies to make room for one another, she regrets that she cannot afford to pay extra to sit in the front alone.

Like most days, the weather is hot and sweat is already drenching her blouse. The ride is long and bumpy as the car dodges and weaves in and out of traffic, avoiding potholes and boys selling newspaper and gum in the street. As the taxi pulls into campus, she watches the various street vendors line the entry way selling pens, books, biscuits, fruits, and all the necessities that might attract the students who pass on their way to class. The campus buildings are etched with the signs of war. Tattered buildings, crumbled sidewalks, a library stripped of its resources, and ill-equipped laboratories. In contrast, the newly built Fendell campus showcases pristine tile floors, freshly painted buildings, and the revival of on-campus residential housing. However, the

new portion of campus does not open until next year. Dekonti often dreams of taking classes in the new building and entering Fendell with rejuvenated hope for growth and development. Her daydream fades as she walks past one of the main campus buildings and an open air classroom. Once again she is reminded about how difficult it is to concentrate in these classrooms that are subject to the lively sounds of everyday Liberian campus life and lack electricity. She is hoping to get to class early in order to get a seat or at least a standing spot inside the hot, noisy and overcrowded classroom. She passes groups of students along the way arguing at the ID office, friends laughing, and men debating politics in a special place on campus called the Palava Hut. The day has just begun on Main Campus and she is already worried about getting to the old portion of Fendell campus for her science labs in the afternoon. The commute will take another 30 minutes and she is often late to her professor's dismay.

Dekonti works hard to do well in school and to keep up with her studies with minimal resources or support. Times are improving for Liberia. There is still some chaos and corruption on campus and in the larger society, but she sees a brighter future for the university as it gradually overcomes postwar challenges. She often prays and hopes for better resources and opportunities, such as technology, textbooks, and study abroad programs, but for now she tries her best to access available resources to complete her degree. Dekonti is unsure of what is to come after graduation, but she is thankful for another day in a peaceful Liberia.

Social Organization Structures

This study explores the experiences of undergraduate students at the University of Liberia in regards to academic advising. The story of Dekonti represents a collage of experiences shared by student participants in this study. The name of this fictional student, Dekonti, means "there is a time for everything." It is a reflective motto representing the positive and yet taxing

experiences students face in their pursuits of higher education. Many of their stories emphasize the challenges of higher education in a developing country, but also highlight the horizons of change, improvement and possibility as students pursue their degrees in hopes of a brighter future. The findings suggest that advising at UL encompasses various purposes and roles from student, faculty and staff perspectives. Overall, advising is positively viewed as a necessity to student success. Specific patterns and characteristics have emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts, documents and observations regarding the role of advising in relation to access and declaring a major at UL (affiliation), the availability and use of resources (collective resources), compliance to university policies (recorded control), progress towards degree completion (substitutability), and institutional culture (organizational culture). Many of these characteristics overlap, adding complexity and interdependency of variables that impact the college student experience and which further demonstrates the multifaceted role advising plays in an organization. Although each characteristic is presented independently, I show relationships across patterns where appropriate. This chapter describes the components that makeup the structure of social organizations – Affiliation and Collective Resources. Chapter Six and Seven describe components of social organization processes – Recorded Control and Substitutability. Several cultural aspects do not fit the conceptual framework, which is based upon Western ideology. Therefore, I rely on the use of metaphors to describe and elaborate on the role of advising from a non-Western perspective in Chapter Seven.

Affiliation

Affiliation refers to membership, access, or entry into an organization. Affiliation with an organization creates a sense of purpose, belonging and identity for individuals. Entry into a university can be a very exciting and yet overwhelming experience for new students. Oftentimes,

advisors serve as the first point of contact. Academic advising is an intentional interaction among university/organizational agents (advisors) and students to help them to navigate their way through their educational journey and to understand educational options. Considering the structure of these interactions is essential to determining the role of advising within an organization. My primary focus of Ahrne's (1994) first feature revolves around student affiliation; however, all nine faculty members and eight out of the 10 staff members were once students at UL. Their long-standing affiliation with the institution resulted in reflections of their undergraduate experience and serves as a comparison to the experience of current undergraduates.

In this study, student affiliation is determined in part by the gatekeeping mechanisms of the university as well as student choice. There was consensus among all participants, that two characteristics of affiliation exist at various stages the educational process: 1) access, the challenges within the admissions process and entrance exam and 2) sorting, the components and considerations of affiliation by major. Factors contributing to student choice were collected via survey and further explored during interviews. Perceptions of these factors differed among faculty and staff versus students. This section outlines each component of affiliation and describes the entry and process for undergraduates at UL.

Access: The Compromised Gatekeeping Mechanism

The current admission process at UL consists of the submission of high school transcripts showing completion of high school, a biographical data form that collects contact information, the ranking of the student's desired programs of study, entrance exam results, the West African Examination Council (WAEC) certificate,⁶ and health certificates. In addition, students must pass English and Mathematics placement tests as part of the university entrance exam. Currently,

⁶ The WAEC certificate verifies eligibility for tertiary education as described in Chapter Two.

the entrance exam serves as the initial gatekeeping function in the UL admissions process. This exam helps to control the number of students who can enter the institution, yet overcrowding still occurs. The Vice President of Academic Affairs explained the function of the exam:

Yeah, since the war there are so many students. In fact, what we do is we try to...that's why we established the national, the university entrance examination so that the influx of students that are coming we will be able to choose the better ones. Not the best, but at least the better ones.

Affiliation with the university is a very straightforward and uncomplicated process. However, loosely regulated access to the university ultimately impacts the overall quality of a student's educational experience as the institution overextends resources. In an effort to meet the tertiary needs of a nation and improve educational opportunities the university faces four challenges in regards to access.

Over-enrollment. The first challenge to the university is the over-enrollment of students. Student enrollment has grown exponentially during the postwar period. From 1989 to 2011 student enrollment increased from 7,000 to 23,837 students. Out of the 43,541 students in tertiary education in Liberia, more than half of the students attend UL (Dennis, 2012). Controlling the influx of students is of great concern in an environment of limited resources. Recruitment is not a priority for the institution because UL is only one of two public higher education institutions in the country. Its government funding makes it the most affordable. As a public organization, the university has an obligation to be accessible to Liberians in pursuit of higher education, yet the university must create restrictions based upon limitations of the institution's resources. The institution itself has exceeded capacity and most of the buildings and facilities are unable to accommodate the growth of the student body. Variables that contribute to this expansion include

the lack of employment opportunities, increased desire among students for socioeconomic mobility, the return of ex-combatants to the educational system, lowest tuition rates in the country, and increased physical access to the university due to the influx of relocated individuals to Monrovia after the war. According to faculty and staff, the campus is overcrowded with an overwhelming number of students, yet the university does not have adequate policies or practices to limit the number of students admitted.

Admission criteria. A second challenge to regulating access is the compromised admission criteria. The admissions standards are not as stringent as they once were due to the necessity to adjust to the skill level of students who have completed their education in a deteriorated postwar educational system. According to a professor in Teachers College, the caliber of the students has changed, and the level of student competitiveness has decreased due to postwar challenges. Pre-war high schools, sometimes called colleges in Liberia, prepared students in ways that appear not to occur today.

When we were here [in 1987] there were schools like we competed among ourselves in high school, so we brought that same competitiveness in college. We had students from Ricks. We competed with students...I graduated from CWA (College of West Africa). CWA competed with BW Harris, St. Patrick's Convent, Ricks, MC Tubman High. Those were the schools that were like top academic schools, so guess what? When we came here we had the valedictorian from Ricks, the valedictorian from CWA, the valedictorian...I mean it was competitive and you know that's what drove us here. It's almost like you had to maintain your GPA from high school. That's the kind of spirit we came here with. It was not just [our] college. It was all of the colleges, but now no. We're doing a lot of other things you know, so it's different. It has really changed.

The president of UL believes that the institution must improve the standards and competitiveness, which will in turn improve enrollment management; however such adjustments must occur gradually in a fragile and developing system, taking into consideration the current educational inadequacies at the primary and secondary school levels. Otherwise, drastic changes to admission standards lend themselves to potential student demonstrations and unfair limitations given the current state of educational system. Efforts to strengthen admission standards must be approached collaboratively with advising and other student support services that can help improve retention rates. The President stated that:

Access does not mean compromising quality, so entrance into UL needs to be increasingly competitive yet we will for a long time not be as strict as we should be. In other words, the competitiveness will increase with time because our high schools are relatively weak so our entrance starts off with a wide standard of deviation to come in. In other words we are bringing in people we shouldn't be bringing in. That deviation will be narrower and narrower.

Lack of resources. The third challenge is the lack of resources to help support the admissions process and expanding student body. The Admissions Office did receive a few computers to help manage the process, but several tasks remain. Under the new administration the remediation program for students who did not pass the entrance exam was discontinued due to the unavailability of resources to provide quality remedial services. In addition, the staffing demands and technology needs are unavailable to handle the large influx of students who apply to the institution. The lack of technology support leads to human error when processing thousands of student records manually. These manual processes overwhelm the staff and the increased likelihood for human error inconveniences students who fall victim to such oversights.

To account for the workload demands, the essay requirement was cut from the admissions application according to the Registrar and Acting Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management. This streamlined admissions process makes it difficult to accurately assess the caliber of students admitted to the institution, their writing abilities and academic support needs, as well as their academic and career interests in pursuing higher education as was once asked in their essay question. According to the Registrar:

[The admissions application] used to ask [students] to write some short autobiography about themselves. It was intended to know the background of the person, their ability to write, you know all those kinds of thing, but [the President] said we should cut it off because we don't have the time to read it.

These changes weaken admission criteria in order to accommodate resource availability only relating to affiliation. Further resource limitations and needs that impact other areas of the university will be addressed in the Resource section of this chapter.

Corruption. In addition to the lack of resources, the fourth challenge involves the persistence of fraudulent documents and corrupt behavior embedded in the admissions process. Part of the Registrar and his staff's responsibilities include the verification of authentic admission documents. A single computer stores the WAEC results used to identify forged certificates. Therefore, the verification process is daunting and the overall process to regulate affiliation is compromised. A peer advisor, discussing his role in the admission procedures of the institution, described the process as "hectic" for him and his 20 colleagues.

I was responsible for the screening process of documents entering the University of Liberia – screening of documents of candidates who passed the University of Liberia entrance. Yeah, I was responsible to screen their documents that were coming to the

university because at the time they didn't find out that students entering the university never had proper documents. Most of them were coming with fake documents especially WAEC certificate or diploma with the excuse that most of them saying that documents got missing during the war.

The challenges within the admissions process are further compounded by the lack of advising services. In a system with an overwhelmingly large student body and limited resources to accommodate their entry process, students are left to seek guidance on their own and quickly develop a sense of self-determination as they navigate their new environment.

Sorting: External & Internal Influences to Declaring the Major

Students rank their desired college within the University on their admission application. Enrollment in their desired program of study is determined upon successful completion of the entrance exam. These colleges represent subgroups of organizations within the larger institution, adding a layer of culture and identity to the students and faculty associated with each discipline and field.

This sorting process is an aspect of affiliation that is significant in the new student transitional experience. Students do not receive formal advising prior to choosing a major; this lack of advising services upon enrollment critically impacts student affiliation as they are forced to commit to a program of study at the point of application for admission. Limited guidance among a largely first generation population leaves many students to be self-directed in their academic pursuits or to rely on the occasionally inaccurate advice of peers or family members who are unfamiliar with the idiosyncrasies of higher education. In the absence of structured advising in the current system, students rely on several factors to select a major: those categorized as external influences (input from peers, family advice and the availability of

institutional resources), as well as internal influences (personal interest, career aspirations, and academic strengths). Until the role of the SA2C3 is well-defined, students will continue to rely on these influences during the affiliation stage.

Many of the students rely on informal advice from peers, family and non-advising staff members during orientation. The Registrar described the challenges in the current system to declare a major.

Well, we don't really play much role in the advising because of the workload we have. I hope one day we have a situation where we have a section that will first, you know, advise the students before they even enter and start dealing with Student Affairs, but because of the stress...the work volume, we don't really advise them. We just give them [their choice of college] based on what they say they want to do.

The lack of formal advising upon entry and the influence of peers and family members prevents students from making judicious choices in the selection of their majors. As a result, students experience academic difficulty when placed in incompatible programs or find it challenging to change majors while maintaining their desired academic progress due to the rigidity of the structured curriculum. According to one of the faculty deans, a proposal offered during a faculty retreat suggested that the institution move toward a more flexible general education curriculum during the first year before requiring students to declare a major. This change would permit students to explore the curriculum, receive academic advising, and make an informed decision about their educational and professional outcomes.

This lack of intentional advising partially accounts for the imbalance in enrollment among the various colleges along with limited resources. Over half of the undergraduate population is enrolled in the College of Business and Public Administration, with the majority of

the students majoring in accounting. According to the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry:

Most of the students you will find, most of them are for Business College. Everybody wants to do business, business, business 'cause they feel that's where they can get their way out quicker and that's where they'll be able to make some quick money. So everyone goes for Business College.

He concludes that students' preferences for business majors are due to peer pressure experienced in an environment largely composed of undergraduate business majors, as well as the increased assurance the Business College offers by providing sufficient resources to complete the degree in a timely fashion. On the other hand, new incentives are beginning to influence enrollment numbers in other colleges. Student enrollment in the College of Agriculture increased from 50 before the war to now 1,700-2,000 students. The dean attributes this spike to the financial incentives and scholarships established to support high-need industry sectors, such as agriculture and education in a developing country. This growth can also be partially attributed to growth in the overall postwar student population.

Unbalanced enrollments in the various disciplines were an initial concern identified by the university president and spearheaded the establishment of an advising center. He commented:

There was a disparity in the distribution of students in disciplines. That is quite obvious here. They have an overpopulated business school and an under-populated science and social studies. When I say social studies, I mean the social studies in the humanities area and things like history, English and math majors – those kinds of things. Some of the reasons for that I know is that because of the absence of qualified teachers in certain

disciplines and the.... It was taking students a longer time to go through those disciplines, so they went through disciplines that would take the shortest amount of time. It had a snowball effect in that as people went into business because you can find a lot of business people in the community who can, uh, who think they can teach courses.

Although faculty and staff anecdotally attribute student affiliation to the availability of resources and influences of peer pressure, most of the student participants attributed their affiliation to potential educational opportunities and personal interests with some tangential input and advice from friends and family. For example, all four participants in Teachers College chose their majors based upon their previous experiences as teachers and their desire to pursue tertiary education in their professional field. However, professional guidance from an academic advisor can strengthen students' decision-making skills and expand their understanding of how educational offerings can enhance and complement internal influence factors.

The SA2C3 counselors do not formally advise students upon entry to the university. Most of their daily appointments are referrals or walk-ins. Everyone, from students to faculty and staff, pointed to the lack of advising for new students as an inherent problem that hinders their transition experience. New students receive informal advising during orientation from peer advisors, who are not affiliated with the SA2C3, but rather with Student Affairs. Peer advisors assist with orientation programming. Their formal training for these positions did not involve academic counseling.

The SA2C3 counselors play a crucial role in helping students to understand how their choice of major applies to their strengths, interests and alignment with institutional resources and national workforce needs. These in-depth conversations do not exist in a structured format at UL. For these reasons, the SA2C3 director recognizes the importance of advising in the formative

stages of the college experience. As the advising program is in its infancy, the director is still strategizing ways to integrate counseling services earlier in the college student affiliation stage to help students make well-informed decisions regarding their program of study:

Well, the process that we're working on that we will be recommending later on to administration is we have to be proactive, and so we need to go to the high schools. Advisement need to start at that point so that we guide them along the way. By the time they come to take the entrance [exam] we're working with them. By the time they get finished with the entrance [exam], we are there with them to help them in the selection of the courses that they will take so that they don't get frustrated.

Beyond the parameters of SA2C3 services, a limited number of faculty members do engage students through advising in the early stages of affiliation. The College of General Studies is the only college that provides structured advising prior to admissions due to the special population of students whom they serve. This proactive approach to advising is referred to as the "interview." The College of General Studies was designed to meet the unique needs of working adults and students with families, both of whom could benefit from flexible evening and weekend course options. These populations of students represented a small cohort prior to the war; however current conditions have forced many adult Liberians to return to college after years of civil unrest. Additionally, a large number of traditional and non-traditionally aged students have familial obligations due to a variety of life and cultural circumstances. According to a faculty advisor:

Before we give you the admission letter we call you for what we call interview... because of the nature and caliber of people we are dealing with. So we call them for interview, then through the interview we ask [them] certain things. We ask them...excuse us

because maybe the question might be personal, but we ask you if you are married or maybe you were married and separated.... So there are things that we advise people on. Sometimes some of the women come, most are disadvantaged when it comes to the program because we have been here for 13 years working with the college. I have encountered women who have come to tell me say, "Look, Mr. [last name], my husband say I shouldn't come to the classes on Saturday and the late evening classes.... My husband is not satisfied because class is between 6-7 and when he gets home he gets angry", so what do we advise them in that area? And in that case, some of them we tell them, "Even if your husband or your wife will have problems will you come here? Even though you have the desire to come here?" We extend an open invitation to them.

The College of General Studies identifies the special need and early interventions that are necessary for student success of students in their population. During these interviews they assess individual circumstances and provide appropriate support services and academic information to prepare students prior to enrollment.

Collective Resources

Challenges identified in student affiliation allude to the need for more resources. However, incremental and critical investments have been made to help stabilize the university and improve the quality for faculty, staff and students alike. All participants agree that conditions have improved at the institution in the postwar period particularly under the leadership of the current university president, but essential resources are still needed. Collective resources are vital to the maintenance of any social organization. In an organization with limited resources each investment must consider priorities, as well as a timeline to complete initiatives. Gradual changes bring a sense of hope for the community, but fail to address institutional and national

concerns of urgency. As previously discussed, affiliation along with all other features of social organizations are directly impacted by the resources provided by the organization. The organization itself is also defined by the availability and distribution of its resources. In this study, collective resources are categorized as physical, human, and fiscal. Each category of collective resources discussed below demonstrates recent growth as well as demand for further investments and allocations.

Physical Resources

Physical resources refer to the tangible yet inanimate objects required to operate an organization effectively. Many of these resources are fundamental for day-to-day operations and essential in the execution of the core components of the mission of the institution – teaching, research and community service. A variety of physical resources are mentioned throughout the study creating an exhaustive wish list, but three areas remain consistent across all participants: facilities, academic materials, and technology. Specific needs under each area vary among faculty, staff and students, and in some cases, by college. Examination of these resources shed light on current institutional priorities and areas for improvement.

Facilities

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the university facilities in postwar Liberia are extremely deteriorated and remain a concern among participants with varying priorities among students, faculty and staff. All student participants lamented over the overcrowding problems on campus and lack of available seating. Faculty members struggle with the short supply of office space. Lastly, all members of the SA2C3 staff emphasized the need to expand and improve advising facilities. Facilities discussed include academic buildings, administrative offices, and the university transportation system. According to the University of Liberia Long Range

Development Plan 1976-1984 (1975), these areas were noted as priority facility needs at that time as well:

Several existing academic buildings are in very poor condition. Equipment and furnishings are minimal. Many faculty have no work place on campus at all. The library and administrative buildings are inadequate....The present environment may at least double in twelve years...A direct physical link should be established between the College of Agriculture and Forestry and the main campus.... A public transport center should be planned in a suitable place.... By 1987 all five undergraduate colleges will be located on the Fendell site....Classrooms, laboratories and faculty offices should be based on enrollment figures. (p. 111-112)

These physical structures along with other plans to improve housing, dining, and athletic facilities were either destroyed or plans delayed by the civil war. This long range plan identified that the university had 83,000 net square feet, but needed 160,000 square feet to accommodate its 1,600 student enrollment. Now with over 23,000 students and minimal expansion of the campus, facilities have reached a critical threshold.

Academic buildings. When describing the physical environment and challenges to affiliation a common characteristic is described, campus overcrowding. Student enrollment tripled over the last eight years and the exponential growth in the student body is pronounced by the limited numbers of classrooms and classroom space. In response to these inadequacies, the university continues to complete its goal to open doors at the new Fendell campus in the next academic year. The new Fendell campus will prove to be an essential resource that can address facility concerns for most of the university. According to the University of Liberia Goals and Objectives in the Medium and Long-Terms 2005-2011 (n.d.), renovations to the campus

infrastructure and completion of the new Fendell campus remain first priority on the list (University of Liberia Goals and Objectives, n.d.). While progress is made in this new construction, other facilities on campus remain a concern as discussed by all student participants.

Among student participants, each expressed their frustration with the insufficient amount of armchairs (i.e., seats with an attached desk) available in classrooms. The overcrowded campus also affects the seating capacity in the classroom. Even one of the counselors discussed this pertinent student concern.

Sometimes [the students] come they feel so downhearted. They come with the mentality of “I’m going to the university. At the university everything is just bread and butter.”

When they come, it’s not like that. They get frustrated. You got to tow a chair from [one] building here to maybe [another building] for a class. They get frustrated, but sometimes we meet them along the way. We tell them, “Well, this is the University of Liberia. This is the situation we find ourselves in. We got to cope with it and we want better education.

We are so many so because of that we have to help ourselves by taking our armchairs to the next class.

From the administration’s point of view, replacing chairs became too expensive because students left them outside in the rain all too often.

Administrative offices. Lack of space and adequate facilities is also an issue for faculty. Out of approximately 375 full-time faculty members, many professors do not have office space to conduct business. Most of the teaching faculty are employed on a part-time basis and already spend a limited amount of their time on campus. Out of the 375 full-time faculty members, 278 are full-time professors who teach at the undergraduate level. The lack of designated office space contributes to professors feeling less inclined to remain on campus, and

not feeling fully invested in their role on campus. Temporarily, teachers share offices to maximize on available space until the campus relocates to Fendell. Shared office space hampers faculty productivity for course planning, writing, research, and increases the likelihood for distractions. In terms of advising, this limits opportunities for privacy needed in academic advising.

As the campus expands its advising services through the center, the SA2C3 director's first priority was to create an environment conducive of advising. The university provided the space, but was unable to further support the development of SA2C3. The director took the initiative to host a fundraising event and invited friends and key members of the community to help support the center. He was able to raise funds for painting, furniture and other essential office supplies. The staff agrees that they need more office space, to provide confidentiality during student appointments, as well as storage for materials to help students with their studies and career planning. The office environment is also impacted by the lack of air conditioning. One of the SA2C3 counselors complained about the heat. It impacts their ability to work effectively, especially when the center is packed with students.

Transportation. The final physical resource mentioned by nine participants, one of the SA2C3 counselors, one faculty dean, one instructional professor, and all of the students with majors housed at Fendell campus, involved the need for adequate inter-campus transportation. This particular concern also creates issues within classroom dynamics in terms of student and faculty absences. The Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry explained:

If you don't provide mobility for students and the professors to get to work on time of course they are missing classes. Then the students of course will have a different view [of

the faculty]. [A] very negative view of the professors because they are missing classes.

The professor is not on time.

In an environment where faculty/student interactions are tense, insufficient inter-campus transportation escalates negative responses between students and faculty both of whom are consistently late to class.

Academic Materials

Academic materials are the tools through which teaching and learning occur. Faculty and students rely on published sources and research equipment to engage in academic inquiry, develop critical minds, discover truths, and fine-tune lifelong skills. The access, availability, and sharing of these resources undergird the mission of higher education. Consequently, there remains a shortage of academic physical resources available on campus including, but not limited to laboratory equipment, textbooks, and library materials.

All participants expressed frustrations with inadequate academic physical resources because student and faculty academic progress is hindered at no fault of their own. In particular, students and faculty in the science fields consistently lamented the lack of appropriate laboratory materials. A peer advisor shared his sentiments as he reflected upon his undergraduate experience as a Biology major at UL. When trying to conduct experiments in his lab sections, the chemicals had lost their potency with expiration dates long overdue. He explained that these experiences were so discouraging that he thought seriously about changing his major to business. Further, the equipment available is limited, and these limitations also apply to the prevalence of labs in other applied fields. A freshman Biology major projected:

You can't say you are teaching someone biology, training someone to be a doctor, and then the person [doesn't] know how to focus on the slide of a microscope. You can't have

75 students to nine microscopes. If you improve your laboratory and I think introduce computer[s], not just for the biology side, [but also] the civil engineering side. The other science courses need labs.

Both engineering and biology are situated in the College of Science and Technology. According to the Dean of the College, students are receiving 'NG' (no grades) on their academic records because they are unable to complete laboratory requirements. In the last three months of the first semester 2010-2011 (December to February), he has taken the responsibility to ensure that labs are supplied and completed on time to the best of his ability. One of the SA2C3 counselors discussed her experience advising students who were frustrated by the lack of available laboratory resources and sought academic counseling to switch majors.

Sometimes [students] come [to SA2C3] and say, "Well I came in as a science student, and then I went through it for a year. I want to change my major." Sometimes we ask, "Why?" They say, "Because there's no laboratory [materials]. We don't know what we are studying." It's just abstract and they get frustrated about it and then they switch.

The lack of academic materials also includes the lack of textbooks and educational materials in the library for course instruction, research and personal study. Students are expected to make copies of handouts or find the means to pay for course pamphlets and research information on their own without course textbooks and research materials to assist them in their learning process. Most of the available hard copies of materials are outdated, and the library is ill-equipped. According to President of Liberia, Madam Sirleaf's address on March 23, 2009 (Sirleaf, 2009):

More than 90 percent of the University's facilities, including computers, books, and typewriters were looted and pillaged. More than three-fourths of its library collections of

about two million volumes of texts, periodicals and rare books were ruined. Seventy percent of the Main campus's science complex and 50 percent of the medical dormitories were damaged (p.13).

Additional resource challenges further exacerbate circumstances. Limited internet access, lack of computer literacy, financial support, and irregular electricity further obstruct the overall learning process and the synthesis of new knowledge.

Technology

Technology advances have increased access to information, enhanced capabilities to share knowledge and bridged the communication gap across the globe, however technology is still underdeveloped in most of Africa, which impacts critical areas such as education. As in most of Liberia, all processes at UL are paper-driven. Some call these manual processes “archaic” because the technological resources are not available to allow students to complete applications, exams and registration processes online or to conduct research on the internet and check email. Processing transactions manually take time which frustrates both students and faculty. Furthermore not all students, staff and faculty are computer literate, so there is also a need for training. Overall, technology limitations include the lack of access to computers and insufficient infrastructure to support technology needs all of which challenges the efficiency of administrative and educational processes.

Administratively, the lack of computers and low computer literacy rates significantly impacts the Admissions and Registration Office. Manually processing approximately 16,000 applicants per semester creates a larger margin for human error and overwhelms staff. The office was able to acquire a few computers and training, which has allowed the staff to create a more systematic and faster process than previously. They hope to establish a computerized process in

which students can approach a processing window and have all documents submitted and processed electronically on the same day. In the current system, students wait in lines and are required to leave their documents for verification and return the next day in hopes that the manual process will be complete. The office relies on what the university can afford to provide. According to the Registrar, “Normally, we just get stationary or paper. I put in for [a] few computers. Sometimes when we ask for six they give us two, you know printers, they give us what the university can afford and you know, so that’s it.”

In an attempt to compensate for the lack of technology, the Registrar’s Office planned to develop a newsletter to help disseminate information regarding registration. However, this process was delayed and finally jettisoned due to the lack of funds to produce the newsletter and the lack of qualified personnel to develop the newsletter content. This one example reflects many of the challenges to administrative productivity across the campus.

Educationally, the lack of technology also creates a difficult learning environment for students. Every student highlighted the lack of computers along with limited opportunities for computer literacy education. A junior Primary Education major stated:

One thing, a major recommendation that I have for the university is that the IT, information technology, should please be added. It’s a strong recommendation with asterisk to the authority because besides what we have learned on our own we have a little computer knowledge around. Majority of the students here cannot afford because of the poverty rate that we find ourselves to go to extra classes that has to do with IT...because it makes our learning easier at all levels.

The lack of textbooks and research materials make the need for technology resources even more essential to the educational process for both students and faculty.

The president plans to establish a computer lab on main campus next semester as part of efforts to improve the quality of services available to students, but the current infrastructure must be in place to sustain these new resources such as regular electricity, protection from environmental elements, and access to software programs and hardware equipment to maintain and upgrade these resources. The proposed student computer lab can only be found on Main Campus, while Fendell campus does not acquire similar enhancements. Access to these resources will need to be addressed along with necessary computer training to promote appropriate use of the new facilities.

Human Resources: The Available are the Qualified

Given the large student body, the University is understaffed. It also suffers due to the unavailability of enough qualified personnel among faculty and staff. Diminished resources of the institution are ascribed to the impact of the civil war. In regards to human resources, the civil war impacted the workforce capacity of the university. In her March 23, 2009 address, the President of Liberia, Madam Sirleaf, noted that “The university’s cadre of 1,400 teaching, research and administrative staff including 500 internationally-trained faculty, substantially dissipated in number to about 307 as a result of brain drain” (Sirleaf, 2009, p.14). In addition to the effects of brain drain, decreased human resources are also the result of war-related deaths. During the postwar period the university experienced steady growth as well as the return of some of its faculty and staff, which currently stands at 375 full-time faculty and 980 staff members.

Gradual progress positively impacts institutional productivity, however, the university requires additional human resources particularly with appropriate qualifications to perform essential job responsibilities and to accommodate the growing student body. As the Dean of the

College of Science and Technology accurately stated: “When the qualified are not available, the available become the qualified.”

In this study, the “available qualified” individuals present themselves among the faculty, students, and staff who are employed at the university. Available faculty members teach courses in the absence of faculty who are more skilled, experienced and qualified. Available peer advisors become qualified in the absence of faculty advisors. The SA2C3 counselors become the qualified trailblazers in the absence of comparable advising and counseling resource centers in the country. In each case, human resources are limited and qualifications are restricted due to the limitations of professional development and training resources. Available background expertise and qualifications among current employees are fully utilized to provide the best services and academic opportunities possible.

Faculty

The role of faculty to share and synthesize knowledge constructs the foundation of the institution’s mission of teaching, research and community service. When the foundation is weakened the entire structure of the university is compromised. Scarce faculty resources are defined as the lack of full-time tenure-track faculty, extensive academic qualifications, and alignment of academic expertise relevant to current institutional and national needs. These drawbacks in human resources impinge on course availability, demands on faculty workload, and the overall quality of the academic and advising experience.

In the past three years, resources have been allocated to expand graduate programs, develop a Confucius Institute, and incrementally improve course availability at the undergraduate level. In addition, five out of the six faculty deans have created plans to review their college’s curriculum in order to revamp outdated academic programs. However, limited

faculty availability impacts the university's ability to provide enough courses to support the current curriculum. As previously mentioned, the disparity in distribution of students among the disciplines is partly attributed to the lack of qualified teachers. Inadequate staffing among instructional faculty has a domino effect on students because it constrains course offerings that delays students' ability to graduate on time. Therefore, they seek other departments that have enough course offerings regardless of interest or aptitude in the subject area. One junior student talks about changing his major because of the lack of courses in the College of Science and Technology. He wanted to be an Engineering major, but there were not enough professors available to offer the necessary courses and associated labs to complete the major in a timely fashion. Therefore, he changed his major to Economics, which is housed in the most populated college of UL, the College of Business and Public Administration. Limited human resources (faculty availability) impact academic resource availability (classes). In addition, the ratio of students to faculty is very high, roughly 63:1 (23,837 students to 375 full-time faculty). Teaching assistants and lecturers (including graduate students and visiting working professionals) outnumber tenure-track faculty, which also compromises academic quality and integrity of the curriculum. Out of the 278 full-time faculty members who teach undergraduates, 135 hold master's degrees, 73 hold the rank of professor, associate professor or assistant professor, and 11 hold doctoral degrees.

A full-time faculty teaching load is defined as 12 credit hours per week in addition to other administrative duties. Department heads have the right to make variations to these teaching loads and instructional faculty may teach additional courses to the 12 credit hours for compensation. Part-time faculty teaching loads consist of no more than nine credit hours per week (UL Handbook of Rules and Regulations, 2011). According to the Vice President of

Academic Affairs, qualified faculty are not readily available in the country, so those the colleges are able to secure are overused with demanding teaching loads and other administrative duties. In some cases, other demanding administrative duties involve the prevalence of interim or acting positions at the institution. The few tenure-track faculty members and experienced staff members are taxed with performing multiple roles and duties in addition to regular job responsibilities. Eleven out of the 19 faculty and staff participants are employed in additional interim/acting, visiting, or voluntary staff positions. Limited permanent positions jeopardize the potential for sustainable change, institutional stability, and consistency of institutional initiatives and efforts.

The Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry elaborated on other drawbacks faced by instructional faculty including lack of full-time professors, insufficient facilities and limited student interaction, which impact the quality of the academic experience.

Professors leave their jobs because there are a lot of part-timers here too. They have no base and they have no time to advise, no time to counsel and when you have a lot of part-time persons who just come and teach and leave, there's no process [for student interaction]. The other issue is that most of the people who teach here don't have offices.

So I mean there's not a forum for [advising] if even you wanted to sit down.

From one student's perspective, the lack of qualified department chairs makes it difficult to receive sound advice. In his experience, the department of his major does not have a chairperson with a master's degree in the field.

Let me start from my own area. There are many competent persons who now [are] in our department that should be chairperson of the department because as a departmental chair you should get a master's and the master's should not be outside the discipline and in our department we [have] four master's degree holders. One person there is holding three

masters' [alone], and he is not given the opportunity to become the chairperson...and those guys I'm talking about with master's, one from Russia. He got three master's [degrees]. Other guy from China, he got one. The other one from China again, and another one from Great Britain.... Here [in Liberia] they don't offer master's. Only in Africa, but Liberia no [advanced degrees in] sciences.

An additional challenge particularly for the College of Agriculture and Forestry is aging faculty. The university is forced to make the most of all manpower in light of limited faculty recruitment and hiring. Many of the professors in agriculture and forestry have been affiliated with the institution for 30-40 years and reportedly continue to instruct using dated material. One student expressed his desire to learn aquaculture, fish production. Although the country is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, such resources are not available in the outdated curriculum. Obviously, the country could greatly benefit from such curricular offerings. According to the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry:

The bottom line is that you have to know the up-to-date subject matter and if you don't know of course students will have difficult time tuning into you they stop listening a long time ago. You can see the [positive] records and actions of those professors who are proactive and tend to integrate current activities with their students. Our professors are aging. Some of the ones who are teaching are the ones who taught me some 35...37 years ago.

These concerns not only impact the quality of the educational experience for students inside the classroom, but also outside the classroom in the advising setting.

As previously mentioned, the high student to faculty ratio not only impacts teaching, but also advising. The quality of advising is diminished because there are simply not enough faculty

members to meet with students. According to the Dean of the College of Science and Technology:

If the university was made to accept 3,000 students...you got let's say 21,000 students, how are you going to advise the students? So as a result you have plenty of problems here, and sometimes the students are not responsible. If you [have] weak instructional staff, definitely. The people cannot even advise themselves. How can they advise students? ...See for example, look how we gave a test to [teaching assistants] in math. We collected the test papers these people have been using and printed the test out to them. See the grades. How can a teacher make 5 out of 100? What kind of advice do you expect them to give to a student? This is some of the weaknesses of the university.

The aggregated effect of the faculty shortage on the quality of the academic experience for students and professors is evident from these interviews and my day-to-day observations.

Peer Advisors

One of the ways that the university supplements its staff is to utilize peer advisors, however even these assistants are too few to be effective to assist the student body. Currently, academic advising and academic approvals are orchestrated by the deans within each college and the chairs of the respective departments. Challenges to information dissemination, lack of technological processes, and continuous improvements and changes to academic procedures lend themselves to frequent intervention and interaction between students and their deans and chairpersons. However, high student to faculty ratios overwhelm faculty workloads and impede their accessibility by students. One of the peer advisors mentioned the challenges a student faces to secure an appointment with a dean. He explained that many of the peer advisors are more accessible and helpful to students than the faculty because faculty members are often

unavailable. “Each time you come the dean is out and you are lucky to see the dean and the dean will still call the peer advisor to have the work done, to get the work done.... We need more. We need more [peer advisors].”

Peer advisors serve as extensions of faculty advisors, as well as registrar and admission staff. They provide the manpower required to meet the processing needs of more than 23,000 students. Peer advisors are not only the “qualified” staff in the absence of faculty advisors, but also in the absence of technological resources the only ones who can manage processing tasks. They provide critical support to the operations of the institution, but a system reliant upon supplemental student assistant exposes itself to greater chances for inaccuracies and oversight of sensitive information and procedures.

Professional Advisors and Counselors

As the first advising center of its kind in the country, the SA2C3 has the opportunity to lay the foundation for best practices in advising and counseling services. Limited training resources are available; additionally, in some cases, Western advising approaches and counseling techniques are incompatible in the Liberian tertiary context. As a result, the qualifications and skills of the current staff set the tone for the future of advising and counseling at the institution. In the absence of historical empirical knowledge about the functions and structure of advising and counseling services in Liberia and limited staff to provide advising services to all UL students, the current available staff members find themselves recreating the role of advising and their approach to providing adequate services to its large student population. Challenges with human resources among professional advisors and counselors presented themselves in limited numbers of staff members and limited accessibility to various campus locations.

One guidance counselor was employed at UL prior to the war; she served in a dual capacity both as a counselor and as the matron in charge of dormitory head residents. When the system was dismantled during the war, advising and counseling services had to be created from scratch. Prior to the establishment of the new advising center in 2010, postwar advising relied solely on faculty advisors. The SA2C3 is still in its infancy and does not currently have the staff available to advise all UL students. Therefore, the peer advisors and upperclassmen play a significant role in providing academic support during critical times such as registration. The entire course selection and course enrollment process is operated primarily by volunteer student assistants who review course plans, direct students to appropriate locations for registration and manage final course entry at the Enrollment Data Processing (EDP) center.

The original proposal for the advising center was drafted in March of 2010 by the Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Affairs. The plans called for three full-time counselors, part-time faculty representatives from Science, Business, and Liberia Colleges, one UL alumni, and work study students. The current director and staff immediately recognized that this complement was insufficient staffing to address all counseling needs of approximately 23,000 UL students at the various campus locations. According to the Director,

After we did the justification to administration, administration found out that what we were saying, you know, was practical and so they worked with us. Now we have 14 people so we can service Sinje. We can service Fendell. We can service this Main Campus, and if need be if we want to reach the graduate school and the professional schools like the law school and the medical school so that they can benefit from what we have here.

As the university expands to four campuses and on-campus housing options are reintroduced, the need for and delivery of advising services must expand as well.

Professional Development

In spite of the resource limitations, the university has been able to make incremental improvements to enhance the skills and expertise of current employees. By investing in the institution's "available qualified," the university is positioned to meet its goal to improve academic quality and student services. Although limited, opportunities for training are favorable signs of administration's commitment to enhancing faculty and staff qualifications. These initial investments in professional development have been restricted to faculty, and as a result only impact pockets of the university workforce. In regard to enhancing advising and counseling services, faculty and staff professional development has not been addressed. Advising and counseling service programs were a priority to establish, but the absence of professional development threatens the program's sustainability and success.

On the one hand, resources were secured to implement the center to support the institution's goal to enhance advising and counseling services. On the other hand, limited resources were allocated to support professional development particularly for a center that is unique in the country and in need of best practices that are befitting of the Liberian educational context. All staff members expressed their need for additional professional development and training. They seek resources that include counseling books for staff as well as reading materials for students to assist them in dealing with stress and motivation. The director is writing a career counseling guide for students. He emphasized the importance of contextualizing the job hunting and interviewing experience for individuals in Liberia. Most of the current literature is based upon Western culture and circumstances and thus are relevant primarily to developed countries.

Professional development opportunities for SA2C3 counselors are limited. The center has a few books available that have been personally supplied by the director, but the SA2C3 counselors voiced the need for counseling manuals that would aid in their ongoing professional development, particularly for faculty advisors outside of the center who do not have a background in academic, career and personal counseling techniques. Advisor training among the faculty is mainly based on previous experience with advising from their undergraduate and graduate education. The only faculty advisor training occurs in the Teachers College in which newer faculty shadow experienced advisors. Even with an emphasis on faculty professional development, advisor training is a low priority in comparison to teaching, research and faculty exchange programs. However, each dean expressed their desire to integrate advising experts into their departments, collaboration with SA2C3 or opportunities for training to improving advising skills. Most faculty members graduated from UL. Therefore they advise students based upon their own experiences as an undergraduate. As expressed by the Dean of Teachers College:

Fortunately, for us all of us that are teaching [in] the college graduated from the college with our bachelor's and then we went away and got our master's in the same area and we came back. And this is why our college is a little bit unique. We don't have strange people.

Their experience with the institution brings a level of familiarity, but the differences between the faculty's pre-war college experience and students' postwar experience lends itself to misaligned expectations, campus cultural differences, and new elements of advising and counseling that requires training and preparation.

Fiscal Resources

Financial support for higher education in Liberia has made substantial gains in the last five years. Since 2006, the university received a \$ 7.8 million USD increase in government allocations (Dennis, 2012). These significant gains have improved institutional stability, but more revenue streams are necessary for sustainable outcomes and improvements to provide quality education. The lack of fiscal resources produces the majority of the challenges faced by the institution. However, for the purposes of this study I focus on three areas of fiscal resources that impact advising and college student progression: expenditures for advising staff and faculty salaries and compensation; revenue sources including government support, tuition and fees; and funding allocations within the institution's operating budget particularly in Student Affairs.

Salaries and Compensation

Salaries constitute a significant portion of university expenditures as it directly impacts the core mission of the university to engage in teaching, research and service. Faculty salaries were made a priority under the new administration in order to keep courses available, the doors to the university open, and minimize lecturer strikes over back wages. Although faculty salaries have been improved, additional revenue sources are essential to hire enough full-time instructional faculty to meet the demands of the student population. The university's efforts to subsidize faculty wages impact the student experience in three ways 1) begins to shift the focus of faculty commitment and responsibilities towards the university; 2) highlights other needs for compensation beyond teaching; and 3) directs attention to salary improvements for non-faculty personnel.

Many of the teachers are part-time employees because sufficient funds are not available to hire full-time professors. In addition, several faculty members "moonlight" and supplement

their salaries by teaching at various higher education institutions in the vicinity or pursue research opportunities. Thus, the commitment of their time to the University and to their students is compromised and shared across multiple places of employment. A history of insufficient salaries has fueled a culture of faculty exploitation of students. For example, some sell required course pamphlets for exorbitant amounts. According to the Vice President of Student Affairs:

We improved salaries. People, the excuse they had before was because salary was low they had to do 3, 4, 5, 6 jobs, issue lots of pamphlets [and] make all kinds of requirements. So we're trying to correct a culture of malfeasance that was prevalent.

Now it's going to [a] minimum, but we still have some more work to do with that.

Enhancements to faculty salaries simultaneously improved students' circumstances. Three students recognized and appreciated the improvement to faculty salaries because it meant that courses would be offered on time and they could expect the faculty member to be present. One senior Secondary Education major commented,

When we got here, you know, most of the professors were not actually exhausting the material we needed to go through because some of them were having appointments at other schools. [They were] focusing their time in some other private schools and universities, and so they were paying less attention. Sometimes they leave their whole work with students and then they go to their other thing, so we were not actually feeling whether we were doing the right thing or we are learning the right thing.

The need for continued competitiveness in faculty salaries is coupled with debates over compensation for peripheral responsibilities such as advising.

Additional compensation is not offered for faculty advising responsibilities as it is assumed by the university to fall within the teaching faculty's job responsibilities. In addition, all

college deans confirmed that additional funds are not provided to produce curriculum guides or other academic materials needed to support advising. They fund these resources from their personal finances. All of the deans are now responsible for fundraising; they network to find resources to compensate for institutional shortfalls. In the past two years, some of the departments have been able to acquire limited supplies such as stationery and a few used computers from the university in efforts to alleviate the burden of personally producing handouts and other academic materials. In a new culture of student-centeredness, financial structures have yet to be fully addressed in regards to student support services and responsibilities.

Emphasis on improving faculty salaries aligns with the priority of the institution to improve the quality of the educational experience. However, staff salaries are only now beginning to undergo similar scrutiny. Currently, all of the SA2C3 counselors with the exception of the director work on a voluntary basis. Many of them work full days in the office, and supplement their income with part-time jobs to make a living. The director has requested salary lines for his staff, but the University is unable to fund these positions at present. Many of the staff counselors remain dedicated to their positions in hopes that full-time employment will be granted. In the meantime, their joy and desire to help students is their compensation, but such intangible rewards do not assuage the hardships of unemployment as described by one SA2C3 counselor.

Once you are well paid, and then you are given the needed incentive, I mean things will be better off. Yeah, because you can't send a man from here to Sinje [campus] and no logistics. He doesn't have a car and he's not been provided with you know scratch card⁷ to be able to contact back home, so those are all things I think this office really needs.

⁷ Scratch cards are prepaid telephone calling cards to add credits to cellular phones.

Beyond staff salaries, professional counselors will require discretionary funds for transportation and other business related expenses in order to effectively provide advising services at all campus locations. Current funding allocations do not align with advising rhetoric. However, the university president recognizes that the advising center is still in an incipient phase with little financial support. Although resources are limited, the SA2C3 is a vital component of student success at UL.

Government Support/Tuition & Fees

As a public institution of higher education, appropriations from the Government of Liberia make up the majority of the institution's revenue source followed by tuition and fees. Significant improvements have been noted in the postwar period as UL receives increasing governmental support. However, insufficient funding threatens UL's ability to provide access to quality higher education and develop the skilled workforce needs of the nation. Given the poor economic state of the country, improving revenue streams at the university must take into account limitations of government support and restricted tuition increases based on per capita income. These challenges force the institution to gradually raise the tuition cap, consider diverse revenue generating strategies, and reinforce the stance that quality higher education is a costly privilege and not a right in the midst of massification.

Prior to 2009, government subsidy to the university was less than \$1 million USD. In 2009, it was \$5 million and for the 2011 fiscal year was \$9.8 million. This subsidy comprises approximately 58.3% of the institution's budget. These increases are substantial, yet still not enough to operate the University effectively. According to the university president:

To have the kind of conducive environment that's necessary for student learning and relevance to the community will now take a neighborhood of \$50 million [USD] rather

than the \$12 million budget we have. Avenues for bringing in additional resources [are] that which we have to pursue.

Most students cannot afford high tuition and fees, but the current fees in place (\$2.50 USD per credit) are not enough to provide students with a quality education. Students clamor for more available scholarships and financial aid to assist them in their studies. Five out of the 20 student participants attributed their ability to attend UL to the receipt of a scholarship, and 10 students attributed their ability to attend to the low cost of tuition. Four students delayed attendance until they were able to work and save enough money to pursue higher education and continue to work. A senior, English major shared his experiences about his financial hardships.

My mother sold doughnuts to just get me in school and I used to sell. I sold kerosene. I sold doughnuts, and I wear one [pair of] pants for a week. Then at times we don't have soap. I studied on what the people call jack-o-lantern and I take notes on the doughnut paper that I used...we used to sell with and we were under high restriction.

In response to students' financial circumstances, the availability of scholarships has increased. The institution provides several scholarship opportunities to students with a 2.70 grade point average and higher on a four-point scale. In the last three years, the Dean Honor Roll list, the President Honor Roll list, and student organization scholarships to provide additional financial support and to incentivize good academic performance have been established.

In 2004, tuition was \$25LD per credit hour, by 2007 \$100LD. Now it is \$175LD per credit hour, which is equivalent to \$2.50 USD. Approximately 83% of the Liberian population lives on less than \$1 USD per day (World Bank, 2011). The president has set a goal to incrementally increase tuition over the next three to four years. He believes that access to education is a right, but education is not a right in itself. In other words, not everyone is able to

afford tertiary education, but quality education comes at a higher price. The goal is to reach \$5USD per credit hour in the next four years. But the University must foster entrepreneurial enterprises, develop private and public partnerships, and pursue investment opportunities to generate additional revenue.

Other faculty members concurred with the president's attitude about the cost of a quality education and view that education is not a right. According to the Dean of the College of Science and Technology the values that students place on their education are not consistent with the amount to which they are willing to pay for their education.

Eighty percent of the students in that class have cell phones. Everybody has cell phone here on UL campus, but you give them piece of sheet to have and they say they don't have [the money] or like me, I carry books and say we will be talking on this and so these are books. Go and photocopy. "Oh it's too much we can't photocopy." So I told them, you don't need to carry cell phone. Once you can afford to carry cell phone...education is not cheap.

The institution's ability to successfully raise tuition without student protest has required ongoing communication about the value of higher education and helping students understand the role of tertiary institutions. The massification of higher education has forced UL to not only continue to explore ways to obtain resources to support and maintain the quality of its academic programs, but to explain these financial needs to all constituents. Open dialogue, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, has been critical for transparency and helped to engage the community in financial decision-making processes that impact student progress.

Budget

Budgetary planning assists organizations with forecasting financial strategies, controlling resource allocations, as well as managing revenues and expenditures. Budgeting is a proactive approach to resource management and demonstrates institutional priorities based upon which and to what extent budget items are funded. Although gaining access to budgetary documents proved to be challenging, three features of resource allocation are identified from interviews and observations. First, establishing precedence for budget allocations has required institutional diplomacy. Second, effectively managing resources has called for new strategies to enhance transparency and break the cycle of corruption. Third, budgets bolstered by external funding are reflecting national priorities, but not necessarily student needs.

Most of the financial support for the SA2C3 comes from Student Affairs primarily to finance workshops and student programs, such as résumé writing and cover letter writing workshops. Twenty percent of student fees finance Student Support Services. This fee was introduced by the President to support the proposal to establish the SA2C3. Students pay \$200-\$250 LD (\$2.86-\$3.58 USD) per semester to help support Student Affairs services including advising and counseling. As mentioned in chapter three, resource allocation is an indicator of institutional priorities and aligns with administration's focus on student development. However, the introduction of expenditures for advising and counseling represents yet one more contender in the battle for resources. As the center slowly establishes its role on campus, the director has used patience and his political savvy to strategically gain buy-in and trust among campus constituents before submitting major requests for resources.

Because anything that is new or perceived as being new will encounter challenges because people will feel that too much attention is being given. So it opens up the room

for petty jealousy and stuff. Why they want to give this center attention? ...In administration you don't use your influence until you get it and you just don't get influence during the first year you there. During the first year you're trying to prove yourself and you're trying to create a sense of presence so that people know that you're here. During the second year you started formulating a good shelf-time plan where you say, "Look, ok I've been around here with you now. You know something about me. I know something about you. Let's try to see how we can work together. Let's see how this marriage can work."

His tactic allows for a minimal operational budget for the center in the first year targeting funding for programs and resources for students and faculty. In the next year he hopes to focus on securing staff salaries and other critical supplies needed to effectively run the center and diminish resource threat among his colleagues.

The lack of technology also impacts budgeting because it makes it difficult to maintain accurate records across each of the colleges. The Dean of the College of Science and Technology proposed that the university decentralize the college budget and make it a responsibility of each dean to oversee the budget of his/her academic unit in 2010.

I make sure to scrutinize the salaries, to know who is on payroll, who isn't on payroll and you can ask Dr. Dennis. I'm the only professor that was able to retrieve \$7.2 million LD... through my initiative. To see ghost names, to see people who are not working on payroll. I got that record with Dr. Dennis.

This effort has led to a more effective way to track spending and scrutinize records for ethical reporting measures. A decentralized budget has allowed for checks and balances among departments and administration.

The only college with substantial outside funding is the Teachers College as its aims are closely aligned with national development needs and priorities. Even with its additional sources of income, receiving funds can oftentimes be delayed. External funding sources include the Liberian Teacher Training Program through the United States Agency for International Development, Government of Liberia Ministry of Education, and the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help. These programs were put into place to support students pursuing teaching professions in primary and secondary education. Students not only receive support for tuition and fees, but also receive an additional stipend allowance. As education is seen as key to development efforts it is a high priority of the government to financially support these academic programs. Although additional financial support is available, Teachers College still has one of the lowest enrollments at the university partly due to the negative stigma of teaching in Liberia as a low paying profession. The president hopes that effective advising services can help address imbalanced enrollments across the colleges and provide students with accurate information needed to make informed decisions.

Summary

The University of Liberia represents a microcosm of greater challenges found in higher education in Africa. According to Reddy (2002), trends in higher education in Africa include massification, privatization, globalization, changing government-university relationships and overall challenges are the results of limited resources. Broader challenges that mirror the circumstances at UL include booming student enrollments that compromise access and quality of the student experience, as well as the lack of programs to improve student affiliation. These challenges are exacerbated by limited resources which include brain drain, underdeveloped curricula at all levels of the education system, deteriorating infrastructure, ill-equipped libraries

and laboratories, a history of mismanaged funds, the lack of books and technology services, as well as limited opportunities for professional development. Improvements to student affiliation and collective resources under the current administration demonstrate the slow pace at which institutions in developing countries are forced to address access and resource needs, but encourage hope that positive change is on the horizon.

Chapter Six

Social Organization Processes, Part I

Chapter five focuses on the elements that represent the structure of a social organization: the organization's affiliates and the collective resources that are "produced, maintained and used" by these affiliates (Ahrne, 1994, p. 12). Defining these components allowed me to better understand the college student experience and the manner in which advising services fits within the institutional framework. This chapter and the next explore elements of Ahrne's (1994) conceptualization of the processes within a social organization: recorded control and substitutability. I provide an in-depth description of the key academic policies and regulations that create institutional boundaries and order, as well as the advising and counseling processes that impact student experiences and their academic progression. I employ a metaphorical interpretation⁸ to describe the processes that are contextual to Liberian culture.

Recorded Control

According to Ahrne (1994), recorded control refers to the monitored and sanctioned actions of affiliates. In other words, to what degree do students, faculty and staff comply with the rules, regulations and obligations of the institution and what consequences for their behaviors are in place? Recorded control allows members of the university to monitor and regulate performance of students, faculty and staff. For the purposes of this study, which is about advising, the focus is on student performance to scrutinize the quality of their educational development, the policies that guide recorded control of the institution, and the role of faculty and staff in enforcing these policies.

⁸ Metaphorical interpretation was defined in chapter three as the use of metaphors to compare and contrast familiar and unfamiliar concepts in order to develop new meaning.

Successful navigation through the higher education system requires that students know and understand policies as well as the academic requirements of the institution. Policy development and enforcement often occurs in response to organizational concerns or as a means to address realized or potential behaviors that have or could deviate from institutional effectiveness. Major concerns addressed in Chapter Five include over-enrollment, limited resources, weakened educational quality, and corruption. As a result, the institution is exploring policies to control and manage these areas of concern. In addition, policy development and enforcement at the university covers a broad spectrum of austerity with tight, strict and well-defined regulations on one end, loosely, developing and unstructured policies on the other, and gray areas in between that leave room for individual interpretations. Policies and other recorded control mechanisms involve three areas: 1) student accountability, 2) academic requirements, and 3) ethical standards. Each policy is monitored and enforced to varying degrees. In addition to interview responses, the *Student Handbook*, curriculum guides, and *UL Handbook of Rules and Regulation* provided additional detail.

Student Accountability

Accountability forces institutions to examine critically and respond to the quality of performance (Huisman & Currie, 2004). In this case, UL is reintroducing its probation policy to hold students accountable for their satisfactory academic progress. Academic probation policies can positively impact enrollment management through the enforcement of dismissal sanctions. Monitoring such a policy can also improve student performance and provide early interventions for students who find themselves on probation due to unsuitable academic programs, poor self-management skills, or other extenuating life circumstances. Three of six faculty deans and six of 10 staff members discussed the probation policy during my interviews. Six of the 20 student

participants were placed on academic probation in the last year. From their experiences, four characteristics of student accountability display a mix of reactions among students, faculty and staff: 1) the changing culture of academic responsibility; 2) the challenges of monitoring student performance; 3) the integration of advising services to compensate for the lack of institutional response to academic progress; and 4) the evasion of systematic policy enforcement.

Changing the culture. The new probation policy is changing how students approach their academics and the university's culture of academic responsibility. According to one peer advisor, "Yes, with this issue of the probation, you know, at least you can find some seriousness [among students] now as compared to the past. Compared to the past, [someone can] come to class and carry 17 credit hours and fail all, [but] he doesn't care." The new probation policy is clearly outlined in the Student Handbook. Students who fall below a 2.0 grade point average in any given semester will be placed on academic probation. If their cumulative grade point average (CGPA) falls below a 2.0, then the student is suspended from the institution and is eligible to apply for readmission after one semester. A student who has been readmitted and falls below a 2.0 CGPA for a second time (double probation) will be permanently dropped from the institution. According to the Vice President of Academic Affairs,

Yes [this revived policy came from] my office here because we found out that there are students who've been here 10 years, some eight years, some 15 years they've been here. They fail and come back. They fail and come back. They fail and come back. Therefore, we've established the fact that there's no reason why students should stay here for more than four years, and so we have awakened in students this idea that the objective of why [they] are here by instituting this...re-instituting this probation thing.... "There's no reason why we should be keeping you here when there are other people who [are]

standing by and waiting to come. So you have to put your business in order. You come four years and you get out because this is...we are responsible for training the nationals of this country even though there are several other universities, but this the only distinct university of higher learning.”

The lax culture of academic integrity has been intercepted by policy initiatives under the new administration during the 2010-2011 academic year. Regardless of the existence of the policy, monitoring student performance still presents challenges due to a lack of student performance data, inaccurate reporting, and limited departmental involvement.

Monitoring challenges. Only recently have retention efforts been scrutinized; other priorities for the institution have been paramount. Current data on student attrition are not available because the institution only revived its probation policy within the last year in order to monitor student academic progress. The sheer number of students, low staffing and manual record-keeping processes make it difficult to monitor student attrition and retention. The lack of data makes it challenging to determine the gravity of poor student performance. However, all faculty and staff participants spoke anecdotally about the high percentage of students who struggle academically or find themselves on probation under the new policy. A campus newspaper approximated that 6,000 students were placed on academic probation in the first semester of the 2010-2011 academic year, and approximately 3,000 were subsequently suspended.

The current grade reporting mechanisms still rely on manual processes that make students susceptible to human error and inaccurate reporting. One of the junior Chemistry majors related that he appreciates the probation policy, but offered that many of the students who find themselves on probation do so as a result of human error in grade calculations.

I admire and appreciate the probation [policy] ever so much, but my only problem that I have with that is that it hasn't been monitored by the president of the university. When I say monitored, what do I mean? All the deficiencies students face or students have faced in the past should be monitored properly. When it's monitored, then you hear probation on campus you don't hear any [complaints]. Most of the probations you will hear [complaints] because mistakes happen on the wayside and the EDP [Entry Data Processing] people they don't want to investigate things either.

Integrating advising. Grade reporting errors not only frustrate students who are left with no process for recourse, but also create unnecessary angst and undeserving dismissals. Once again students are impacted due to the lack of institutional resources and ethical challenges. Some students found themselves on probation because grades were not turned in on time by their professors. Others were victim to what they called, "the Liberian requirement." In other words, low grades they received in class were a result of not paying bribes, which is further explored below in the Ethical Standards section. Without accurate student data or management systems to monitor student progress proactively, departments are unable to intervene when students experience academic difficulty. The Dean of the College of Business and Public Administration, the largest of all of the colleges, expressed his concern for the college's student retention efforts.

Actually we are not very...it's a concern, but we are not very keen to that. It is one of the responsibilities that make us inefficient. Ineffective in terms of getting down to individual students to talk to them relative to difficulties they are faced with and the students themselves are not forthcoming, you know. Before you get to know that, they've already dropped out of school, so what we need to do as a university is to [utilize] that [SA2C3] office...that kind of interaction to talk to the students with difficulties.

In the absence of early alert mechanisms, responsibility for monitoring and following-up with students on probation is unregulated. According to the *UL Handbook of Rules and Regulations*, students who are on academic probation are to be notified by the dean of his/her College.

Policies are in place to assist with monitoring student performance, but these processes are not implemented systematically.

Even in the early stages of the implementation of the new policy, the SA2C3 has played a critical role to support students dealing with academic difficulties. The Vice President of Student Affairs & Dean of Students spoke candidly about his office's role to address the impact of the probation policy.

For retaining [students], we play a [minor] role because we work with them while they are already in the system and dealing with academic probation and suspension. ... Those of them that are on the double probation, as we're preparing now with the counseling center we hope to tie in that they should visit the counseling center during the period of their probation at least to keep talking to them to see whether there are other problems or other issues that they are dealing with that led to the probation or just financial problem or other social problems they are dealing with. In that way will help us to see how to address specific issues that they have or direct them to who they can go to help solve their problem.

Students are slowly learning about SA2C3's role and available services. A junior Economics major explained his understanding of the progress promoted by the policy and new services.

[The experience of academic probation] was very serious. Almost like 6,000 students were on probation, and what happened is that administration came out and said that those that are on probation were to stay away for one semester and after that one semester

[students] will go for counseling and then they can go back and enroll again in their courses, their studies.

Based upon the comments of faculty participants, retention is viewed as a personal responsibility of the student to maintain the minimum grade point average. The limited resources and unstructured and informal mechanisms to improve and monitor academic progress demonstrate this hands-off philosophy. According to the Dean of Teachers College, academic support for probation students is not necessary because the penalty of probation provides the incentive to avoid future suspension.

Well, I don't know what happens [in other colleges], but we do not have a tutoring class per se. But in our culture if you reach a certain level in life and certain things happen to you, you will catch yourself up and you will come up. Our society is not a reading society and because of that even our students and grandchildren we have they do not study. So if you come to a big university like this and you are dropped for poor academic work automatically when you come back nobody will tell you to study. You are going to put up time and you will never go on probation again. That's one way that you can learn here.

The SA2C3 and Student Affairs staff is beginning to fill this void in their efforts to improve student performance and to serve as a recorded control mechanism of the institution.

Evading systematic enforcement. Enforcing the probation policy falls in the gray area as it is left to the discretion of the faculty member. Although the policy explicitly details the standards of satisfactory academic progress, a course instructor may decide to submit an incomplete grade in the best interest of the student. A professor from the College of General Studies described his view of the role of advising a student as a "strong" yet "soft" approach. If a student is facing dismissal, he may instead report an incomplete grade. The student will still be

required to repeat the course, but it allows the student to avoid the financial expenses associated with the readmission process and keeps them within the university system. With limited employment opportunities and impoverished societal conditions, he fears that students who are dismissed are at a greater risk to engage in social deviance and are neither fully rehabilitated nor ready to be integrated back into society. In his judgment it is best that faculty advising take into account factors that justify full enforcement of policy verses alternative options to uphold the spirit of student accountability and still promote student success.

In the past, students knew how to circumvent the unregulated system. One of the senior Sociology majors described how she purposely failed all her courses in a semester because she knew she would not be able to attend class due to work. She did so because it was cheaper to pay for classes and remain enrolled versus withdrawing for a semester and paying for readmission. Before implementation of the probation policy, students could fail courses without penalty. In her case, she purposely opted not to withdraw from the university because of employment opportunities. It was less expensive to pay for and fail unattended courses, than to reapply for admission. However, the new probation policy now prevents her from doing so in the future. The control mechanisms for probation are clearly defined and made available to all students in the *Student Handbook*, but enforcement is not yet equally nor systematically implemented and seemingly can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Academic Requirements

In the absence of a published college catalog, I assumed originally that the management and communication of academic requirements was underdeveloped. However, upon arrival I reviewed curriculum guides produced by each academic college. These guides thoroughly outline the major requirements of their respective departments. Unlike the probation policy,

degree requirements are strictly enforced, follow a structured curriculum and consist of prescribed course sequences. Students are given or purchase a copy of the curriculum guide from their college. For the most part, students appear to understand the necessity of obtaining these guides. Out of 20 student participants, only two did not have a student handbook and two did not have a curriculum guide. These guides are often used to initiate the academic advising process within departments. The lock-step approach to course offerings minimizes the time dedicated to advising students on course selection. In addition, the current advising structure provides limited opportunities for follow-up to monitor student progress, and the SA2C3 has not established policies that fully define their role in monitoring student progress. Recorded control of academic requirements and degree completion is clearly defined and adhered to by the institution and students.

Student progress oversight. Although academic policies are well developed, additional policies and processes to guide and advise students have yet to be developed. Most students only seek academic advisement during registration periods that occur once each semester. These decentralized advising services vary in scope and depth and rely heavily on prescriptive versus developmental approaches that would introduce students to the academic life of the institution. According to faculty participants, student advisement lasts anywhere from two minutes (College of Science and Technology), five minutes (College of Business) to 20-30 minutes (College of Agriculture and Forestry), and 30 minutes to one hour (Teachers College). In the College of General Studies, students are advised continuously throughout the semester. According to a General Studies professor:

It is not an easy thing, most especially to advise people coming to General Studies. It takes a lot of time, but what is important is patience. If you don't have patience you

won't advise them well because what you tell them today, they come and ask the same question [later]. Yeah, so I plan courses for students up to graduation level even if we give them a curriculum guide, this will be the courses for the major and minor, your elective. After the semester they'll tell you, "My brother, I'm back again." So you need to guide them throughout up to the point of graduation.

Curriculum guides provide clear outlines to detail course sequences and departmental requirements, but the lack of coordinated advising efforts often leaves students to make meaning of the curriculum on their own. The curriculum guides neither address students' concerns when faced with academic difficulty, nor introduce students to other academic opportunities to enrich their programs of study. The use of the guides to initiate advising assumes that students have received a copy, have read the guide, and fully comprehend the items addressed in the guides. To further complicate student comprehension of the curriculum, each department develops its guides with different formats and information.

Infancy of advising policy. The process of advising is still being defined, and as a result policy development has taken time. Often several factors contribute to failed policy implementation such as unclear expectations that justify the need for policy, limited resources (physical, human and fiscal), and policy and institutional cultural dissonance (Fowler, 2009). The SA2C3 faces similar challenges to policy implementation as it attempts to define advising functions to be harmonious with the current faculty advising model, struggles to secure resources, and faces the challenge to mediate student and institutional cultural differences. According to the SA2C3 director, the center must gradually create and implement policies in order to avoid these potential campus conflicts.

Well, we work directly under Student Affairs. We are very careful to recommend policies because policies connote bureaucracy and bureaucracy can bring about conflicts sometimes. So we're working with what we have and the [Vice President of Student Affairs] and myself meet either once or twice or more every week. We have that kind of cordial relationship, which I think is good for the school. We haven't known [the students] much, so we are all operating on assumptions. You cannot formulate policies on just assumptions. You have to have some tangibles. So we're building confidence and we're creating relationships with the students so that they will trust us and we will trust them, and we're doing the same with the staff. We're trying to find out what speaks and what will resonate with them and so that's what we've been doing.

The lack of advising structure, policy and procedures also proves to be challenging for some of the current staff. One of the SA2C3 staff expressed his frustration regarding the lack of structure and the impact it had on his work.

It's a matter of going back to the drawing board and the fact that the university has accepted [the SA2C3] and coming up with an administrative structure. Okay, if you are secretary, perform your duty. As peer counselor, since that's my position here I should know what a peer counselor can do or else I will function as a counselor because I have counseling training. Yeah, but I should know my limitations or else I will be doing somebody's job and what will happen? People will put on a laissez-faire attitude and allow me to do their job. Time for paying, they get their pay because no one knows what to do.

Currently, the staff is encouraged to bring suggestions and recommendations regarding advising policies and procedures to senior staff through the Dean of Students. Discussions are still underway regarding the organization of this new academic support center.

Ethical Standards

A recurring issue discussed by all participants is the prevalence of corruption in the institutional system. The university president and his administration have taken a proactive approach to control bribery, fraud, and other malfeasant behavior in order to improve the tertiary experience for all constituents. These efforts have greatly reduced and controlled corruption on campus. This section outlines various types of corruption among students, faculty and staff, as well as the administrative responses to improve ethical standards through the disclosure and documentation of these intolerable acts. The president is using transparency, open communication, access to senior leadership, severe penalties and public reprimand as means to control corruption. These strategies not only protect the integrity of the institution, but also serve to rehabilitate students in preparation for their transition into society as morally-sound and responsible college graduates.

Exacerbated by the war and poor government administration, corruption has infiltrated all sectors of society including the educational system. At UL, offenders can be found among faculty, staff and students. On campus corruption occurs in many forms and for a variety of reasons, but primarily in response to limited resources, abuse of power, and learned/accepted behavior. Twenty-seven out of the 39 participants mentioned corruption while describing their experiences at the university. These incidents consist of inside and outside the classroom offenses such as bribery, sexual exploitation, cheating, transgression, and forgery.

Types of corruption inside the classroom. Monetary bribes were mentioned by 16 of the participants: four staff members, three faculty members, and nine students (five seniors, one junior and three freshmen). These fraudulent financial transactions are initiated by faculty and staff to generate personal income, and by students to circumvent procedures and unfairly receive higher grades. Participants primarily discussed occurrences in which students pay professors for grades, faculty members sell required course materials for exorbitant amounts, and staff members solicit bribes from students to carry out administrative processes illegally.

As mentioned previously, one participant described Liberia as a “non-reading society.” The deteriorated pre-collegiate educational system is ill-equipped to adequately prepare students for postsecondary education. Therefore, the university is forced to adjust their admission criteria to meet current educational standards and many students are overwhelmed and underprepared for the academic expectations they find in tertiary education. Some prefer to circumvent the educational process and pay for grades in order to earn their degree, which of course ultimately jeopardizes their academic and professional future, not to mention the legitimacy of the university. According to a peer advisor:

Well, most of the students here they are not willing to read, you see. They feel so complacent. They say, “Oh, this assignment is too bulky for me to read, so at the end of the semester I think I will give the instructor a telephone call.” They are in the position to get around the instructor. They can give him cash and get the grade. They feel comfortable with that, but the difficulties they face for themselves... they are not able to read.

In some cases, students are pressured by the culture of corruption to partake in bribery. A senior Business Management major shared his experience during examinations. “During my freshman,

sophomore, and partly junior year, [students] paid [to take] tests. You know, we paid [to take] tests and our names were recorded. If you didn't pay, you didn't do the test." Some students are then ostracized by their peers because they were unwilling to conform to such behavior. A senior Agriculture major shares a similar experience:

You used to see people selling pamphlets. Professors will go print pamphlets and bring it in the class. It was customary that you buy the pamphlet before entering...before sitting in the class. Even if you refuse to buy the pamphlet, then any test that you do it will be done in vain. Just count yourself as a failure for that course. Since Dr. Dennis took over there's nothing. No knowledge of selling pamphlets, paying for this, no. I mean everything is going on smoothly.

Corruption has decreased on campus under the new administration, but is not completely eliminated. Consequently, some new students who observe these behaviors believe that monetary bribes are a necessary and accepted part of the culture that allows them to progress through their education as described by a freshman Secondary Education major:

Immediately after the final [examinations] I was hearing a whole lot of things that I have not even experienced throughout my high school days. Like sometimes you have to go to some of the professors behind closed doors to "talk" to them and if not, you cannot receive your promotion. At the time I didn't have anything, so I [asked] my nephew.... I was just lucky that I could afford to pay. I got a passing grade on my grade sheet, a 2.5 GPA. It worried me. I thought I may not receive a passing grade [because] I didn't have anything to offer.

Many faculty and staff members engage in bribery in order to supplement their income. They abuse their positions as institutional agents in order to solicit bribes for grades, withhold

mandatory course materials in exchange for fees, and obstruct administrative processes.

Corruption in the classrooms contributes to faculty and student tension and lack of trust between both groups. Limited resources results in insufficient salaries, which serves as the impetus for monetary bribes among faculty as recognized by a senior Biology major:

The faculty, they are not bad except for one time when the fees were not okay.... For Science College, most of our instructors, they don't sell pamphlets. They sell lab manuals. The only thing they bring you a lot of notes you have to photocopy throughout the semester, but because of how the payment of salary was like before...you have to buy a manual and the instructor will come up with their manual fees.... Sometimes high fees because they have to sustain their family. For the faculty, they are okay and for now things are improving.

Other less prevalent forms of corruption inside the classroom include student cheating and faculty transgressions. Three participants (one staff, one faculty and one student) described instances of academic dishonesty on the entrance exams, course examinations and homework assignments. According to a professor in the College of General Studies:

You give the students assignment. They will prefer one or two persons go and do the assignment and the rest of them try to get the assignment and paraphrase. So, if you sit down, you read your student assignment thoroughly you will see the same sentences being repeated, or maybe just change one or two words. So, we have a culture of laziness when it comes to doing research, yeah, of most of our students. When you go to the classroom, sometimes you give a test [and] everyone will give the same answer.

From one senior's perspective in the College of Agriculture and Forestry, the prevalence of cheating impacts even those students who were not involved and further amplifies the lack of trust between students and professors.

There are some professors that I know of, when they administer a test...whenever a lot of students pass they will wonder, "How did this happen?" Then we [students] begin to sit back and think, "What is your motive of teaching us? Is it not for us to understand?" I mean a lot of them when they teach, the moment they give a test and a lot of people pass they say, "In fact the test leaked." They prefer changing the questions over. These are the problems we face with them. Though they are teaching us, many of them hate to see lots of students passing under them.

In addition to cheating among students, faculty transgressions occur, such as abuse of faculty positions, mismanagement of funds, and sexual exploitation according to four participants (two faculty members and two students). Some of the deans are forced to closely monitor their colleagues to ensure that they are in fact performing their responsibilities. According to the Dean of the College of General Studies:

As a dean of the college, you've got to...let's say you call us supervisors. Supervisors in terms of you've got your instructors, your department chairs, your staff, so you control everything and report to the VP of Academic Affairs, our immediate boss. So as dean, you are expected to be hard-working because some deans can even abandon their offices and go and sit down somewhere drinking and they don't even know what's going on.

When the classes start, the deans and the chairpersons have to go around to see if the instructors are doing their job, if students are going to class.

One senior Sociology major expressed her frustration over professors who were not accountable.

Some of [the faculty members] have been poor like this one instructor. This man, he barely comes to class. [On] the days he comes to class he'll say, "exercise" (pop quiz). He will lecture maybe in 15 minutes for the class time to be over. Then he will say, "exercise." In that 15 minutes, probably we will not even finish [the quiz]. He will say, "Pass the paper over." He will grade you right there.... [Students] warned us. People said, "Don't go to this man's class," but I didn't know.

A more distasteful offense is sexual exploitation – initiated by students and faculty alike – that was not openly discussed by many participants, but one that I observed and discussed informally with students, faculty and staff on campus. It felt inappropriate to directly ask questions regarding this sensitive topic, but it is still an important component to address in its impact on recorded control. According to the Dean of the College of Science and Technology:

It is not fair to question your fellow professor. You know, academic freedom, you can't question them, but the situation we're in demands such harshness. It's regrettable, but when students trade in sex with professors, money, all of these things I use this to come down hard. Many professors may not like it, but these are some of the ways to improve the situation.

Types of corruption outside the classroom. Corruption outside of the classroom occurs primarily between students and staff through monetary bribes and forgery of documentation to expedite or evade institutional processes. For example, as mentioned in the Affiliation section of Chapter Five, Admissions and Registrar staff are trained to identify fake documents such as replicas of WAEC certificates and grade sheets (university grade reports). Five students shared their experiences in which individuals required payments of students before processing paperwork. In a few instances, some individuals have presented themselves as employees of the

institution when they were not and demanded remuneration. For example, a senior Biology major was directly impacted by corruption from her admissions process through senior year. She was almost unable to sit for the entrance exam because she could not afford to pay the bribe. The main hospital provided her with a health certificate for admissions without performing any diagnostic tests. She received a fake student ID from an individual claiming to be an Admissions staff member, and by the time she was able to begin her first year at UL she spent over \$1500 LD in bribes. She explained that these experiences have negatively impacted her perspective of current institutional support services.

I would only be able to use the [advising and counseling services] if I am educated on it, so the awareness has to be created first for the students to know what's important...how is it important to them. So, first of all that has not been in the system. So, if you just bring [an advising center] in and there is no awareness created, [students] see it as just creating jobs for somebody. We won't take it serious. That other person just wants to create jobs for that person.

The consequence of corruption has been a lack of institutional trust in this student's case. Student services created to benefit students instead are perceived as nepotistic opportunities.

A senior Business Management major recalled:

The [name] Department they used to really give us problems. When you go and pay for the courses, then they will tell you that that section is full. When you ask them, "Which of the sections is open?" They say, "I'm not responsible. Go and find a section and you pass around here again." Sometimes you go [to them] and say, "Here's \$20LD." Then they will turn around and give you this section. So, it was too much. The students decided to go to Dr. Dennis and meet with him. He went there and put a stop to it.

A junior Economics major agrees:

Some staff find themselves in the administrative area, and they too are involved with some malpractices. You know, sometimes you even take a piece of paper to them for signing. They demand money from you before they sign this paper, but things are changing gradually on our campus. It's not like before. Dr. Dennis has made a great change on campus right now.

Students are beginning to feel more confident in campus leadership and assured that ethical concerns that are brought to attention will be addressed appropriately. The Vice President of Academic Affairs explains:

Well, the students now, their fear that used to exist, the skepticism that used to exist between students and professors is being erased gradually. That skepticism that used to be between...the hiatus that used to be between the students and administrators is gradually erased because now if the students have problems they can call me by my cell phone and tell me, "I have a problem here. We met in class 30 minutes ago and the teacher is not here." Or they can call the president of the university and say, "For two days this professor has not come," and then we can move right in there and call the professor and ask, "Why haven't you come? Professor, why didn't you send the students' grades?" That skepticism that was from them we want to...we have removed that fear from there. The teachers understand that this is a student-centered institution. We are here because of the students.

Administrative responses to corruption. Both the *Student Handbook* and *UL Handbook of Rules and Regulations* outline penalties for students, faculty and staff who defy institutional policies, and the new administration is exercising its authority to enforce the policies by using

warnings, suspensions and dismissals. Reporting and documenting incidents is improving as the president gains trust in the campus community. According to the Dean of the College of Business and Public Administration, “The strong bond between teachers and students has been broken, but it’s [getting better] because of recent policies put in place from administration.”

Although policy development is beginning to address major campus concerns, completely eliminating corruption from the campus climate will be an onerous process due to the surreptitious manner in which corruption pervades the culture. As explained by a freshman Agriculture major, corruption happens secretly behind closed doors. For example, some professors will not instruct students to directly buy a course pamphlet. They may say that it needs to get “photocopied” and their quoted prices will be inflated. In other cases, corruption is a difficult topic to discuss – particularly sexual exploitation – which makes the deviance harder to confront.

Some students, faculty and staff still fear retaliation if they were to report incidences of corruption as explained by a professor from the College of General Studies.

When the student goes [to the classroom] and the instructor is absent, [administration] will not know about it the first time. So we also depend on the students for their own input, their own report. Because in the past some of the students were threatened. Maybe if they carry the report on the instructor they will get a failing grade...but we advise them each time around that they are protected. Come and give us the information. We don’t need them to expose their name to the instructor.... So in that area we have been doing a lot of advising for the students.

Efforts to improve ethical standards across the institution will not completely resolve the issue. However, administration is exploring several strategies to minimize corruption as much as possible and build confidence and transparency among the community.

As noted in the organizational culture, the dissemination of information, open lines of communication, transparency of leadership, and access to individuals in administration are expanding among students, faculty and staff. These changes in dialogue and decision-making processes create opportunities to empower individuals to voice concerns and expose issues in which senior administration can then take action. In one example, a peer advisor discussed how he felt empowered by administration when trained by his supervisor how to identify fake grade sheets and to follow the reporting procedures for such offenses. Not only do students feel more empowered, but faculty and staff feel both supported to carry out their responsibilities and safe to report concerns to administration. The Dean from the College of Science and Technology declared:

I'm a man who believes in transparency. I'm a man who believes in fair play. Now before I go to that, I'm the first Dean of Science College to say that laboratory manuals should be centralized. Why? The students were over exploited. [Certain faculty] will give two sheets [of paper] and [charge the students] \$175LD. Two sheets like this [cost] just \$5LD. [Instructors] make it compulsory that the students get [the lab manual] with the instructor's signature on it. Now, we have collected all of the lab manuals for this coming semester, and [the dean's office] is going to be the one to print them and give it the price that it is supposed to be.

In terms of sanctioned actions, the *Student Handbook* and *UL Handbook for Rules and Regulations* outline a list of penalties as consequences for noncompliant behavior. The president

plans to increase the severity of current policies in order to communicate a clear stance of no tolerance for campus corruption. As with the example of fake grade sheets, the president addressed his solution.

For example, I told [students over the radio] last night that the very next time anybody manufactures grade sheets it will not be suspension, it will be expulsion. So we have a second group that manufactured grade sheets. The first group, we suspended them for four years, but because we had not made the change, the second group we're suspending for five years. The third time it happens it will be expulsion.

Sanctions have included public reprimand of faculty and students, particularly through newspaper and radio announcements. Denouncing corruption through public humiliation and transparency of these processes are beginning to shift the ethos of campus interactions. After the release of a school newspaper article, the president discussed his decision to fire three faculty members.

I was able to take a strong stance on turning in grades [on time] and from now on. I started last semester; first term grades were due the 28th of February. There were about three persons – after lots of announcements – there were three persons who up until the 17th of March [had] not turned in their grades. Those people don't work here anymore. I'll do without them. I hate to make people feel that they're indispensable. It's better not to have them and even if it means they are not teaching the course. They were not teaching it [anyway], and it's better not to have them teaching the courses.

Behaviors that challenge ethical standards of the university concur with types of educational corruption discussed in literature including bribes for grades, fraudulent admission processes, mismanaged funds, and illegally supplemented salaries (Altbach, 2006; Chapman,

2002; Rumyantseva, 2005). According to Rumyantseva (2005), educational corruption must be addressed because it “undermines public trust in higher education, exacerbates the quality of education, prepares unqualified young professionals, and teaches them distorted values and culture” (p. 82). Additionally, tertiary institutions are tasked with preparing future leaders. Therefore, improving recorded control is a high priority of the institution along with increased resources. However, for now, the emphasis is on administrating sanctions. The institution continues to explore strategies to enhance how to monitor these control mechanisms and recognizes that changing the culture of compliance will take time.

Chapter Seven

Social Organization Processes, Part II

The main objective of this study has been to understand the college experience and academic progression of students at the University of Liberia, as well as to define the role of advising in regards to the Student Advisement and Career Counseling Center. Previous chapters laid the foundation of understanding the social organization interactions impacted by culture, the social organization structure characterized by interactions of affiliates and resources, and the social organization processes that are guided by the strength and challenges of recorded control. This chapter defines the final social organization process of *substitutability*. It addresses the process of student navigation through the University of Liberia and completes the analysis of understanding the experiences and progression of students and the role that advising plays during this integral social organization process.

Substitutability

Substitutability refers to the replacement of members to sustain the organization (Ahrne, 1994). In this case, replacement of students is defined by their academic progress towards graduation, the quality of their college experience, and the resources to assist in their navigation, specifically with regards to advising and counseling. Sustainability of any higher education institution relies on the ability for the organization to produce quality graduates and recruit prospective students with promising potential. Aspects of the student journey from orientation to graduation are described in this section.

Although culture is not explicitly identified as its own feature in the original social organization conceptual framework, Ahrne (1994) recognizes its importance in the replacement process. “The culture of an organization facilitates the substitutability of affiliates.... The culture

of an organization strictly adheres to the organization and not to individuals” (p. 21). Two dominant cultural traits impact student substitutability and define the role of advising: 1) the postwar effects and 2) the shifting culture of student-institutional interactions. Substitutability in this study focuses primarily on how students enter, navigate and exit the university, and the role advising plays to support the student experience and their educational connections to societal needs. Previous chapters focus on the current and former faculty advising structure. This final feature of the conceptual framework explores the development of the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center (SA2C3).

Student Academic Advisement and Counseling Center

In 2007, the University recruited its current Dean of Students and Vice President of Student Affairs after a report identified that the Office of Students Affairs was the weakest link of the institution at the height of student strike action. A full-time Student Affairs team whose primary responsibility was personal growth and development of students was needed. Prior to the war, advising was considered a form of guidance counseling and was associated with the dormitory staff. At the time the new Dean of Students was recruited, only one acting guidance counselor comprised the staff, a resource that was insufficient to meet the needs of the entire student body. Therefore, the Dean of Students along with the President spearheaded the initiative to create a stand-alone advising and counseling center to address academic, personal and career advising needs of students. The SA2C3 was officially launched on September 18, 2010.

Advising models differ widely across campuses all over the world because they are often defined by the parameters, culture and goal of the institution. In response to institutional characteristics and needs, the SA2C3 prides itself on being an advocate for students and it provides a much needed friendly and welcoming environment. According to the 2010 proposal to

establish the counseling center, counselors in the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center at the University of Liberia are responsible for providing academic, career and personal counseling services to all incoming freshmen and sophomores, as well as ongoing services to all other UL students as needed. Although located on Main Campus, the staff members are also responsible for providing advising and counseling services to students from other UL campuses and serve as liaisons to various offices and university departments.⁹

According to their brochure, specific duties include:

- Academic Advisement: helping students make sound and right academic choices that will enhance their journey through the rigorous academic programs at UL.
- Career Counseling: working with students to ensure that the majors/minors and other academic courses they take are in line with career objectives/goals.
- Personal Counseling: taking a holistic approach to help students achieve their highest potentials, including personal challenges they may encounter.
- Training: providing educational training and prevention services, career preparation, as well as college adjustment classes.
- Consultation: consult with faculty members about students who are in stressful crises or distressful situations in order to seek the best way these students can be helped.
- Referral: networking with on-campus and off-campus sources to get the best resources and services for students.

⁹ The liaison function is not yet defined because the university and the SA2C3 were still establishing its role at the time I was conducting the study. Currently, the staff works with all administrative and academic offices in some capacity.

- **Crisis Intervention:** prevent crises and address critical situations by meeting students where they are and helping them transcend barriers that are hampering their abilities to achieve their goals.
- **Outreach:** serve as the bridge between the university and community to address issues that impact UL student academic and career achievement.
- **Therapeutic:** counsel students in times of grief, sickness, disappointment, celebration and other aspects of student life that impact their college success.
- **Assessment/Reporting:** conduct ongoing assessment and evaluation of SA2C3 services. Continuous tracking and reporting of findings will enhance the quality of services the center offers the students. (University of Liberia, 2010, p. 2)

The Center's overall purpose is to assist students in their "personal development, academic choices, and overall preparation for careers beyond campus" (see Appendix A). As one SA2C3 counselor described, "I think [advising] is all about assisting students. You know, to help in achieving their goal at UL and not to do the job for them, but assist them in shouldering their own responsibility to obtain the reasonable objective for which they are here at UL."

The SA2C3 is still in its early development stages and has not yet fully implemented its proposed duties. The president hopes to quickly get the program fully launched.

Our advising and counseling facilities are not even close to what I'd like to see it.... It's going to be a critical place for our students and we're starting in particular with our incoming students up through the second year. It's really needed, and then later on career counseling and placement of our students becomes extremely important.

However, the SA2C3's short-lived establishment on campus has already produced significant changes in student support services and the college student experience. "Academic advising is an

essential element in the success and persistence of postsecondary students.... Advising evolves from an institution's culture, values, and practices and is delivered in accordance with these factors" (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education 2011a, p. 2). As described below the college student experience, as well as academic, career and personal counseling services provided by the SA2C3 have been shaped by postwar conditions and the shifting culture of campus interactions.

Postwar Effects

University life in a postwar setting is riddled with challenges of remediation and rehabilitation of tomorrow's workforce. These unique challenges frame a different picture of higher educational experiences, particularly in a developing country. The quality of education has been compromised by the effects of war and increased postwar corruption. As previously described, UL currently does not have sufficient resources to support the efforts of the institution and unregulated enrollment management intensifies these circumstances. In a postwar climate, the institution struggles with the lack of textbooks and supplies, electricity, qualified instructors, traumatized students, and the remnants of unethical behavior. According to the Dean of the College of Science & Technology, "You have to create an atmosphere for learning. We want students to learn. In Fendell, no toilets, no water, students carry chairs left and right, students fighting over chairs. These are the challenges." A senior English major discussed his struggles and those of his classmates. "We leave home frustrated. Leave from home with a lot of things, sometimes no food and sometimes no money in the pocket." Students are forced to focus on these daily challenges of college progression. In such a fragile environment, the institution finds that advising takes on a new role as the tumultuous student experience gradually improves.

Higher education recovery: Remediation of tomorrow's workforce. The *Education Reform Act of 2011* outlines reform measures recommended by the Ministry of Education, policymakers, and representatives from all levels of the Liberian education system. This document was developed to improve the education sector given the country's current conditions. With regard to tertiary education, data were collected from the 27 tertiary institutions in Liberia and the following postwar challenges identified: insufficient infrastructure, facilities, equipment, libraries, brain drain of qualified faculty and staff, over-employment of junior faculty with only bachelor's degrees, massification, declining quality of the learning experience, minimal research activities, outdated curricula, low salaries, no doctoral degree granting institutions outside of medicine, high enrollments in business and humanities, and increased bribery. These concerns for Liberian higher education impact the quality of the college student experience across the country and are reflected in the experiences of students at UL. To some degree, all participants described the college education process as "torturous," "chaotic," "challenging," "frustrating," and "a struggle." In response to these challenges the institution is beginning to take steps towards educational reform including the establishment of the SA2C3. All participants recognize the essential need for the SA2C3. The Center has provided additional support for students in need of remediation. Remediation for tomorrow's workforce is defined as the role of SA2C3 support services to address students' academic and career preparation.

Aspects of the developing country and postwar environment greatly shape the roles of advising and of the advisor. The lack of resources on campus makes it difficult for students to navigate their way through an already chaotic experience. Many of the students being first generation require more guidance on the selection of a major and navigation through the higher education system. The analysis related to Affiliation captures the need for advising in the early

stages of student enrollment. Similarly, the analysis concerning Resources and Recorded Control reflects the multiple challenges students continue to face through their academic progress. The current academic advising structure still relies on the unstructured faculty advising model, which does not guarantee that a new student will receive academic advisement upon enrollment and declaration of the major. Five out of 20 student participants never received academic advice. As a freshman History major stated, “Madam, this is Liberia...our status now to just find people to advise you is very hard. Yeah, because the academic structure is not correct....I still need advice because it’s like I haven’t done anything yet, so I want for somebody to guide me. Keep guiding me until I can come out successfully.” The current system is “fluid” as described by the Vice President of Student Affairs.

[The advising system] already existing is not structural. It’s just fluid. I think [the SA2C3] needs to work closely with the different departments and colleges and you say for example, “Professor [name], you have these 100 students as your advisees for this semester or this year.”...Once that is structured, you institutionalize that process and it makes it easy. When it’s fluid it depends on the whim of people who are there.

The SA2C3 has yet to coordinate a structured advising program because they are using this implementation stage to learn about students’ needs. A senior Agriculture major expressed his need for more proactive advising services.

Before even sitting for the entrance [exam], I should have some guidance. What do you want to do at the university or why do you want to do this? Do you have the background? What motivated you to say you want to do this? It’s from this interview that the interviewer will know what area to place [students].

In the interim, the Center has focused its efforts on providing additional support as it continues to define its role in the current advising model. The staff are able to provide walk-in assistance for immediate academic concerns (e.g., student probation, remediation, study skills, etc.), and career counseling services for soon-to-be UL graduates. According to the SA2C3

Director:

Well, I think Dr. Dennis and the cabinet were farsighted in realizing that the absence of advisement and counseling would be counterproductive to the whole academic journey that the university is trying to take on. And so, they decided that it would be in the collective interest of the students and the administration and staff to go ahead and create a center where academic advisement, career counseling and personal counseling can take place.

In addition to identifying student needs, understanding a student's background in a postwar environment is critical to exploring the role of advising as well as student/faculty dynamics. Today's Liberian student is a product of a deteriorated educational system. Most students are entering higher education without the proper educational foundation that affects the quality of work produced by students. According to the Dean of Liberia College:

Many of our students that enter our college now had a very poor foundation from high school. No teacher wants to be faced with headache. They only want the smart students. So they will come and say, "Oh Doc, we sick, man, 'cause we talk whole day [and] they don't understand us. When they write, they can't. When they speak, we can't understand them. When they write, we can't understand. What do we do?" I say, "You must persevere. If possible, you need to take extra hours with them." Take extra hours with them and by doing so you are breaking them out of, you know, so we're doing two in

one. We're doing tutoring. We're doing major teaching and then we're putting them...we're also serving as advisor to them.

This additional responsibility on part of the faculty is difficult to sustain because additional compensation is not available for extensive remediation and academic support outside of the classroom. Several faculty members are committed; however current salaries are inadequate and cannot compensate faculty for these additional burdens. The faculty feels overworked already without the addition of advising responsibilities. The perceptions about advising need to change. According to the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry:

In a year [we must] have the capacity and encourage the level of enthusiasm for people to want to advise students. To know that this is part of their responsibility, not just a headache. If students knew I was his or her advisor and they knew that from day one, it makes it easier for them. I've asked so many students to bring their paper to sign. [I'll ask,] "Who's your advisor?" They say, "I don't have one." [I ask,] "Who's your head of the department?" [They say,] "I don't know him or her." [I ask,] "What level are you?" [They say,] "Oh, I'm a junior student."

This lack of organized support outside of the classroom creates an additional hurdle students must face independently on top of inadequate academic preparation. A professor in the College of General Studies explains his concerns with student preparation:

If you look at a college student composition...the sentence structure, that will tell you that [students] are not serious. I teach management, I'm not teaching English, but as a manager what you say out there...what you say represents you first and your institution. So if you can't represent yourself, you can't represent your institution and representing yourself is the kind of language you use. The choice of words and the manner in which

you use it, that is very important. Some of them grammatically they cannot construct a sentence. Being a college student is difficult for them.

The Dean of Teachers College agrees:

We have found that students even there have problems with speech, with the English, whatever it is. So, as they are going through class they were getting feedback from their friends and feedback from the teachers that if you speak English this way, it's not standard. It is substandard, and at the university in the classroom you do not use substandard English, but there are Liberians that do not even know the difference between substandard and standard English...speaking is poor, listening is poor, reading is poor.

Poor presentations of academic readiness among students elevate the need for advising to ensure that students are guided accordingly in their course planning and learning process.

Retention problems enumerated by a faculty member from the College of General Studies included students' inability to grasp academic materials, financial restraints that prevent students from purchasing the course pamphlet, and affording transportation to attend class. Overall, as with advising, academic support services to address these concerns have been decentralized across campus. Services provided vary by college. The College of Agriculture and Forestry, College of General Studies, and Teachers College do not offer tutoring services for students with academic weaknesses. The College of Science and Technology has suspended their Student Assistant program due to the lack of accountability and oversight among the student tutors who were receiving pay without having to document tutoring sessions or maintaining satisfactory grades. The College of Business and Public Administration does not support a formal tutoring program, but refer students to the services of an independent individual who charges additional

fees; the practice obviously excludes students who are unable to afford a tutor. In Liberia College, professors serve as tutors without additional financial support for these services. Like advising services, tutoring services are informally structured and decentralized in each college. Emphasis has now been placed on the role of SA2C3 to help identify academically at-risk students to then develop effective responses for tutoring and educational enhancement. For these reasons, the implementation of the advising program is a central topic of discussion and priority of the institution. A senior Agriculture major describes how he wishes tutoring services were available.

Group study is really what I wanted or some professor may call you and say, "Look, I found out that you dropped in my course. What is the problem?" Then that professor maybe will call me to carry on some tutorial classes or special class for me. If he's really doing it at free will, but nothing like that is done so I continue to fight to encourage myself.

The probation policy reinstated under the new administration also requires an examination of support services to complement the needs of academically at-risk students. The President discussed his desire to change the approach to remediation and retention on campus. These changes include revisiting the structure of remediation that takes into consideration what the university is able to accommodate. Two proposals he has considered include replacing the English and Math placement exams with remedial courses and provide those that fail these courses an opportunity to take a lower level of English and Math at the college level. The alternative would be to create a cutoff score that would determine which track of coursework would be best appropriate for students. Both options eliminate the need for multiple placement exam testing. He discussed how these changes would impact advising services.

[Restructuring remediation] has led to [discussions] like the establishment of learning resource centers. Okay, it can be group disciplined-based. For example, you can have a math/science learning resource center. This is where you work closely with the advising center. This is where you begin to do your tutoring, your mentoring of people based on the discipline they have chosen to ensure that you have a higher percentage of people completing.

Earlier interventions through structured advising will help the institution identify specific academic needs of at-risk students. In addition, students who are advised prior to declaration will avoid academic challenges due to selections of inappropriate programs of study. In addition, the Registrar suggested that the institution develop a policy to oversee the process of students who wish to change their majors.

On the application form we ask [students,] “What college or what major?” [The student will think,] “Maybe I want to do accounting. I want to do biology.” But the reality is when they get in school and start to do the courses, then they notice that maybe “I don’t have the ability to do this biology that I wanted to do, or this accounting.” So, because of that students move from department to department, from college to college.... The reality now is that people are just switching from college to college without any guidance. We think that by putting a policy in place it will help them through the process. I was seeing whether administration could look at it and come up with some policy that will help control it so that before you change you will have to contact your department. The new department you want to go to, let the people talk to you, advise you, and tell you the advantages and disadvantages.

Students not only need sound advice in the selection of their majors, but also to change majors that are impacted by the lack of resources. The SA2C3 director believes that the Center can play a role to help students who are academically at-risk.

Some of [the students] stay here ever so long. They choose majors because they have friends who've been telling them how much money they can make and how there's a pie in the sky. Then they come to the reality of it and they're flunking out. Then they have to go under probation, and that can be devastating. So, we want to work with them to find the best way out.

Another aspect of today's Liberian collegiate situation is the growing rate of non-traditional aged college students. Their enrollment aligns with the educational gap created during war. Many of these students now have families and are working at full-time jobs. According to the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry:

The faculty think too many of the students didn't get that foundation and it's been like 20 years and some of them are trying to leave college at the age of 40, 42. They missed 15 years of their lives and you know whatever number of years. Some of the faculty [members] just think the students don't show any commitment. These students have a lot of issues and problems that we didn't have. They lost most of what they had. They are working to make ends meet. They want to get an education. It's a whole balancing act. Some of them now have families, so the issue that they must deal with impacts their ability to stay on course.

A freshman Agriculture major described his challenges with balancing familial responsibilities and study time. He did not have anyone to advise him on balancing his academic responsibilities.

Before even going to school I will have to make sure I find three square meals for my family and if it is not there I go to school and I may not pay full attention to the lesson because it's like, "What will my family take in for today? If I go home, what will it be like?" See, sometimes even though I take notes, I'm trying to read with comprehensionsometimes when I read, read, read as soon as I reflect my mind will [wander].

A junior Primary Education major discussed the challenges of balancing school and family responsibilities from a woman's perspective:

I sometimes get frustrate[ed], especially with my gender sensitivity. It will discourage women because I'm telling you, we leave the children at home. We leave our family. We are almost like playing a major role as household heads in Africa, especially in Liberia, and then you come [to campus]... and it's running into the time for you to pick your child up from school. It's stressful, you understand? Not only picking your child up from school, you are also thinking about your practical role as a woman in your home to go and accomplish that. So you can imagine the war that is taking place especially for we the women.

Many men lost their lives or were displaced during the war, leaving women to bear the responsibilities as caretaker and provider in their households (Lekskes, van Hooren & de Beus, 2007). A professor in Teachers College described this new generation of students as being of a different caliber from what she experienced when she was a student at UL.

The postwar challenges [that students] have gone through, some of them sat out for five, some seven years, and even the ones that came back, sometimes they will attend college for like one semester out of the whole entire year and then sit out. Something will happen and they will sit out. So all of those interruptions just created an entire new breed of

students. We can use a lot of descriptive words, but for the sake of communication it's a totally new breed. They're different. They're really different.

This population of students has forced some advisors to change their approach to counseling as described by a professor in the College of General Studies:

We have people coming to take the entrance [exam] and they are quite older than you.

Some of them are capable to be our fathers, our brothers of age. So sometimes when you advise them or you restrict them...for example say, "Well when you go to the classroom behave this way, or when you come to the college do not drag the chair, or when after your exam take the chair from out and put indoors so that the rain won't destroy it." The person will tell you, "You are not my father or my mother. Why will you restrict me?"

It's an affront to you, the administration...but if I complain to the university, action will be taken against [the student]. The action will be justifiable, but you are suppressing your inner conscience. We need to help that person. We don't want to believe that [the student is] such an arrogant person, but something was the cause... In most cases we accept some of the bitter pills. We swallow them, but it doesn't mean we aren't solving them.

Remediating tomorrow's workforce has required the institution to rethink academic support services to account for students' academic preparation and the postwar student demographic.

Career counseling services are one of the newest programs introduced to the campus after the establishment of SA2C3. Previously, a Career Day was held for graduating seniors, but the Dean saw the need to address career planning in the earlier stages of students' academic experience. Because academic advising exists in silos among the various departments, career counseling is not consistently provided to students. Only three out of 20 student participants received career counseling. These services are critical given the need for the institution to meet

the workforce needs of a developing nation. A visiting researcher and former graduate of the university commented on the valuable role of advising:

As we rebuild the institution, the issue of advisement really is crucial because from time to time you hear we're putting out so many thousand students. What happens out there? They go out. They have degrees. They can't fit anywhere. They're not fully prepared, so this issue of advisement is like coming back to us to say, 'Okay, you're training students. You're putting them out there. What is happening to the student? Are they getting jobs? Are they...' because that's something we need to be able to follow through. That the training we provide here can show that they can get jobs. That they're properly placed when they go out there. As we rebuild the nation, like [the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry] said, we need to fit into the national agenda.

Identifying appropriate workforce needs is not only essential to national development, but also critical to reduce high unemployment rates. The President commented:

I observed that the university itself was repeating disciplines that it had 20 years ago without consideration to what the country really needs and what the job market is. So our graduates...the graduates we're putting out had no relevance to needs...not adequately. And so we are graduating a lot of accountants for example who are not finding jobs. So this whole career counseling part of the picture comes into vogue. Even as to curricular transformation...to make your curriculum relevant and then at the same time direct students who are interested and have the talent in those areas...those three things have a major impact on helping me to redirect where we're going as a university.

The Dean of the College of Science and Technology concurs:

[Career counseling] is one thing we have not done yet because for every institution...if you know what your students are doing, then you have to go after that. This is why the average program is very important because what you are doing...you have the mandate to produce students, so you must go and follow-up with your students. What are they doing in the greater society? If you're not doing that, then you will not be able to evaluate yourself. Whether you are doing well or you are not doing well. Nobody has ever done that....Are we really imparting the actual knowledge or are we just producing, just getting them out, mass production.

Academic relevance is one facet of addressing workforce needs. The lack of career counseling to guide student choices is another area of concern. The Dean of Liberia College discussed students' perceptions of career choices and the lack of career counseling to develop their understanding of professional purpose.

[Students] see the business man [and say,] "I want that." The second thought is, "I wish I could go into government and my purpose for going into government is to get some good money, either by hook or crook. Maybe build for myself a luxurious home. Get a good car and live a very good life." Such a life is anticipated by all of us. We want it, but we want these people who can guide society to a prosperous society and that means the minds of people must be shaped towards a very positive action, towards positive development. When you don't have that, then of course you have society degenerating in the old, same old ways.... It is serious because a student knows less about what they are going to study. They need to be informed. They need to be guided, but they make up their minds and say, "I'm going to study political science," without knowing what political science offers in the future.

A senior Biology major explained her concerns about graduating and the desperate need for career counseling.

To have somebody to do career guidance because most of the time we go to see [friends]. We don't really have the strength to do that [career] and because my friend is there I want to be there, but if I had somebody to guide me in the process...give the advantages, disadvantages, then I will be able to make a better choice. I might come out to say, "I want to be a doctor, but that's not my calling. That's not my area because of my academic performance and other factors." If I had somebody to guide me properly I won't be able to make that mistake.

Using their own personal funds for transportation, the SA2C3 staff takes initiative to build relationships with local businesses in order to create a database of job and internship opportunities for students. In addition, they organize field trips to allow students to learn more about local industries and potential employment demands. These new activities are gradually being introduced on campus to expand students' understanding of the Liberian job market and increase post-graduate preparation activities. The director has found it necessary to create a career manual for students. He felt that it was important to contextualize career advice for students and provide strategies that are applicable to the Liberian professional setting. The Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry described the degree to which seniors are unprepared for the job-seeking process.

I just took 12 students to Foyah, Bong, Margibi, and Lofa (locations in the interior of Liberia) and for most of the students it was the first time they've left Monrovia, and they're leaving school in the next few months with a degree in agriculture and forestry. Some of them have never seen a rubber processing plant as big and as huge as rubber is

in our mainstream. I think advising is continuous. It's for the person's character, academics, attitude, writing, communications, and job search. It's all of that. Okay, so most of the students don't even know how to network. I asked them, "Do you have a listing of all the contacts I can follow-up in writing following employment?" No, they don't have it. "Do you know how to write a letter to seek employment?" [They say,] "No we don't."

He wants to ensure that students take courses in other related areas such as business, natural sciences and engineering to really create an integrated experience for students. He argues that students need to know how to develop business plans and apply their field skills in a variety of ways. All of these modifications will enhance the quality of the program. He describes the current curriculum as too broad and general. However, the high unemployment rates add to the university's challenges. According to the Dean of Liberia College:

Even after [students] graduate, the 9,000 that we're talking about...many of them just float the street and have nowhere to work because the entities are not created for such a thing. Alright, so they find themselves going maybe Waterside, Red Light (low socioeconomic market areas), even crime to create their business entity which is extremely hard. They can't go to the bank to borrow money to start up their own business so they become extremely difficult. We have a good percentage of that number not having jobs and I think it should be a concern to policymakers and to the university as a whole.

A lack of funding currently impacts SA2C3 staffing and its ability to provide quality career counseling services. The director believes in taking a systematic approach to developing the Center and working with available resources. To create an ideal Center will take time and

strategic planning on part of administration. The lack of fiscal resources also impacts the role of the advisor when working with students in a limited resourced environment. When the resources are not available, the advisor takes on the role of the encourager as described by one SA2C3 counselor.

Even the undergraduate...majority of the problem is support so they [are] kind of frustrated. They don't have anybody to pay their tuition, take care of their transportation, all that stuff so...and some them living far off. They can't come to school on time, as a result they are late, and then the teacher gives them 'AB' absent. Some of the problems but you know we continue to encourage them.... We only talk to them, counsel them how to take, you know, courage. For now we don't give any financial assistance.

Another SA2C3 counselor concurs:

Students come for academic reasons. Some of them are on probation. Some of them do not have the money to continue. Some of them are sick and the instructors have given them an I (incomplete) or an NG (no grade). They come for other reasons even something [such] as violence. Some are, you know, assaulted by others and they come for that purpose. Some of them come for personal reasons. They might have been out of school for some other personal, financial or family reason. They come for all sorts of reasons....When students come for academic advising, we encourage them that maybe they need to study harder. Give them encouragement that they shouldn't be discouraged because some of them are discouraged, but we encourage them to continue. Even if it means that they have to be suspended, we encourage them that even as they go they can do other things to keep busy until that one semester is over. It doesn't mean the end of the world. We encourage them to study harder to obtain a scholarship.

With that encouragement, advisors refer students to the Business and Finance Office and/or Student Affairs Office in pursuit of loans, scholarships or work-study opportunities. Words of encouragement have helped to build trust between staff counselors and the students who have visited the Center. Another staff counselor explains:

We can talk to [students] and make them understand that college life is not like high school life. There will be difficulties, but sometimes if you come with the determination, discipline and dedication to do what it takes, you'll continue to remain in [school] and pursue your studies.... Students don't really know [about] the assistance of this office except maybe when someone directs them when they have a problem, but it's kind of new to them, but in time to come I guess it will expand.

Overall, students are beginning to see the advising and counseling services as an outlet and safe haven to express their frustrations and as a source of hope and encouragement.

According to the President, "Advising is a normal part of development for students and without that one cannot excel. [Advising identifies] where the interest of the student is, and how to guide the students in the right direction." A senior Sociology major and a freshman Biology major both agreed that they wish the university would provide more counseling services to support students in their academic success, a friendly environment that offers individual attention to needs, and a place of encouraging advice in a challenging environment. The counselors focus their efforts on supporting students through encouragement and finding other alternatives to make the most out of the college experience based upon resources that are available. The presence of the SA2C3 in itself represents great strides towards supporting student success and is discussed by all participants as an essential addition to UL programs.

Posttraumatic recovery: Rehabilitation of tomorrow's workforce. War not only corrodes the physical structure of a society, but also has had a long-term impact on the individuals who experienced the trauma. In a country undergoing the journey of reconciliation, Liberia is still trying to integrate displaced youth and adults back into society. The university in this case serves as part of the rehabilitation process for many students, some of whom are ex-combatants. Psychological services are in demand to address these recovery concerns, but only one psychologist and one psychiatrist exists in the entire country. Access to their private mental health clinic is limited both in location and cost of services to the larger population (Lekskes, van Hooren & de Beus, 2007). Also, the university currently does not have a psychology department to train future professionals. Therefore, the rehabilitation process on campus as in the larger society is insufficient to address the posttraumatic recovery needs of the campus community. However, the institution has been able to provide support and initiate the healing process through personal counseling services embedded in religious ideology. According to the Vice President of Student Affairs, their division spends majority of their time providing personal counseling services and will later prioritize academic advisement.

We're still trying to keep that balance between being an academic community, but in a post-conflict country, the university also has the responsibility for rehabilitation and we in Student Affairs have that large responsibility. I always have to struggle with colleagues in other areas of the university that believe that we should punish our students. If we go to the further of the extreme, then there will be no room for them to be rehabilitated from society, and so it is that tension...trying to create that balance is giving us difficulties right now.

The civil war ended in 2003, but the repercussions have taken years to resolve and there continues to be an uphill recovery process. All participants mentioned the need for personal counseling services among students. A peer advisor describes how easily students are agitated as a result of posttraumatic stress.

Well you know we've just [come] from war. Okay. And you know some people are...they are traumatized already. You know, they need their own personal counseling because some people, simple things make them very vexed. And the issue of young people now, every time they find themselves somewhere drinking. When they drink, they come to class. They come on the university campus...no control.

These tendencies towards aggression and violence have driven students to various coping mechanisms. Some students turn to drinking and other abusive substances, while others turn to family support and religion to deal with their challenges. According to the Vice President of Student Affairs:

When you find yourself in a post-conflict country...issue of trauma, psychological and all of the above you will find students dealing with that. Some of our students here were actively involved in the civil crisis on all sides of the divide, but we are the ones responsible to work with them as they rehabilitate and get back into society. They are in school. What do we do? We have to keep working with them to make them better citizens of Liberia when they graduate from the school.

A professor in the College of General Studies described how he uses advising to address these concerns.

Many [students] come here with the belief that when you come to the university it's an area of agitation, an area for argument because if you don't argue people will not know

your potential, but that is not so. We advise [students,] “Yeah, you have the right to argue, but you must argue on subject matter. Know the pros and cons of the subject matter. Don’t argue for the sake of argument. So, sometimes [students] will come and say, “Look, my brother from the way you have been advising me, let me be frank to tell you, I’m this kind of person. This is the kind of life I’ve been living. I’ve spent two days without eating.” Some of them come to your office and I got \$50 here. I say, “Go and eat something.” Being tough and soft is a hard thing to do.

A freshman Public Administration major shared his experience when he lost his temper with a professor.

I was angry like I said, and I went to inquire from the professor having done virtually everything for the semester. Why did he send NG? Yeah, but I was like aggressive so [a peer advisor] advised me not to speak to [the professor] in the manner and tone that they saw me. So, I calmed down and heeded the advice.

One of the SA2C3 peer counselors explained how these violent outbursts are beginning to decline after the establishment of the Center. “In the past students used to approach issues in a violent way...but for now students are beginning to change because of this Center. We don’t experience too much violence on campus like before.”

The campus community consists of both students who were victims in the war and those who are ex-combatants. As explained by a professor from the College of General Studies,

We advise ex-combatants, but you see, it is a difficult situation.... If a student comes and tells the counselor or fellow student, “I’m an ex-combatant.” It’s like a stigma. No one will want to be associated with that, but we already have that in mind, that among the

people that come in we will encounter some of them...you will get to know from their behavior.

For both victims and ex-combatants, addressing concerns for student mental health was one of the president's goals with the establishment of the SA2C3.

The condition of our students' mental health...perhaps the most shocking to me was a student will be talking to me and he's shouting and it's like he and I are having a confrontation. At first you will say, "Why is he disrespecting me?" But he's not. He's not. That's the posture he has developed. His defense posture of his experience going through...what people went through during the war. It was then clear to me that some kind of personal counseling would be necessary to try to reorient our students back and get them into the frame of mind that, "Okay, yes, you had this experience, but now it's over. Get back on track. This is how normally human beings behave to each other, and not in the confrontational mode."

Providing student counseling was the first step in the rehabilitation process, but the center needed to first build awareness of the services, regain student trust in utilizing institutional support, and overcome the negative stigma associated with individuals who seek psychological services. Fourteen out of 20 participants were not aware that an advising and counseling center had been established on campus. According to the SA2C3 Director:

Well, we're beginning to move into a positive direction because to effectively advise people they must have some degree of trust. You have to build confidence and I think since we've gotten here July 1st we've been trying to build that kind of trust level and to really have the bridge so that students can know that this office is for them. We're currently working with the deans, and the chairpersons, as well as faculty members so

that no one feels that this office is intruding or dictating to them what they need to do, but rather that we are all working as partners seeking the greater good of the institution.

One of the SA2C3 counselors described the challenges faced by the Center to inform the campus community of the benefits of their services.

Some of the challenges are that one, the Center is not known by the students and faculty members because some of them even say, "What is this SA2C3?" And then sometimes when we get out [in the community]...maybe you are lobbying for something for this Center and they say, "But, what is that? When did that one start?" And you know, that's some of what we go through here. Some of the students say, "Who wants to tell their personal things to the people down there?"... Some feel shy because it's kind of new within the university.

All of the student participants, except two, stated that they would feel comfortable using the Center's personal counseling services if confidentiality is upheld because a need exists. A junior Primary Education major shared her experience after talking with her peers in the community.

I saw [young people's] hunger and thirst for counseling and for acquiring new knowledge. So, I think and I'm definitely sure that if [SA2C3] is well publicized to the student populace and they can come here and they can find a place of confidence where whatsoever is being shared here can remain because this is the problem we have. They will soon...if you are the person there they will soon find a mother because most of these young people had a breakdown in their upbringing and development of character because of the war. Some of them were like eight years old, ten years old and they grow up on their own and they never had a mother or father or someone to say, "What you are doing is wrong, but do it this way." But rather it has been like criticizing, criticizing, criticizing,

and no correction. You know, so this is what I found out about the community and imagine we have all the community mixed up here [on campus]. So, definitely [the SA2C3] is going to work.

The SA2C3 director emphasized the need to improve confidentiality.

Well, I believe that wherever the university goes there has to be the presence of SA2C3. An advising center should have a degree of privacy and people's documents should be kept under lock and seal. I think that we will get there, but we are not there yet. So, my sense of an advising center where you have a cabinet and everything is cataloged, [and] people keep the confidentiality law intact so students who are counseled don't feel that we are going to be sharing their information with somebody else, or that people who are not related to [the student] in terms of advising and counseling will not be privileged to their documents of concern.

Those who did not feel as though they or their peers would discuss personal concerns with a counselor alluded to negative sentiments found in the Liberian society in regards to personal counseling as explained by a junior Economics majors.

Students will feel comfortable [talking to a counselor] for career issues, but personal issues...there are many students that will be very proud and not want things for people to know about their personal issues. In our African setting, we experience those things. There are students that are very proud about their personal issues. They don't want to share with people. Even sometimes some personal issues are because of some reason that you don't pass [your classes] because sometimes you come from school and you find it hard to even find food to eat. Yes, so for that reason you are not comfortable studying because your mind can't lead you to study. Those are some personal issues that some

students wouldn't even want to share with people. They will feel that people will laugh at them. They will feel that people will look down at them and all of that, but those are personal issues that really make students to not learn well. It's serious.

A senior Biology major further explains how the negative stigma of counseling extends beyond just the campus community.

The issue of counseling in our society is something that people don't really see it to be very important. Like at the YMCA, we had a project that we were working on during the heat of the war. After the war we were working with some displaced refugees. We were working on a psychosocial project and we did some psychosocial counseling and so we, the counselors, we used to even find it difficult in talking because if the clients come, then as a counselor they feel that you are there to give them advice. What to do instead of them looking at the option to make their own choices. Yeah, they look at you to be like you are the one to decide for them. So, the issue of counseling, people don't really take it serious. Even if a child is being raped and you say that this child has to go through some time of healing and counseling, they feel that it's not necessary. [They say,] "It had happened already. Why should the person talk about it?" They don't know the healing process from it, so you have to create the awareness.

Another SA2C3 peer counselor agreed that counseling in Liberia has a negative connotation and at times students question their expertise.

In the Liberian society when you talk about counseling and advisement it's a new thing because students are used to doing things alone except where they encounter difficulties academically. That's when they come to [SA2C3]... When you talk about personal counseling they feel like, "Why should this person know about me in the first place. He's

nobody to me. He's not related to me."... I went to counsel someone. The person asked me, "Well do you have master's in counseling?" I said, "No." [He said,] "But then you can't counsel me because I [have a] bachelor's, you [have a] bachelor's. You can't counsel me, so you shouldn't be above me.

An interesting aspect to note is the background and educational training of the SA2C3 counselors and Dean of Students. Seven out of the 11 full-time staff members attended seminary, have training in psycho-theology, or pastoral counseling. Most described that they felt a calling to help others and decided to attend seminary, while one of the counselors attended seminary because his church would sponsor his education. Five of the seven attended seminary schools in Liberia, while two attended in the United States. They draw on their experiences as former UL students and use counseling and conflict transformation therapy when working with students in a postwar context.

Religion plays a critical role in Liberian society in its efforts to recover from impact of the war. Nineteen out of 36 participants made references to religion, God, faith, prayer and biblical scriptures during their interviews. For example, a junior Primary Education described her interactions with the Dean:

We talked about [expectations]. The dean wanted to know what were my expectations and I said to her, "Well my expectation is that I wish that I can get a scholarship to continue my studies." That was one expectation because that's the only way I could stay in for the scholarship because the salary then I was receiving was not really too enough to take care of me, my little daughter, my family because I'm a single parent. All right, so I was really wishing for...and then she told me, "Well, we cannot really promise you scholarship, but we hope and pray that one day we can have a scholarship and when it is

available we will share with you. Then one thing she also stressed was my academic performance.... Is it possible to keep [up my grades] with all the many problems I have – single-parent, going to work? I have to study the same time, but then I just get courage. She advised me on the load of courses to carry.

A freshman Accounting major described how she never received advising and counseling from the university. She wished someone would have provided her with encouragement, advised her on her course sequences and suggested the means to achieve academic success. In the absence of an advisor, she ascribed her timely and successful academic progress to God. “I know within that God will work out things. I know my graduation will be on time. I don’t have overseas support. I don’t have any support, but at least by God’s grace I made things possible for myself to come to school. Every time in my life I believe that my education comes best, and comes first.”

A senior Sociology major credits her success to prayer and fasting.

I’m Christian, so every semester if I plan my courses, I lay down and I pray over my courses. I even involve my instructors in it and say, “God, help me with the kind of instructor that I will be dealing with this semester because the burden I cannot do it my own way. I cannot do it alone, so I need you to guide me in this process. Only you I’m depending on. I don’t have nobody.” I just give everything to God. The first day of school I can hold a one day fast. That’s my secret. I can hold that day for my entire semester. I give that day to God for God to strengthen me. Yes, that’s what I usually do and back it up with study.... Things really improved now. I want to bless God for bringing such a leader on this university.

In the US culture, we are taught to avoid conversations regarding religious beliefs. However in Liberia, religion is embraced and is a part of the cultural identity. Religion is a

means of encouragement; when resources are unavailable to address concerns, many individuals turn to their faith. It was through faith that several of them discuss their survival through the war. Two participants compared and contrasted personal counseling and advising with pastoral counseling. According to a professor in the College of General Studies:

[Advisors] have to be between two lines. So, sometimes we draw [students] closer, we appear to be at their level, then from that particular direction they will expose things to you.... [Students will say,] "I see you as an elder brother or elder sister, but actually I want you to be my personal advisor. This is my problem." They will come and confide in you. Once that confidence is there you try to help them to build them up. So it's like it even happens in the religious area. Somebody confides in you and they expect you not to expose them. You keep the person's information and you treat with cautiousness. They will come closer to you and you find that that person becomes a new person.

One of the SA2C3 counselors further explains: "When you're dealing with people in pastoral counseling, you, the pastor, decides what they will do, but not in academic counseling. You leave them with the choice to select what they want to do."

Two participants also recognized that personal counseling is not only necessary for students, but for faculty and staff members who have been traumatized as well. Their recuperation is just as important in order for them to be whole and in turn help students. According to the Dean of Liberia College, "Advisement, in my opinion, is not only for students. Advisement also goes towards lecturers. We all are coming from war. We are traumatized and we need to be de-traumatized and that is why I was...I am still interested in the opening of a psychology department." The SA2C3 Director elucidates the need to counsel staff and refers to them as "wounded healers."

Well, I want for us first of all to realize that in advising students you have to be open-minded. You can't be judgmental. Whatever your religion or your belief, your persuasion, your philosophy, that's secondary. When you come to counseling [students] or to advise [students], you have to meet them where they are. Even if you are wounded, then you can be a wounded healer. Everybody thinks that when they come to the counseling center, they have come to bring God from heaven to earth, and so they come with that kind of superiority where I'm more religiously sound than you. I'm this. I'm okay. You're not okay, but what we want to realize is that when they come to us we want them to know that, "We're here for you."

Part of the advisors role is to heal the wounded in this postwar environment, but many of the faculty and staff are wounded themselves and still expected to uplift students.

The Shifting Culture of Student Interactions

The tumultuous college student experience was not only impacted by postwar effects, but also the deteriorated relationship between students and the institution especially with the registration staff and with the faculty. Two of the most frustrating experiences during academic progress described by all student participants were the registration process and negative faculty relationships. Students expressed their aggravation with the tedious registration system that includes course enrollment procedures and frequently changing registration processes, as well as poor institutional relationships impacted by the lack of quality advisement and interactions with uncaring and unsupportive faculty.

Student versus the institution. Registration is a manual process that can take months to complete. Students are required to receive a pre-registration form for course approval signatures from each respective department and verify courses with the Registrar's Office on what is called

a control sheet. Students are then billed for these courses and have three days to make payment. Otherwise, after three days the system will drop their courses. Once classes have been paid for students can then submit all documents to the Enrollment Data Processing area (EDP) to enter courses in the system. Several challenges arise during this process. 1) physical exhaustion of completing the process; 2) financial constraints and delayed scholarship dispersals that result in dropped courses; 3) corruption of the process through bribes and grade swapping; 4) information dissemination challenges to adequately inform students of process changes; 5) schedule modifications during registration; 6) lack of quality advising and support services from staff during registration; 7) fragility of paper-driven processes; and 8) late grade submissions.

Students are required to constantly wait in line under hot weather conditions. According to a senior Accounting major, “The registration process is too tedious. You have to stand on your feet the whole day. You stand in line fighting just to get that process done.” Students wait in line for course signatures, for registration processing, for bill payment, and for record processing. When students are waiting outside in line for registration they get frustrated, and interactions with impolite staff and students who rely on bribery in order to get priority only intensify circumstances. Among a population of traumatized students these situations can easily escalate frustrations. In addition, instances of bribery are more prevalent in a system comprised of a mostly volunteer staff. Volunteers who assist the official staff further complicate the process in that some seek bribes to complete their assignments. An SA2C3 counselor reflected on his experiences as a student and how that has shaped how he advises students.

I was once a student here before and I usually tell [the students,] “Look, when you enter UL, you will continue to stand in the queue... Yeah, you will continue to stand in line...’cause some of them can get so frustrated. It happened to me... Especially the first

time I wanted to go do my registration. I got on the line. By the time I got to the professor he said, "Oh the section is filled...closed, so you got to go." So, I had to leave and go plan, and then come back. It took me almost three weeks.

A junior Primary Education major shared her angst over completing registration:

The registration process can be very tedious, but it's becoming a little bit relaxing now with Dr. Dennis. If we could just have...a systematic way. It should not be bustling and tussling because it's like every semester you come you have to go to this place and you do this one, and then next semester you come it is not there.... You are stressed out. You don't know where to start from. You maybe have to stand for hours...standing two, three, four hours.

Although the process is quite taxing for students, they do recognize changes and improvements.

Another improvement to the registration is the post-billing of courses. Prior to the 2010-2011 second semester, students were required to pay for courses, then register. Limited course offerings left students struggling to complete their schedules and trying to find enough courses to cover what they have already paid. Now, students are billed after registration and given three days to make payment. After three days, courses are dropped for nonpayment. Three days presents a challenge to students who are not aware of the new process and unintentionally miss the deadline. The deadline also impacts students who are unable to secure the needed funds for tuition in three days.

Students with external scholarships lamented over what they considered to be an unreasonable timeframe. Delayed scholarships payments pose unnecessary roadblocks for students. According to administration, the Ministry of Education has not provided allocated funds to the university that cover 75% of the institution's scholarships. To date, the ministry

owes UL over \$600,000 USD. Students were advised by administration to plan to pay their own tuition and later apply for reimbursement from their scholarship donors. They encouraged students to at least pay for one to two courses, or whatever they could afford in order to remain in the system.

As described previously, bribery creates unfair advantages during the registration process. Students pay bribes in order to expedite the registration process, to improve grades needed to avoid academic probation, and to forge grade sheets (grade reports) required for record processing. A senior Biology major found her academic progress delayed after she was scammed by an imposter who presented himself as if he were an employee of the university.

[A man said,] “I will talk with my friend in the Admissions Office. They will put your name on the class list, but you will have to give me something for me to give [to the admission officer].” Everyone wants something. I said, “Okay.” He said, “\$2,005.” I said, “No, I don’t have it.” He said, “Any money you give me, if the [admission officer] doesn’t agree, I will give your money back to you.” I took \$1,500, I gave it to him. He took it....He didn’t add my name to the class list....Everything I had done was for nothing. I cried.

She was forced to sit out of school for an entire semester. Now, the administrators are advising students that money should not be given to individuals. Instead a receipt should be obtained from the Business Finance Office (BFO). For these reasons, security measures have been enhanced during registration and the Registrar’s Office only accepts original documents and no longer photocopies of grade sheets because students illegally have changed grades in the past. A freshman Public Administration major commends the institution for providing security to monitor the registration process.

The support staff, they too are doing their job. They too are on course, especially the security. Because I can remember the days the security on the campus was very hard working, especially during the time of registration. They make sure that everything is properly done. No one cheats. Everyone stands in the line. I mean everything is done on a first-come, first-served basis. So they too are doing well.

Challenges to information dissemination discussed in Chapter Four significantly impact the registration process. The Registrar's Office currently uses the campus newspaper, bulletin announcements, radio announcements, peer advisors, and Student Affairs staff to help disseminate information. As one of the most challenging processes for students to complete on campus, registration is constantly undergoing changes. A senior Agriculture major agrees, "For every semester there is a new system, so you have to be asking your friends. They will show you where to go, but things are not always the same." During a town hall meeting the Registrar announced that they would like to pilot a registration procedure in which students are not required to receive signatures from all departments. Instead, they would like to create a one-stop process, but only approximately 80 out of 23,000 students were in attendance to hear this announcement.

During the registration period peer advisors are primarily responsible for distributing grade sheets or reprinting lost grade sheets, or they strive to settle students' problems in the office. All peer advisors meet with the deans before every registration period to review procedural changes, and then assist in the dissemination of these changes to the larger student body. According to a peer advisor:

Information usually changes during registration period. Okay, so when the registration period is about to start, [peer advisors] have their own orientation where the [Dean of

Students] will get information from the Faculty Senate meeting and come to give us information – things we need to be doing, such and such information we should give to students, so we are all aware of the information. As the dean receives it he relays it to us. Although frequent changes frustrate students, the administration is constantly exploring new ways to improve the process, but challenges in information dissemination complicate systematic changes on campus and do not alleviate students' immediate frustrations. A professor in the College of General Studies elaborated:

Registration is about to start and the students need to get information on the registration period. Procedures will change over the semester or over the year period. Because for example, you will discover that what happened in past registration we discovered a mistake, so to avoid the mistake we will do some modification. We will make some changes. The students who don't come to listen to advisement or go to the bulletin board, all that student knows is that, "I'm going to register in the same manner." So, when they get there, there is some argument between those who are doing registration and the students.

Course schedule modifications create an additional hurdle during registration.

Modifications are sometimes made during registration, which force students to repeat the registration process because of created course conflicts or creates delays in the process. Four types of schedule modifications were identified: 1) course schedule changes; 2) room assignment changes; 3) schedule policy changes; and 4) external changes that impact university scheduling processes.

In some cases of course the schedule changes: courses are cancelled or moved for a variety of reasons. Other schedule modifications are made when departments do not offer enough courses to meet the needs of the student body. As described by a junior Chemistry major:

When we came to the university (2008) at the time the university was like helter-skelter. Open for one year, or open for one semester a year. And the schedule, before you copy the schedule it used to come in three [versions]. Different, different schedules, so at that time if you don't have an advisor you will do the wrong thing.

However, he appreciates recent improvements to the registration process. Last minute course additions complicate course scheduling, particularly on a campus with limited classroom space and lack of electricity to offer evening courses. Therefore, changes create a domino effect that leads to the next modification, room assignment changes. A junior Economics major explained how he found it difficult to find his classes.

Well, my current experience is like, I went to one of my classes and I find it difficult finding this class because normally when you pre-register sometimes classes are listed and classes are assigned to a room. Then when classes commence, these rooms are not the exact rooms that you are going to use. I mean you find yourself in different rooms assigned to that course. So, sometimes I find it difficulty from the initial stage in finding classes that we should be in.

During the second semester of the 2010-2011 academic year, the administration announced that they would now offer odd numbered courses in the first semester and even numbered courses in the second semester. This change in scheduling policy impacted thousands of students. A freshman Biology major discussed her academic progress delays.

I'm supposed to carry 17 credits and now the university is saying they can't offer a certain course that I'm supposed to do this semester because it ends with an even number not an odd number. If I don't do it now, then I got to do it next semester and I have to carry 21 credits which I think is too much burden considering what I have to study. First semester was really fine, but this semester doesn't have a good start.

The last modification that impacts the registration process involves the lack of coordination among secondary and tertiary schools. Students who are unable to get their WAEC scores from the school in time are ineligible to sit for the UL entrance exam, which in turn delays their registration for their first semester. The WAEC used to be administered in May, but is now administered in July. The lack of coordination of deadlines puts incoming freshmen at a great disadvantage and initiates a difficult transition.

Lack of quality advising and other support services negatively impact the registration process. As previously mentioned, sufficient time is not always dedicated to advising students. Most advising consists of course scheduling and fails to explore other needs that address student development holistically. According to a SA2C3 counselor:

Advising here on campus is not like what [is] expressed in America. Advising here is, I have my control sheet [the verified course approval form]. You will see on this place for advisor signature, right? An advisor should take me through the entire college process, but it's not like that here. So, when I go [to the department] and you see this place for advisor signature, that person signs because [the advisor] just wants to get you out of their face and go and do the next process. That's how it is here. It's just now that we have this center. So, sometimes those who are aware, they come around and say, "Oh, I tried to do this. I went to my college and they sent me here."

Inadequate advising services particular affects female students. Oftentimes women are misadvised by male peer advisors because they want to “make a show” and have her in their class. The lack of structure and oversight enables the abuse of position authority.

The quality of advice is also impacted by the student-to-advisor ratio as mentioned by the Dean of the College of Science and Technology: “[The SA2C3 Director] and [Vice President of Student Affairs] cannot counsel 21,000 students, so even if we’re connected to the SA2C3, we need more [counselors] especially from a country coming from war.” A potential solution that will be recommended in the near future is a proposal for a first-year seminar. The SA2C3 director has proposed the creation of a University 101 course that would include a student orientation, acclimation and transition issues and student success behaviors. This course would help to familiarize students with the UL system and resources, as well as help them to select a major and schedule courses. The course would enable staff to interact with students in larger groups and to provide well-defined and precise information to new students.

In addition to the lack of quality advising services, students also complained about support staff for registration. For example, four students expressed their dissatisfaction with support services from Enrollment Data Processing (EDP) as described by a freshman Biology major:

[The EDP staff] doesn’t act like they are interacting with the public. They don’t talk to you like you’re a student. They talk to you like you are some kind of slave or you are inferior to them. Maybe they feel because they are sitting behind the computer. Like, I had a problem with my grade sheet. They didn’t send my grade sheet and then they put the wrong section. I went to [EDP]. It’s been like a month. Instead they still can’t sort it out. When I go to them, the man is shouting at me, so I just stop going.

The seventh registration challenge consists of manual process errors. The fragility of paper-based system includes increased error in recording as well as lost or damaged documents. The president explained, “[Students] don’t register online. Everything is paper driven. There is so-called discipline-based advising going on at the same time as registration which makes no sense. So the pathway of students is really torturous.” Manual processes used in course planning and registration of over 23,000 students create significant delays. The official university academic calendar does not allocate a timeframe for advising prior to registration. Therefore, the paper-driven processes involved with course planning overlap with and delay the registration process. In addition, the timeframe dedicated to registration is often insufficient to complete processing all necessary documents prior to the first day of classes. In addition, manual processes also result in more reporting errors which contribute further to registration delays. The Dean of Agriculture and Forestry discussed how he wants to start his own student database at the college to maintain copies of all student records. Students often find missing grades, incomplete grades, no grades, and absent marks on their records entered in error, but resolving these errors can take weeks to track down the paper trail of grade reports. He believes that departments can create a system of checks and balances by also retaining copies of all student records to align with records maintained by the Registrar’s Office.

Other challenges relating to registration include submission of late or inaccurate grades. When students do not receive their grades on time or receive incorrect grades they are unable to register for classes. During the first semester of the 2010-2011 academic year, students were preparing to organize a campus demonstration in response to their inability to register. Fortunately, administration was able to intervene before a full student protest ensued. Incorrect grades, and in some cases the resulting student protest, hinder and disrupt student progress, and

further aggravate tenuous student-institutional rapport. Late grade submissions accounted for a two week delay in course commencement. Registration was originally scheduled from March 1 until March 29. Classes were supposed to resume on March 28, but due to late grade submissions did not begin until April 15.

Late grade submissions are not only the responsibility of faculty, but the EDP also has the responsibility to properly enter accurate grade reports on time. A freshman Biology major describes her concerns with EDP.

[Administration] should see about EDP. They should talk to the employees there. Let them know how to talk to people and make sure people's grades are sorted out because sometimes if you are on scholarship and they give you the wrong grade of the wrong section, then the next semester you don't have the opportunity to enter.

A senior Biology major also details her experience with incorrect grade reports.

Yes, like this semester my grade sheet, there was a stamp, "probation" 'cause I had a deficiency in one course. I go to the instructor to see how best we could handle it. He said it was a miscalculation. [The correction] was not accepted in the Record's Office.

Many of these challenges could be adequately addressed, avoided or improved with a systematic advising period prior to registration. But students need to be educated about the purpose and function of advising also. According to the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry, "This happens to be the registration period. Registration advising, that's when people think that's the only time you can go and meet the advisor, meet the professor." The lack of frequent and organized one-to-one or small group interactions with faculty further hinders relationship development.

Faculty-student relationships have deteriorated in the institution's hierarchical and corruptive culture. Relationships are gradually improving, but participants shared concerns about the need for faculty to dedicate time to students, improve communication, and shift to a culture of student-centeredness and high ethical standards. Because the advising system is not structured, faculty members do not prioritize advising responsibilities and clearly do not have the time to meet with all 23,000 students. This lack of faculty commitment to close student interactions is indicative of the poor faculty/student relationship as explained by the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry:

Well, [students] basically get advice through their program officers and department professors, from their department chairpersons. If then they still have issues they come to our office, the dean's office. That's the quote/unquote "the process". That's what they do, but it's not very well structured.... [There is an] overwhelming number of [students] to staff to do just [advising]...I think that the professors, staff and others need some specialized training in general in terms of advising and counseling. I think they have it very low on the ladder in terms of its importance....We're working overtime and some of them think...believe that they have to be paid extra for doing this and I don't think so.... I'm seeing some crazy examples of students who are sometimes doing courses long before they should be doing courses and students who have done courses they should not have done. Students not knowing their grade average at a certain level need to be monitored more and probably provided some advice on a lower number of credits.

The Dean of the College of Business and Public Administration agrees:

[Students] feel that people create stumbling blocks for them...for them to make progress. A lot of them also feel that they are not being evaluated properly. They are not told the

rightful information. Interaction in the classroom is sometimes poor. Most other complaints that they have are in the midst of the huge numbers, we're trying to solve this problem.

Because of these large numbers a senior English major describes how faculty just do not have sufficient time to spend with students.

Well, the faculty, I want to bless God for their life because one way or the other they are imparting knowledge to us, but they need to seek the students' interests because [in the past] they had people who use to spoon feed them with knowledge, but unlike our days...nobody wants to give attention to anybody. Nobody...you are busy, I'm busy, so who will you go to? It is only Jesus Christ that we are all depending on....I do all things by myself 'cause if you go to someone that is very busy they won't give you time. They will only just talk to you like in two to three minutes....We are all human. We need assistance.

For a senior Sociology major, she feels as though faculty and staff do not know how to communicate well with students.

From [name] department, looking at their human relationship is very, very poor...very, very. They don't know how to talk to people. When you go there, you are downhearted. They shout at you. You know, they [discourage] you, but what can I do? What can I do? It's not my business to go to [the Dean of Students]...go to the President, and you know carry my complaint....What [the university] could do is open a counseling section like [SA2C3]. A counseling section where they are always talking to students, always creating avenues so that people will come...human friendly people will come and listen to

people's problems. They can really help students to minimize mass failure at the university level.

Difficult communication is often exacerbated by the hierarchical culture between students and faculty as described by a junior Chemistry major:

The faculty has their own problems. Most of the bureaucracy the students face around here, the faculty is the cause and I think that can be best addressed by themselves because they have their own constitutional rules....The university has a funny policy between faculty and students. Whenever faculty carries a complaint, too bad for [the student], no judgment. It is not fine. It is not a bureaucracy we are running here. At least the students, he or she should hear where they fall short, and when they are punishable or when they need to be punished, they will know what they are punished for.

A senior English major declared, "We are human and we need to interact with each other. We are not a boogey man or evil forces to be afraid of." Students are seeking attention and support from faculty within a culture that is still transitioning to student-centeredness. Improvements have been recognized by all participants now that faculty needs are getting addressed. According to a professor in the College of General Studies:

In the past, the students didn't have any opportunity to meet with the president of the university because he was seen...the instructors were even seen as semi-gods. If you argue with the instructor for something he or she did. [You think,] "I wasn't wrong," and you try to set it straight maybe just settle and get an "F" for the particular semester.... Some of the teachers' concern and welfare have been taken care of. We cannot say 100%, but at least it has been taken care of. So, a lot of the instructors, the teachers feel that

some level of respect has been returned to them. All right, so they are doing what they are supposed to do.

A SA2C3 peer counselor reflected on his undergraduate experiences and is glad to see that students now have an option to speak with a caring advisor in the Center.

Except for now that students are coming to this office, not like when I entered here. We were told to go to our various colleges and they had people sitting there calling themselves advisors who will talk to you if they feel like. If they don't feel like talking to you, they will not talk to you. And sometimes some of them were not even open with the subject matter. How they saw it, that's how they advised you.

Although not perfect, relationships are improving under the new administration as described by a freshman Public Administration major:

The faculty, they are great. Some are highly motivating. It's just that in contemporary post-conflict educational sector there are so many ups and downs, so many frustrations. They too are concentrating on family problems, domestic problems. So, you observe at times they don't give it their all in all, but by and large, they are great.

All three students from the College of Agriculture and Forestry described professors as aging and having tempers. They attributed breakdown in communication due to these generational gaps and older faculty's authoritative views of student-faculty dynamics. A senior Civil Engineering major explained that the faculty culture is simply not student-friendly. Students perpetuated this culture by informing incoming cohorts. "Some of the instructors are not actually student-friendly. While it may be true that some are friendly....When we enter people spoke about instructors and that it was difficult to get through [the system], so that fear existed." The Vice President of Student Affairs concurs and has found that some of the faculty

do not even think that students have the right to ask them questions and that the president is too student-friendly.

In addition to shifting the institutional culture towards student-centeredness is the need to shift perceptions of faculty expectations. A senior Agriculture major feels as though faculty just assume that students are lazy and unwilling to learn. “Many of [the faculty] feel that we are not serious....We don’t want to learn. They always say we are lazy. We don’t want to read. I mean, just like that.” He attributes half of these perceptions on poor student performance, but claims that the other half of poor student performance is due to poor presentation of the material and limited resources. He wants the university to reinstitute vacation school (summer session) to help with student progress and internships to help prepare seniors with transition into the workforce. A freshman Biology major agrees saying, “Where I come from, [faculty] always doubt our ability like we are not able. They always say, ‘If you can’t make it, change your college now.’” The Vice President of Academic Affairs counters this student perception with his views on reading challenges among students.

One of the things we have to do is to challenge our students to read. It’s not that they don’t have the ability to read, but they don’t use the time to read. They think it takes a whole lot of time to sit down and look at this book, and they say, “Wow, it’s thick. When am I going to read it?” So you don’t see them sitting down supinely reading like other students will do at other universities, and so we would graduate our students from here, but even when we graduated [and then] went to foreign countries [for graduate school], one of the most difficult problems we faced was to sit down, read, and comprehend. Bridging these divergent views on academic expectations continues to delay developments in student-faculty relationships, but certainly has not halted progress.

One college did not align with traits described in weak faculty-student relationships, Teachers College. This college has embraced processes that include: 1) consistent and continuous advising; 2) frequent positive interactions with students and faculty in and outside of the classroom; 3) advising interactions that cover both academic and non-academic concerns; and 4) interactions that demonstrate student respect.

At the beginning of their first year, students are directed to their respective departments to meet with the chairperson who assigns their academic advisor. Every subject and specialty area has faculty advisors. Students review course plans, discuss their academic status, and talk over a host of other concerns that impact academic success and student transition. Students' grade sheets are recorded on file in the department and used to guide the student through matriculation to graduation. According to the Dean of Teachers College, students are not equipped to plan their academic programs independently, even with the assistance of curriculum guides. Therefore, Teachers College takes a proactive approach to assist students early in their progress.

[The dean's office] has a monthly meeting with the faculty to interact and find out what are the things that are going off-hand or what are the things we should change, and this and that. We interact...it's a close interactive relationship in the college with the faculty and also the students.

The college has been able to create an environment that treats its students and faculty as a family. Faculty members understand and apply the holistic development concept to their students as future educators. Advising sessions tend to address both academic and non-academic matters. According to the Dean:

Like this young man that came over here. He came, he said that he had a file [folder] and that he brought his file [folder] with his documents and this and that, but we have looked all over there and we didn't see the file. [I said to him], "My son, go and get a file [folder]." He couldn't tell me that he didn't have the money, so I took \$40 and I gave it to him [and said,] "Go and get the file [folder]." He got the file [folder] and brought the change to me and I told him, "Carry that change and drink cold water." He said, "Thank you madam." We usually advise them also on their department, their physical appearance... So it's not only the academic side, we...even if they are drunks. If they come with something smelling on them. They are afraid, I will usually tell them, "We are the leaders." These are the people that will take our places. We have to tell them...make them open up.

The unique culture found in Teachers College is reflective of the Dean's leadership style and her passion for education, as well as student development values evident in courses offered in the Teachers College, such as Educational Psychology and Education Guidance Counseling.

A junior Primary Education major recollected her positive advising experience in Teachers College:

Well, for my college, I continue to see that it's stable. I don't know about other colleges. To be very frank, if you would just interview any other person inside Teachers College you'll almost hear what you're hearing from me, seriously. We are so comfortable.... The Dean and the staff have created a room of relaxation. There is no fear. We can contact any professor, any staff and they are just always willing to listen to us and give us the best counsel and advice for our lessons and courses, seriously.... There's such coordination in the Teachers College. It's like a family. It's like a family networking, so

you go there any hour, any time. The Dean is not too busy to talk to you. The staff that she has working with her they're also professors. They're not busy to talk to you.

The faculty also maintains open lines of communication with students and maintains levels of mutual respect in and outside of the classroom as described by the Dean.

The students of Teachers College hold the faculty of the College with high esteem. That I know, and because sometimes they will even come and tell me how they appreciate certain faculty members... How they are treated in the class. So, the students of Teachers College have high regard for the faculty of the College from their interaction with them because we usually meet with them, talk with them, and tell them that they are examples, and whatever they see out there [in society and on campus] number one, they don't have to behave like other students because this is a career college. If you are a teacher, you go out there. Whatever you do you should be an example for others to look at and follow.... Most of the students that graduate from here...the resulting information that can come back to us we are very pleased with them.

A senior Secondary Education major agrees:

My professors were advising me about their course I'm going to study. I'm in the Teachers College and most of the advice was that teaching is not just only getting the material from the book and giving it to the students, but you are also teaching them the character that they will also need to be living by. You are also presenting your behavior and the manner in which you need to do things where the student needs [your mentorship] and live in the same respectful manner...We have the rural teacher and we have the urban teacher. For the rural setting we are not just like the urban teachers where maybe you come here today and do what you want to do here and you get out this

community, and it's not counted on you. It's not like that in the rural area because what you do in the rural area, it also has an effect on you.... You are not only teaching the student in the rural area, but are also teaching the community as a whole.

Clearly, the students in the Teachers College are instilled with pride and taught about the importance of their profession and the integral role they will play in society. They receive consistent messages from all faculty and staff in the College and have experienced supportive environments in and outside of the classroom. A senior English major who is not in Teachers College recommended that all professors at UL undergo training in the Teachers College to improve their teaching methodologies and to empower professors in hopes that it will improve the student learning process.

Being in a career-specific program such as primary and secondary education has resulted in students who self-select this major based upon intrinsic interest and passion. A professor in Teachers College described her students as very goal-oriented and dedicated.

One thing I've found out from the class that I've taught, [the students] are very eager to learn. I found in the class that we had the focused, goal-oriented [students]. Majority of them – I can say about 90% of them, which is very good. They know what they want to do. They work hard at it. If they don't understand most of the time they will come up and ask. They are willing to take that extra mile to come up and ask for help whenever they need it. Not only the cognitive side, but you know, the affect.

A junior Primary Education major agrees:

I can talk more of Teachers College because that's where I am, and what I notice about our overall education atmosphere is that everyone is serious because we are always warned by the dean that our profession is very, very important. Some time ago teachers in

Liberia thought that, “We’re so poor,” and people were not taking the teaching thing so serious, but from motivation from the dean and the staff...for every class or any course you are doing is like they’re speaking one language. And the one language is that teachers are not poor people. Teachers are very important. They built up our self-esteem. Making us continue to love what we’re into and they continue to tell us that it is not all about the money. It’s about the passion and if you have the passion you’re going to really learn the application and the methodology whereby you’re not going to be a poor teacher. Because of that now our shoulders are getting high.

All of the faculty participants agreed that training in advising and counseling is needed for professors to improve the quality of their student support. They contribute poor advising to the lack of training and high student-to-faculty ratio.

According to the Vice President of Student Affairs:

[My vision is to] keep playing the role the university wants us to play. Being that center, that area that creates an enabling environment for students to enjoy their academic sojourn.... It appeared as if when you enter the university you went to hell and you didn’t leave hell for seven, eight, to 10 years. So, it was not a pleasant environment. Everywhere there was trouble. Nobody advocated for you. Nobody talked to you. You were always looked at as if you were nobody. You were nothing, and you didn’t have any room for redress. Now the students are seeing that there’s somebody in the Faculty Senate, in the University Council, on the President’s Cabinet who will say, “No,” from the student’s side. “Let’s see it this way.”

The SA2C3 has the potential to work with students to help restore faculty-student relationships and utilize lessons from the Teachers College. Their hope is to improve the college experience

and henceforth improve the quality of their graduates. According to the Vice President of Academic Affairs:

When you come [to the university], you should come here to rediscover yourself. You shouldn't come here to memorize. You should come here with the idea that there is something in you that you want to develop and the university is the one that can develop this for you. You don't come here as "mama baby." Leave "mama baby" and you come here as an individual....We tell the teachers, "You teach 75 students...make them creative." Let them put out something, a discussion and get everybody's opinion. Don't tell [the student,] "Oh no, you're wrong and I'm right."

All staff and faculty participants agree that the SA2C3 needs to create collaborative processes and work closely with all departments and appropriate administrative offices. All faculty members were open to receiving additional training from the SA2C3 staff to improve advising services. According to a SA2C3 peer counselor:

Well, except for the SA2C3 – we have qualified advisors – but the other departments to be very frank with you, they don't really pay attention to students. Students are left alone to do what they want to do. Actually, there are some [professors] that need training because when it comes to advisement or you talk about career counseling, there are some advisors that do not really do counseling.

According to the Dean of the College of Business and Public Administration, collaboration will allow each department to build on its strength to support student success.

What we need to do is work more collaboratively. First, we should familiarize them with our curriculum. What are the fields we are teaching...actually concerned about their relevance to society? We need to have meetings with them and coming out of that should

be students who have peculiar problems, social interactive problems can be sent to them. Talk to them because we don't have that expertise. That sort of collaboration and link should be established and sustained...because the academic side, we have control over that, but when it comes to problems that impact their academic performance, it should be the counseling section doing that.

A professor in the Teachers College believes that collaboration creates a united front for the institution.

I think [advising with SA2C3] should be a collaborative effort so the students can see [that advising is] not just from the college perspective, but from the administrative perspective as a whole unit. It's not just one person doing it, but it's the whole university culture that's involved in counseling.

The Dean of the College Agriculture and Forestry agrees:

We have a lot of changes, so a lot of the time [students] get confused. Counseling needs a complete rethink. Resource persons who are specially trained to be attached to the colleges will help in the long run. Orientation is not only for students. Orientation must be for professors who are coming in, especially ones like us coming from a research background with no skills for teaching. No skills for interpersonal structured dialogue. If we are part-timers, we come in the morning. We have class two to four, two days a week. They're on campus five minutes to two, and leave five minutes after four. And so, the students don't know us. We don't know them. If they have problems they don't know where to go because we work in two or three different places, so that weakens the whole process for students.

He believes that students also need a strong pre-registration advising process as an opportunity to engage them in their course planning and goal-setting.

A huge part of the SA2C3 Director's responsibilities involves networking with other campus entities.

Well, my job responsibility is networking to ensure that this Center is viable. Creating a sense of belonging to be able to give justification on why this Center should be here.

Why we need more staff. To interact with the deans, the chairpersons, and faculty members to make sure that students forgo the myth that their deans, chairpersons and professors cannot be approached. So, I'm here to put a program together administratively, but I'm also here to network and to ensure that this Center serves the interest of our student population, especially freshmen and seniors.

Although challenges still exist, all participants mention positive changes they have seen under the new administration. According the Dean of Liberia College, strengthening educational quality has helped to improve the faculty-student relationship.

I must tell you quite frankly that previously...before the present administration [students'] thoughts have always been negative. Now they have positive thoughts about Liberia College. There are much improvements in the College. The attitudes of teachers' relationship to students have changed and students' relationships to lecturers have also changed. It's becoming richer.... Many of them look to us as maybe fathers. Those are the kinds of improvements we want to see.... We must learn to understand and teach human relationships among people...expand that decency.

Student-centeredness. The new campus philosophy of student-centeredness has created a unique role for SA2C3 as the institutional agents who advocate for students. The Center is very

involved and determined to know students, their needs, their concerns, and potential solutions.

According to the SA2C3 Director:

I go around the campus. I get my staff to go out. We'll shake [students'] hands. We'll interact with them. Wherever they are, we want to make our way there. And if, for example, we observe that they are grouping and stuff like that, we realize that they are grouping for good or for the bad, so we try to make our presence felt. If it's for the good, then we compliment them. If it's for the bad, then we try to skillfully intervene so that we can resolve the problem.

Their efforts in student advocacy cover assistance and referrals for all student challenges that may negatively impact the college experience. In response to the introduction of a student-centered culture, the college experience is improving for both faculty and students. According to the Dean of Liberia College:

The current administration is trying to be student-centered. And this student-centeredness brings about positive change and the interaction opens up the students' minds and it makes both administrators and lecturers know what [the students] think. What they expect. This makes our job much easier. Yes, so that's the change that I see.

This shift in faculty-student relations has impacted the role of the SA2C3 in this cultural transition. The most significant finding from this study is the role of the advisor as mediator. Staying true to the Liberian context, I call this phenomenon the "advising palaver hut."

In many African cultures, palaver huts are communal places established to provide a safe space to resolve conflict and build consensus among members of the community. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the Republic of Liberia (2009), palaver huts (or more colloquially spelled in Liberia, "palava" huts) are "common to rural communities around

the country, [and] is a conflict resolution mechanism wherein select members of integrity in the community adjudicate matters of grave concern to the community and seek to resolve disputes amongst or between individuals and or communities. Palaver huts derive legitimacy from a host of cultural influences including the Poro, Sande and Bodio institutions and have the greatest legitimacy and viability in rural areas” (pp. 1-2). These institutions are cultural secret societies and rituals. Palaver huts are circular, open-air structures usually made of mud, clay and/or wood with thatched roofs. The circular structure represents equality of all participants in the enclosure. The concept of African palaver can be found in several African countries each with varying degrees of structure and format of dialogue. However, commonalities of African palaver include the inclusive and collective nature of community dialogue to address moral concerns, conduct conflict resolution, create judicial laws, establish cultural norms, educate youth, welcome visitors, host social gatherings and uplift the common good of the community (Bujo, 2001; Kimosop, 2011; Maina, 2008; Wamba dia Wamba, 1985).

The term “palaver” means “a long parley usually between persons of different cultures or levels of sophistication (especially one between primitive [sic] natives and European traders); conference; discussion; or idle talk” (Palaver, n.d., p. 1). The origin of the word comes from the Portuguese term “palavra” which means words or speech. From 1461 until the late 17th century, the Portuguese, Dutch and British operated trading posts in Liberia. The Portuguese first called Liberia *Costa da Pimenta*, which means Pepper or Grain Coast. The term has developed in many African countries to be a culture of community building and no longer associated with the historical references to colonial traders. Kratz (1983) defines “palaver” in African cultures as “a context in which discussion is centrally concerned with expression, avoidance or resolution of conflict” (p. 409). She notes that although definitions of palaver connote open participation,

some formats exclude women or only allow women to participate through supporting roles. In this case, the emphasis is on the process of African palaver and not the exclusion of participants in this traditionally male-dominated practice. The metaphorical interpretation of the advising palaver hut is not meant to diminish modern developments in advising and counseling to antiquated customs, but to recognize and appreciate the value and contributions of traditional concepts and celebrate its cultural relevancy and applicability in today's society. As with traditional African palavers, the SA2C3, now referred to as the advising palaver hut, serves multiple roles in the campus community as an area to: 1) resolve conflict in order promote solidarity and cultural values and 2) welcome, engage and heal the community through dialogue, education and informal social gatherings.

The primary role of the palaver hut is to settle disputes and maintain peace among the community. In the case of the advising palaver hut, the SA2C3 has taken on the responsibility to mediate academic and personal disputes between institutional agents and students, particularly between faculty and students. The SA2C3 Director shared that he is willing to intervene on behalf of the student to improve support services.

We're here to help the culture.... [For example,] for that culture to improve we go out to people who run the cafeteria and stuff and we talk to them. We observe how they interact with the students. If we think the services are not being given to the students and the students are not being treated in a more respectful manner, then I get up and go and talk to the management and say, "Look, these students are here and this university exists because they're here."

An example of this intermediary role of SA2C3 was also described by a peer advisor.

You feel like [the student] is going out of his mind because I try to explain this one simple thing to you and you can't understand....Instead of both of us having confrontation I say, "Okay, come let's go to the counseling center and maybe they will sit you down and cool your tension down and we can find a solution."

However, this role was not intended in the original purpose and responsibilities of the Center as explained by a SA2C3 counselor.

Well, students' perceptions of this office, even the perception of some of the staff here, they think that this center is for settling disputes. Some of them they think it's for settling disputes because once a staff sent somebody here that had some problem with another student and really it was like this is something he could've taken care of. [Students] say, "Oh, go to the counseling center," for us to come and judge a case between two people, but I don't think it's for that. I think it's more than that. I think if there are some things that can be settled easily. Other people can take care of that instead of having them come in and it's not for counseling. It's just for us to be arguing and judging you this and that and takes a lot of time from somebody who really wants to talk about something. I think some of them see this Center as a place that they can settle disputes and not to come for help or for counseling.

Students misconstrue the purpose of academic, career and personal counseling services and focus on their needs for advocacy. Because this misperception of advising is commonly held, some students prefer not to use the advising and counseling center as mentioned by a senior Biology major:

When things happen, we would rather share it with our colleague than going to.... We feel that if I'm affected by one or two problems, maybe with our instructors, so if I go to

Student Affairs or Dean of Academic Affairs it will be like you are reporting the instructor or something. So, we rather share it with one another.

Part of the centers student advocacy efforts involves discussing and mediating disputes on students' behalf, but also continuing to clarify other services provided to the campus community and create awareness. In light of the cultural shift towards student-centeredness, an advising palaver hut has been critical in assisting with dissonance that has occurred during this cultural and philosophical transition. Its intermediary involvement has contributed to improved student-institution relations, strengthened cohesion among various community members, and promotion of the administration's new cultural value of student-centeredness. The SA2C3's involvement in these dialogues has also resulted in clarification of institutional governance. Advising policies are being developed based upon observed student needs, and the SA2C3 staff members are able to propose policy and procedural changes based upon the concerns brought forth in these dispute settlements.

Two palaver huts exist on the campus of the University of Liberia, the political and religious palaver huts. In these huts students gather to carry on debates and lively discussions as well as to resolve their concerns relating to these two topics. SA2C3 staff often visit these huts to learn about student concerns and advocate on their behalf with administration. The current political palaver hut seems to have a negative connotation according to one professor in the College of General Studies.

[Students will say,] "I'm a politician and I'm not used to going to classes, [so fellow students] follow me...palava hut, palava hut." At the end that's a failure [in their academics]... Many of them come they see their friends under the palava hut. Some of those guys out there, they have completed their courses. They are only waiting around for

graduation. They go under the palava hut so they can [hear a] lecture series, listen to lecture, but for some of the students that just entered they don't know. So they just get carried away, join the fray and stay there while classes are in session. We also advise students because many of them will see their friends sitting on the veranda. They go and join them. They say, "I'm just sitting down here." [I ask them,] "What happened? No good lecture today?" And there is no lecture that is not a good one, so we also advise them in that area. Pay attention to your lesson. Even there will be time for socialization, which of course is part of academic life, but they put more time to the lesson in classroom than going to socialize because that is very important in the academic sojourn.

The SA2C3's involvement and frequent visits with these huts have created a more positive environment for student engagement and shifted students' attention towards using the Center in order to constructively participate in educational and social gatherings.

The original purpose of the Center was to provide academic, career and personal counseling for students. Although these services are not yet fully developed, the center plays a crucial and therapeutic role in student socialization. According to the SA2C3 Director:

We serve a role as a point of reference. We refer them. We give them direction where they need to go to get help. We don't solve all their problems here, and to ever draw that conclusion is to change the nature from advising and counseling center to something else. We want to make sure that we help them find a sense of direction. Find out where they need to go and to get a resolution to their problem.

Students are invited to attend Conversational Hours to discuss concerns and learn about resources available at the university. The staff members make themselves available to welcome new students and visitors. Oftentimes, students frequently return to the Center to engage in

friendly and informal conversations and are gradually building trust with the SA2C3 staff to discuss personal concerns. Daily appointments observed in the SA2C3 not only involved conflict resolution between students and faculty or students and institutional challenges they face day-to-day, but more importantly as a meeting place for informal dialogue, relaxation and a place to have a voice.

Summary

The current role of faculty advisors fulfill the prescriptive needs of advising and course planning, however tension and corruption exists among students and faculty, resulting in a growing need to address other developmental aspects of today's Liberian college student. A clash between traditional culture in which one respects authority and the development of student-centricity is tugging at the organization. New administrative policies and philosophies have improved the college student experience for all constituents, but the relationship gap is still on the mend. Both students and institutional agents have opposing opinions regarding their challenges and experiences that involves targeted blame and creates a vicious cycle of tension. Thus, this cyclical animosity creates an interesting power dynamic between the faculty and student, and is only aggravated by the proliferation of corruption. In this effect, the SA2C3 counselors become the peace keepers or informal ombudspersons while the Center continues to develop its original purpose of offering academic, career and personal counseling services to students.

Chapter Eight

Light in Darkness

This study sought to analyze the organizational role of advising from student, faculty and staff perspectives, as well as to explore the culture, college experiences and academic progression of students prior to and after the establishment of the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center (SA2C3), particularly for freshmen and senior students. An ethnographic case study approach, a social organization analysis, and a metaphor were used to gain an in-depth understanding of Liberian higher education, as well as shed light on the nuances and interactions of the organizational culture and behaviors that formulate part of the University of Liberia advising experience. The motto of the institution, *Lux in Tenebris* or Light in Darkness, captures the essence of this institution as an organization that is thriving in the face of uncertainty and challenge. The motto was appropriately selected as the university once represented a pioneering initiative to provide higher education to a non-colonized African nation that had been led by freed African Americans. The motto represented the image of hope and promise for the establishment of a great nation. In its postwar period, the university still represents opportunities for growth, restoration, and development of a new nation. This chapter provides a discussion of these developments and findings, as well as recommendations.

The original purpose of this study was to: 1) identify the role of academic advising in Liberian higher education; 2) understand the relationship between social organization and interactions that occur from advising; and 3) investigate applications of advising approaches and models in a non-Western cultural setting. However, this investigation shed light on larger concerns regarding the challenges faced by a higher education institution in a developing country. Challenges included, but were not limited to insufficient resources, inadequate

infrastructure, massification of higher education, outdated curricula, lack of faculty and staff, corruption, as well as needs for student remediation and rehabilitation. All of these concerns superseded the full establishment of academic advising services as defined by the *Pillars of Academic Advising*. Instead, this study identified two primary elements that continue to shape the college education experience: postwar effects and the shifting culture of student interactions. As a result, these elements have redefined the preliminary role of the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center (SA2C3) as what I called the advising palaver hut.

Postwar Effects

The college student experience was explored through Culture, Affiliation, Resources, Recorded Control, and Substitutability. Exploring each of these features highlighted challenges at the University that have negatively impacted the college student experience. These challenges were products of the civil war. The war created massive devastation across society and manifested microcosmic consequences in all social institutions, including the University. Since the end of the war and specifically in the last three years under the new president, institutional priorities have emphasized the reconstruction of the essential teaching functions and the infrastructure of the institution, but at what cost to the student experience? This section further analyzes the challenges associated with postwar effects in higher education. In regards to the institutional motto, these postwar ripple effects represent UL's darkness.

My analysis of the social organization provided "a roadmap-like breadth and a lens-like depth" for examining the role of advising and college student experiences in the context of a Liberian higher education institution (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005, p.577). With this birds-eye view of the Liberian higher education context came the harsh reality of a recovering society. Ten years after the civil war, Liberia has demonstrated remarkable growth, yet inadequate

improvements in human and economic development. I argued in Chapter One that higher education institutions have the capacity to significantly contribute to national development. With the abundance of natural resources, education can help sub-Saharan African countries improve business enterprise, market trade, and boost economic productivity. According to Ivana Milojević (1998), six models exist for institutions of higher education. Colleges and universities have the ability to serve as *corporations*, providing vocational training and generating revenue; as *academic leaders*, providing knowledge through teaching and research; *cultural coordinators*, preparing individuals for citizenship; *poliversities and multiversities*, playing multiple roles in the communities they serve; *global electronic university*, expanding access and innovation through technology; and *community-based institutions*, providing public service and outreach to local communities (Shore, 2010, p.19). For an institution that plays so many roles in society, it is logical to connect higher education to national development initiatives. However, through a closer examination, social organization analysis has shown that several challenges within each feature of the conceptual framework are preventing the UL from fulfilling its mission and promoting quality student experiences. Therefore, the university is not effectively meeting societal needs within a timeframe that society demands, especially with the MDG deadline of 2015 fast approaching.

Postwar challenges created a domino effect across Liberian higher education institutions. At UL, areas most afflicted by postwar conditions included inadequate resources such as, insufficient academic buildings and administrative offices, scant academic materials, limited technology, and diminished financial support. In regards to human resources, war-related deaths and brain drain have forced the institution to make the most of available talent among the faculty, staff and student employees. Investments in physical, human, and fiscal resources have

gradually increased at UL, yet these investments are insufficient to address all critical needs of the institution such as, infrastructure development, faculty and staff recruitment, student remediation, community rehabilitation, and improvements to enhance curriculum relevance.

The loss of resources has exacerbated challenges to affiliation including over-enrollment of students, unenforced policies to regulate student access via admission standards, deteriorated students' academic readiness for higher education, and continued corruption. These challenges related to student affiliation make the entry and socialization of students in their new environment a turbulent process. The institution had yet to define clear goals for student affiliation and socialization. Therefore, advisors have difficulty determining their responsibility to students. The lack of formal advising services have forced most students to engage in educational planning independently and often incoherently, rely on informal advice from friends and family, or receive limited support from faculty advisors. This lack of educational guidance fails to inform students of career opportunities that are accessible and would impact national needs and fulfill workforce demands. Within the organization, postwar effects bred a culture of student and institutional conflict elucidated in the next section, *The Shifting Culture of Student Interactions*. Social organization analysis expanded my investigation of the role of advising beyond individual interactions. The guidelines established in the *Pillars of Academic Advising* provide ideal principles that could help prioritize areas of need for advising services, but these guidelines were not always applicable given the dire circumstances that were a result of postwar conditions. Overall, advising is ultimately shaped by the organizations and students it serves, while organizations are shaped by the context of the country. Therefore, the cultural context of society is what truly determines the priorities of social institutions and shapes the structures and processes found within organizations.

The Shifting Culture of Student Interactions

As outlined in the previous section, postwar effects determine the structure and processes of an organization. In addition, these postwar conditions negatively impacted the University and concurrently created obstacles for students as they navigated their way through the educational system. Barriers to student progress include the aforementioned challenges, but more importantly the barriers represent the consequences of these challenges. The lack of resources hinders the educational process and the availability of academic offerings. High student to faculty ratios result in many students who are unable to obtain academic, social, and professional support from institutional agents and reduce the quality of the educational experience. The deteriorated education system is creating a generation of students underprepared for academe and no recourse for remediation. In addition to academic preparedness, many students also struggle to cope with posttraumatic symptoms. A culture of corruption creates conflicts among students, faculty and staff; threatens the bond of trust between students and the institution; and tarnishes the confidence of constituents who witnessed a level of hypocrisy in an institution that should foster and develop academic and social integrity in the community. In postwar Liberia, the relationship between the institution and the student has broken down. However, positive changes and developments initiated under the current president have reignited hope in all of the participants. The most significant development is the shift in culture of student interactions towards student-centeredness and away from traditional hierarchical structures. This major cultural shift in student-institution interaction represents the Light in the Darkness as the University gradually resurrects.

Student-centeredness can be defined as “a university’s effort to convey to students that they are important...the extent to which students feel welcomed and valued” (Elliott & Healy,

2001, p.7). *The university exists because of the students* was the recurring message that I gathered from participants. According to the president, it is essential that all functions of the university cater to the best interest of the students. He has created opportunities for students to voice their opinions, have informal access to administration, and actively participate in the institution's decision-making processes that impact students. Part of the cultural shift towards student-centeredness requires the need for student advocates among institutional agents. Therefore, the President strengthened the responsibilities of the Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students, as well as expanded services with the establishment of the SA2C3.

This major cultural shift within the organization also influences structures and processes, and can have significant impacts in society with the quality of graduates the university produces. A student-centered approach now encourages faculty and staff to reconsider the ways in which they educate, support and interact with students. Student-centeredness improves the university's ability to regain student trust, and opportunities to increase student success (Elliott & Healy, 2001; Spanier, 2010). However, with change one must consider the consequences of conflict and other elements that coincide with transitional processes. Not all members of the community agree with the ideology of student-centeredness. In some cases, some may misinterpret what is meant by student-centeredness. This cultural change does threaten existing hierarchical structures among faculty and staff and cultural norms of authority that have been established at UL. Conflict emerges among faculty, staff and students as they redefine the "dichotomy of teacher-centeredness and student-centeredness" (Huang & Leung, 2005, p.40). I argue that the SA2C3 served as the mediating entity to resolve these conflicts and support the institution during this time of cultural change.

The Advising Palaver Hut

The infancy of the SA2C3 forced me to examine primarily the current faculty and peer advising system, as well as initial and potential functions of the Center. Because resources are limited, the institution is forced to prioritize allocations. Prioritization has resulted in minimal investments in advising. Current advising services are unable to promote university sustainability and are limited in their ability to ensure that students are efficiently placed in appropriate courses because of the lack of a systematic process, lack of advising prior to enrollment in various colleges, and limited resources available to monitor student progress proactively.

Department enrollments hinge on the availability of resources, but also student demands that are currently not always informed by input from an institutional advisor. Therefore the quality of the college education experience was described as “chaotic,” “challenging,” “torturous,” and yet improving compared to student experiences three years prior to the inauguration of the current president. Students who have access to advising services are better armed with the information and skills to successfully navigate the college environment. Those not provided with the tools to make informed decisions regarding academic and career goals often drop out (Kiker, 2008). Although current advising structures and processes do not fully align with the principles of the *Pillars of Academic Advising*, in its formative stages of existence, the SA2C3 still played an essential role as the advising palaver hut in the midst of the institution’s cultural shift. The metaphor of the palaver hut aligns the Center’s role with the structures and processes of the institution.

Shifting the institutional culture to one that is more student-centered has significantly impacted student-institutional interactions, and has considerable implications for student-

institutional conflicts that arise such as, student-faculty relationships in and outside of the classroom, and student-staff interactions during institutional process (e.g., registration, admissions, etc.). In the midst of a cultural change, advisors play a pivotal role to help mediate this institutional transition. Although the institution's student support services are not adequately addressed and assigned, the SA2C3 has the potential to assist the institution through these cultural shifts – postwar effects and student-centeredness – through academic, career, and personal support services. In the process of establishing the advising center, SA2C3 counselors have been able to make contributions through walk-in appointments, career development workshops and programs, and services such as the “palaver hut” or intermediary role to improve student and faculty interactions and overall student transitions. Although not currently fulfilling its projected mission, the Center is upholding its tenets of NACADA's core values to be *responsible to their institution and the individuals they advise.*

The SA2C3 has played several roles in the guidance of community affairs. The findings suggest that new approaches to advising that are culturally specific will better meet the needs of the students and the institution. As a result, I introduced a metaphor to expand our understanding of the role of advising in Liberian higher education: advising as the palaver hut of the university. Integrating a metaphor that is contextual to Liberian culture permitted a comprehensive and more accurate analysis of UL as a social organization. The advising palaver hut metaphor compares advising to the similar roles of African palaver huts found in villages. In many African cultures, palaver huts have been utilized as a place for mediation, education, and community building.

Applying the use of African palaver has been found to be a successful strategy with regards to litigation, mediation, reconciliation and counseling in Liberia (Al-Bakri Nyei, 2011; Lekskes, van Hooren, & de Beus, 2007; Milne, 1991; Pillay & Goodfriend, 2009; Truth and

Reconciliation Commission of the Republic of Liberia, 2009). In particular, in counseling services it can reduce negative stigmas associated with psychological services. In relation to advising, the palaver concept provides students with informal ways to communicate with institutional agents, but perhaps in formats to which students are familiar and accustomed. The *NACADA Statement of Core Values* states that advisors serve as mediators managing conflicts between the student and their institutions, and the role of the SA2C3 has become the place of settling disputes. Advisors are uniquely positioned to encourage ethical decision making skills (Fisher, 2005). “When the needs of students and the institution are in conflict, advisors seek a resolution that is in the best interest of both parties” (NACADA, 2005, Exposition section, para. 4). Although well-positioned to mediate student-institutional concerns, it was unclear during this investigation if advisors genuinely have the power to solve problems?

Recommendations

This study has gathered rich data on the higher education experience at UL. Its alignment with literature on African higher education presents potential to apply advising processes in similar educational settings. “Reasoning by analogy allows the application of lessons learned in one case to another population or set of circumstances [that are similar to the study sample]” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003 p.105). Small investments in student support programs, such as academic advising could have major impacts for an institution particularly under post-conflict conditions. Therefore, this section focuses on recommendations for practice and for future research. Specific recommendations for the University are presented followed by broader recommendations that address the need to explore cultural contexts, expand applications of concepts, and conduct future research.

University of Liberia

From my analysis, I would characterize the University of Liberia as an institution whose:

- 1) environment is undergoing restoration;
- 2) mission aligns with societal needs, but is not executable due to the lack of resources;
- 3) socialization processes are loosely structured;
- 4) information dissemination relies on methods that lack the convenience of technology; and
- 5) strategy and leadership are influenced by shifting culture of student-centeredness.

As an institution, it faces unending barriers, and yet continues to thrive – *Lux in Tenebris*. In the last three years, the institution has undergone a cultural shift with much emphasis on the contributions of leadership. However, this shift has resulted in conflict related to change and the need to redefine and refine its processes. As a result, advising has taken on the new role of mediating these conflicts and supporting change through student advocacy. It is critical that all faculty and staff buy into the campus' new student philosophy.

Mediate organizational change. During major organizational transitions it is important to identify ways to support all constituents through change and guide the process. Support mechanisms for major transitions could be applicable in other postwar environments undergoing rehabilitation. Advisors are uniquely positioned as neutral entities of the institution to support these delicate developments. Because advising is a teaching and learning process according to the *Concept of Academic Advising*, the SA2C3 has developed a new role as the palaver hut as its mechanism to educate students. It is where individuals gather to settle disputes, welcome guests, hold social gatherings, educate youth, and strength community bonds. The process of African palaver becomes the Center's *pedagogy* through which it exposes students to the institution's *curriculum* of values, expectations and culture. As part a collectivistic culture, this approach seems most appropriate. In the advising palaver hut student *learning outcomes* include how to

address challenges with the support of institutional advocates. Advisors truly become the mediators of the institution as outline in the *Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising*.

Integrate Pillars of Advising. The current role of advising at UL is prescriptive and uses an unstructured approach. However, the findings reveal that a more robust advising system is necessary to address the multi-layered concerns of this institution. In comparison to the *Pillars of Academic Advising* many aspects of the role of advising are significantly impacted by postwar conditions and shifting culture of student-centeredness. The SA2C3 proposal outlines a clear mission and learning objectives for its students, but without necessary resources (human, financial, facilities and technology) as outlined in *CAS Standards and Guidelines of Academic Advising*, the Center is unable to fulfill its projected *mission*. As the larger institution improves *ethical standards* on campus, the Center must develop its own statements and guidelines for ethical practice.

As the trailblazers for advising in Liberia, the Center has a unique opportunity to set the tone for the profession in the country. Currently, staff members of the Center are using this time to assess student needs and developing *institution and external relations* before recommending *policy and governance* for their work. SA2C3 has decided to use these initial stages to establish these connections and to develop policies and procedures informed by institutional data. Until all areas of advising are established, the Center is unable to address needs for *assessment and evaluation*.

Social organization analysis enabled me to examine the intersections of structure and processes within the organization that define advising and its potential impacts on the college student experience. Clarification of policies and procedures that govern affiliation would enable administrators to determine the capacity to which advising can support these objectives. Postwar

conditions account for current weaknesses in the educational system, insufficient resources, changes in today's student demographic and culture, the need for remediation services of tomorrow's workforce, and the need for rehabilitating tomorrow's workforce. Academic and career readiness should be assessed to guide students adequately into appropriate fields. In addition, academically and emotionally at-risk students should be identified proactively in order to provide adequate intervention and prevention services.

Empower advisors to promote/enforce policy. Part of the rehabilitative mission of the institution is to develop morally-sound graduates and responsible future leaders, both of which are imperative to national development in current unstable conditions. Advising has the ability to contribute to these institutional policies, procedures and values, but with faculty, staff and students involved in corruption, trust is difficult to regain among various constituents. The SA2C3/advising palaver hut has begun to intercede into those areas that impact students as an attempt to restore a sense of campus community. Advisors should be empowered and trained to understand, promote and monitor the policies and procedures of the institution. As student advocates they can promote the needs of students and recognize ways that institutional policies help or hinder students. In postwar conditions, they should be given flexibility in the enforcement of sanctions as the experts of student needs.

The university currently focuses on administering sanctions in response to actions of affiliates that do not align with the rules and regulations of the organization. However, control mechanisms to monitor these behaviors are limited due to the lack of resources. The lack of resources disables the institution from promoting the prevention of defiant behavior. Current areas of concern included student accountability, academic requirements and ethical standards. Addressing compliance by controlling behaviors that deviate from institutional values promotes

the overall mission and enables constituents to believe in the mission and policies of the institution. Advisors must uphold the policies, procedures and values of an institution based upon measures of ethical standards in the *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising*. Equitable control is based on good and consistent communication of these policies and procedures through institutional agents. Advisors should contribute to enforcing and promoting policy appropriately.

Integrate approaches to advising based on cultural needs. Based upon the objectives and goals outlined in the 2010 SA2C3 proposal from the UL's Office of Student Affairs (see Appendix A), the advising center will exercise integrative approaches composed of academic and career advising, as well as personal counseling. O'Banion (1972) recognized the unique relationship between academic and career advising during the development phases of early advising research. "The process of academic advising include the following dimensions: 1) exploration of life goals, 2) exploration of vocational goals, 3) program choice, 4) course choice, and 5) scheduling courses" (p. 83). McCalla-Wriggins (2009) reminds us that effective integrated approaches to academic and career advising require that advisors guide students to reflect on personal strengths, values, interests, and skills in order to create meaningful academic, career, and extra-curricular experiences. McCalla-Wriggins (2009) postulates that the combination of academic and career advising enhances a student's ability to "navigate the ever changing world of work" (p.1). Several researchers emphasize the importance of reflection, resources, decision-making skills, campus collaboration, professional development for advisors, and student self-assessment in the academic and career advising process (King, 2008; McCalla-Wriggins, 2009). All of these areas and elements are recommended for the SA2C3 to consider.

Workforce trends are increasingly dynamic that now require advisors to be more collaborative in their efforts to coordinate academic and career planning between institutions, departments, and the broader community. The holistic perspective that social organization analysis requires enabled me to explore the collaborations that do and do not exist between the SA2C3 and other on and off-campus offices. Advisors providing both academic and career counseling must stay abreast of workforce trends that impact their ability to assist students with curricular and vocational planning (Hughey & Hughey, 2006). “Academic advisors are uniquely situated to help students establish cohesive educational and occupational goals” (Gore & Metz, 2008, p.103). Armed with accurate information, students are empowered to develop a sense of purpose for their academic and career journey.

Burton (2006) views academic and career advising as services that must be “choreographed” in an intentional coordinated effort. Many students enter college undecided due to the lack of curricular diversity and vocational exposure in secondary education. Burton (2006), Gore and Metz (2008), Hughey and Hughey (2006) support the need for academic and career advisors to integrate advising practices that necessitate student exploration, decision-making, and emphasize the connections between liberal educational experiences to transferrable workforce skills. In this case, the mission of academic and career advising is “to educate and graduate qualified individuals with the skills needed to enter suitable employment and contribute to the economic development of surrounding communities and beyond” (Burton, 2006 p.2). Research supports the benefits of academic and career advising, and the SA2C3 has the opportunity to determine if these recommendations are transferrable given their context.

Challenges that face these dual-role advisors include financial and human resources, professional development needs, learning outcomes and advising approaches that balance the

objectives of career and student development, as well as assessment. On the other hand, this integrated approach would help to close the gap between disjointed efforts to provide students with academic and career counseling. In addition, the confluence of academic and career advising strengthens a student's ability to develop a sense of purpose by elucidating the connections between curricular aspirations and occupational pursuits. "Within this context, students can find meaning in their lives, make significant decisions about the future, be supported to achieve their maximum potential, and access all that higher education has to offer" (CAS, 2011a p. 2). Although current literature is limited to suggestions for higher education institutions in the United States, these recommendations could permit similar contributions in Liberia.

Reexamine resource allocations. A need also exists to enhance funding sources from the government and by increasing tuition rates. These additional finances can partially address inadequate salary concerns. However, budgeting practices should be explored to strengthen savings and scrutinize expenditures. Under these intense financial strains, the university should closely examine educational program relevancy and contributions to institutional goals and objectives. Academic programs should be cut in areas that are inefficient, ineffective, or irrelevant to permit the institution to then focus on areas of high demand and critical need. Advisors are then able to explain and guide students into these high need programs of study and help them to formulate goals that take into consideration academic relevance and personal academic interests.

The government is supporting scholarships in agriculture and education according to those respective college deans. These programs have helped to increase enrollments, but these colleges still represent the lowest enrollments of all undergraduate programs at the university.

Departments are experiencing imbalanced enrollments with high percentages of students enrolled in the College of Business and Public Administration. Faculty attribute these enrollments to external influences on student sorting (limited resources and advice from friends and family) while students attribute their choice of major to internal influences (personal interest, career aspirations, academic strengths, and inadequate departmental resources). These diverging perspectives between students and faculty on motivating factors presents an issue best addressed through structured academic advising, advising research, and advisor training.

Invest in advisor professional development. Although advising services are critical to the institution, there are other concerns that understandably have taken precedence including faculty salaries and faculty professional development. Each dean expressed an interest in receiving advising training for their departments. Therefore, incorporating advising within existing faculty development funds may be a worthwhile investment. Providing professional development for the SA2C3 staff will empower them to train the faculty. One of the core values emphasized that *advisors are responsible for their professional practices and for themselves personally*. Promoting training and professional development can help enhance the current model of advising while maximizing the talents of human capital. Perhaps the Teacher's College faculty could provide the institution with valuable best practices in advising. A small investment in advising professional development could enhance the universities capacity to fill critical need areas in agriculture, education and science disciplines by teaching faculty how to properly assess students' strengths and interest areas in order to appropriately advise students and recommend suitable majors.

Explore Cultural Contexts

As discussed in Chapter Two, advising relies on a variety of theories including, but not limited to “student development, cognitive development, career development, learning, decision-making, multiculturalism, retention, personality, moral development, adult development... sociological, organizational, psychosocial and person-environment interaction ” (Williams, 2007 p.1). Research in these areas has provided the field with various approaches to advising in order to meet the needs of diverse student populations. These approaches include prescriptive advising, developmental advising, advising as teaching, advising as coaching, intrusive advising, appreciative advising, strength-based advising to name a few (NACADA, 2013). Many of these approaches are grounded in theories explored in the Western-context. Research has explored differences in advising approaches when working with students from other cultures whose college experiences are within a Western context. However, research has not often examined approaches to advising outside of the Western context. One example though is the work on social constructivism advising, which “is grounded in the belief that knowledge is a product of meaningful social interactions. Furthermore, social constructivism acknowledges the role of culture in the construction of knowledge” (Kirk-Kuwaye & Libarios, 2003, para. 8). It is geared towards “high relational” groups, in other words those who are “sociocentric” and have “strong community values” typically found in non-Western cultures (Kirk-Kuwaye & Libarios, 2003, para.2). Thus, this type of approach to advising might include group processes that promote social learning methods to meet the needs of students from a variety of cultural backgrounds in a Western-context. Approaches such as social constructivism as well as others yet defined should be further explored within non-Western settings. NACADA should continue to support expanding international research to meet the needs of its global community. There are strong

implications that support the need to understand the cultural context that significantly influences advising structures and approaches.

Consider the role of culture in advising approaches. A plethora of advising approaches and delivery methods can be found on American campuses and include faculty, peer, professional, group, or a combination of these advising services. Most current academic advising approaches found in the literature are extensions of *prescriptive* and *developmental* advising. Crookston (1972) differentiated between the approaches of prescriptive and developmental advising. The prescriptive approach focuses on providing students with institutional guidelines, passive methods of teaching and learning, course selection with little student participation, and curricular decisions are prescribed for the student. This form of advising is no longer recommended, as research supports the benefits of holistic approaches to student development (Grites & Gordon, 2000; Hale, Graham, & Johnson, 2009). However, in some circumstances students require direct and prescribed information pertaining to academic policies.

Unlike the prescriptive approach, developmental advising is the foundation for many recently developed advising methods. It takes a more holistic approach to advising processes and focuses on students' strengths, solutions, potentials, goals, talents, active learning, participation, and students take responsibility for his or her educational journey (Crookston, 1972; Grites & Gordon, 2000; Jordan, 2000). The combination of prescriptive and developmental approaches is known as an integrated advising approach (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Using this integrated approach has created several effective advising methods, in which advisors support students in active learning, student outreach, intellectual and personal growth, build rapport, and connect students' personal aspirations with academic goals to improve student success (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Lowenstein, 2005; Schwebel et al., 2008; Vander Schee, 2007). Integrated

approaches allow advisors to combine multiple theoretical approaches and designs that enhance the advising experience. However, research should continue to explore cultural context to address problems for which Western-based approaches are not entirely applicable.

Expand Applications of Concepts

The findings suggest that college student experiences have been negatively impacted by postwar effects, however, gradual improvements initiated by leadership's value on student-centeredness are promoting positive change according to faculty, students and staff. These changes have required intermediary support of advisors in the SA2C3 who have been able to advocate for students and mediate institutional conflicts. On the other hand, the SA2C3 had yet to fulfill its initial goal to provide systemic advising services. Therefore, lack of structured student support services continued to exacerbate postwar challenges and the college student experience. I was able to gain a holistic understanding of the contributions and need for advising. However, this study only focused on the processes that occur within organizations. In addition to resources, advising is one of the missing links in the university process that prevents it from producing quality graduates and contributing citizens. It is necessary for the government to invest in higher education and strengthen the university's ability to serve society.

Explore outside and between organizations. Ahrne's (1994) conceptualization of social organization included processes that occur inside, outside, and between organizations. He believes that "what is going on inside, outside, and between organizations is central in all analysis of society. Organizations are the mechanisms that shape macro-processes" (p.vii). In this case I examined how the internal processes among students, faculty and staff of UL can contribute to society and help frame actions beyond UL as students become contributing citizens. "Through actions on behalf of organizations human action is transformed into social

processes.... Social change happens through interaction between organizations and the movements of people between organizations through entries and exists” (p.50).

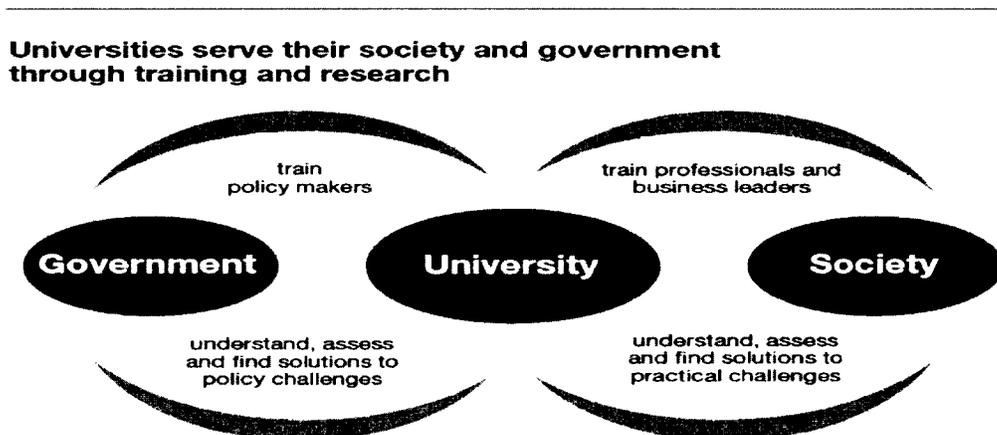
To me, advising serves as the bridge with other organizations through external collaborations that promote student success and support the needs of the institution. In a postwar climate the needs of the institution have changed to one more geared towards remediation and rehabilitation. The new SA2C3 has been able to support the institution and provide minimal student services to address these challenges and cultural changes. In addition to goals aimed at contributing to MDGs, advisors have the ability to bridge students’ understanding of curriculum and policy and how success in both areas relate to societal needs. “The traditional focus on individuals and on individual-level changes in attitudes and behaviors must expand to include a broad focus on the norms and social context in which the behavior occurs” (Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2005, p.579). Advising should also expand to explore its role in the greater context of organizations and society. *Advisors are responsible to their educational community.* Academic advising services help the university by coordinating and connecting students’ academic goals and desires to a curricular discipline, career, and solutions to societal issues.

We should not undermine the role of higher education institutions in the development process. They are very powerful institutions and the demand for access is growing. Entering and leaving a university can be life-changing. Advising can help strengthen the cohesion of UL and provides services that can help retain students, monitor the sanctions of academic policy, and lastly, help individuals commit towards the goals of the university by educating and integrating students in the culture of the institution. Based upon the values of UL, advising services must be guided by external obligations and influences of the MDGs. Advising efforts should promote critical disciplines and help educate students on their importance while allowing them the

flexibility to explore their strengths and interests in other academic areas. Advising has the capacity to influence student experiences positively by helping the institution fulfill its mission and preparing students for the ways in which they will interact with society.

If processes that occur inside, between and outside of higher education institutions shape social processes, then advising can serve as the missing link to help guide processes within UL that will then transform social actions in the larger society. According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2004), “as key institutions of civil society, universities are uniquely positioned between the communities they serve and the government they advise” (p.1). The association makes a strong argument for the need of higher education to fulfill the MDGs. These institutions provide society with teachers, professionals, and research to solve societal concerns (see Figure 8.1). Academic advising assists with the process of university workforce output. As argued before, Waggoner and Goldman (2005) emphasized student retention as an organizational process; advising is similar. Academic advising is an organizational activity designed to promote student progress and improve the quality of graduates who will one day contribute to national needs.

Figure 8.1 Universities as Social Organizations



Source: Associate of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2004).

Use organizational approaches to better understand advising. The diversity and complexity of higher education institutions require student services that move away from one-dimensional structures. “Organizational structure is the framework for delivering advising services to students.... If the organization structure is not a good fit for the institution or its students and faculty, the advising program’s effectiveness could be limited and student satisfaction with the service could be adversely affected” (Pardee, 2004 p.1). Because advising is such a multifaceted process taking an organizational analysis approach to understand its role and impact on students, faculty and staff can inform the delivery methods, structure, and resource requirements for effective services. Alignment of organization and institutional needs is critical. King (2008) argues that institutions must compare the organization of advising services with the needs and expectations of students. In doing so, researchers can develop new concepts of advising and gain a better understanding of “how advising services interconnect with other programs and services on campus” (p.251).

King (2008) outlines several factors that must be considered when analyzing the appropriateness of organizational structures of advising. These include: *institutional mission, student population, role of faculty, budget, and institutional structure*. These factors were investigated through the interactions of the social organization analysis as this study sought to identify organizational elements and interactions—including the culture—that define the role of advising at UL. “Efforts to enhance student success often falter because too little attention is given to understand the properties of the institution’s culture that reinforce the status quo and perpetuate everyday actions” (Kuh, 2008, p.81). The modified social organization model, which included a feature of organizational culture, was appropriate to expand the scope of investigating advising.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided a comprehensive perspective on the field of advising at a Liberian higher education institution, however, future research could explore other aspects of social organizations and advising that were beyond the scope of this study. One of the limitations of this study included the timeframe in which the study was conducted, January to April 2011. It was not a full academic semester, and thus only captured a segment of all student processes and experiences. A longer study may provide a more in-depth perspective on the college student experiences and greater insights into the role of advising. In addition, a longer study may allow researchers to explore additional aspects of social organizations and expand the examination of social interactions not only inside an organization, but also outside and between organizations. Future research could examine advising not only from an organizational level, but from the service level, and investigate specific approaches and models of advising as the Center develops. Finally, exploring advising research in other international settings will not only enable deeper understanding of issues in other cultures and countries, but also validate the methods of advising identified by NACADA and within this study, or perhaps uncover new approaches.

Liberia has seen so much change and growth. Every participant praised the new administration, particularly Dr. Emmet Dennis. Students finally feel as though they have a voice and more importantly an advocate among the SA2C3 advisors. Advising for this office is not focused on telling students merely what courses to take because the resources are limited; advising is attentive to creating a positive educational experience and making the most of what is available. For some in the educational field, the conditions in which I described the university may sound discouraging, but in a country that has seen so much tragedy, the university is an

opportunity for brighter horizons. As an institution undergoing significant adversities and change, this case study reflects the light in darkness – *Lux in Tenebris*.

Epilogue

Lessons can be learned from common challenges. This study represented an extreme case of resource limitations. Although this institution has unique challenges of post-conflict resource deprivation, lessons can be applied to less extreme cases in which advising programs and students are facing financial constraints. My transition back to academic advising in the U.S. was very difficult after witnessing severely limited university circumstances. In Liberia, no longer did my advising interactions involve discussions about the diversity of the curriculum and narrowing down course selections. I was advising students who perhaps did not have food to eat that day or money for transportation to get to and from campus. It changed my advising approach and the ways in which I work with students and colleagues. I learned from the SA2C3 how to focus on the ways in which an institution and society makes the most of what it is available. It was our job as advisors to inspire students not to lose hope in spite of so many challenges and to appreciate the privileges and opportunities higher education can provide. In addition, I appreciated listening to the stories of students, faculty and staff regarding the tragedies they experienced during the war. Their resilience and ability to overcome such devastation sparked my interest in positive psychology, emotional intelligence and the role of faith and spirituality in advising. The diversity of concepts that relate to advising suggests that there are many opportunities in which research in advising can develop.

Serving as a temporary advisor in the SA2C3, not only assisted in my ability to build rapport with various campus constituents, but it also provided an opportunity to become a part of the campus culture. On one particular occasion, I was invited by the student leaders at the political palaver hut to participate in their discussion. As the only woman in this male-dominated activity, I was pleasantly surprised at their willingness to allow me to engage in their discussion.

The students began the palaver with a traditional call and expressed their appreciation for my participation. Experiencing the energy, liveliness and passion students demonstrated in their palaver holds promise for the concept of the advising palaver hut.

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APPENDIX A**Student Academic Advisement & Career Counseling Center (SA2C3) Draft Proposal**

March 4, 2010

**Student Career & Advisement Center
Office of Student Affairs
University of Liberia BOX 9020
Capitol Hill
Monrovia, Liberia**

Mission: To facilitate student learning and development along with nurturing their ambitions for career success through high-quality advising and mentoring.

WHY: The Student Career and Advisement Center is needed at the University of Liberia to assist students with their personal development, academic choices and overall preparation for careers beyond our campus.

WHO: Beneficiaries – Freshmen and Sophomores specifically as well as general UL students.

The role of the Advisee in the Student Career & Advisement Center (SCAC)

- Responsible for scheduling, preparing for, and keeping advising appointments
- Meet with their SCAC Advisor at least once a semester and take part in required number of SCAC events and activities
- Ask plenty of questions
- Bring a printed copy of their control sheet to advisor meetings
- Know the requirements of your college/degree program

The role of the Student Career & Advisement Center (SCAC) Professional Advisor

- Invite advisees to meet with you each semester
- Help students clarify their educational values and goals
- Engage students in discussion about plans for courses and degree completion
- Guide students toward internships, opportunities for engagement within the campus community (clubs, organizations, volunteering, etc.) and discuss the connection to their educational and life goals
- Know campus resources, be informed about the different colleges that support academic and personal success
- Be a resource and advisor for leadership training, conflict resolution skills and civic responsibility
- Provide inspiration, be encouraging, be student focused and customer service oriented
- Help students reflect upon and make meaning of their college experiences by joining extracurricular activities on campus
- Challenge students to think critically, reflectively, and creatively

WHEN: Beginning September, Academic School Year 2010-2011

WHERE: University of Liberia, FQ Building: Rm 23-25

HOW: By offering personal appointments, workshops, demonstrations, administering personal evaluations, making relevant literature available to students, hosting annual career fairs, relevant presentations and inviting guest speakers to cover the following areas:

- I. Assessing personal values, interest, occupational types and personal skill sets
 - a. Realistic
 - b. Investigative
 - c. Artistic
 - d. Social
 - e. Enterprising
 - f. Conventional
- II. Assisting student in investigating career options
- III. Informational Interviews
- IV. Job Search strategies
 - a. Transcripts, letters of recommendation, data sheets and professional dress
 - b. Using the internet as a tool to search, networking
- V. Resume
 - a. Constructing a resume
 - b. Cover letters
 - c. Applications
- VI. Preparing for the Interview and Job Interviews

Student Career & Advisement Center Objectives (SCAC):

- I. Assist students in personal discovery and development identifying their own competencies, interests, values and talents related to the university major and career choice.
- II. Assist each student in finding employment by providing job search skills.
- III. Assist each student in connecting their competencies to a variety of opportunities.
- IV. Design and encourage students to complete assignments on and off campus that build skills and require reflection about tasks performed in the workplace.
- V. Supply education and occupational information based on career fields and colleges.
- VI. Assist each student in developing a complete set of personal career marketing materials.
- VII. Provide exposure to employment opportunities locally and internationally by hosting an annual Career Expo.

Based on SCAC Objectives the Student Learning Outcomes will be:

- I. Student will be able to select an academic or career goal by applying what they learn about themselves.
- II. Students will be able to develop personal materials and strategies to market themselves in a successful job search.

- III. Students will be able to identify an entry-level or career related position by matching one or more of their personal attributes to potential opportunities.
- IV. Critically think about tasks in the work place and how they can contribute to the organizations success.
- V. Students will clearly understand the education, training, work expectations associated with the specific career fields.
- VI. Students will learn to regularly look to the advisement center for conflict mediation, leadership and individual counseling assistance as well as gain an understanding for professional concepts of different industries.
- VII. Students will be able to meet with employers prepared to market themselves for a variety of opportunities.

BUDGET: To be supplied (Budget and Honorariums)

SUPERVISION TEAM:

- Three Full Time Student Career Advisement Center Professionals
- Faculty representatives from Science, Business, and Liberia College on a part-time weekly rotating schedule.
- One recent LU Alumni and work study students.

APPENDIX B

Advising Survey and Consent Form for Survey Participation

Academic advising is the exchange of information to help guide students through their program of study. Advice can occur through an advising center such as the University of Liberia's Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center (SA2C3) or informally through faculty and peer advisors. Please answer the following survey questions about advising services available at the university.

1. Your current academic class is:
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Other: (Please explain)_____

2. What is your academic status?
 - a. Full-time student
 - b. Part-time student

3. Your major is:

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Business <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Business Management ii. Accounting iii. Economics iv. Public Administration b. Agriculture and Forestry <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. General Forestry ii. General Agriculture iii. Wood Science and Technology iv. Agronomy v. Home Science and Community Development c. Science and Technology <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. General Biology ii. Chemistry iii. Mathematics iv. Physics v. Zoology vi. Civil Engineering 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> vii. Electrical Engineering viii. Mining Engineering ix. Geology d. Education <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Primary Education ii. Secondary Education e. Social Sciences and Humanities <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. English ii. Demography iii. French iv. Geography v. History vi. Mass Communication vii. Political Science viii. Sociology f. Other: (Please specify)_____
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4. Have you ever changed your major?

- a. Yes
- b. No

5. How did you decide what you wanted to major in?

(Using the numbers 1-3, please rank your top three responses if applicable. Write the number in the blank beside the answer. One being the most important reason, and three being the least important.)

- a. ___ Personal interest
- b. ___ Professional interest
- c. ___ Salary interest
- d. ___ Availability of classes
- e. ___ Family advice
- f. ___ Faculty/Staff advice
- g. ___ Friend's advice
- h. ___ Excelled in this subject area
- i. ___ Other: (Please explain)

6. How did you first find out about your major requirements?

- a. Department Chair
- b. Professor
- c. SA2C3 Advisor/Counselor
- d. Peer Advisor/Counselor
- e. Other: (Please explain)

7. I understand the requirements that I must fulfill in my major so that I may graduate.

- a. Completely
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not at all

8. Why did you decide to attend the University of Liberia?

(Using the numbers 1-3, please rank your top three responses if applicable. Write the number in the blank beside the answer. One being the most important reason, and three being the least important.)

- a. ___ Educational opportunities (including academic majors)
- b. ___ Social opportunities (including activities)
- c. ___ Scholarship opportunity
- d. ___ Family
- e. ___ Friends
- f. ___ Location
- g. ___ Low cost of tuition and fees
- h. ___ Other: (Please explain)

9. What motivates you to stay at the University of Liberia?

(Using the numbers 1-3, please rank your top three responses if applicable. Write the number in the blank beside the answer. One being the most important reason, and three being the least important.)

- a. ___ Educational opportunities (including academic majors)
- b. ___ Social opportunities (including activities)
- c. ___ Scholarship opportunity

- d. ____ Quality of education
- e. ____ Quality of support services
- f. ____ Family
- g. ____ Friends
- h. ____ Location
- i. ____ Low cost of tuition and fees
- j. ____ Other: (Please specify)

10. Who has helped you adjust to college life?

(Using the numbers 1-3, please rank your top three responses if applicable. Write the number in the blank beside the answer. One being the most important reason, and three being the least important.)

- a. ____ Family orientation, advisement, etc.)
- b. ____ Friends (please explain)
- c. ____ Faculty support
- d. ____ Staff support f. ____ Other: (Please explain)

- e. ____ University programs and services (including

11. Have you ever received academic advice at the university?

- a. Yes
- b. No

12. If yes, from whom did you receive the most academic advice?

- a. Department Chair
- b. Professor
- c. SA2C3 Advisor/Counselor
- d. Peer Advisor/Counselor
- e. Other: (Please explain)

13. Did the academic advice solve your problem?

- a. Yes
- b. No

14. What do you think could be done to enhance the academic advising services at the university?

15. If you have not received academic advising, is it something that you think you could use in deciding your course selections?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. How prepared were you for the academic challenges when entering the University of Liberia?

- a. Completely
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not at all

17. Are you the first in your family to go to college?

- a. Yes
- b. No

18. Prior to the university, what was your academic status?

- a. High School graduate
 - i. Private school
 - ii. Public school
- b. Professional School Certificate
- c. Associate's degree
- d. Professional career
- e. College/University transfer student
 - i. Private college/university
 - ii. Public college/university
- f. Other: (Please specify)_____

19. Who would you go to if you felt that you needed help to decide your major? (Please explain)

20. Who would you go to if you felt that you needed help to decide what classes to take? (Please explain)

21. How would you describe your initial orientation to the university?

- a. Very Good
- b. Good
- c. Fair
- d. Poor
- e. Very Poor

22. Have you found faculty to be easy to contact when you need help with your academic concerns?

- a. Yes
- b. No

23. If yes, how often have you approached faculty members for help?

- a. Often
- b. Sometimes
- c. Never

24. If it has been difficult to contact faculty in any way, can you help me to understand why? (Please explain)

25. Have you found staff to be easy to contact when you need help with your academic concerns?

- a. Yes
- b. No

26. If yes, how often have you approached staff members for help?

- a. Often
- b. Sometimes
- c. Never

27. If it has been difficult to contact staff in any way, can you help me to understand why?
(Please explain)

28. Are the courses you need to graduate offered regularly so that you can make progress toward your degree in a timely manner?

- a. Yes
- b. No

29. How would you describe your progress towards completing the degree?

- a. On time
- b. Slower than anticipated
- c. Earlier than anticipated

30. Would you explain the reason why you just answered this question as you did? (Please explain)

31. Do you know what career or occupation would you like to pursue upon completion of your degree?

- a. Yes
- b. No

32. Would you share your career or occupation aspiration with me?

33. Have there been any campus resources to help you with choosing a career?

- a. Yes
- b. No

34. If yes, which resources? (Please explain)

35. If yes, did the services provided help you with information about careers?

a. Yes

b. No

36. Please describe the type of academic support services you would like to have at the University of Liberia:

37. Other comments you would like to share regarding your academic experience, advising experience, or career counseling experience at the University of Liberia:

38. What advice would you give to new students about making their way through the requirements of the university and your major?

39. Your sex is:

a. Male

b. Female

40. Your age is: _____ years

41. If you are a Liberian citizen in which county is your home town?

- a. Bong
- b. Nimba
- c. Grand Kru
- d. Grand Bassa
- e. Sinoe
- f. Lofa
- g. Maryland
- h. Grand Cape Mount
- i. Grand Gedeh
- j. Gbarpolu
- k. Bomi County
- l. Montserrado (including Monrovia)
- m. River Gee
- n. Margibi
- o. River Cess

42. If you are not a Liberian citizen, what country are you from?

I am collecting information from students about advising at UL. I would like very much to interview you if you would be willing to participate in one or two interviews as a part of this research study. If you are willing to talk with me about your university experience please provide me with your contact information.

Name _____
Telephone # _____

If you would rather email me to agree to an interview and not put your name on this survey, my email address is jobilawilliams@yahoo.com.

Thank you for your time and thoughts.

Consent Form for Survey Participation

This survey is being conducted as part of Jobila Williams' dissertation at the College of William and Mary. I understand that my involvement is voluntary and with the intention of exploring undergraduate advising experiences at the University of Liberia.

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. I understand that the honesty and accuracy of my responses are important for this study. I also understand that I do not have to answer every question asked of me and I am free to withdraw my consent (quit) and discontinue participation at any time. All efforts will be made to conceal my identity in this study and to keep my personal information confidential.

By participating in this study, I understand that a possible benefit is an increased awareness of advising needs and opportunities at the University of Liberia. In addition, the results of this study may inform future decisions at the University of Liberia, even though the dissertation research is not being conducted for the University, but only with its approval. Because of the sensitive nature of this study, I understand that there may be minimal psychological discomfort (or things that make me feel sad) directly involved with this research. My decision to participate or not participate will not affect my relationships with faculty, students, staff or administration at the University of Liberia. If I have any questions or concerns in connection to my participation in this study, I should contact Dr. Julius Nelson, the University of Liberia research advisor at jsnelson40@yahoo.com. I understand that I may report any problems or dissatisfaction to Dr. James Kollie, chair of the University of Liberia Internal Review Committee at jnksr@yahoo.com, or Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the College of William and Mary School of Education Internal Review Committee at tjward@wm.edu, or my dissertation chair, Dr. Dorothy Finnegan at definn@wm.edu.

My signature below certifies that I am at least 18 years of age, I have received a copy of this consent form, and I consent to participating in the tasks outlined above.

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of the Investigator

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (PHONE: 757-221-3901) ON JANUARY 1, 2011 AND EXPIRES ON JANUARY 1, 2012.

APPENDIX C**Institutional Review Board Approvals****College of William and Mary**

This is to notify you on behalf of the Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC) that protocol EDIRC-2010-12-13-7045-jywill titled Social Organization Analysis of the Role of Academic Advising: A Case Study at the University of Liberia has been EXEMPTED from formal review because it falls under the following category(ies) defined by DHHS Federal Regulations: 45CFR46.101.b.2.

Work on this protocol may begin on 2011-01-01 and must be discontinued on 2012-01-01.

Should there be any changes to this protocol, please submit these changes to the committee for determination of continuing exemption using the Protocol and Compliance Management channel on the Service tab within myWM (<http://my.wm.edu/>).

Please add the following statement to the footer of all consent forms, cover letters, etc.:

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2011-01-01 AND EXPIRES ON 2012-01-01.

You are required to notify Dr. Ward, chair of the EDIRC, at 757-221-2358 (EDIRC-L@wm.edu) and Dr. Kirkpatrick, Chair of the PHSC at 757-221-3997 (PHSC-L@wm.edu) if any issues arise during this study.

Good luck with your study.

Protocol modified by tjward on 2010-12-15 16:44:27

University of Liberia



OFFICE OF THE VICE
PRESIDENT FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF LIBERIA

P. O. BOX 9020
Monrovia, Liberia
West Africa

January 24, 2011

Re: Social Organization of the Role of Academic Advising:
A Case Study at the University of Liberia

Dear Ms. Williams:

In accordance with 45 CFR, the human subjects protocol of the above mentioned research study has been approved by the University of Liberia Institutional Review Board (UL-IRB) through an expedited review on January 21, 2011. This IRB will review the protocol during the implementation of the study to confirm human subject procedures. This approval expires on July 21, 2011.

Should there be other additional changes in protocols or incidents involving human subjects during the conduct of this research, you are required to report them right away to the IRB. Changes in research during the period for which IRB approval has already been granted may not be implemented without prior IRB review and approval; except where necessary to protect subjects. Proposed changes to approve human subject protocol must be reported promptly to the IRB for review using the Continuation Review format.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "J. Kollie Sr.", is written in black ink.

James N. Kollie Sr. (Ph.D.)
Chairperson, UL-IRB

APPENDIX D

Student Participants

Business and Public Administration

College	First Generation	Major	Gender	Academic Class	Advising	Age	Status
Business	No	Accounting	F	Senior	Yes	35	Unknown
Business	No	Accounting	F	Freshman	No	28	Full-time
Business	No	Public Admin.	M	Freshman	Yes	26	Full-time
Business	No	Economics	M	Junior	Yes	23	Full-time
Business	Yes	Management	M	Senior	Yes	31	Full-time

Agriculture and Forestry

College	First Generation	Major	Gender	Academic Class	Advising	Age	Status
Agriculture	Yes	General Ag.	M	Freshman	Yes	39	Full-time
Agriculture	No	General Ag.	M	Senior	No	30	Unknown
Agriculture	No	General Ag.	M	Senior	Yes	32	Full-time

Science and Technology

College	First Generation	Major	Gender	Academic Class	Advising	Age	Status
Science	No	Biology	F	Freshman	Yes	18	Full-time
Science	Yes	Biology	F	Senior	No	32	Full-time
Science	No	Civil Engineer	M	Senior	Yes	Unknown	Full-time
Science	Yes	Chemistry	M	Junior	Yes	26	Full-time

Education

College	First Generation	Major	Gender	Academic Class	Advising	Age	Status
Education	Yes	Secondary	M	Freshman	Yes	42	Full-time
Education	Yes	Secondary	M	Senior	Yes	40	Full-time
Education	No	Primary	F	Junior	Yes	Unknown	Full-time
Education	No	Secondary	F	Freshman	Yes	35	Full-time

Social Sciences and Humanities

College	First Generation	Major	Gender	Academic Class	Advising	Age	Status
Liberia	No	Sociology	F	Senior	Yes	28	Full-time
Liberia	No	Sociology	F	Freshman	No	24	Part-time
Liberia	Yes	History	M	Freshman	Yes	39	Part-time
Liberia	Yes	English	M	Senior	No	35	Full-time

Staff Participants

- Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center
 - 4 Staff Counselors (including 1 Peer Counselor)
 - Director
- Office of Student Affairs
 - Vice President of Student Affairs/Dean of Students
 - Peer Advisor
- Registrar's Office/Admissions
 - University Registrar/Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management
- President's Office
 - President of the University of Liberia
- Office of Academic Affairs
 - Vice President of Academic Affairs

Faculty Participants

- College Deans and Professors
 - Dean of the College of Business and Public Administration
 - Dean of Liberia College
 - Dean of Teachers College
 - Professor in Primary Education
 - Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry
 - Visiting Professor/Researcher
 - Dean of the College of Science and Technology
 - Dean of the College of General Studies
 - Professor in Management

APPENDIX E**Sample Letter to Faculty Participants**

March 8, 2011

[Name]
[Position Title]
[College]
University of Liberia

Dear [Name]:

Greetings of Shalom.

I am pleased to introduce to you Ms. Jobila Williams, visiting Scholar in Residence. She is attached to the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center in the Office of Student Affairs. Ms. Williams is currently conducting a study for her dissertation and counseling services at the University of Liberia. This study consists of faculty, staff and student interviews. She would like to interview each Dean from the six undergraduate colleges as part of this study to get a better understanding of advising services offered to students from your college, your perspective on challenges and opportunities for students, as well as information regarding the curriculum.

Please find attached a copy of the official approval letter from the University, a copy of sample questions that she may ask during the interview, as well as a copy of the consent form. Each participant will be required to sign a consent form prior to the interview.

We will appreciate any time you may have to be a part of this study. We hope that this study helps increase the awareness of advising and counseling needs at the University. Please let me know when you will have time for a one-hour interview. We look forward to hearing from you very soon and will be sure to follow-up with you by Friday, March 11, 2011.

Kind regards,

In Mission with a Vision

[Name]
Dean of Students

APPENDIX F**Sample Letter for Member Checks**Student Email

Dear [Name],

I hope all is well. I know it has been quite some time from the last time we spoke, but I certainly have not forgotten about you. It has taken me almost a year to type up all of your interviews and to review all of the materials for my research about the University of Liberia's advising and counseling services. I just want to thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. It was a pleasure getting to know you, and I hope you will continue to stay in touch and perhaps we will meet again during my next visit to Liberia later this year.

As part of the research process, I've typed up our interview and have attached a copy to this email for your review. If you have time, please review it for accuracy and let me know if I missed any information. I will need your feedback by Friday, April 6, 2012. If everything in the document seems correct, then you do not need to send anything back to me.

Thank you!
Sincerely,
Jobila Williams
Visiting Researcher (SA2C3) 2011

Faculty/Staff Email

Dear [Name],

I hope all is well. I know it has been quite some time from the last time we spoke, but I certainly have not forgotten about you. It has taken me almost a year to type up all of your interviews and to review all of the materials for my research about the University of Liberia's advising and counseling services. I just want to thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. I hope the university will find this information helpful, and I hope to see all of you during my next visit to Liberia later this year.

As part of the research process, I've typed up our interview and have attached a copy to this email for your review. If you have time, please review it for accuracy and let me know if I missed any information. I will need your feedback by Friday, April 6, 2012. If everything in the document seems correct, then you do not need to send anything back to me.

Thank you!
Sincerely,
Jobila Williams
Visiting Researcher (SA2C3) 2011

APPENDIX G**Observations**

- SA2C3 Student Appointments
- Faculty Advising Appointments
- Staff Meetings
- Probation Student Advising
- Town Hall Meeting
- Conversational Hour
- Public Policy Seminar – Role of Women in Reconstruction and Development
- Meetings at various campus offices (Student Affairs, Registrar, Public Services, Media, and IT)
- Palava Huts (Religious, Political, Sports – Tree)
- Dean’s Meeting
- Classroom (Accounting, Ethics, Intro Philosophy Focus Group)
- Registration Period
- Grading Period
- ID Card Lines
- On-site visits for student career opportunities (Liberia Petroleum Refining Company, Office of Immigration, Ministry of Lands and Mines, and National Port Authority)
- AME Zion University campus visit/meeting with the dean
- Campus program on Empowerment of Women in the Upcoming Elections

APPENDIX H**Documents**

- SA2C3 Referral Sheet
- Director's Offer Letter
- ECOMTECH Brochure
- ECOMTECH Senior Training Manual
- ECOMTECH Training Manual
- Yearbook 2009-2010
- Long Range Plan
- College Curriculum Guides
- Student Handbook
- SA2C3 Brochure
- UL Newspapers
- SA2C3 Job Descriptions
- SA2C3 Work Schedule
- SA2C3 Draft Proposal
- Organization Chart – Restructured Student Affairs
- University History
- University Charter
- Registration Process Forms
- Faculty/Staff Handbook of Rules and Regulations
- Control Sheet
- Liberia History
- Faculty Senate Petitions
- SA2C3 Budget for Workshop
- SA2C3 Meeting Agendas
- Student Affairs Agendas
- Orientation Schedule
- Board of Trustees Retreat Minutes
- Graduation Clearance Data
- SA2C3 Launching Report
- MOE Data on Higher Education
- MOE Accreditation Proposal
- Staff Meeting Notes
- Office of Student Affairs Two-Year Action Plan
- Full-Time Faculty Listing 2010/2011
- National Commission on Higher Education Policy

APPENDIX I**Interview Guides****Faculty/Staff Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe academic advising on this campus?
2. What kind of academic/career advice or guidance counseling do students receive from you and from your department?
3. How are decisions made regarding advising/counseling procedures, referrals, course offerings, career advising, etc.?
4. How would you describe the quality/quantity of advising that students receive?
5. How would you rate yourself as an advisor to your students? Would you say that your colleagues act in a similar fashion?
6. How is academic information disseminated?
7. How do you inform students about academic policies?
8. How do students learn about their academic requirements? Choosing a major? Choosing a career?
9. Please tell me about your experience with advising when you were a student or in your professional career prior to UL.
10. What role do you play at UL when it comes to recruiting/retaining/socializing students at the university?
11. What are some of the resources provided to your office to support students academically? (human, financial, physical)
12. What kind of advising and academic information/handouts do you provide students? May I have a copy of these materials?
13. Where do the funds come from for these materials?
14. How would you describe your authority in your position relative to advising?
15. What kind of services do you offer students?
16. Please tell me about your job responsibilities in relation to advising.
17. What are your office/department policies?
18. Who creates these policies?
19. How do you enforce college policies regarding academic regulations and student conduct?
20. Are there any ambiguous policies? If so, how/who interprets them?
21. Who is responsible for monitoring these policies?
22. In the US, sometimes universities have loose responsibility of students. How would you characterize the university's perceptions of students? How would you characterize students' perceptions of the university? What about perceptions of this department?
23. What is your office's/department's mission statement?

24. How do you help students understand and adjust to campus culture?
25. How would you describe the campus' academic culture?
26. What are some of the academic challenges you see among students?
27. How are they supported and encouraged?
28. Does your office/department collaborate with the Student Academic Advisement and Career Counseling Center?
29. Have there been changes in the way the university is supporting students academically (curriculum)/professionally?
30. How does academic or career advising impact your office/department? Does it help/hurt your office/department functions?
31. How does your department help students with decisions they must make following graduation? Careers or graduate work?

Student Interview Questions

1. What kind of advising have you received
2. What advising process would you like to have?
3. What has your academic experience been like at UL?
4. Is there anything you think the university should do to make your learning more successful?
5. If you could start all over, what would you do differently in pursuing a program of study?
6. Progress towards degree follow-up question.
7. What resources do you use to find out about policies and requirements?
8. What do you think about faculty? Staff? Administration?
9. Are you familiar with SA2C3?
10. Tell me about academics at UL. Social life.
11. If you are having academic difficulty what kind of support have you received? What kind would you like?
12. Would you feel comfortable going to a counselor about academics? Career? Personal?

APPENDIX J**Consent Form for Interview Participation**

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study involving faculty, students and administrators at the University of Liberia. The purpose of this study is to examine the role and impact of advising on students' progress toward a degree. This study is being conducted as part of Jobila Williams' dissertation at the College of William and Mary. I understand that my involvement is voluntary and with the intention of exploring my undergraduate advising experiences at the University of Liberia.

I will be expected to participate in one or two interviews lasting no more than one hour. I understand that the honesty and accuracy of my responses are important for this study. I also understand that I do not have to answer every question asked of me and I am free to withdraw my consent (quit) and discontinue participation in this study at any time by informing the researcher. I agree that I will read and review summaries of the information that are generated during the interviews for accuracy.

I have been informed that any information obtained in this study will be recorded with a pseudonym of my choosing that will allow only the researcher to determine my identity. At the conclusion of this study, the key linking me with the pseudonym will be destroyed. In addition, measures will be taken to preserve confidentiality of sensitive information at the request of faculty and staff participants in cases where anonymity is not possible. Such confidential information will not be included in the results of the study. I also acknowledge that both interviews will be audio taped to ensure accuracy of information presented. These recordings will be stored on digital devices that will be password protected. The recordings will be erased after transcription and will no longer be available for use. All efforts will be made to conceal my identity in this study and to keep my personal information confidential.

By participating in this study, I understand that a possible benefit is an increased awareness of advising needs and opportunities at the University of Liberia. In addition, the results of this study may inform future decisions at the University of Liberia, even though the dissertation research is not being conducted for the University, but only with its approval. Because of the sensitive nature of this study, I understand that there may be minimal psychological discomfort (or things that make me feel sad) directly involved with this research. My decision to participate or not participate will not affect my relationships with faculty, students, staff or administration at the University of Liberia. If I have any questions or concerns in connection to my participation in this study, I should contact Dr. Julius Nelson, the University of Liberia research advisor at jsnelson40@yahoo.com. I understand that I may report any problems or dissatisfaction to Dr. James Kollie, chair of the University of Liberia Internal Review Committee at jnksr@yahoo.com, or Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the School of Education Internal Review Committee at tjward@wm.edu, or my dissertation chair, Dr. Dorothy Finnegan at definn@wm.edu.

My signature below certifies that I am at least 18 years of age, I have received a copy of this consent form, and I consent to participating in the tasks outlined above.

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of the Investigator

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (PHONE: 757-221-3901) ON JANUARY 1, 2011 AND EXPIRES ON JANUARY 1, 2012.

APPENDIX K

Matrix of Elements for the Conceptual Framework

Soc Org Elements	Students	Advisors	Faculty	Administrators
Affiliation (recruitment, retention, socialization)	Family, ethnicity, location, opportunities, class, major, credits, mentors, peers, activities, socialization/orientation	Professional background, institutional employment, professional affiliations, career goals, role in student affiliation	Professional background, institutional employment, professional affiliations, career goals, role in student affiliation	Professional background, institutional employment, professional affiliations, career goals, role in student affiliation
Collective Resources (human, financial, physical, gaining and providing)	Financial support for studies; accessibility of faculty or advisors, mentors, academic offerings; quality of advice; educational background	Budget, human resources, professional development, office resources (location, equipment, arrangement), institutional authority and power	Degree and quality of programmatic and career advising, institutional authority and power	Degree and type of coordinated support services, institutional budget, institutional authority and power
Substitutability (replacement and sustainability)	Progress toward degree, graduation, academic and career goals and motivation, quality of the experience	Academic advising and monitoring, recruiting, job placement, career advisement, academic and career goals	Programmatic advising and monitoring, career advisement	Degree of coordination retention and graduation
Recorded Control (compliance)	Knowledge of major requirements and student conduct policies, ability to follow prescriptions	Office policy creation, implementation, interpretation, and monitoring	Departmental policy creation, implementation, interpretation, and monitoring	Mechanisms for quality control, institutional policy creation, implementation, interpretation, and monitoring
Organizational Culture	Perceived values, beliefs, & attitudes of UL toward students, students toward UL, students toward other students, toward faculty, faculty toward students	Perceived values, beliefs, & attitudes of UL toward students, students toward UL, students, toward advisor, advisor toward students	Perceived values, beliefs, & attitudes of UL toward students, students toward UL, students, toward faculty, faculty toward students	Perceived values, beliefs, & attitudes of UL toward students, students toward UL, students, toward administrators, administrators toward students
Environment (location and	Campus arrangement, academic and social	Campus arrangement,	Campus arrangement,	Campus arrangement,

climate)	climate	academic, political, and professional climate	academic, political, and professional climate	academic, political, and professional climate
Mission (purpose)		SCAC mission	Departmental mission	Institutional mission
Socialization (institutional fit)	Orientation, socialization into social and academic culture, postwar climate	Socialization into academic, political and professional culture, socialization services for students	Socialization into academic, political and professional culture, socialization services for students	Socialization into academic, political and professional culture, socialization services for students
Information (creation, dissemination, quantity and quality)	Catalogs, online resources, department bulletins and announcements	Catalogs, online resources, office manual, advising handouts, referrals, advising information	Catalogs, online resources, department bulletins and announcements, referrals, advising information	Catalogs, online resources, office bulletins and announcements, referrals, coordinated messages
Strategy (decision-making)	Student choice for major, institution, and career	Decisions that guide advising procedure and referrals, decision-makers	Decisions that guide departmental offerings and career advising, decision-makers	Decisions that guide support services, coordination, referrals, decision-makers
Leadership (style, values, role)	Peer advisors	Professional advisors, Director of SCAC	Faculty advisors, Department chairs	President, academic deans and directors of support services

APPENDIX L

Document Summary Form (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 204)

Name or Type of Document: _____

Document No.: _____

Date Received: _____

Date of Document: _____

Event of Contact with which Document is Associated:

- Descriptive
- Evaluative
- Other _____

<i>Page #</i>	<i>Key Words/Concepts</i>	<i>Comments:</i> <i>Relationship to Research Questions</i>
---------------	---------------------------	---

Brief Summary of Contents:

Significance or Purpose of Document:

Is There Anything Contradictory About Document?

 Yes
 No

Salient Questions/Issues to Consider:

Additional Comments/Reflections/Issues:

APPENDIX M**Primary and Secondary Codes****Affiliation**

Orientation

Friends

Family

Entrance

Collective Resources

Human

Physical

Monetary

Background

Substitutability

Progress

Quality

Registration

Goals

Advising

Religion

Recorded Control

Policy

Student Handbook

Curriculum Guide

Corruption

Organizational Culture

Leadership

Information

Mission

Staff Culture

Faculty Culture

Student Culture

Environment

Strategy

Socialization

Liberian Context

Palava Hut

Postwar

Communication

APPENDIX N

Interpretation Outline (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 156)

Findings Through Recommendations			
Findings	Interpretations	Conclusions	Recommendations
<i>"If I find this..."</i>	<i>"Then I think this means..."</i>	<i>"Therefore I conclude, or what I know to be true is..."</i>	<i>"Thus I recommend that..."</i>

VITA

Jobila Y. Williams Sy

Birthdate: October 31, 1983

Birthplace: Plainfield, New Jersey

Education: 2008-2013 The College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia
Doctor of Education
Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership
(Higher Education Administration)

2005-2007 The College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia
Masters of Education
Educational Leadership
(Higher Education Administration)

2001-2005 University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia
Bachelor of Arts
Psychology