



The Impact of Student Motivation, Preparation, and Learned Helplessness on Undergraduate Students' Communication With Advisors


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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine communication factors that influence students' academic advising appointments, including predictors of scheduling future advising appointments. Undergraduate students' motivation and feelings of learned helplessness were related to their advising meeting preparation and their communication involvement during advising meetings. Students who reported high levels of motivation and low levels of learned helplessness were more likely to prepare for advising meetings and be communicative during meetings. Students with immediate advisors were more likely to communicate with their advisors during meetings. Advising meeting preparation, motivation, and learned helplessness were significant factors in future advising appointments.

KEYWORDS: academic advising, learned helplessness, communication competence, immediacy, interaction involvement

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Introduction

Advising is an integral part of helping students navigate the unfamiliar and sometimes confusing world of higher education. Recent estimates suggest there are more than 12,000 academic advisors working at colleges and universities across the United States (Academic advisor demographics and statistics in the US, 2023); there are also thousands more faculty who also serve as advisors.¹ Advising involves multiple activities, including helping students identify and complete programs of study, provide information about available courses, navigating administrative paperwork, helping students identify activities and internships for future success, and responding to academic problems or hurdles students encounter during their collegiate careers (Stickle, 1982). No college or university approaches advising the same way; some universities maintain advising centers for students, some assign students to faculty in their first year on campus, while some move students from academic advisors to faculty advisors as they transition into upper-division classes. Some institutions require students to meet with their advisors at least once a semester, while other institutions let students decide when or even if they meet with an advisor.

Advising students is a crucial component to students' success (Young-Jones et al., 2013), even though "advising is often an unrecognized and unrewarded activity" (Nadler & Nadler, 1999, p. 56). Many departments may situate advising as part of faculty's teaching or service loads, folding advising in as one of the "extra" teaching and/or service work faculty do (similar to mentoring student research projects). The author, for example, previously worked in departments that treated advising as a separate category, folded it into teaching responsibilities, and did not include advising as part of their annual review at all (it was just expected work). Although there is communication research examining graduate student–graduate advisor relationships (e.g., Buell, 2004; Bullis & Bach, 1989; Carpenter et al., 2015; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993; Mansson & Myers, 2012), there is limited research on undergraduate students' interactions with faculty advisors (Leach & Wang, 2015; Nadler & Nadler, 1999; Swanson, 2006; Taylor et al., 2011) and only one communication study to date that includes academic (nonfaculty) advisors in these conversations (Pitts & Myers, 2023).

A variety of communication factors impact students' and advisors' communication interactions, including training, empathy, motivations, and mode of communication (Leach & Wang, 2015; Nadler & Nadler, 1999; Taylor et al., 2011). Students and advisors have different expectations and preferences for communicating about or during advising appointments. Taylor and colleagues found that students prefer face-to-face interactions over email correspondence; this was especially important for female students and African American students. Students have multiple motives for communicating with advisors, ranging from developing personal relationships to seeking affirmation and support to navigating scheduling and paperwork (Leach & Wang, 2015). Students and advisors believe advisor empathy is crucial to the effectiveness of advising interactions (Nadler & Nadler, 1999); however, students believe female advisors are more successful at communicating empathy for students. More recently, Pitts and Myers (2023) identified four confirming communication practices students believed created a positive advising experience, including providing

1. Academic advisors are people whose primary job is to advise students on coursework. Faculty advisors are people whose primary job is as a faculty member and who also is assigned students to advise as part of their service or teaching responsibilities.

students with praise, recalling previous interactions and information about the student, and, important for this study, working with students on identifying, setting, and working toward their academic and professional goals.

When successful advising does not happen, students believe their needs are not being met, no matter the purpose for the advising meeting (Nadler & Nadler, 1999). Students do not feel supported in the advising relationship when their advisors do not personalize the advising experience or make the student feel a burden or not worthy of attention (Pitts & Myers, 2023). This may be the result of advisors receiving little to no advising training, being uncomfortable communicating with students about anything that is not academic-centered, or because they struggle to manage a large advisee caseload along with their other work (Swanson, 2006).² This mismatch between student expectations and advisor practices could also be influenced by advisors' advising approach. For decades, advisors have debated whether to take a prescriptive or appreciative approach to advising (Bloom et al., 2008); whether to simply disseminate information to students and tell them what courses to take or to mentor and guide them through the critical thinking necessary to make decisions for their education. The prescriptive approach also delegates all paperwork to advisors, freeing students from figuring out how to navigate bureaucratic systems and learning the skills to complete work.

The National Conference on Academic Advising (NACADA) argues that advising is a part of the teaching and learning process (Lance, 2009; NACADA, 2023); advisors are responsible for educating students about decision-making, critical thinking, and other cognitive and functional skills necessary to complete their degrees (Crookston, 1994). As a relational learning experience, advising from a teaching perspective means that the learning space inhabited by students and advisors can be influenced by several teaching and learning factors, including teacher immediacy, student motivation, and interaction involvement. These factors have been well-researched in the communication discipline over the past 40 years (e.g., Andersen, 1979; Cegala, 1981; Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Duran, 1992; Frymier, 1993, 1994; Galanes & Carmack, 2012; Gorham, 1988; Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Kelley & Gorham, 1988; Pogue & Ah Yun, 2006; Teven & Hanson, 2004; Trad et al., 2014; Witt & Wheelless, 2001; Yungbluth, 2009), but the unique educational space of the advising appointment as a teaching and learning experience calls for the exploration of these factors in the student–advisor relationship.

Additionally, the unique communication that occurs in the advising relationship also offers communication researchers an opportunity to explore an outcome of prescriptive approaches to learning: learned helplessness. Learned helplessness occurs when individuals do not know how to act in a given situation or complete certain tasks because they perceived to have lost control over actions and decision-making (Maier & Seligman, 1976). Learned helplessness has rarely been explored in communication (Moreland et al., 2015), but it could lend insight into understanding students' approaches to advising. The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine students' perceptions of student and advisor communication factors that influence students' academic advising appointments. Specifically, this study examines the impact of students' perceived communication competence, perceived interaction involvement, perceived advising motivation, perceived meeting

2. The most recent national advising survey found that the average caseload number of advisees is 129 to 688 for academic advisors and 20 to 39 for faculty advisors (NACADA, 2014).

preparation, perceived learned helplessness, and their perceptions of their advisor's immediacy on the likelihood of scheduling future advising appointments.

Literature Review

Student Advising Motivation

Students' academic motivation is a tension between "engagement and involvement" and performing the work to get the "actual accomplishment" (Frymier, 1994, p. 136). Communication scholars have traditionally framed motivation as a relational state, with a focus on what *instructors* can do to motivate students. Motivation can vary because of instructor immediacy, communication choices, teaching style, credibility, and interest in a topic or class (e.g., Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Frymier, 1993; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Galanes & Carmack, 2012; Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Mazer et al., 2007; Pogue & Ah Yun, 2006; Trad et al., 2014). This body of research suggests that the more students connect with their educator, the more motivated they will be and the more they will prepare for their classes. Ultimately, however, "students must find ways to motivate *themselves* to succeed in a specific class or continue learning. Motivated, communicatively competent students understand what to do to ensure that their educational goals are met" (Galanes & Carmack, 2012, p. 112, italics in original).

One of the primary functions of advising is goal achievement; students identify a major and minor and work to complete their degree. They may also identify additional short-term goals, such as internships, to help them meet future goals. Much like a class, advising appointments often come with "prep work" students need to accomplish before the meeting; they may need to prepare a list of possible classes for the next semester, research future careers to identify potential majors and minors, or complete initial paperwork. Galanes and Carmack (2012) found a significant correlation between students' academic motivation and their confidence in achieving their goals. But do students see advising appointments as a way to meet their goals? If they do, then they should have high motivation toward preparing for their advising meetings to be successful.

H1: Students with high advising motivation will come prepared for advising meetings.

Communicating in the Advising Appointment

As a relational learning experience, advising success can be impacted by students' *and* advisors' communication skills during the advising appointment. Students need to be able to competently navigate advising appointments, identifying the most effective ways to communicate with their advisors. Communication competence focuses on individuals' ability to learn and master the appropriate rules for a given communication interaction and apply that knowledge to make it an effective exchange (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Communication education researchers have previously identified communication competence as an important element of classroom success, with "ideal" communicatively competent students being participative and engaged (Canary & MacGregor, 2008). Instructors expect a communicatively competent student to engage in cognitive and behavioral skills, such as adapting to changing topics, following discussions, and participating in classroom dialogue (e.g., Cegala, 1981; Duran, 1992; Duran & Kelly, 1988; Gan et al., 2009; McCroskey,

1982), and affective skills, including showing empathy and concern, active listening, and building relationships (Mazer et al., 2014; McCroskey, 1982; Titsworth et al., 2013; Yungbluth, 2009).

A central part of communication competence is interacting and engaging in conversations with others, known as interaction involvement (Cegala, 1981). Interaction involvement includes three elements which allow individuals to showcase their competence: perceptiveness, attentiveness, and responsiveness (Duran & Kelly, 1988). Perceptiveness asks individuals to read deeper meaning and interpret understanding beyond spoken or written words. Attentiveness requires individuals to be active participants in conversations, actively listening and paying attention. Finally, responsiveness expects individuals to adapt their communication as needed to ensure appropriate communication during an interaction. To successfully accomplish all three elements, individuals must be competent communicators. In classroom settings, interaction involvement often manifests as participation (Rocca, 2010), and because learning is a relational experience, students' participation is often impacted by instructors' cognitive, behavioral, and affective skills (Frisby & Myers, 2008; Myers et al., 2007; Myers & Rocca, 2001; Umphrey et al., 2008)—in essence, their communication competence. Previous research has directly connected communication competence and interaction involvement (e.g., Cegala et al., 1982; Rubin et al., 1990) and more recently, scholars have connected students' communication competence, interaction involvement, and student motivation (Galanes & Carmack, 2012). Building on Galanes and Carmack as a teaching and learning interaction, students' motivation toward advising should be related to their communication effectiveness. Thus, the second hypothesis is posited:

H2: Students with high advising motivation will (a) have high communication competence with their advisors and (b) be highly perceptive, highly attentive, and highly responsive during advising meetings.

Advisor Immediacy

Advisors' communication with students is also a central factor in advising success; a student can come prepared to a meeting and engage in conversation, but the advisor's perceived communication success is also important. In learning spaces, verbal and nonverbal immediacy has been identified as a key communication skill that helps students engage, participate, and learn (see Liu, 2021; Witt et al., 2004, for reviews). Immediacy is the way individuals communicate closeness and reduce perceived distance between themselves and others (Richmond, 2002; Teven & Hanson, 2004; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006). More than simply "enthusiasm" or "expressiveness" (Sheybani, 2019), immediacy can be communicated through behaviors such as eye contact, smiling, relaxed body position, disclosure, humor, and use of inclusive pronouns (Andersen, 1979; Gorham, 1988; Gorham & Christophel, 1990), all with the goal of building a connection with others. Past instructional communication scholars have connected immediacy to students' affective learning (Frymier, 1994; Plax et al., 1986; Witt & Wheelless, 2001), academic performance (Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Christophel, 1990; Comstock et al., 1995; Gorham, 1988; Kelley & Gorham, 1988), and overall teaching effectiveness (Andersen, 1979); however, several studies offer insight into how advisor immediacy could impact advising interactions. Teven and Hanson (2004) found that instructor immediacy contributed to students' perceptions of competency and credibility, which Sheybani more recently connected to students' overall willingness to communicate in educational interactions. Important for the current study, Hsu (2010) and Zhang and Sapp (2008) found that students' motivation was connected to

instructor immediacy; students who felt their instructors used immediate communication practices were more likely to work toward and have a positive feeling about their academic goals. Hsu's findings are similar to previous scholars who argued that immediacy had a direct impact on student motivation (Christophel, 1990; Richmond, 1990). Immediate instructors can help students engage and participate in classroom conversations; by extension, advisors perceived as immediate should create a communication climate where students feel they can openly communicate and interact during advising meetings. As such, hypothesis 3 states:

H3: Students with highly immediate advisors will be more communicatively competent and involved during advising meetings.

Student Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness occurs when individuals feel that have no control, have lost control, or face repeated failure, and thus, behave in a passive or apathetic manner (Seligman, 1991). According to the Learned Helplessness Theory, when individuals feel they have no control over decision-making or outcomes, they will "give up" (Maier & Seligman, 1976). Learned helplessness is not the result of a single event; it occurs when "an individual is repeatedly unsuccessful in manipulating an unfavorable situation that is either stressful or challenging" (Smallheer et al., 2018, p. 599). As Moreland and colleagues (2015) stated, "learned helplessness is a feeling of immobilization, going through the motions, maintaining the status quo, and avoiding conflict" (p. 1157). In cases of learned helplessness, because they feel they have no control, individuals will defer to *response-outcome independence*, asking others to make decisions or do work for them (Maier & Seligman, 1976). Constant deferment creates a cycle of diminished learning, where individuals do not know how to do certain tasks or make decisions (Seligman, 1991), and thus, constantly turn to others to do those things for them, further entrenching the lack of learning. In advising situations, learned helplessness could manifest as students asking advisors to "tell them what to take," to handle all the paperwork, including adding and dropping courses, changing majors or minors, or reaching out to faculty when there is a problem. When advisors do the executive functioning work of completing a college degree, students may not learn important skills and develop cognitive deficits.

Learned helplessness has a direct impact on motivation, satisfaction, and future intentions. Underwood (1992) discovered that motivation was the primarily significant predictor of learned helplessness, accounting for 59% of their model's variance. More recently, Rizvi and Sikand (2020) found that learned helplessness was a predictor of work involvement, or the importance individuals place on participating and engaging in the workplace. Learned helplessness has also been found to impact certain communication practices (e.g., reporting, Tayfur, 2012), satisfaction, involvement/motivation, productivity (Carlson & Kacmar, 1994), and future intentions and behaviors (Seligman & Schulman, 1986). Little is known about the connection between learned helplessness and communication. The only known communication study to connect learned helplessness and communication examined nurses' learned helplessness, communication with colleagues, and intent to leave the organization (Moreland et al., 2015). Important for the current study, Moreland and colleagues examined interaction involvement's relationship to learned helplessness. The authors found that interaction involvement was negatively related to learned helplessness, where learned helplessness decreases the more nurses interacted with other nurses. Although these studies are not about

advising, their findings focused on motivation, interaction involvement, and future intentions suggest there could be relationships between these variables in the current study. These connections guide the following research questions:

RQ1: Does students' advising learned helplessness impact their (a) preparation and (b) motivation for advising meetings?

RQ2: Does students' advising learned helplessness impact their communication practices (communication competence, interaction involvement) with advisors?

Advisors and students are both important for successful advising meetings. From a student perspective, how they approach academic advising, what they can do to prepare for the advising appointment, and how communicatively active they are during the meeting should be predictors in whether they schedule future advising appointments. Likewise, advisors' communication with students during the meeting should also contribute with this future scheduling. Taken together, the final hypothesis for this study posited:

H4: Students' communication practices, advising motivation, advising meeting preparation, advising learned helplessness, and advisor immediacy are predictors of students' willingness to communicate with advisors in future advising meetings.

Method

Three hundred fifty-eight undergraduate students enrolled at a large Southern U.S. university participated in this study. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 51 years old ($M = 20.29$, $SD = 3.09$). Participants were primarily female, Caucasian, non-transfer students majoring in a communication program. Students in their first, second, third, and fourth years of college were almost equally represented (see Table 1 for demographic breakdown).

Participants saw a variety of advisors, including a major-specific faculty advisor ($n = 110$, 30.7%), a major-specific academic advisor in an advising center ($n = 208$, 58.1%), or a general academic advisor ($n = 7$, 2.0%). Thirty-three students (9.2%) did not know the classification of their advisor. Different colleges at the university require advising appointments; 48.9% of students said they were required to meet with their advisors ($n = 175$), while 39.9% were not required ($n = 143$). Forty students (11.2%) did not know if they were required to meet with an advisor. On average, most students ($n = 257$, 71.8%) reported meeting with their advisor one to two times a semester; fewer students communicated with their advisor three or four times a semester ($n = 54$, 15.1%), five to six times a semester ($n = 12$, 3.4%), seven to eight times a semester ($n = 2$, 0.6%), or nine or more times a semester ($n = 9$, 1.4%). Twenty-eight students (7.8%) reported never meeting with their assigned advisor. It is important to note that all students enrolled at this university have met with an advisor (required to enroll in first semester classes), but their engagement with advisors may vary after that initial contact depending on individual department's advising requirements. All students could reflect on an advising meeting to answer the survey questions.

TABLE 1 *Demographic Characteristics*

Characteristic	N	Percentage
Gender		
Male	98	34.5
Female	185	65.1
Year at University		
First year	83	23.2
Second year	89	24.9
Third year	89	24.9
Fourth year	77	21.5
Fifth year or more	20	5.6
Race or Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	331	92.4
Hispanic/Latinx	4	1.11
Black/African American	15	4.2
Asian	3	0.8
Biracial	5	1.4
Transfer Student Status		
Transfer student	48	13.4
Not a transfer student	310	86.6
College Major		
Communication, Media, PR	256	71.5
Arts & Sciences	22	6.1
Engineering	8	2.2
Business	28	7.8
Human Environmental Science	14	3.9
Double Major	24	6.7
Undecided	6	1.7

Procedures and Instrumentation

Data collection began after the author received university Institutional Review Board approval. Participants were recruited on a college-wide research participant pool. Students enrolled in general education communication and media classes as well as upper-division communication and media courses are required to complete research participation credits and can choose from studies posted on the college-wide research participant pool. Participants who were interested in this study were directed to a Qualtrics survey consisting of demographic questions, questions about their advising habits and plans for future advising meetings, and five measures. All of the measures were adapted to focus on advising; participants were directed to consider their advisor and advising sessions and words were changed to reflect the study focus (e.g., “instructor” became “advisor,” “during my classes” became “during my advising meetings”).

Communication Competence

Students' communication competence during advising meetings was assessed using the Communication Competence Measure (Wiemann, 1977). This 36-item scale measures individuals' ability to adapt their communication to fit the appropriateness of the communication event. The measure uses a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Examples of items include "I let my advisor know I understand them" and "I generally know what type of behavior is appropriate in an advising meeting." Five items were reverse-coded. The higher the final score, the more students self-reported being communicatively competent. The measure was highly reliable for the study ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .48$, $\alpha = .928$).

Interaction Involvement

The Interaction Involvement Scale (Cegala, 1981) was used to measure students' interactivity during advising meetings. The 18-item scale includes three subscales (perceptiveness, attentiveness, responsiveness) designed to determine where individuals succeed in their interactions with others. Language was changed to emphasize students' interactions with their advisors; for example, items included "In my conversations, I often do not accurately perceive my advisor's intentions or motivations" and "I am very observant of my advisor's reactions while I'm speaking." The measure uses a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at all like me*) to 6 (*Very much like me*). Nine items were reverse-coded before calculating the reliability of the full measure and the three subscales. The higher the final mean score, the more involved students reported to be during advising meetings. The overall measure was reliable ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .82$, $\alpha = .905$), as was the attentiveness subscale ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .79$, $\alpha = .707$) and responsiveness subscale ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.06$, $\alpha = .889$). The perceptiveness subscale had low reliability ($M = 4.29$, $SD = .81$, $\alpha = .548$).

Student Advising Motivation

An advised version of the 16-item Student Motivation Scale (Christophel, 1990) was used to examine students' general motivation for advising appointments. This measure uses a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from 1 (*negative*) to 7 (*positive*) to evaluate individuals on a variety of emotions and reactions, including uninterested/interested, unmotivated/motivated, and don't want to be advised/want to be advised. Higher scores indicated higher motivation for advising. The measure was reliable ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.18$, $\alpha = .949$).

Advisor Immediacy

Students' assessment of their advisors' warmth and caring was measured using Andersen's (1979) Generalized Immediacy Scale (GIS). The GIS uses two sets of four semantic differential scales (using a 7-point scale) to measure communication style and perceived immediacy. Style items include *cold/warm* and *unfriendly/friendly*. Immediacy items asks to provide affirmative or negative responses to the statement "My advisor's advising style is immediate," including *disagree/agree* and *incorrect/correct*. Higher scores indicated higher perceived advisor immediacy. The scale was highly reliable ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.30$, $\alpha = .963$). The GIS was chosen for this study over other instructor or classroom-specific immediacy measures because (1) of the problematic inclusion of touching items in other measures (which would be inappropriate in an advising meeting) and

(2) other measures' focus on either nonverbal immediacy or verbal effectiveness only (rather than both nonverbal and verbal immediacy; Zhang & Oetzel, 2006).

Student Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness was measured using the Measure of Learned Helplessness (Quinless & McDermott Nelson, 1988). This measure, typically used in nursing and health sciences, examines individuals' feelings of lack of control, lack of motivation, and lack of ability or desire to learn new skills or behaviors. This scale was adapted for exploring the study's premise that students lack the motivation and desire to take control of their education and complete educational programs on their own. The 20-item measure uses a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Item language was adapted to focus on advising and completing university and degree requirements; examples of items include "I cannot find solutions to difficult course scheduling problems" and "I feel that I have little control over the outcomes of my coursework." The scale was reliable ($M = 2.44$, $SD = .73$, $\alpha = .940$).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24). One-tailed Pearson correlations were calculated to determine relationships between students' advising motivation, communication competence, advising interaction involvement, advisor immediacy, and learned helplessness (H1–H3, RQ1, RQ2). Variance inflation factor (VIF) values were also calculated to check for multicollinearity. As noted in Table 2, all VIF scores were below 10, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. A general linear regression model was completed to identify predictors of students' future advising meetings (H4).

TABLE 2 *Multicollinearity Diagnostics for Study Variables*

Variable Name	Tolerance	VIF
1. Interaction Involvement	.000	–
2. Perceptiveness	.384	2.607
3. Attentiveness	.441	2.266
4. Responsiveness	.358	2.795
5. Communication Competence	.757	1.321
6. Student Motivation	.602	1.662
7. Advisor Immediacy	.672	1.488
8. Learned Helplessness	.663	1.508
9. Preparation	.668	1.497

Note: Interaction involvement did not receive a VIF score because of the inclusion of subscales in the diagnostic test.

Results

Independent samples *t*-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were calculated to determine if there were differences across demographic groups; there were no significant differences across sex, age, race, transfer status, or major. There were significant differences between groups based on if meeting with advisors was required for three variables: communication competence ($F[2, 356] = 3.354, p = .036, \eta^2 = .003$), interaction involvement ($F[2, 356] = 3.381, p = .035, \eta^2 = .019$), and attentiveness ($F[2, 356] = 5.105, p = .007, \eta^2 = .028$). Tukey post-hoc analysis revealed that for interaction involvement, the difference was between students who were not required to meet with advisors ($M = 4.42, SD = .804$) and students who did not know if they were required ($M = 4.05, SD = .823$). For attentiveness, the Tukey post-hoc analysis revealed differences between students who were required ($M = 4.55, SD = .796$) and students who did not know ($M = 4.21, SD = .781$), as well as students who were not required ($M = 4.66, SD = .769$) and students who did not know ($M = 4.21, SD = .781$). Finally, the Tukey post-hoc analysis identified the difference in communication competence between students who were not required to meet with their advisor ($M = 4.11, SD = .388$) and students who did not know if they were required ($M = 3.92, SD = .471$).

Additionally, there were significant differences between groups based on the number of times students met, on average, with their advisors for six study variables: interaction involvement ($F[5, 352] = 5.152, p < .001, \eta^2 = .068$), perceptiveness ($F[5, 352] = 2.876, p < .001, \eta^2 = .061$), attentiveness ($F[5, 352] = 4.031, p = .001, \eta^2 = .054$), responsiveness ($F[5, 352] = 4.360, p < .001, \eta^2 = .058$), student advising motivation ($F[5, 352] = 4.893, p < .001, \eta^2 = .065$), and advisor immediacy ($F[5, 352] = 4.483, p < .001, \eta^2 = .060$). Tukey post-hoc tests revealed that for all variables, the significant differences existed between students who never visited their advisors, students who visited their advisors one to two times a semester, and students who visited their advisors three to four times a semester. In all significant cases, students who never visited their advisor reported the lowest mean scores, while students who visited their advisors three to four times a semester reported the highest mean scores, suggesting that students who visit their advisors three to four times a semester are more motivated and engaged during meetings and believe their advisors are more immediate. Students who visited their advisors one to two times a semester typically fell in the middle. There were no significant differences between groups for communication competence ($F[5, 352] = 2.089, p = .066, \eta^2 = .029$), or learned helplessness ($F[5, 352] = 2.098, p = .065, \eta^2 = .029$).

The first and second hypotheses posited that students' advising motivation would be an important factor in preparing for and communicating during advising meetings. Student advising motivation was significantly positively correlated with advising meeting preparation, suggesting that students who are highly motivated to have productive advising meetings are also more likely to prepare for their advising meetings. Student advising motivation was also significantly positively correlated with communication competence and interaction involvement, including perceptiveness, attentiveness, and responsiveness. Students who are highly motivated are more competent in their communication with their advisors during their advising meetings. They are also more perceptive, responsive, and attentive during their advising meetings. The third hypothesis suggested that students with highly immediate advisors are more communicatively competent and interactive during their advising meetings. Advisor immediacy was significantly positively correlated with communication competence and interaction involvement, including perceptiveness, attentiveness,

and responsiveness. Students with immediate advisors are more competent and interactive with their advisors in their advisor meetings. Hypothesis 1, 2a, 2b, and 3 were all supported. See Table 3.

TABLE 3 *Correlation Coefficients for Study Variables*

Variable Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Interaction Involvement	–	.847**	.836**	.945**	.433**	.374**	.326**	–.508**	.506**
2. Perceptiveness		–	.644**	.728**	.362**	.390**	.393**	–.379**	.418**
3. Attentiveness			–	.646**	.429**	.352**	.244**	–.384**	.510**
4. Responsiveness				–	.374**	.303**	.280**	–.523**	.434**
5. Communication Competence					–	.270**	.213**	–.329**	.231**
6. Student Motivation						–	.529**	–.101	.392**
7. Advisor Immediacy							–	–.073	.222**
8. Learned Helplessness								–	–.141**
9. Preparation									–

*Correlation significant at .05 level (1-tailed).

** Correlation significant at .01 level (1-tailed).

The study research questions examined the potential relationship between students' learned helplessness and their motivation and preparation before advising meetings and communication during advising meetings. Students' learned helplessness was significantly negatively correlated with preparation for advising meetings but was not significantly correlated with student motivation. Students' learned helplessness was significantly negatively correlated with communication competence, and interaction involvement, including perceptiveness, attentiveness, and responsiveness. Students' learned helplessness impacted students' preparation for advising meetings and communication, attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness during advising meetings. See Table 3.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that students' communication practices, motivation, preparation, learned helplessness, and perceived advisor immediacy would be predictors of students' willingness to schedule future advising appointments. The model also included whether advising appointments were required. The linear regression model determined that the model was significant, $F = 26.74 (3, 354)$, $p < .001$. Of the total variance in future scheduling, 18.5% was significantly predicted by meeting preparation, $\beta = .328$, $t = 6.22$, $p < .001$, student motivation, $\beta = .175$, $t = 3.34$, $p < .001$, and student learned helplessness, $\beta = .110$, $t = 2.28$, $p < .05$. Students' communication with their advisors during meetings, their advisors' immediacy, and whether advising meetings were required were not predictors. The hypothesis was partially supported.

Discussion

Advising is an important part of the educational experience as both a teaching and learning activity (NACADA, 2023). This exploratory study strove to apply several well-known instructional communication variables to advising as a unique teaching and learning endeavor. The results of the study found that student motivation, communication competence, interaction involvement, and advisor immediacy were all related to students' preparation for advising appointments. This is also the first instructional communication study to date to explore the role of students' academic learned helplessness in their advising interactions. For participants in this study, learned helplessness was connected to their preparation and advising interactions. The inclusion of learned helplessness also offered a novel element to consider, as it, along with preparation and motivation, were the only predictive factors impacting students' future advising plans. Communication research examining advising communication is limited, and the findings from this study add to the growing literature about advising communication interactions. The findings also offer several theoretical and practical implications to improve advising communication.

Students' academic motivation was a strong factor in their communication during advising meetings. The results suggest that students who are highly motivated are more competent in their communication with their advisors during their advising meetings. They are also more perceptive, responsive, and attentive during their advising meetings. Previous communication researchers also found that students with high academic motivation communicate more with their instructors to help them achieve their academic goals (e.g., Galanes & Carmack, 2012; Myers et al., 2002a, 2002b). The same may be the case here; students know part of their success in college is to complete their degrees in a timely fashion, so communication with advisors is crucial to achieving that goal. As a result, these students prepare for their advising meetings to get the most out of the meeting. The findings also suggest that the success of advising interactions is not just the advisor's responsibility. Students who take advising appointments seriously are more likely to believe their interactions are important and participate more, akin to class participation or communication with their instructors out of class (e.g., Cegala, 1981; Frymier, 2005; Umphrey et al., 2008); when students feel it is important, they engage and interact more.

Similarly, the results suggest that students who perceive their advisors as being immediate felt more confident in their communication and interactive with their advisors in their advisor meetings. This highlights the relational nature of advising communication interactions. It is not enough for an advisor to be knowledgeable about majors/minors, paperwork, and requirements; students also want warmth and connection. Similar to instructor immediacy in the classroom (e.g., Booth-Butterfield et al., 1992; Frymier, 1994), when students feel close, seen, and connected with an advisor, they are more likely to be attentive, perceptive, and responsive during their advising meetings. Advisors have a different challenge, however, as they do not have as much contact with students to build rapport and develop immediacy with their students. In this study, the majority of students only met with their advisors one or two times during the semester, likely just to talk about the next semester's registration or change their class schedules. Whereas instructors have a semester to develop relationships with their students, advisors may only have one meeting a semester with a student. The average score for advisor immediacy in this study was relatively high ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.30$), suggesting that students in this study felt their advisors were able to develop

and demonstrate caring and closeness in a short amount of time. Although the current research on instructor immediacy identifies specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors instructors can do, is it merely the successful accomplishment of these behaviors that determine immediacy? Is time a factor here? Many immediacy studies ask students to reflect on an instructor's immediacy after they have been in a class for a period of time or to think about a past instructor's immediacy. But what about when you only have one meeting a semester to connect with students? These results raise more questions about how immediacy is accomplished beyond the performance of verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

The findings related to students' learned helplessness approach to their education and advising appointments offers some paradoxical insights into why students' learned helplessness may emerge. First, students' learned helplessness was related to students' meeting preparation and communication, attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness during advising meetings. Why would learned helplessness inhibit their preparation for advising, especially when this is a change to take control of their academic future? There are several possible reasons for this. First, learned helplessness may be the result of feeling they have no control or choice. Students could believe they do not need to prepare because of strict course sequencing and degree requirements. They could also be frustrated with course offerings, class time options, or instructor choice. They may not feel they can successfully look through the course catalogue to find courses or put together a schedule.

Second, the advisor's advising style may remove control, so they are willing to let someone else make the choice. If their advisor is using a prescriptive advising style, then they may be simply telling students what to take, so there is no reason to prepare. Finally, their learned helplessness could be because of past failures in selecting classes, past failures in passing classes, or poor past advising interactions. It could also be the result of past academic experiences in the K-12 system that did all the work and decision-making for them, so they never learned how to make these decisions. The complexity of learned helplessness means that how it manifested may be different for each student, creating challenges for advisors. This, in turn, impacts their advising meetings. The results suggest that learned helplessness impedes communication during advising interactions. Students who believe it does not matter will not try to engage or interact during advising meetings. This can further entrench students' learned helplessness as it can create the "stuck in the mud" feeling (Nicotera & Clinkscales, 2010) and allow them to develop diminished learning.

Interestingly, students who visited their advisors three to four times a semester reported the lowest mean scores for learned helplessness, meaning they feel they have the most control over their academic success ($M = 2.217$); students who reported visiting their advisors nine or more times a semester reported the highest learned helplessness ($M = 3.07$). Although there were not significant differences between groups, the mean differences suggest that, for students, interacting with advisors beyond the basic one to two times a semester is empowering, but too many visits may contribute to learned helplessness. Students who reported visiting their advisors three to four times a semester also reported the highest mean scores for motivation, engagement, and connection with their advisors, suggesting they may develop a relationship with their advisors, which could help to reduce their learned helplessness. It is important to note, however, that students generally reported low levels of learned helplessness, suggesting that they might not feel particularly helpless in terms of making decisions about picking classes. But, as discussed above, this could be because there are not many options for students, so selecting classes and working through a structured degree

program might not activate feelings of learned helplessness. The difficulty here is to determine if the lack of choice creates feelings of frustration for students.

Finally, the regression determined that future advising appointments was determined by individual factors—motivation, preparation, and learned helplessness—not communication factors or even meeting requirements. Although these factors impact the communication interactions students have with advisors, ultimately, whether they return is determined by their personal motivations about advising (does it matter for my academic success, is it important) and whether they feel they have control (preparation, learned helplessness). Students who feel lost, disconnected, or that advising does not matter are less likely to return for future appointments. If they do not feel they have control, they may not engage unless they are required to do so.

Practical Recommendations

Students' feelings of learned helplessness of their educational experiences can be lessened by emphasizing student empowerment and training. There is little research to suggest that students receive training on how to make their way through their degree programs and make decisions about choosing courses to meet program requirements. Students need to receive training as they enter their colleges and universities on how to read their degree program curriculum, identify courses that meet requirements, and how to follow course sequencing. Students have access to all the tools necessary—they can access the course catalogue, download course worksheets, and keep track of their completion requirements. They may just need more training on how to use the university system or how to read and use catalogues and worksheets. Departments could offer a training workshop for students to help them learn about course sequencing, selecting classes, and completing their degrees. This training will allow students to reduce or prevent them from developing learned helplessness in completing their degrees. Training allows them to take ownership of their educational journey.

Students still need advisors to help them complete their degrees and faculty and academic advisors may need to adapt their advising styles to reduce or prevent learned helplessness. Much like students, faculty advisors may not receive sufficient advising training, or in some cases, no training at all. Likewise, while some academic advisors may have an educational background in student affairs or advanced degrees in advising, others may not receive training. When training does not happen, the advising default may be prescriptive advising. All advisors need training on how to be effective advisors. Using NACADA's framing of academic advising as a teaching and learning experience, just like classroom learning, could help faculty and academic advisors to see advising as part of their instructor duties. Moreover, it may help academic advisors, especially those that do not teach, see themselves as educators who are also important for students' educational journeys.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study examined the impact of advisor immediacy, student motivation, communication behaviors, and learned helplessness on students' advising choices. However, advising is a very contextual

communication event; a myriad of student factors may influence communication with advisors. The participants in this study were primarily White/Caucasian women who were mostly enrolled in a communication program (communication studies, public relations, or media) at a large Southern university.³ Although there were no significant differences identified between groups, this may be the result of uneven groups and does not mean there are not differences between demographic groups. Little is known about what student demographics impact communication choices with advisors and motivation for advising, although Nadler and Nadler (1999) did identify gender and racial/ethnic differences in advisor preference and use. BIPOC students, trans students, students of different genders, LGBTQAI2S+ students, and students enrolled in different majors may approach advising meetings differently because of their intersecting identities. Students at smaller or specialized colleges and universities may have expectations or experiences that differ from students at a large university. These intersecting identities may also be influenced by concordant or discordant advisors (e.g., women seeing women advisors, BIPOC students seeing BIPOC advisors, etc.). Finally, most students were non-transfer students, meaning they had only attended this one university. Transfer students may receive specialized transfer advising, but the author was not able to determine if transfer status was a factor in students' approach to and assessment of advising. Future studies need to tease out these important demographic variables to paint a clearer picture of communication and advising.

The findings from the study also offer fruitful directions for future studies. This study focuses on only one participant in the advising relationship: the student. The author also did not ask students to report information about their advisor other than asking if their advisor was a faculty advisor or an academic advisor. What is the demographic or educational background of the advisor? Are they trained in advising or have an advanced degree in advising? What is their advising style (appreciative, prescriptive, developmental)? These are questions students might struggle to answer, but they could impact students' perceptions of advisor immediacy. Future studies should examine advisor communication practices; for example, observations of advising appointments could provide insight into the communication practices of students and advisors. Additionally, further examination into the communication similarities and differences between faculty and academic advisors could also provide insight for advising training of faculty and staff.

This study asked students to focus their responses on general advising meetings about course registration and completion of their academic degrees. Faculty and staff advisors know, however, that these are not the only meetings advisors have with students or the only topics they talk about during their advising meetings. How would students assess their communication interaction involvement when talking with advisors about general life issues? When seeking out internship or job opportunities and information? How does student motivation, communication, and perceptions of advisor immediacy change when the advising meeting is about a problem, such as failing a class or the semester or academic misconduct? We also need to consider how the communication medium may impact immediacy and communication practices; do students and advisors change communication styles when communicating in in-person meetings compared to over the phone or email? Has Zoom changed the nature of communication and perceived advisor immediacy? Finally, this study only focused on the traditional student–advisor meeting and did not account for

3. The percentage breakdown of gender and race is representative of the student body at this university as well as the demographic make-up of the communication college in which many participants majored.

students receiving advising from other faculty, staff, or students who were not their assigned advisors. Communication researchers should examine other advising interactions that could impact students' feelings of motivation, learned helplessness, preparedness, and success. Future research must complicate the student–advisor communication experience to learn more insights for communication researchers and advisors.

Advising is an important part of students' academic journeys; poor planning or advising could create barriers for students to complete their degrees in a timely fashion. It is incumbent on students and advisors to approach the advising learning space as one where students have some control over their decision-making, empowered by their advisors to make the best choices for their futures. The findings from this study examines only a small number of communication factors that go into the success of these teaching and learning moments. As instructional communication scholars develop research about advising communication practices, we will be able to identify how best to help students succeed.

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